

# Introduction to Communication Research Methods

## COM 365 Course Syllabus ~ Spring 2009

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Course Website: <http://www.uky.edu/~drlane/methods>

*“The best research is driven by theory, validates a theory, further explains a theory, challenges an existing theory, or aids in the creation of theory. Theoretically driven research is built on the results of previous researchers, and it provides a foundation for subsequent researchers. It is highly unlikely that any theory could be formulated, tested, and verified in one research study. Rather, theory is developed and tested over time. What we come to know as ‘the theory’ to explain some phenomenon is the result of many research studies and the efforts of many researchers.” (Keyton, 2001, pp. 8-9)*

### GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

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COM 365-002

Class meets: 8:00 - 10:30

Friday EGJ 225

### INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

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**Derek R. Lane, Ph.D.**

**Email:** [drlane@uky.edu](mailto:drlane@uky.edu)

**Office:** 859.257.7805

**Office Hours:** Wednesday

**Office Location:** 133 Grehan Building

**Communication Department Office:** 859.257.3622

10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. (And by appointment)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

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*Introduction to Communication Research Methods* provides an overview of the concepts, methods, and tools by which communication research is designed, conducted, interpreted, and critically evaluated. The primary goals of this course are to help you become a knowledgeable consumer and a limited producer of communication research as you develop skills in gathering, organizing, interpreting and presenting research information using competent and ethically defensible methods. The following objectives will help you reach these goals: (1) master the concepts and technical vocabulary of communication research, and be able to use this language appropriately; (2) comprehend the relationship between theory and research methods in the study of communication as a social science; (3) assess the ethical choices of researchers in conducting and presenting research; (4) compare and contrast four major research methods (experimental, survey, textual analysis, and naturalistic inquiry) used to investigate communication behavior; (5) develop skills necessary for conducting communication research; (6) develop the ability to clearly communicate, both orally and in writing, the findings of original communication research to a lay audience; and (7) become an intelligent consumer of research—able to read, understand, explain and critically evaluate communication and other research reported in scholarly journals as well as in the popular press.

### REQUIRED READING

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American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

In addition to the required textbook and the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Publication Manual of the APA you will need to become familiar with the communication resources available in the Communication Department and W.T. Young Library in order to secure the necessary references required for the research article critique assignment and your original communication research study.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Booth, W., Colomb, G., & Williams, J. (1995). *The craft of research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morgan, S. E., Reichert, T., & Harrison, T. R. (2002). *From numbers to words: Reporting statistical results for the social sciences*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Rubin, R. B., Palmgreen, P., & Sypher, H. E. (1994). *Communication research measures: A sourcebook*. New York: Guilford Press.

Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., & Piele, L. J. (1999). *Communication research: Strategies and sources*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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**ATTENDANCE: Attendance is required.** Students are required to provide official written documentation for excused absences. Excuses for university-sponsored activities must be presented in advance of the absence and arrangements for work missed for such activities must be made prior to such absences. No excuses or documentation will be accepted more than two weeks after the absence. **Your final grade will be lowered 100 points (i.e., by one letter grade, or 10%) for each absence above one.** The University code for classroom behavior and academic misconduct will be enforced in this course.

**MISSED OR LATE EXAMS OR ASSIGNMENTS:** By definition, late assignments are below average. Missed or late assignments create major time and scheduling conflicts, and are unfair to those who are prepared. For these reasons, any late assignment will have 10 percent deducted from the score as a penalty for each day it is late (including weekends). An assignment is considered late when it is submitted after the stated deadline, and deductions will be taken beginning with the missed deadline. For example, if an assignment is due in class on Thursday, deductions will begin immediately following the conclusion of class. The only exception to this policy will be documented and university accepted excuses (see Students Rights and Responsibilities Code). No make up work is available for in-class exercises or exams unless prior arrangements are approved by the instructor.

**READINGS AND PARTICIPATION:** All readings should be done prior to the assigned class period. Students are expected to participate fully and positively in class discussions and activities.

**CLASSROOM CIVILITY:** We want to build a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. In a communication class, it is *especially* important that we (1) display respect for all members of the classroom – including the instructor and fellow classmates, (2) pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities; (3) avoid unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g., having private conversations, reading the newspaper, doing work for other classes, receiving cell phone calls, etc.); and (4) avoid racist, sexist, homophobic or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus and classroom. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; rather, they represent the minimal standards that help make the classroom a productive place for all concerned.

**WRITTEN WORK AND PRESENTATIONS:** While it should go without saying, I'll say it anyway – students must use correct spelling and grammar in all written and oral assignments. In-class activities and exams may be handwritten. All other submitted work must be typed. All written assignments must conform to guidelines established in the Fifth Edition of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Publication Manual. Grades on poorly written assignments or those not conforming to APA guidelines will be lowered by up to 10 percent

**E-MAIL & COMPUTER WORK:** All assignments *must* be submitted in hard copy. However, we may use electronic mail for on-line discussions and class updates. Please read your mail regularly (at least twice per day) so you can keep up-to-date on upcoming assignments. If you do not already have these skills, you will need to acquire them quickly. They will not only be useful now, but for virtually any job you take after you leave UK. Let me know if you need help with this.

**POLICY ON INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY:** Intellectual dishonesty is a fancy term for cheating. Unless otherwise explicitly stated by the instructor, all work must be the original product of the student, and all materials taken from others must be properly cited. Cheating and plagiarism in any form, regardless of any justification, will not be tolerated. Any student whom the instructor has sufficient evidence to believe has cheated or plagiarized in the course will receive an automatic "E" (failure) in the entire course. There will be no exceptions. Additional penalties may involve suspension, dismissal, or expulsion from the University. As you can see, these are extreme measures for academic offenses that we believe are serious. Policies related to cheating/plagiarism (as well as excused absences, withdrawal, incompletes, final exams and common exams) can be found in your copy of Student Rights and Responsibilities. As students and faculty in the University of Kentucky, we are all responsible for adhering to these policies. You should be particularly familiar with Senate Rules 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, which are available online at [www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html](http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html).

If you suspect that someone else in the class is cheating or plagiarizing, please report it to me immediately. You may report such incidents anonymously at <http://comm.uky.edu/surveys/contactus/cheating.html>.

**REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION POLICY:** Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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**EXAMS:** Four Unit Tests will be given upon completion of each of the major units of the textbook. Unless otherwise noted, the Unit Tests will not be cumulative. There will be no cumulative Final Exam but we will meet during the scheduled final exam time to complete presentations. The Unit Tests will be composed of multiple-choice, true-false, matching, short answer, or essay items, and cover material from lectures, readings, and assignments. Study guides for each exam are posted on the course web page.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** One of the primary goals of this class is to enhance your ability to read, understand, explain and critically evaluate research reported in scholarly journals. The *Research Article Summary and Critique* is designed to help you do just that. A complete description of this project is available on the course web page and on page 7 of this syllabus.

**THE ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH PROJECT** asks you to examine a particular aspect of communication within a specific context, to review how communication theory has been used in previous scholarly studies, and then to design and carry out your own original research study. This project will result in a final written document that will include a title page, abstract, introduction, review of literature, research hypotheses/question(s), methods, results, discussion, references, tables, and appendices as needed. You will submit two paper copies (one for COM 351 and one for COM 365) and one digital copy (emailed to [Derek.Lane@uky.edu](mailto:Derek.Lane@uky.edu) and [Mina.Tsay@uky.edu](mailto:Mina.Tsay@uky.edu) of the complete document. The project will culminate with an eight (8) minute presentation graded by both cohort instructors.

## GRADING CRITERIA

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**There are no optional assignments.** Course completion is accomplished when all necessary assignments have been finished.

Your grade in this course is a function of the following:

		<b>Points</b>
<b>Unit Tests</b>		450
• Exam 1 (Chapters 1 - 3)	50 points	
• Exam 2 (Chapters 4 - 6)	100 points	
• Exam 3 (Chapters 7 - 10)	150 points	
• Exam 4 (Chapters 11 - 15)	150 points	
<b>Research Article Summary &amp; Critique</b>	100 points	100
<b>Final Original Communication Research Project</b>		<u>450</u>
• Initial Proposal	25 points	
• Initial Methodology Paper	50 points	
• Data Analysis Assignment	75 points	
• Written Project	200 points	
• Oral Presentation	100 points	
<b>TOTAL</b>		1000

The University of Kentucky College of Communications and Information Studies does not use the “plus/minus” system. Based on student input, the university uses less-sensitive, but more traditional, “straight” letter grades. Final letter grades will be assigned based on the following point distribution:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Point Range</b>	<b>Quality Points (GPA)</b>
A	900-1000	4.0
B	800 – 899	3.0
C	700 – 799	2.0
D	600 – 699	1.0
E	Below 600	0.0

## HOW TO STUDY AND EARN AN “A” IN THIS COURSE

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The following guidelines are offered as the best way to master the material in this course and earn an “A:”

- Come to class, listen actively, and participate. This means taking good notes and participating in the discussions and in-class exercises. Be certain that your comments improve on the silence.
- Participate in the on-line discussions and make use of web resources:  
<http://www.uky.edu/~drlane/cohort>
- Take notes as though you will be explaining the content to a friend who missed it.
- Communicate with your instructor – about possible absences, late assignments, or anything else that will affect your performance in class.
- Ask questions if you don’t understand something. Just because others aren’t asking questions doesn’t mean they understand everything being said. If something isn’t clear to you it may not be clear to your classmates. Do them a favor and raise your hand--or ask it in an e-mail.
- Summarize, re-write, or otherwise review your notes between classes. Don’t wait for the night before an exam to re-familiarize yourself with the material covered. Mental preparation is similar to physical exercise. A little bit every day will make you stronger gradually. A strenuous workout after a long layoff will only leave you sore.
- Read the assigned readings twice (including the discussion questions at the end of chapters). Don’t wait for the last minute to read! There’s no reason you can’t read ahead.
- Take some action to personalize the material. Develop your own set of reading notes, summarize each reading, or write out what you think would be a likely essay question.
- Don’t simply highlight the readings with a marker (This can be a trap - it *isn’t* true that “to highlight is to know.”).
- Think about your written assignments *before* you write them. Create a detailed outline before you begin to write any assignment. Plan on at least two—and preferably more—drafts of your work (ideally written at different sittings).
- DON’T PROCRASTINATE!
- Work with Dr. Lane outside of class as needed.

## SYLLABUS REFERENCES

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Keyton, J. (2001). *Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

### TENTATIVE DAILY SCHEDULE

Following is a tentative, preliminary list of topics I hope to cover. However, the actual schedule may vary, depending on the needs of the class. You will be responsible for knowing from week to week what we are actually covering in class.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	CHAPTER	ASSIGNMENTS
#1	1/16/09	Introduction & Overview Unit I: Conceptualizing Research	1	
#2	1/23/09	Asking Questions About Communication Generating Research Questions & Hypotheses	2	
#3	1/30/09	Finding, Reading, & Using Research EXAM #1	3 1-3	Unit Test #1 (50 points)
#4	2/06/09	Unit II: Planning & Designing Research Observing & Measuring Com Variables 2/06/09 Designing Valid Communication Research	4 5	Initial Proposal due
#5	2/13/09	Research Ethics EXAM #2	6 4-6	Unit Test #2 (100 points)
#6	2/20/09	Unit III: Methods for Conducting Research (Experiments)	7	
#7	2/27/09	Surveys	8	Research Article Critique due
#8	3/06/09	Textual Analysis	9	
#9	3/13/09	Naturalistic Inquiry (Ethnography)	10	Initial Methodology due
#10	3/20/09	SPRING VACATION [March 16 – March 21, 2009]		NO CLASS
#11	3/27/09	EXAM #3 Unit IV: Analyzing Quantitative Data	7-10 11	Unit Test #3 (150 points)
#12	4/03/09	Inferring from Data: Estimation & Significance Testing Analyzing Differences Between Groups	12 13	
#13	4/10/09	Analyzing Relationships Between Groups Unit V: Reconceptualizing Research	14 15	
#14	4/17/09	EXAM #4 4/17/09 Analysis & Interpretation	11-15	Unit Test #4 (150 points) Data Analysis due
#15	4/24/09	Analysis & Interpretation 4/27/09 MONDAY DEADLINE FOR FINAL PAPER		Final Written Project due by 12:00 noon
#16	5/01/09	Presentations Presentations		
	5/06/09	Presentations conclude Wednesday, 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.		

## RESEARCH ARTICLE SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE

Much can be learned about how to do your own research by critically evaluating the research efforts of others. To this end you will select a published example of communication research and tell me what you think of it. Your reports are to be typed, with normal margins, and will follow the APA 5<sup>th</sup> Edition Style Manual. As you prepare your literature review for Communication Theory you will read several articles. Initially you will be judging the appropriateness of each article for your original research project. As you locate recent articles that address your topic, however, it will be necessary for you to comprehend how the researchers arrived at their conclusions. This assignment will provide opportunities for you to demonstrate that you understand research methods and conclusions. You will summarize one (1) article of your choice and critique the questions, methods, results, and conclusions. The summary must be typed and answer each of the following seven (7) questions:

1. In a very tiny nutshell (that holds 3-4 sentences at most), what is the article about?
2. What theory(ies) is(are) the author(s) using? How is the theory guiding the research? Or is there no sign of theory? If there is no sign of theory, can you think of one that might be applicable?
3. What is the research design/methodology? Is it appropriate to the questions asked? Are there any apparent weaknesses? Are there particular strengths?
4. Who are the research participants (if applicable) or what is the unit of analysis? Are they (is it) the appropriate population to study?
5. What questions have been answered? That is, what do you know now that you didn't know before? What is the "take home" message?
6. What questions are left unanswered? What new questions have been raised?
7. What is your evaluation of this article? Thumbs up? Thumbs down? Or maybe you think the author(s) had no opposable thumbs? Why?

PLEASE NOTE: Each student is required to submit one research summary but it must be approved by me in advance and different than other student taking the cohort.

## **ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH PROJECT**

The major project in the cohort is to write an original communication research paper. The entire project asks you to examine a particular aspect of communication within a specific context, to review how communication theory has been used in previous scholarly studies and then to **design and carry out your own original research study**. The project for 351 will serve as an introduction, rationale and review of literature which is the first part of any scholarly communication study.

The theoretical framework that you develop for COM 351 (Communication Theory) will be employed in COM 365 (Research Methods). You will construct an actual research study that will be completed by the end of the semester. [Note: I will grade only the research methods section of the paper; Dr. Tsay will grade only the literature review-theory section of the paper.]

This project requires each student to conduct an original communication study and write a 20-25 page research paper. Your task is to address a significant communication problem, topic, or issue and design original communication research. Students generally feel most comfortable using survey research, but any of the methods we discuss during the course can be used-assuming that the method is appropriate for the research questions/hypotheses posed.

**Research Questions or Hypotheses and Methods (Research Design)** (Typed, double-spaced)

### **METHODS**

This part of the project will clearly **identify the research questions and/or research hypotheses** as well as the **methodological design** of the study (**subjects, variables, operationalizations, detailed procedures**). You will provide precise information about the sampling and subjects as well as specific details of the **exact procedures** which will be followed. **IRB approval** may need to accompany the methods section. In addition, any and all specific instruments (e.g., survey questions) will be submitted as an appendix to the final written report.

### **RESULTS**

The second part of the research methods project will present the complete statistical/descriptive results of your study. Actual data (e.g., field notes, surveys, videotape, audiotape, etc.) as well as all SPSS statistical output should be included as part of the appendices. While the results may be relatively short (depending on the specific methodology employed), it must be written using appropriate language, rules, and social science customs.

### **DISCUSSION: Theory Reconceptualization (Discussion & Interpretation, Limitations, Future Research Directions)**

This part of the project will consist of an insightful discussion of your results as well as implications for future research (follow guidelines established on pp. 381-396). You should interpret the meaning of the findings as they relate to theory, previous research, and/or expectations. In addition, you should identify limitations of the research due to internal as well as external validity threats. The discussion will include an APA bibliography as well as an Appendix that will include complete measurement instruments (demographic questions, survey, scales, etc.) and the SPSS analysis from the results.