

CMN 102: Empirical Methods in Communication

Spring Quarter 2014

Instructor: Robert A. Bell, Ph.D.

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Lecture

Monday/Wednesday, 4:10 – 5:30 PM
Wellman 126

Discussion Sections

A01: Friday, 10:00 – 10:50 AM
(CRN 27288), Haring Hall 2016

A02: Friday, 11:00 – 11:50 AM
(CRN 53747), Haring Hall 2016

***You must attend the discussion section in which
you are enrolled – No Exceptions!!!***

Prerequisite

The prerequisite for this course is Statistics 13 or an equivalent course in basic descriptive and inferential statistics. (Note: CMN 101 is no longer a prerequisite for CMN 102.)

Course Objectives

CMN 102 provides an introduction to research methods commonly employed by communication researchers. Much of our attention will be devoted to surveying four styles of research: *experimental procedures*, *survey research*, *qualitative field work*, and *content analysis*. Our consideration of the various methods will be informed by the multi-method perspective. This approach to scholarship acknowledges the value of all of the above methods, but recognizes that each has particular strengths and weaknesses.

Course Materials

Textbook

Earl Babbie. (2014). *The Basics of Social Research* (6th edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. We will cover chapters 1-12.

The textbook is available at the UCD bookstore. Less expensive used copies can sometimes be obtained from Amazon.com. Earlier editions should not be used because significant changes were made in the 6th edition.

Illustrative Studies

You will read two studies that represent examples of experimental and survey research, the two most commonly used methods in communication research. These papers will be dissected during discussion sections. Both papers are available for download at the course SmartSite in the folder labeled “Illustrative Studies.” Both are authored by faculty within the Department. Read these publications *before* coming to your Friday session:

Pena, J., Hancock, J.T., & Merola, N.A. (2009). The priming effects of avatars in virtual settings. *Communication Research*, 36: 838-856. [Experimental Research Exemplar]

Cho, J. (2005). Media, interpersonal discussion, and electoral choice. *Communication Research*, 32: 295-322. [Survey Research Exemplar]

Supplemental Materials

Course Manual for Lecture Sections. A packet of supplemental materials can be downloaded from the course SmartSite. The course manual is required. Please bring relevant sections with you to every class period. You may also download the document to a flash drive and have it printed out at a copy shop of your choosing. *Please note:* I have made this manual available in PDF and Word formats. The PDF is the official manual – the one I use in class. Some students want the Word version so they can enter notes directly into it. Feel free to do so if you wish. *Tip:* If your PDFs take forever to print, check the “print as image” option, which is available on the “Advanced Printing” tab.

Discussion Section Packet. A packet of exercises and other materials for the discussion sections can be downloaded from the course SmartSite. Bring this with you to the discussion section sessions.

Evaluation

Overview

Final grades are based on a 120-point system as follows:

Grade Component	Points	Weight
Midterm Examination	48	40%
Final Examination	48	40%
Discussion Section Attendance	12	10%
Assignment 1 (Experiments)	6	5%
Assignment 2 (Surveys)	6	5%
Total	120	100%

Midterm and Final Examination

Overview. There will be one midterm examination and one final examination. Each examination will account for 40% of your grade and will consist of 48 questions. The final examination is not comprehensive; it covers materials taught after the midterm. These exams will be comprised of multiple choice questions (including an occasional True/False question). Bring a Scantron Form 2000, as well as several sharp pencils and an eraser to examination sessions.

Tardiness. If you show up late on an examination day, your tardiness will cut into your allotted time and severely reduce your probability of success. *Do not be late!*

No Electronic Devices! All electronic devices must be stored under your seat during the exams. Any student found using or even holding an electronic device during an exam will be assumed to be cheating and will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs.

Policy on Make-up Examinations. Make-up tests will not be given, except in the case of a documented illness or family crisis. If you provide a documented rationale for missing a test prior to its administration, you will be allowed to take the test at a later time. If you have several examinations scheduled for the same day, you will need to plan ahead and take the exam in this course as scheduled. Your instructor does not postpone tests for this reason. *Please note: If you are approved to take a make-up examination, your test will not be the same one given to the class.* Make-up exams will be composed of short answer and essay questions and are scheduled for Friday afternoons.

No Early Test Times. For security reasons, early test times are not available for the midterm or final examinations. If you cannot take the final examination at the regularly scheduled time, you will need to complete CMN 102 in a later quarter.

Study Guidance for Examinations. Study guides are available for both the midterm and final exam at the course website (<http://smartsite.ucdavis.edu>). These guides outline the key points in the textbook. Please use these guides to direct your preparation, not as a substitute for reading the textbook. Anything that appears in the textbook is fair game for the examinations. Your course manual serves as your study guidance for class lectures. Your discussion section learning materials document serves as your study guidance for the discussion section sessions.

Testing FAQs. Here are answers to the most common questions I receive about my tests:

- (1) *Will the test cover mostly class material or book material?* Answer: My tests draw heavily from both sources of information. Some questions will draw from *both* lectures and the book.
- (2) *If I just read the book, do I need to come to class?* Answer: Students who do not attend regularly will have difficulties in this class. My tests will include “attendance questions” intended to reward students who come to class. These are questions that a student would be unlikely to answer correctly if s/he were absent from class.
- (3) *How should I prepare for the examination?* Answer: (a) Outline the book chapters to identify the central points. (b) Focus on the idea behind examples given. (c) Think about joining a study group. (d) Generate your own examples for class concepts. (e) Create flash cards to learn concepts. (f) Come to class and attend all discussion sections!
- (4) *Is the final examination comprehensive?* Answer: No.
- (5) *I missed a lecture (discussion section). What should I do?* Answer: If you miss a lecture or discussion section, it is your responsibility to track down and copy a good set of notes from one of your classmates. It is not the responsibility of your instructor or teaching assistant to give you your own private lecture for those days you miss.

Discussion Section Attendance

Your absence from the course discussion sections defeats the purpose of this learning activity and undermines the quality of your fellow classmates’ educational experience. You are thus expected to attend all class sessions. *Attendance will be taken.* Students who do not stay for the entire session will be counted as absent. At your TA’s discretion, attendance can be taken at the beginning and/or end of each class ses-

sion. You start the class with the full 12 points (10% of your final course grade) assigned to you. However, if you miss more than two class sessions you will lose all of these points and receive a score of 0 for this component of the final grade. If you are sick you must use one of your two passes to cover your absence; there are no excused absences. If you cannot attend Friday sessions you should not enroll in this course.

Attendance at the discussion sections is important. Your TA will be working through exercises in most class sessions that will clarify the more difficult course constructs, illustrate how various research methods are utilized in research, and help to prepare you for the examinations. Thus by attending these sessions you will not only earn an easy 12 points, but will also be better prepared for the midterm and final exams.

Assignments

You will be expected to read two examples of original research; each study illustrates one of the methods covered in this class. This quarter you will be asked to read an example of experimental research and survey research. The article for each assignment will be attached to the assignment instructions. The assignment documents can be downloaded from the course SmartSite. The complete citations for the two articles addressed in these assignments follow:

Assignment 1: Peña, J., & Kim, E. (2014). Increasing exergame physical activity through self and opponent avatar appearance. *Computers in Human Behavior, 41*, 262-267.

Assignment 2: Miller, L. M. S., & Bell, R. A. (2012). Online health information seeking: The influence of age, information trustworthiness, and search challenges. *Journal of Aging and Health, 24*, 525-541.

These assignments take the form of a take-home, short-answer quiz. For each paper you will be given 12 equally-weighted questions that can be answered in a sentence or two based on your understanding of the article. Your responses to these questions will be due at the beginning of the discussion session on the date given in the assignment. Late submissions will not be accepted. No exceptions. The work you submit must be your own. You may not work with other students. Treat these assignments as tests. Each is worth 6 points (5% of your final course grade).

Extra Credit

On occasion, colleagues and our own doctoral students ask your instructor to make you available (on a voluntary basis) as research participants in their studies. When asked, I always agree to do so, provided that the studies have been approved by the UCD Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, such opportunities are not guaranteed. If I receive such requests, and if you participate in these studies, you will receive 2 points for every study you complete, up to a maximum of 4 points. Once again, these extra credit opportunities do not come up in every quarter. It is best to assume that your final course grade will be based solely on your two examination scores, two assignments, and attendance points.

Your Final Course Grade

Your final point total will be converted to a percentage (points earned/120). A letter grade for the course will then be assigned as described in the table below. *This grading scale will not be curved.* Your instructor reserves the right to adjust test scores upward by adding points if the mean is below his expectations. Fairness, as well as the UCD grading policy, requires that grading criteria apply to everyone. Your instructor does not negotiate grades.

Final Grade			
97.00 – 100%	A+	73.00 – 76.99%	C
93.00 – 96.99%	A	70.00 – 72.99%	C-
90.00 – 92.99%	A-	67.00 – 69.99%	D+
87.00 – 89.99%	B+	63.00 – 66.99%	D
83.00 – 86.99%	B	60.00 – 62.99%	D-
80.00 – 82.99%	B-	<60%	F
77.00 – 79.99%	C+		

Other Matters

Class sessions are for learning. Do not text, email or surf the web during lectures and discussion sections. These rude behaviors are distracting to your fellow classmates, your teacher and your TA. If you must respond to an urgent email, please step outside to do so.

Schedule of Activities

Your instructor reserves the right to make alterations to this schedule, including the midterm test date, as needed.

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
March 30	Introduction to Course / Human Inquiry and Science	Chapter 1
April 1	Human Inquiry and Science	Chapter 2
April 3	Discussion Section: Introductions	
April 6	Causation	Chapter 3
April 8	Research Design	Chapter 4
April 10	Discussion Section: Ethics and Politics of Research; Variables and Attributes	
April 13	Research Design (continued)	
April 15	Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement	Chapter 5
April 17	Discussion Section: Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Research. Reliability and Validity of Measurements	
April 20	Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement (continued)	Chapter 6
April 22	Sampling	Chapter 7
April 24	Discussion Section: Midterm Review	
April 27	Sampling (continued)	
April 29	MIDTERM EXAMINATION	
May 1	Discussion Section: Dissecting an Experiment. Assignment 1 is Described Today.	Peña et al (2009)

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
May 4	Experiments	Chapter 8
May 6	Experiments / The Survey Questionnaire	
May 8	Discussion Section: Writing Good Questions	Turn in Assignment 1
May 11	The Survey Questionnaire	Chapter 9
May 13	Survey Research	
May 15	Discussion Section: Dissecting a Survey Study. Assignment 2 is Described Today.	Cho (2005)
May 18	Survey Research / Qualitative Field Research	Chapters 10
May 20	Qualitative Research/Content Analysis	
May 22	Discussion Section: Qualitative Field Research	Turn in Assignment 2
May 25	Memorial Day (No Class)	
May 27	Content Analysis	Chapter 11
May 29	Discussion Section: Content Analysis	
Jun 1	Evaluation Research	Chapter 12
June 3	Evaluation Research	
June 11 8-10 AM (Thursday)	Final Exam The examination will be held in our regularly scheduled classroom. Other times and earlier times are not available. If you enroll in this course you must take the final examination at this time. If this time does not work for you, you will need to take the class in a future quarter.	