JOUR 494 - RESEARCH METHODS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

Spring 2013

Tuesday/Thursday 9:30–10:45 a.m.
SPA 029C

Class taught by:

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Course Overview

You will learn the basic techniques for research in mass communications and mass media with emphasis on their utility in academic and industry settings. The class will review theoretical concepts and hypothesis-testing procedures as applicable to the current problems in the field. You will learn about a variety of scientific methods, both quantitative and qualitative, survey and experimental design, field studies, analysis of data. The class includes a hands-on research project completed by the students under professor’s supervision. A prerequisite for this class is math proficiency at the college level. Some basic understanding of statistical concepts will be very helpful, too.

Course Outcomes

The primary purpose of JOUR 494 is to introduce you to modern research methods in mass communication. The practical component of this class teaches you applicable skills in tailoring scholarly concepts to fulfill given practical needs.
During this class, you will:

- Learn the basic theoretical concepts in mass communication research;
- Learn about quantitative and qualitative research approaches;
- Develop and enhance your research skills;
- Enhance your critical thinking and reasoning;
- Learn how to use primary and secondary sources;
- Learn how to use diverse research methods;
- Enhance your skills in writing reports and papers; learn proper rules of scientific style.

Readings

The main text for this class is Wimmer, R. D., and Dominick, J. R. (2012). Mass Media Research: An Introduction (10th Ed.). New York: Wadsworth. You must also purchase a course packet from Mozena Publishing (instructions how to do this are provided separately). You must have the packet available by the second week of class!

For scholarly style references, we will be using the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Ed.) You do not need to buy it – it is available in the library, and I will provide you with handouts on the essentials. A lot of information is available at http://www.apastyle.org/. You will also use these online tutorials: http://csulb.libguides.com/content.php?pid=115235&sid=2560863

In addition, I will assign a variety of scholarly publications (articles, chapters), which you will find in the course packet or receive as electronic handouts. As your expertise in research methods grows, you will learn to find scholarly materials on your own and will be required to complete literature reviews using library resources.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for JOUR 494 will be formed by the following components:

**APA style quiz:** 100 points

**Class research project (groups):** 200 points

**Three in-class content tests**

* (multiple-choice + open-ended questions): 600 points (200 each)
Annotated bibliography and research essay: 100 points

| Total: | 1,000 points |

Accumulation of 900 to 1,000 points at the end will mean an A for this class, 800 to 890 will get you a B, 700 to 790 – C, 600 to 690 mean D, and anything below 600 points is a failing grade. Possibilities for extra credit may exist, but I cannot guarantee that. Extra credit will not be offered to those, who skip any regular assignments or have more than two unexcused absences.

Class participation is essential to your success in this class. Student online and in-class discussions with my moderation are among the methods through which I can judge your level of involvement with the material. Don’t expect me to lecture all the time – all class participants must share the responsibility for the learning experience. I will keep regular notes on the discussion activity in class to assure a veritable record of students’ participation. Your task, however, is to make yourselves noticed. I will give you the participation grade during the last class session.

APA style quiz will come very early in the class and will require you to master the basics of the American Psychological Association citation style. You will use the APA Publication Manual and other materials to prepare, but the actual test will be given in a classroom setting. This exercise assures that you will know the APA style well, which will enable you to write with competence scholarly literature reviews and other papers.

Class research project and group presentations are based on the research topic assigned to this class. You will be divided into several groups (depending on the number of enrolled students). These groups will work on:

- Preparing a literature revue, which includes finding and using a sufficient number of sources;
- Designing the study (research instrument), which includes pre-tests of the questionnaire;
- Conducting the actual study, which includes recruiting participants and administering the questionnaire in a controlled setting;
- Conducting the basic analysis of data using SPSS, which includes hypotheses-testing.

Each group will make class presentations of their work (about 20-25 min.) and write a group-specific report. Please log in how many hours you dedicated to each task, when and how you accomplished those tasks, any group meetings you had, library work, notes on challenges and frustrations, etc. – that is, keep a complete record of your progress. You will be graded individually, but your overall performance depends on the quality of your group work, of course.
The entire class will participate in the formulation of the study hypotheses. I will explain more details in class and will give you the minimum requirements for each collective task. At the end of the class, members of each group will submit self-evaluations and peer evaluations, which will allow me to judge the individual contributions. Again, remember that in group assignments your grade represents a share of this group’s final product.

**Three content tests** will quiz you on basic concepts in research methods. Questions (both multiple-choice and open-ended ones) will come from the textbook chapters or, rarely, from other readings. I will give you a schedule of readings and tests, so you can prepare in advance. **All readings are due by the class session for which they are assigned.** In addition to the multiple-choice part, these tests may include open-ended questions.

Each student will prepare an **annotated bibliography** on a selected topic and also write a related short **research essay** (I will explain the details in class). You will have to find and prepare brief notes on at least 10 sources from **peer-reviewed** journals. Each student will have to research a different concept/topic from any area of mass communications. I may help you with the selection or you may choose on your own.

**Over two unexcused absences** during this semester will deduct 50 points from your final tally. To repeat, I allow you to have two unexcused absences, no questions asked, but after that I will be trimming your score. Coming to class is as important as going to work – please treat it that way. You are expected to come to every single meeting, period. I will excuse only legitimate absences as defined by the Journalism Department and CSULB (see the addendum) and only with an adequate supporting document or my explicit written consent.

**Conclusion**

There will be no free-loaders in this class. You must understand that at this point in your career you will not succeed unless you take your assignments as a serious job and apply yourself accordingly. If you don’t do your part, others will suffer – but your grade will go down, too. Be patient and courteous with your peers during discussions and at the times of collective work. **Do not distract or interrupt anyone, and do not allow disruptions into the classroom, such as not-class-related use of computers, eating, talking. Make full use of your time – after all, you are paying for your own education.**

Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, problems or concerns. You will be surprised to know how many brewing crises can be solved by timely communication with your professor.
Addendum 1: Additional Student Learning Assessment

The national accrediting agency for journalism education has established a requirement that all accredited journalism schools assess student mastery of 11 core values and competencies that any graduate of a journalism and mass communication program should possess. According to the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, all graduates, irrespective of their particular specialization, should be able to:

1) Understand and apply First Amendment principles and the law appropriate to professional practice.
2) Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
3) Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications.
4) Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
5) Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
6) Think critically, creatively and independently.
7) Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professionals in which they work.
8) Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
9) Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
10) Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
11) Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.
Addendum 2: Policies on Grading, Conduct of Classes, Drops and Absences

Grading: The grading policies and practices in this class are explained elsewhere in the syllabus. It is the student’s responsibility to read them and to seek clarification if necessary. The student should be fully aware of what is required for success in the course, such as group participation, writing, speaking and completing assignments.

Seat in Class: An enrolled student may lose his/her seat in class if he/she misses the first class meeting without notifying the instructor. At the instructor’s discretion, a student who attends the first class but not subsequent classes may also be dropped from the course.

Withdrawal from Class: Students may withdraw from a class (check the deadlines for the winter session!) for “serious and compelling reasons.” Normally these are defined as anything of importance that is beyond the control of the student. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, death or serious illness in a student’s immediate family or a documented change in a student’s work schedule. Poor performance, tardiness and unexcused absences are not considered serious or compelling reasons beyond the student’s control for purposes of withdrawing.

Absences from Class: Grades in a course may be adversely affected by absences, and students should seek clarification from the instructor regarding the course absence policy. Make-ups usually are granted in strict accordance with CSULB policy, which defines excused absences as (1) illness or injury to the student; (2) death, injury or serious illness of an immediate family member or the like; (3) religious reasons; (4) jury duty or government obligation; (5) CSULB-sanctioned or approved activities. These and any other requests for an excused absence must be documented.

Responses, Penalties and Student Rights: Students should consult the appropriate sections of the Catalog for examples of cheating, fabrication and plagiarism, and instructor and/or CSULB response options in such circumstances. The Catalog also outlines student rights. Any instance of academic dishonesty may result in immediate expulsion from the class with a grade of “F” and/or other sanctions, as the instructor deems appropriate.

CSULB Cheating/Plagiarism/Fabrication Policy: CSULB takes issues of academic dishonesty very seriously. If you use any deceptive or dishonest method to complete an assignment, take an exam, or gain credit in a course in any other way, or if you help someone else to do so, you are guilty of cheating. If you use someone else’s ideas or work and represent it as your own without giving credit to the source, you are guilty of plagiarism. This does not apply if the ideas are recognized as common knowledge, or if you can show that you honestly developed the ideas through your own work. Any instructor can show you the correct ways of citing your sources, and you should use quotation marks, footnotes or endnotes and bibliographic references to give credit to your sources according to the format recommended by your instructor.
Addendum 3: Accommodation of students with disabilities

Students with disabilities who need assistant or accommodation to participate in or benefit from university programs, services, and/or activities should inform the instructor and then contact Disabled Student Services. Students needing support services or accommodations should contact the instructor of the course within the first week of class. In addition, students should establish their eligibility for assistance by contacting the Disabled Student Services Office (Brotman Hall 270) at 562-985-5401.

Students are to provide to the instructor verification of their disability from Disabled Student Services. Typical accommodations available from Disabled Student Services, working with the journalism instructor, includes extended time for tests, test proctoring, private test rooms, note taking, Braille transcriptions, and referral for tutoring.

If the service offered is insufficient or inadequate, the student should confer with the instructor and the director of Disabled Student Services. If these efforts are unsuccessful, students have the option of directing their concerns to the Office of Equity and Diversity (University Student Union 301) at 562-985-8256. Responsibility for oversight and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act has been delegated to the campus director for disability support and accommodation.