

COMM 415 Research Methods: Discovering and Investigating Stories
Loyola University Chicago, Spring 2014 (Monday 7:00-9:30, SOC 015)
Dr. Pamela Morris (Office hours: Lewis Tower #904, Mon, 5–6:45, Tue, 12:45–2:00, pmorris1@luc.edu)

Course Description and Learning Objectives

The objective of this course is to enable you to become well-informed users of communication research, including methods using the Internet, to find and develop story ideas. This class will help you formulate research questions, know the appropriate research method to be undertaken, appreciate what can and cannot be learned from investigations, consider how different methods provide unique perspectives, evaluate source credibility, and analyze found information. You will learn a variety of different research techniques and have the opportunity to try each out yourself in several mini-project assignments based on topics that interest you. Assignments should help you develop ideas and methods which you may use in other program courses.

By the end of this semester, you will be able to:

1. Describe the concept and role of research in developing good stories.
2. Apply critical thinking to evaluate source credibility and interpret information.
3. Find, analyze, and critique data by employing different methodological approaches.
4. Know how to use a variety of investigative methods with the Internet, social media, archives, interviewing, ethnography, visual content analysis, and others to find and polish story ideas.

Course Design

The course will utilize lectures, guest speakers, readings, projects, and discussions. While graduate-level study is self-driven, the variety and combination of course components are devised to motivate students to engage in active learning. Students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in discussions. An important aspect of this course is the hands-on experience to be gained from the design and implementation of research projects, analysis of data, and presentation of results, which may/should take creative approaches.

Required Text

Merrigan, G., & Huston, C. (2009). *Communication Research Methods* (2nd ed). New York: Oxford University Press. Other readings will be posted/provided.

Individual Assignments #1 – #3 (80%)

Assignments are summarized here although they may change based on student interests and opportunities that come about throughout the semester. More details for each will be provided in class.

Assignment Summary		
#	Description	Pages
1a	Archival Topic – Select a topic to research using an archive. Consider how the topic can translate into additional research using social media, participant observation, and interviews.	1 page
1b	Archival Report and Presentation – Report and present findings for archival research. Report objectives/research question(s), archival search/analysis methods, findings, and discussion/implications. Present to the class summary of goals, methods, and findings/implications creatively (use storytelling/digital techniques).	2 – 3 pg Video/other pres
2	Social Media Report and Presentation – To build on/discover other perspectives of your archival topic, search 3 social media or digital sources, such as blogs, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Write a report of your results including details of the search, perspective/credibility considerations, similarities/differences, and which platforms/sources you feel offer content most helpful to your question/topic. Present to the class your efforts and findings.	2 – 3 pg Video/other pres
3a	Ethnography-Participant Observation/Interview Project Idea/Preliminary Plan – Continue to explore your topic area with participant observation and interviews. Report topic idea and initial plans for how you will complete the project.	1 page
3b	Ethnography-Participant Observation/Interview Research Report and Presentation – Report and present findings for 2 methods (mention archival/social media investigations if appropriate). Include objectives/research question(s), methods, analysis, findings, and discussion/implications. Present to the class summary of goals, methods, and findings/implications creatively (use storytelling/digital techniques).	2 – 3 pg Video/other pres

Class Participation and Other Exercises (20%)

An overall grade for class participation will be given and will consider how actively involved students are in all class discussions and work. Participation is valued and is expected of all students. Students should come to class prepared by reading assigned texts, doing homework/other outside investigations necessary to succeed. There will also be several in-class activities and other exercises where students will need to be engaged.

Attendance – Regular and on time attendance is essential for the educational process to work. Loyola University Chicago expects all students to attend every scheduled class on time. Exceptions may be made for University sponsored or work related activities, illness, or valid emergency situations. Any unexcused absences will result in a lower participation grade.

Meeting Deadlines – Deadlines for all projects are firm. Any work turned in after the deadline will receive a one letter grade reduction for each week it is late, even if by one day.

Special Needs – Please give me written notice in the first week of class about any medical or other conditions that may interfere with your individual performance. Documentation may be required. Information about Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) can be found at <http://www.luc.edu/sswd/index.shtml>

Wellness Center – Students are urged to contact the Wellness Center for any physical or mental health issues. Visit <http://www.luc.edu/wellness/> if you have issues or concerns about you or someone you know.

Spelling & Grammar – All assignments must be typed (unless otherwise directed) and free of spelling and grammatical errors. Allow time for proofreading, editing and revision. As a student in communication, you have a responsibility to pay close attention to details and if your work contains blatant errors, expect a grade deduction.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity – Any use in whole or in part of another person’s work or ideas constitutes plagiarism and will result in an automatic failure in this course. Details of the SOC policy on this issue will be given to students and they are expected to understand and follow the policy. Students should always ask questions if they are not sure about the policy rather than risking a failing grade. The policy can be found at: <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>. Remember, integrity is one of the most important traits for success. You control your own honor and integrity.

Performance Evaluation and Grading

In addition to project specifics, evaluation of assignments will use this rubric to ensure clear/consistent grading.

Grade	Description
A range	Excellent analysis that critically examines topic; digs deep beneath the surface. Creative and innovative approach to the problem/question being considered. Outstanding content, clarity of writing and organization of research material. Sophisticated, appropriate use of language. Thorough research and documentation of ideas, arguments, and comments. Free of mistakes: no typos; no misspellings; no punctuation or grammatical glitches; no errors of fact. All the necessary details, documentation, quotes, citations, and specifics are there.
B range	Very good attempt to link analysis to class themes, but more connections could be made. Very good to excellent; above average work and research. Some improvement needed in content, clarity, organization, or documentation. Occasional typos or other glitches say more about the lack of close proofreading than failure to master the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. More details, quotes, citations, or examples needed. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, source, or date, etc.) show inattention to detail/accuracy although content is above average.
C range	Average analysis that lacks clear connections to class themes. Average, acceptable writing and research that meets basic expectations. Needs much work on content, clarity, organization, and documentation. Although basic facts most likely are there, lacks elaborating and supporting documentation or quotes. Errors indicate need for improvement in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage: material was not proofread carefully. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, wrong source, date or page number, etc.) show inattention to detail and accuracy.
D range	Weak, unfocused work. Organization is below average, with numerous grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Documentation and details are scanty or superfluous, with errors of fact. Paper may reflect a lack of understanding of the assignment or a lack of research effort.

Grading Scale

(The grading policy is subject to change but it will be based on these guidelines.)

80% Assignments #1 - #3	100-93% = A	87-83% = B	77-73% = C	67-63% = D
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20% Participation and Other Exercises	92-90% = A- 89-88% = B+	82-80% = B- 79-78% = C+	72-70% = C- 69-68% = D+	62-60% = D- 59% ≥ = F
100%				

COMM 415 Spring 2014 Tentative Schedule

(Schedule may change based on class interests, understanding, needs, and unforeseen events.)

Wk	Date	Topics/Activities/Assignments Discussed/DUE
1	Jan 13	- Introductions, course overview, schedule, expectations, grading. - Research, ways of knowing. - Professional writing style, samples. <u>- Introduce Assignment 1a/b: Archival report and presentation – Select a topic/archive to explore. Write a report of your results including details of the search/archive, methods, findings, and implications. Make a creative presentation to the class. (1a Topic 1 page; 1b 2-3 pgs and pres)</u> - Read to discuss 1/27: Chpt 1 <i>Introduction to Communication Research</i> , Chpt 2 <i>Ethics and Research</i> , and Chpt 3 <i>Three Paradigms of Knowing</i> .
2	Jan 20	NO CLASS – Martin Luther King Day
3	Jan 27	Discuss Chapters 1 <i>Introduction</i>, 2 <i>Ethics and Research</i>, and 3 <i>Three Paradigms of Knowing</i> - Read to discuss 2/3: Chpt 4 <i>Making Claims</i> and Chpt 5 <i>What Counts as Communication Data?</i>
4	Feb 3	Discuss Chapter 4 <i>Making Claims</i> and Chapter 5 <i>Communication Data</i> - Read to discuss 2/17: Chapter 6 <i>Warrants for Research</i> .
5	Feb 10	Meet at the Women and Leadership Archives – Piper Hall Lake Shore Campus Guest Speaker Nancy Freeman, Director, Women and Leadership Archives - Archival data - Read to discuss 2/17: Chapter 12 <i>Conversation and Discourse Analysis</i> .
6	Feb 17	- Due Assignment 1a: Archive topic and initial plans. - In class activities – share topic ideas/plans, discuss with constructive critique, and help focus and strengthen plans. Discuss Chpt 6 <i>Warrants for Research</i> and Chpt 12 <i>Conversation and Discourse Analysis</i>
7	Feb 24	- In class activities – archival assignment progress report.
8	Mar 3	NO CLASS – Spring Break
9	March 10	- Due Assignment 1b: Archive report and presentation. - Introduce Assignment 2: <u>Social media/digital sources search report and presentation – Build on/discover other perspectives of your topic to search 3 social media or digital sources, such as blogs, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Write a report of your results including details of the search, credibility, and content issues, similarities, and differences. Which platforms do you feel offer content and credibility most helpful to your topic? (2-3 pgs and pres)</u>
10	March 17	Guest speaker Gabriella Annala, Reference Librarian, Subject Specialist for Business Administration and Communication - Social Media/Digital Sources Search - Searching subscription-based and open web for content, evaluation criteria, privacy, and ethics issues lecture, discussion, and in class demonstration/activities. Please be ready with ideas to try! - Read to discuss 3/24: Chapter 13 <i>Ethnographic Research</i> .
11	March 24	.Discuss Chapter 13 <i>Ethnographic Research</i> - Lecture/discussion – ethnography, participant observation, and interviews. - Introduce Assignment 3a/b: <u>Participant observation/interview project – Continue to explore your topic area with participant observation and interviews. Write a report and make a creative presentation to the class. (3a Topic 1 pg; 3b 2-3 pgs and pres)</u>
12	March 31	- Due Assignment 2: Twitter/blog search report and presentation. - Due Assignment 3a: Participant observation/interview topic/preliminary plan.
13	April 7	- Field work for participant observation/interview method research project.
14	April 14	- Progress report/work in class on participant observation/interview method research project. - Read to discuss 4/21: Chapter 9 <i>Content Analysis</i> and Rose chapters posted.
15	April 21	Discuss Chapter 9 <i>Content Analysis</i> - Lecture/discussion – visual methodologies (content analysis/semiology). - Progress report for participant observation/interview method research project.
16	May 5 7-9:00	- Due Assignment 3b: Interview/participant observation report and presentation.