

**COMM 506.1**  
**Introduction to Mass Communication Research**  
Fall 2012

*(Course Information Available on ANGEL: <https://cms.psu.edu/default.asp>)*

- Instructor:** S. Shyam Sundar, PhD  
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- Office Hours:** Tuesdays & Fridays – 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm  
(Advance sign-up sheet can be found on office door)  
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- Teaching Assistants:** T. Franklin Waddell (PhD student)  
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- Yan Huang (M.A. student)  
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Office Hours: By appointment (tentative)
- Meeting Times:** Tue. 9:05 am – 12:05 pm
- Meeting Location:** Rm. 3, Carnegie Bldg. (unless otherwise indicated)
- Goals:**
- (1) To introduce the scientific method of inquiry used in the social sciences, particularly as they inform communication research.
  - (2) To survey basic concepts of theoretical and empirical research in the field of communication.
  - (3) To enable students to critically analyze published research and identify threats to validity of inferences.
  - (4) To help students design and conduct a communication research project by training them to formulate questions, develop appropriate methods for generating the data needed for answering those questions, conduct data analysis and produce original, publishable research.

**Texts & Readings:** The textbooks for the course are *Explication* by Steven H. Chaffee and *Research Methods for Communication Science* by James H. Watt and Sjef A. van den Berg. Both books are out of print, but photocopied versions of them are available at the Penn State Bookstore on campus. One of them, *Research Methods for Communication Science*, is also available as a free download on ANGEL. In addition, students are required to download journal articles assigned for this course. These articles are available online through the library's electronic reserves (go to Course Reserves under CAT in <http://cat.libraries.psu.edu/>). Also required for this course is a guide titled *Writing Empirical Research Reports: A Basic Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences (7<sup>th</sup> ed.)* by Fred Pyszczak and Randall R. Bruce, available at the campus bookstore. Specific readings from the textbooks as well as the journal articles are assigned for each class meeting. Since all submissions for this class should conform to APA style, it is recommended that students have ready access to a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Given that all students will be required to critique published research as part of class activity, it is recommended that they read a guide titled *Evaluating Research in Academic Journals (4<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* by Fred Pyszczak. Another book that's likely to come in handy while designing your research project is *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)* by Mildred L. Patten. All three optional books are shelved under "Comm. 506" at the campus bookstore.

**Exams:** There will be a midterm and a final as scheduled in the syllabus and the university timetable. Both exams are designed to test your mastery of methodological concepts and principles learned in class. The midterm counts for 20 percent while the final accounts for 25 percent of the course grade.

**Assignments:** To provide experiential learning, students will be conducting a number of research tasks throughout the semester. Many of these tasks are folded into the research project requirement described below. However, one assignment, which involves a comprehensive explication of a communication concept and the development of measures for that concept, will be graded separately and accounts for 15 percent of the course grade.

**Critiques:** Starting Sept. 10, students will take turns presenting critiques of communication research articles (downloaded from electronic reserves) during each class meeting. The student responsible for a given article is expected to distribute a handout and make a ten-minute presentation of the article in the class, followed by five minutes of questions from the instructor and fellow students. This exercise will count for 5 percent of the final grade in the course. Each critique will be graded on a ten-point scale as follows: One point each for correct identification of concepts and statement of

research question, three points for description of methods used, two for interpretation of results, and three points for a detailed methodological critique of the study (which includes coming up with creative alternative explanations and discussion points for the class to think about as a way to expand/redesign). The average score across two or more critiques will be used to compute the overall “critique score” for the semester. PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU SHOULD UPLOAD BOTH YOUR POWERPOINT PRESENTATION AND YOUR HANDOUT (WORD DOCUMENT) ON ANGEL AT LEAST 24 HOURS BEFORE YOUR PRESENTATION.

**Critique Participation:** Another 5 percent of the course grade is devoted to the quality of your participation in other students' paper critiques. That is, when they critique their article in class, it is important for you to have read the assigned article ahead of time and come prepared with questions, probes, suggestions, etc. The caliber of your comments following each paper critique will be graded, and an overall score of critique participation will be computed at the end of the semester, accounting for 5 percent of the course grade.

**Class Participation:** Yet another 5 percent of the total grade is devoted to active participation in class—asking questions, responding to questions posed by instructor, integrating readings and contributing meaningfully to classroom discussions.

**Research Project:** Groups of two or three will be formed to facilitate peer learning and collective brainstorming through the research process. Each group will discuss relevant methodological issues during class meetings and conduct a research project by the end of the semester. Details on the Research Project will be spelled out as the semester progresses. Performance on this project accounts for the remaining 25 percent of the final grade.

### **Grading Policy**

Midterm Exam:	20% of grade
Final Exam:	25%
Assignments:	15 %
Critiques:	5%
Critique Participation:	5%
Class Participation:	5%
Research Project:	25%

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university.

Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at:

<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/cyberplagstudent.html>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: [www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20](http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20), and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

**NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS located in room 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at [www.equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/). Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

**NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH FLU SYMPTOMS:** In compliance with Pennsylvania Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control recommendations, students should NOT attend class or any public gatherings while ill with influenza. Students with flu symptoms will be asked to leave campus if possible and to return home during recovery. The illness and self-isolation period will usually be about a week. It is very important that individuals avoid spreading the flu to others. Most students should be able to complete a successful semester despite a flu-induced absence. Faculty will provide students who are absent because of illness with a reasonable opportunity to make up missed work. Ordinarily, it is inappropriate to substitute for the missed assignment the weighting of a semester's work that does not include the missed assignment or exam. Completion of all assignments and exams assures the greatest chance for students to develop heightened understanding and content mastery that is unavailable through the weighting process. The opportunity to complete all assignments and exams supports the university's desire to enable students to make responsible situational decisions, including the decision to avoid spreading a contagious virus to other students, staff, and faculty, without endangering their academic work. Students with the flu do not need to provide a physician's certification

of illness. However, ill students should inform their teachers (but not through personal contact in which there is a risk of exposing others to the virus) as soon as possible that they are absent because of the flu. Likewise students should contact their instructors as quickly as possible to arrange to make up missed assignments or exams.

If you have questions about academic policy-related issues, please call the Associate Dean/Chief Academic Officer of your college. For health-related questions you can email Dr. Margaret Spear, director, University Health Services, at [uhsinfo@sa.psu.edu](mailto:uhsinfo@sa.psu.edu).

### SCHEDULE

Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings BEFORE coming to class. This will help you participate more effectively in class meetings.

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|----------|---|--|
| Aug. 27  | <p>INTRODUCTION &amp; OVERVIEW<br/>         NATURE OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY<br/>         Chaffee Ch. 1; Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 1</p>  |  |
| Sep. 3   | <p>CONCEPTUALIZATION<br/>         Chaffee Ch. 2-12; Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 2; Pyrczak &amp; Bruce Ch. 5, 6 &amp; 7<br/>         (Finish IRB Regulations, SARI, CITI Training and Certification at home)</p>                                  | <p><i>Explication assignments handed out</i></p> |
| Sept. 10 | <p>OPERATIONALIZATION<br/>         Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 3, 4 &amp; 13; Pyrczak &amp; Bruce Ch. 1, 2, 3 &amp; 4<br/>         Csikszentmihalyi &amp; Kubey<br/>         Beniger<br/>         Schweitzer, Zillmann, Weaver &amp; Luttrell</p> |  |
| Sept. 17 | <p>MEASUREMENT<br/>         Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 7; Ch. 18 (pp. 347-352 or online pp. 274-277)<br/>         Zillmann, Rockwell, Schweitzer &amp; Sundar<br/>         Jensen, Weaver, Ivic &amp; Imboden<br/>         Crum &amp; Langer</p> |  |
| Sep. 24  | <p>SAMPLING<br/>         Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 5 &amp; 6<br/>         Green &amp; Gerber<br/>         Lacy, Riffe, Stoddard, Martin &amp; Chang</p>   | <p><i>Explication outline due</i></p>            |
| Oct. 1   | <p>SURVEY RESEARCH &amp; MIDTERM REVIEW<br/>         Watt &amp; Berg Ch. 16 (pp. 309-317 or online pp. 242-248); Ch. 17; Ch. 18<br/>         (pp. 352-372 or online pp. 277-293)</p>  |  |

	Garrett	
Oct. 8	MIDTERM EXAM	
Oct. 15	EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH Watt & Berg Ch. 14 & 15 Nass, Reeves & Leshner Sundar & Kalyanaraman Zillmann & Bhatia Floyd, Mikkelson, Hesse & Pauley	<i>Explication assignment due</i>
Oct. 22	CONTENT ANALYSIS Watt & Berg Ch. 16 (pp. 317-323 or online pp. 249-254); Ch. 18 (pp. 372-377 or online pp. 293-297) Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, Schat, & Bevan Oliver Schooler, Sundar & Flora	
Oct. 29	DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS Watt & Berg Ch. 8, 9 & 10 Baker, Wagner, Singer & Bundorf Reichert & Carpenter	<i>JMP practice 1</i>
Nov. 5	INFERENTIAL STATISTICS Watt & Berg Ch. 11 & 12 Eveland Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod Sundar	<i>JMP practice 2</i>
Nov. 12	DATA ANALYSIS Watt & Berg Ch. 19 Pencil	
Nov. 19	DATA INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION PLANNING Pyrszak & Bruce Ch. 9, 10 & 11	
Dec. 3	REPORTING RESEARCH Pyrszak & Bruce Ch. 8, 12, 13 & 15	<i>Group Project Presentations</i>  <i>Report due at 11:59 pm on Dec. 6</i>
Dec. 10	WRAP-UP & REVIEW	

## FINAL EXAMINATION AS SCHEDULED IN THE UNIVERSITY TIMETABLE

The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the semester. Attendance is mandatory for every class meeting. If a student needs to miss a class, prior permission has to be obtained from the instructor.

### List of Readings in Course Reserves

(Electronic copy accessible by performing a Course Reserve Search at <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/course.html>)

- Baker, L., Wagner, T., Singer, S., & Bundorf, M. K. (2003). Use of the Internet and e-mail for health care information: Results from a national survey. *JAMA*, 289, 2400-2406.
- Beniger, J. R. (1983). Does television enhance the shared symbolic environment? Trends in labeling of editorial cartoons, 1948-1980. *American Sociological Review*, 48(1), 103-111.
- Crum, A. J., & Langer, E. J. (2007). Mind-set matters: Exercise and the placebo effect. *Psychological Science*, 18, 165-171.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Kubey, R. (1981). Television and the rest of life: A systematic comparison of subjective experience. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, 317-328.
- Eveland, W. P., Jr. (2002). News information processing as mediator of the relationship between motivations and political knowledge. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(1), 26-40.
- Floyd, K., Mikkelsen, A. C., Hesse, C., & Pauley, P. M. (2007). Affectionate writing reduces total cholesterol: Two randomized, controlled trials. *Human Communication Research* 33(2), 119-142.
- Garrett, R. K. (2011). Troubling consequences of online political rumoring. *Human Communication Research*, 37(2), 255-274.
- Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2006). Can registration-based sampling improve the accuracy of midterm election forecast? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70, 197-223.
- Hum, N. J., Chamberlin, P. E., Hambright, B. L., Portwood A.C., Schat, A.C., & Bevan, J. L. (2011). A picture is worth a thousand words: A content analysis of Facebook profile photographs. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27, 1828-1833.
- Jensen, J. D., Weaver, A. J., Ivic, R., & Imboden, K. (2011). Developing a brief sensation seeking scale for children: Establishing concurrent validity with video game use and rule-breaking behavior. *Media Psychology*, 14(1), 71-95.

- Lacy, S., Riffe, D., Stoddard, S., Martin, H., & Chang, K. (2001). Sample size for newspaper content analysis in multi-year studies. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, 836-845.
- Linz, D., Donnerstein, E., & Penrod, S. (1984). The effects of multiple exposures to filmed violence against women. *Journal of Communication*, 34, 130-147.
- Nass, C., Reeves, B., & Leshner, G. (1996). Technology and roles: A tale of two TVs. *Journal of Communication*, 46(2), 121-128.
- Oliver, M. B. (1994). Portrayals of crime, race, and aggression in "reality-based" police shows: A content analysis. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 38, 179-192.
- Pencil, M. (1976). Salt passage research: The state of the art. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 31-36.
- Reichert, T., & Carpenter, C. (2004). An update on sex in magazine advertising: 1983 to 2003. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81, 823-837.
- Schooler, C., Sundar, S. S., & Flora, J. (1996). Effects of the Stanford Five-City Project media advocacy program. *Health Education Quarterly*, 23, 346-364.
- Schweitzer, K., Zillmann, D., Weaver, J. B., & Luttrell, E. S. (1992). Perception of threatening events in the emotional aftermath of a televised college football game. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 36, 75-82.
- Sundar, S. S. (2004). Loyalty to computer terminals: Is it anthropomorphism or consistency? *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 23(2), 107-118.
- Sundar, S. S., & Kalyanaraman, S. (2004). Arousal, memory, and impression-formation effects of animation speed in Web advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(1), 7-17.
- Zillmann, D., & Bhatia, A. (1989). Effects of associating with musical genres on heterosexual attraction. *Communication Research*, 16, 263-288.
- Zillmann, D., Rockwell, S., Schweitzer, K., & Sundar, S. S. (1993). Does humor facilitate coping with physical discomfort? *Motivation and Emotion*, 17(1), 1-21.

### **List of Suggested Readings**

*(Published versions of previous 506 group projects)*

- Dou, X., Walden, J.A., Lee, S., & Lee, J.Y. (2012). Does source matter? Examining source effects in online product reviews. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1555-1563.
- Grigorovici, D., Nam, S., & Russill, C. (2003). The effects of online syllabus interactivity on students' perception of the course and instructor. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 6, 41-52.
- Hu, Y., Wood, J.F., Smith, V., & Westbrook, N. (2004). Friendships through IM: examining the relationship between instant messaging and intimacy. *Journal of Computer -Mediated Communication*, 10 (1), Article 6. Retrieved August 15, 2007, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue1/hu.html>



- Kahle, S., Yu, N., & Whiteside, E. (2007). Another disaster: An examination of portrayals of race in Hurricane Katrina coverage. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 14(2), 76-89.
- Ramasubramanian, S., Gyure, J. F., & Mursi, N. M. (2002). Impact of Internet images: Impression formation effects of university Web sites. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12(2), 49-68.