

**Office:** 329 Dan Rather Building, 294-3651  
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Class Meets: T-TH: 11 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., Room MCM 125

Office Hours: M-W 3:30-4:15, T 2:00-3:00, before/after class and by appointment

**Text:** Poindexter, Paula M., and Maxwell E. McCombs. *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2000).

**Catalog Description:** This course will introduce students to the history and application of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, that are employed in commercial media markets and academic environments to assess media audiences, media content and media use. Topics addressed include: survey methods, content analysis, experimental research, ethnographic and critical research, research ethics and statistical analysis. Special attention will be devoted to research in print and electronic media.

**Prerequisite:** MTH 164 and Junior standing.

Communication Research Methods includes the examination and application of formal and informal research methods of fact-finding and evaluation-research techniques used in management and other media decision making. Emphasis is on the quality of information professionals use to make decisions. You will be able to both UNDERSTAND and USE various research methodologies appropriate to your professional fields.

As a result of completing this course, you should be able to (9 competencies):

1. understand the methods available to conduct communication research
2. understand the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods used in communication research
3. understand and apply sampling designs to communication research
4. understand the various data-gathering designs available for communication evaluation
5. select and interpret appropriate statistical analyses
6. select the appropriate method or methods to evaluate your own communication program(s)
7. evaluate research completed in the field of communication
8. apply the methods of communication research appropriately to specific communication needs

9. use a major statistical package to generate data analyses.

The course is structured around projects that apply material presented in class. Emphasis is on practical applications. Therefore, in general, the course is structured to help you:

- \*\*apply the course material/information in problem solving and decision making
- \*\*learn and understand the fundamental principles and generalizations associated with research
- \*\*learn how to find and use resources for answering questions and solving problems

You will need a working university e-mail account, as we have to be able to access an on-line software package.

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Specifically, the course will furnish an overview of the various empirical research methods used in research. The focus will be on understanding and applying the techniques to a practical project. Statistics and sampling will be included from an applications perspective.

You are required to complete one group paper in two parts with separate grades. The two parts will lead to completion of a full, portfolio-quality research project. The first part of the paper is a qualitative analysis of a communication problem that will result in recommendations for a questionnaire. The second is a pilot study of the questionnaire. Students will work in teams. Group members will evaluate their partners.

Communication research will be taught primarily as a lecture class with discussion over specific areas encouraged. You may expect regular, announced quizzes over assigned readings.

Your knowledge will be assessed both through testing and through evaluation of the two original papers. Tests will include some terms but will be primarily short essay in form. Tests will assess integration and application of knowledge rather than focusing exclusively on objective responses. Written papers are expected to incorporate material presented both in class and in the readings.

All out-of-class assignments must be typed, double-spaced on one side of the paper. **No handwritten, out-of-class assignments will be accepted.** Late assignments lose 10 percent per day.

**IMPORTANT:** No make-up tests or assignments will be permitted except for **unforeseen, documented** excuses approved by the instructor. A doctor's appointment at class time is not an acceptable excuse if your absence is not required for the entire day. Because quizzes are over material that has not been discussed in class, **no make-up quizzes** are

given. Assignments and quizzes may be administered early for excused absences only. You are responsible for any and all assignments made in class. Missing an announcement is not considered an excuse to make up an assignment.

**\*\*Beepers and cell phones, including the text function, must be turned off during class. You may take notes on a computer unless -- based on the instructor's evaluation -- the computer becomes a distraction during class.**

**\*\*You may not read other material/newspapers/magazines and/or work on material for other classes during classtime.**

Grades will be based on the percentage of 1000 points (90%+ is an "A," 80% to 89.99% is a "B," etc). Points will be assigned as follows:

Midterm	200 points
Final	200 points
Qualitative paper	200 points
Pilot Study Report	200 points
Daily Grades/Quizzes*	100 points
Class participation**	100 points

The midterm and the final will cover class presentations and materials assigned in the readings. Practical exercises may be included. You will receive a study guide for each.

Although additional points will be assigned during the term and will be added to your existing total, final grades will be calculated on the base of 1000 points.

\*12 quizzes are assigned; the highest 10 grades will be counted. All quiz grades will be posted on Blackboard and your 2 lowest will change to zero at the end of the term.

\*\*class participation is based primarily on attendance - see Attendance Policy, below - and the final attendance/participation grade will be posted at the end of the term.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** Students are allowed no more than five Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of five Q-drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses to grant permission to drop the class, the student will be required to remain in the class.

The Q-drop limit took effect with the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall 2004 semester will not be included in the five Q-drop limit. Neither will Q-drops from other universities.

NOTE: A Q-drop is a drop made after the last day for tuition refunds (12th class day for fall/spring; 4th class day for summer) but before the date for which a drop would result in a grade of 'F' - as published in the Academic Calendar.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Cheating in any form is academic dishonesty that can result in an “F” for the assignment and possibly the course, and the university’s policy is clear. However, two particular forms of academic dishonesty need to be identified here.

PLAGIARISM: Plagiarized papers will not be accepted. Plagiarism occurs when one person claims credit for another person’s work. It is a form of intellectual dishonesty that is treated with great severity by professionals and by the university. You are encouraged to review the university's policy on plagiarism.

Plagiarism takes two forms: Be certain you understand the meaning of plagiarism: (1) a paper using quotes without quotation marks and attribution is plagiarized. But plagiarism is more than unrecognized quotes. (2) Conclusions that are not yours, information that is not common knowledge, and specific facts must be attributed: tell who said it and cite or footnote it, even if this information is not a direct quote.

Although quoted material is not plagiarized, a paper made up of a series of quotations is not a paper written by the student. You should use quotes sparingly and for specific reasons, such as providing evidence to support a point. Not understanding the material is not an acceptable reason for using a quotation.

**IMPORTANT:** You must also learn how to cite an author or work used/quoted by a second author.

DOUBLE DIPPING: Double dipping is a form of academic dishonesty that is a misuse of your OWN work and occurs when one paper or assignment is presented to fulfill requirements for another course. This does NOT mean you cannot do additional work on a topic that interests you, but you must be certain you are developing new and original material for each class assignment. Check with your instructor to be certain.

## **READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

The reading assignments are scheduled for the WEEK specified. These dates are the earliest you can expect to be responsible for the material. Because the course is project-oriented, changes may be made in the reading schedule as specific needs arise.

### **WEEK OF:**

Aug. 25      Introduction: read through Chapter 1, Introduction, and pay particular attention to: the definition of research, figure 1.1, and the three phases of a communication research project. We will discuss NIH/IRB Certification -- you will need to become certified in ethics.

Sept. 1 Read Chapter 17, Research Applications, Ethics and the Future of Communication Research; quiz 1 over Chs. 1 and 17 -- ethics (four types) will be emphasized.

These chapters should help you understand how research is important to your professional field and the ethical considerations for research with human subjects.

Sept. 8 Chapter 12, Experiments, skip “processing and analyzing,” pp. 232-234 & p. 235. Although class will be held Sept. 8, because of the Labor Day, quiz 2 will be delayed until Sept. 10.

Be prepared to discuss the different types of experiments and internal and external validity. I will explain independent and dependent variables to you.

This chapter is important because all campaigns and other types of interventions - whether public relations, advertising or political - are an experiment of some type. Some experiments give you a better evaluation of the outcome of your “experiment” than others. This chapter will help you understand why.

Group assignments for your papers will be made this week. The readings for next week will provide you the background you need to complete the first phase of your team project.

Sept. 15 Chapter 13, Focus Groups and One-on-One Depth Interviews, pp. 312-315, plus Appendix A.4 and D.3; quiz 3 on Sept. 17. Finish Experiments (Ch. 12) if necessary. Sept. 15 is to complete IRB Certification on your own (no class).

Sept. 15: (A) IRB Certification - due on Sept. 17 (late certificates lose attendance credit for Sept. 15). (B) You must also register on the University IRB site by Sept. 17 for this assignment to be complete.

Sept. 22 Chapter 14, More Research Methods, and Appendix A.3; quiz 4. This chapter reviews some of the various techniques available to you as professionals. This chapter does not include surveys, content analysis and focus groups/depth interviews which we cover with specific chapters. [A lot of little pieces in this chapter, start early.]

**Topic for team paper due Thursday, Sept. 24, at class time.** Late topic statements = no credit. Team members without NIH/IRB Certificates = no topic statement credit.

Sept. 29 Chapter 2, The Pre-Research Phase and the Decision Maker, and Appendix D, budgets; quiz 5.

This chapter explains how you begin a survey research project and explains problems that lead to low-quality information.

Oct. 6 Chapters 3, The Research Phase and the Research Expert, and 4, The Survey Questionnaire, and Appendices A.1 and A.2; quiz 6.

These chapters explain the criteria for a good survey instrument and will be very useful to you in the first phase of your team project.

Be sure you have two blank copies of the practice questionnaire.

Oct. 13 Chapter 5, Selecting Survey Respondents; quiz 7.

This chapter is devoted to sampling issues. Although the examples are directed toward survey research, the information applies to content analysis and any other type of empirical research. This chapter will be very useful to you in the second phase of your team project.

To receive credit, practice questionnaires are due Oct. 15.

You should be close to completing your qualitative research. Chapter 9, *Reporting Survey Research Results*, provides a lot of help in organizing and writing a research report

Oct. 20 Chapter 6, Interviewer Training and Survey Data Collection, quiz 8.

This chapter discusses how interviewers affect/provide good survey information and will apply to the second phase of your team project.

**Team qualitative paper due Thursday, Oct. 22, at class time. [If you are late, be sure to have your paper dated by a faculty member or secretary.] Your team will also need to schedule an appointment for a team conference for after the midterm.**

Oct. 27 No quiz, but read through Chapter 7, Coding and Processing Survey Data (to p. 124, Frequency), and Appendix B

\*\*\*Plan to meet in one of the computer labs for the October 27 session - TBA.  
\*\*\***Be sure your SAM e-mail account is working by Oct. 27.**

Chapter 7 explains how survey data are set up for the computer. Your team will need this information in order to analyze the data you gather for the second phase of your team project. We will schedule practice in a computer lab.

**MIDTERM: Thursday, October 29, in a computer lab (TBA)**

Nov. 3 **FINISH MIDTERM** – Stratification (in class) on Nov. 3  
Chapter 11, Content Analysis, quiz 9 on Nov. 5.

Chapter 11 introduces you to a research technique that helps you understand who is carrying your messages and what is being said.

**IMP:** Content analysis does NOT tell you who actually received your messages or the effect of these messages. You need an experiment to document effect.

Nov. 10 Chapter 7, pp. 124-125, Chapter 8, Survey Data Analysis and Statistics, pp. 128-136, and Appendix C.1; quiz 10.

These chapters help you understand the material that is produced by the computer for the second phase of your team project. We will do NO mathematical statistics by hand in this course; you will learn to understand what the numbers tell you.

We will also discuss some material from Chapter 9, Reporting Survey Research Results, and pp. 235-6. These resources tell you HOW to present your data -- they will be very important in producing your final report.

Nov. 17 Chapter 8, 136 to end, pp. 232-234 in Chapter 12, and Appendix C.2; quiz 11.

These chapters continue the material on statistics.

Nov. 24 Class on Nov. 24 -- no class on Thursday Nov. 26 --  
ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Dec. 1 Continue statistics; no quiz.

Dec. 8 Chapter 15, Researching Racial and Ethnic Minorities; quiz 12.

**Final paper due Thursday, Dec. 10, at class time.**

This chapter explains issues professionals deal with in reaching racial and ethnic minority groups.

If your team project is directed primarily toward minority groups, you may wish to read this chapter early.

NOTE: Because this course has an applied focus, I did not assign Ch. 16, Research in the Academic Environment. If Graduate School is on your agenda, you should read Ch.16.

If we have time, on Thursday, Dec. 10, we will review statistics that will be on the midterm. Attendance will be taken.

Dec. 17 Your Final Examination is scheduled on December 17 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. We will meet in a computer lab.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY: Dr. Bridges**

You are expected to attend class, to have completed the readings, and to participate in class discussions. 100 points are built into the course for class attendance or “participation.” Each student is permitted two (2) unexcused absences -- the equivalent of one week of class. Each additional, unexcused absence will result in ten (10) points deducted from the 100-point participation grade. If you come to class after the roll has been taken, you will be counted absent. If you choose to leave class after the roll has been taken or after a quiz, a second roll will be taken before the class ends. You must be on both rolls to be counted present.

Unless you added the class late, your attendance is counted from the first day of class. Therefore, if you were on the original class roll and you were not in class on August 25, you have used one of your “free” absences.

### **UNIVERSITY POLICIES REGARDING ACADEMIC CLASSES**

The university has policies that apply to all students within the classroom. A brief summary of each of these policies is below. Detailed information may be found at <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

1. Academic Dishonesty: Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences, both in and out of the classroom. [Also see my statement on academic dishonesty in this syllabus.] The University subscribes to – and I use -- **Turnitin**, the worldwide standard in online plagiarism prevention.
2. Students with Disabilities: It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs, nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center.
3. Observance of Religious Holy Days: Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work.
4. Visitors in the Classroom: Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar’s Office.
5. Classroom Decorum [Classroom Rules of Conduct]: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.