

Utah State University
Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies
COMST 4470-001: Qualitative Research in Communication Studies

Spring 2017
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
9:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.
Location: Old Main 301

Instructor: Dr. Kristina M. Scharp

Office location: MAIN 069B
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Course Description & Goals

This qualitative methods course is designed as to introduce students to studying communication from a social scientific perspective. The course will primarily teach skills about how to conduct ethical research which includes arguing a study rationale in a review of literature, collecting data, analyzing data, writing findings, and crafting a discussion to make sense of the research. These skills are not merely for conducting research but have tangible applications that can be used to observe, analyze, and critically solve problems in everyday life (home, organization, community).

Specific goals of the course include:

- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view
- Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers
- Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions and solving problems

Specific skills students will practice:

- Making an argument
- Conducting interviews
- Observing participants
- Analyzing data
- Interpreting findings
- Presenting research

Required Texts

The following required text can be purchased in the University Bookstore:

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-1-4051-9202-6

Sanders, M. (2012) *Becoming a learner: Realizing the opportunity of education*. Hyde Park, UT: Institute for Communication & Leadership. ISBN-13: 978-1-4675-3634-9

Course Evaluation

Typically, I do not change grades unless there is a *mathematical error*. My reasoning is that applying subjective standards after the fact invalidates the standards applied to the entire class and is unfair to every student. Also, the participation grade includes a teammate review. To protect your ability to provide honest feedback about your partner, I will not discuss participation grades under (most) any circumstance.

Points will be distributed as follows:

- **Participation: 50 points**
- **Learner Reflections: 100 points**
 - Learner Reflection I: 20 points
 - Learner Reflection II: 60 points
 - Learner Reflection III: 20 points
- **Complete CITI Training: 25 points**
- **Submit IRB: 25 points**
- **Interviews, and Transcriptions: 100 points**
- **Article Critique Exam: 100 points**
- **Qualitative Research Report: 250 points**
 - Introduction and References
 - Review of Literature
 - Methods
 - Findings
 - Discussion
- **Research Presentations: 50 points**
 - Undergraduate Research Symposium (April 13th) OR
 - LPCS Symposium (April 21st)

Total: 700 points

Grading Scale

A	94-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-36	D-	62-60
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	<60

Participation: Come to class having completed assigned readings. I have assigned a very reasonable amount of reading so that you actually have time to complete it. This means, I expect active discussion about the reading. Failure to do the reading not only hurts class discussion but will prove detrimental to your ability to do well on the article critique exam.

Discussion will be assessed based on the content of the discussion. In other words, it not only matters THAT you contribute but it matters WHAT you contribute.

Coming to see me about your research report is going to be imperative. Please take advantage of my willingness to help you. I will read drafts of your paper and provide feedback at any time EXCEPT the day before the due date (unless otherwise negotiated).

You can earn a possible 50 points over the course of the semester. To earn all 50, student must (almost) never miss class, regularly contribute meaningfully to class discussion, consult with me about your research report, and receive a top recommendation from your teammate.

I will determine your participation grade at the end of the semester and assign grades in increments of 10 (50, 40, 30, etc.).

If you miss more than **four classes** over the course of the semester, you will earn a 0 for participation.

Learner Reflections: Part of this course is dedicated to the process of *becoming*; That is, I want to help you acquire new tools to become a better version of yourself in your education broadly. The learner essays are ways for you to set educational goals and chart your progress in this class. There will be three reflections with question prompts (see more details on Canvas)

IRB Ethics Training: To participate in this class, you must take ethics training (CITI). First, go to <https://rgs.usu.edu/irb/training/> and click, “start CITI training.” Create an account to affiliate yourself with USU. Once you do that, go to “My Learner Tools for Utah State University.” Click on “Add a Course.” Select the first option, “Human Research Curriculum (satisfies IRB certification requirements, not RCR) **Basic Course**” then click “Next.” Select the first option, “Group 1: Social & Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel.” Complete this training. Once you have completed this training, send an email with your full name, ANumber, and screenshot/attachment of your completion certificate to Blake Harms at blakeharms@gmail.com

IRB Submission: To complete your projects, you must receive IRB exemption. You can find very detailed instructions on Canvas (in Assignments)

Interviews and Transcriptions: Over the course of the semester, you will conduct two interviews and transcribe them (see more details on Canvas).

Article Critique Exam: To illustrate your ability to *analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view* (see goal of this course) – you will be conducting a peer-review of a qualitative journal article. Throughout the course, we will be learning the research process, reading journal articles, and discussing (in-depth) what makes research, “good research.”

Because the focus of this assignment is to assess your ability to critically think (as opposed to memorize and forget), you must be engaged throughout each class discussion. There will be no right answers – but rather, I will grade you on how well you can identify what the authors did well and where they need to improve.

Qualitative Communication Research Report:

You and a teammate will select a topic, find a data corpus, conduct an analyze, interpret your results, and write up an approximately 10-page research report (see more details on Canvas).

Research Presentations: Students are required to attend the Communication Research Methods poster session (see more details on Canvas) as well as either the LPCS Research Symposium or the Spring Undergraduate Research Symposium.

***All assignments are due before class. Turn assignments in on CANVAS – EXCEPT, the Article Critique Exam and your Final Papers (bring to class).**

Course Policies

- **Assignment Due Dates:** Late work will **NOT** be accepted. Any work that is not turned in on time will result in a zero for that assignment. In certain instances that are unavoidable, students may request an alternative due date. This must be negotiated **BEFORE** the assignment is due. Please do not ask for exceptions.
- **Learning Environment:** The classroom should be an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences. Thus, it is my expectation that students actively listen to their peers and respect their experiences. We learn about ourselves when we communicate with others responsibly and you can expect the same from me.
- **Grade Management:** I will provide grades as quickly as possible but it is your responsibility to keep track of your grades. No grades will be shared via e-mail.
- **Extra Credit:** It is possible (but not guaranteed) that an opportunity for extra credit might arise. This opportunity will be research-related. In the event you do not qualify for the study, another opportunity will be made available.
- **Academic Misconduct:** Plagiarism is not tolerated in any course. Students are required to complete their own work and give credit (both in writing and orally) to any source used in completing an assignment. All citations should be APA 6th edition style. Instances of academic misconduct will be reported to the University and I will determine appropriate sanctions.
- **Computer/Technology:** Technology can be a great asset to learning but research suggests that students who don't use laptops consistently outperform their peers. Thus, this semester I am asking that you keep your laptops/iPads/other technology at home (or tucked away in your bags). Please take a minute to read this article for more explanation: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/30/this-year-im-resolving-to-ban-laptops-from-my-classroom/>
*Special exceptions can be made (please contact me if you have a particular need to use a computer/certain technology)
- **Students with Disabilities:** Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him/her from fully demonstrating his/her abilities should personally contact me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be made. Students are responsible for contacting Disability Resource Center and filing all necessary paperwork so that the disability can be properly documented.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change if the demands of the course require it. Readings will be discussed the day they are listed. All assignments are due at the beginning of class.