

Communication Research Methods Syllabus

Dr. John C. Pollock
COMM 390:01
4:30 PM

Spring, 2016 MTh 2:00 –3:20 PM
Office: M-Th 1-2; 3:30-

Office Hours: Kendall #210, **by appointment only (Make appointment in Comm Studies Dept. office in appointment book.)**. I can also be reached by e-mail: pollock@tcnj.edu; or by telephone at home -- (cell) 732-371-7022; NOT at office 609-771-2338. For ongoing information about the course, please access the "CANVAS" course information site or www.tcnj.edu/~pollock. For information on the instructor's background, please click on the "faculty staff" section of the comm studies dept. website.

Introduction

Along with effective communication skills and some knowledge of marketing principles, understanding the connection between communication theory and research methods is one of the most important skills for a communication major in today's occupational marketplaces or graduate schools. The goal of this course is to help students become knowledgeable consumers and novice producer of communication theory and research, enabling them to use "core concepts", "understandings" and "technical knowledge", as well as avoiding common "misunderstandings" in communication research:

A. Core Concepts

- 1) Learn how social science research methods can test, refine and change theories
 about the role of communication in society
- 2) Learn to use an innovative theory and research method to create original research
- 3) Learn how communication research can address substantive public and policy issues

B. Understandings

- 1) Understand the relationship between theory and research methods in the study of communication
- 2) Understand some key communication research questions/hypotheses and variables
- 3) Understand quantitative data analysis procedures within the broader context of the communication inquiry process
- 4) Understand three research methodologies used to investigate communication behavior: experimental; survey; and content analysis
- 5) Critically evaluate communication and other behavioral and scientific research
- 6) Design and conduct an original communication research project

C. Technical Knowledge and Skills

- 1) Learning how to select a representative cross-national sample of newspapers.
- 2) Reviewing the literature on a “structural” approach to the sociology of news production, learning to write that review into a compelling narrative making a case for its utility in comparative, multi-city, national media research.
- 3) Surveying census data to compare differences among cities for a wide range of metropolitan characteristics, comparing, for example, different levels of college educated, families with incomes of \$100,000+, poverty levels, unemployment levels, percent voting Democratic or Republican, percent of different ethnic groups, age categories, families with different numbers of children, etc.
- 4) Searching databases in the communication and other fields, using key terms to search for literature on selected topics.
- 5) Constructing a complete research paper by building it one section

- at a time, approximately every week or week and a half, including: introduction, literature review, hypothesis section, methodology, data analysis, results, conclusion and bibliography. Instructor comments on each section are typically returned within one week. The first five revised sections plus the bibliography are collected into a “prospectus”, to be submitted about midway through the term and returned with additional comments within a week and a half.
- 6) Utilizing available databases to collect a systematic sample of articles meeting specified criteria for key words and article length.
 - 7) Acquiring techniques of content analysis coding and statistical analysis, Coding articles using a quantitative approach developed by the instructor, combining “placement” and “direction” codes to arrive at a single-score “Media Vector”, a measure unusually sensitive to variations in editorial judgment.
 - 8) Testing selected hypotheses derived from previous research using a “community structure” approach developed by the instructor, available through: a) the instructor’s website (www.tcnj.edu/~pollock); CANVAS; a 2007 book, *Tilted Mirrors: Media Alignment with Political and Social Change -- A Community Structure Approach* (Hampton Press); and chapters for an April, 2015, book, *Journalism and Human Rights: How Demographics Drive Media Coverage* (Routledge). The chapters were previously published as articles in the *Atlantic Journal of Communication*.
 - 9) Entering coded article information on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, learning to use significance tests using Pearson Correlation, Chi-Square and/or regression analysis.
 - 10) Undertaking narrative, in-depth analysis of major US papers most “favorable” or “unfavorable” to the issue studied. In addition, engage in regression analysis, ranking variables by their precise power to explain results.
 - 11) Presenting an oral summary of research results, using appropriate graphic aids.
 - 12) Crafting a polished report by writing three drafts of each part of the paper, based on ongoing comments and feedback from the instructor, resulting in a professional communication “product” or “outcome” that can compare favorably with papers written by experienced researchers in state, regional, national or international

competitions.

D) Common Misunderstandings

- 1) Since building a report is an ongoing process, it requires a “snowball”, “incremental” mindset in which students finish separate portions of the project in discrete steps, one week at a time. It would be misleading to view this semester-long project as a “term paper”, for which research and writing are often left to the end of the term.
- 2) Since the report is a group process, typically with two or three members, it is important that individuals be available to meet with one another to compare literature reviews, hypotheses, data collection timetables, coding and writing of different sections. Any individual who fails to meet regularly with others in the group jeopardizes both the morale of the members and the quality of the final product.
- 3) A mistake sometimes made is to regard oneself as only responsible for a particular section of the paper, resulting in a very uneven, sometimes inaccurate product. In general, if someone is an especially good writer, that person should do most of the writing. If others are particularly good at database searches or data entry or data analysis or telling stories from numbers, those skillful at these endeavors should do most of the work in those areas. The result is typically far better than if individuals simply divide the paper into discrete sections, paying attention only to a single slice of the whole project.
- 4) Since feedback from the instructor is offered frequently for each section of each paper, often on a weekly or biweekly basis, it is important to review instructor comments and revise each section immediately. A mistake sometimes made is to wait until the end of the term to revise the paper, resulting in hurried, less than optimal

revisions because so many other data analysis and data interpretation tasks need to be performed at the end of the semester. Please remember that members will evaluate the performance of one another in the research groups, providing feedback to the instructor on individual contributions.

Required Textbooks and Other Readings:

Books:

- a) Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. Allyn & Bacon. (labeled IC in syllabus)
- b) Pollock, J.C. (2007). *Tilted mirrors: Media alignment with political and social change – A community structure approach*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press (labeled TM in the syllabus).
- c) Bourhis, J., Adams, C., & Titsworth, S. (2005). *Style manual for communication studies*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. (This course uses APA style)

Sample Papers, Chapters, or Articles:

- a) Pollock, J.C. (2008). Community structure model. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of communication, , III* (pp. 870-873). London & New York: Blackwell Publishers (SOCS).
- b) Pollock, J.C. (2008, January). The “communication commando model” creates a research culture of commitment. *Communication Teacher*. 22 (1), 1-5. (SOCS).
- c) Pollock, J.C. Introduction. Social inequality and media. . In J.C. Pollock (Ed.), *Media and social inequality: Innovations in community structure research* (pp. 1-30). New York, NY: Routledge.
- d) Pollock, J.C. 2013. Community structure research. In P. Moy (Ed), *Oxford bibliographies online*. New York: Oxford University Press (available on SOCS).

e) Kiernicki, K., Pollock, J.C., & Lavery, P. (2013). Nationwide newspaper coverage of universal health care: A community structure approach. In J.C. Pollock (Ed.), *Media and social inequality: Innovations in community structure research* (pp. 117-140). New York, NY: Routledge.

f) “Illuminating Human Rights: How Demographics Drive Media Coverage”: Special double-issue of “The Atlantic Journal of Communication” , Vol. 22 (3-4) Summer/Fall, 2014. This entire issue is composed of scholarship conducted at TCNJ in two classes: COM 415 and COM 390 (See grid below). The collection of articles was published as a book in April, 2015 as follows:

Pollock, J.C. (2015). *Journalism and Human Rights: How Demographics Drive Media Coverage*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Human Rights Issue Table

Title	Authors	Human Rights Issue
Cross-national Coverage of Human Trafficking: A Community Structure Approach	Kelly Alexandre, Cynthia Sha, John C. Pollock, Kelsey Baier, and Jessica Johnson	Right to avoid enslavement
Cross-national Coverage of HIV/AIDS: A Community Structure Approach	James Etheridge, Kelsey Zinck, John C. Pollock, Christina Santiago, Kristen Halicki, and Alec Badalamenti	Right to access to health care services, in particular emergency medical treatment
Cross-national Coverage of Water Handling: A Community Structure Approach	Domenick Wissel, Kathleen Ward, John C. Pollock, Allura Hipper, Lauren Klein, and Stefanie Gratale	Right to access to uncontaminated water
Comparing Coverage of Child Labor and National Characteristics: A Cross-national Exploration	Jordan Gauthier Kohn and John C. Pollock	Right to humane working conditions
Nationwide Coverage of Same-sex Marriage: A Community Structure Approach	Victoria Vales, John C. Pollock, Victoria Scarfone, Carly Koziol, Amy Wilson, and Pat Flanagan	Right to marry the person you love
Nationwide Coverage of Detainee Rights at Guantanamo: A Community Structure Approach	Kelsey Zinck, Maggie Rogers, John C. Pollock, and Matthew Salvatore	Right to due process
Nationwide Coverage of Immigration Reform: A Community Structure Approach	John C. Pollock, Stefanie Gratale, Kevin Teta, Kyle Bauer, and Elyse Hoekstra	Right to “freedom from fear” or to pursue a path to citizenship
Nationwide Coverage of Posttraumatic Stress: A Community Structure Approach	John C. Pollock, Stefanie Gratale, Angelica Anas, Emaleigh Kaithern, and Kelly Johnson	Right to mental health care

PowerPoint:

Pollock, J.C. (2010, November). *Pollock PowerPoint overview: Reporting on social change mirrors community/national inequality* (powerpoint presented at U. of Texas).

Recommended Sources:

- a) Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. G. (2005). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research, 2nd Ed.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (AMM in syllabus)
- b) *The New York Times* (now in the bookstore)

ASSIGNMENTS

(Dates refer to Monday of the weeks in which the topic will be discussed, except for the first two dates)

Flex-Time/4th Hour. It is difficult to cover all the reading material in the allotted 14 classes. Therefore, I will assign “extra” time (Mondays and Thursdays from 3:20 - 4 PM) for reading and research that exceeds normal class hours. I shall be available during that time either in person or through email, to answer questions

Section I: Foundations of Communication Research

Week I Jan. 25 Overview of the Research Methods Class and “Communication

Commando” Research Culture; Pollock, J.C. (2008). The “communication commando model” creates a research culture of commitment. *Communication Teacher*. (Canvas);

Introduction to the Community Structure Approach. Pollock, J.C. (2008). Community structure model (Canvas); Introduction (TM); Chapt. 1 (TM) The Community Structure

**Approach and Newspaper Framing of Critical Events;
Chapt. 1 (IC) Introduction to Research**

Culture. Student selection of topics and teams

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING RESEARCH METHODS.
MAKING CLAIMS AND OFFERING EVIDENCE. EVERYDAY
WAYS OF KNOWING: a.) Personal Experience, b.) Intuition, c.)
Authority, d.) Appeals to Tradition, Custom, and Faith, e.) Magic,
Superstition, and Mysticism. THE RESEARCH PROCESS: a.)
Characteristics of Research, b.) Research as Culture, c.) Positive
versus Naturalistic Paradigms in the Social Sciences, d.) Research
as Conversation. THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTINGUISHING
RESEARCH FROM PSEUDORESEARCH

Week II Feb. 1

REFERENCE WORK TRAINING (library)

2 (IC) The

Selected literature reviews in TM, chapt. 3-9; Chapt

Nature of Communication

DEFINING COMMUNICATION. WHAT CONSTITUTES
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH. AREAS OF COMMUNICATION
RESEARCH. BASIC VERSUS APPLIED COMMUNICATION
RESEARCH TOPICS: a.) Basic Communication Research, b.)
Applied Communication Research, c.) An Integrated Model of
Basic and Applied Communication Research. JUSTIFYING
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TOPICS. RESEARCH
QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS: a.) Describing Communication
Behavior, b.) Relating Communication Behavior to Other
Variables, c.) Ordered versus Nominal variables, d.) Research
Questions versus Hypotheses, e.) Posing Research Questions
versus Hypotheses, f.) Posing Research Questions and Hypotheses
about Relationships between variables.

Feb. 4
ACKERMAN) FOR

REPORT TO LIBRARY BASEMENT (DR.

REFERENCE TRAINING

Week III Feb. 8
3 (IC) Asking

Selected hypotheses in TM, chapt. 2-9; Chapt

Questions

REASONS FOR REVIEWING REVIOUS RESEARCH. THE
SEARCH FOR RESEARCH: a.) Types of Research Reports,

i.) Secondary Research Reports, ii.) Primary Research Reports, b.) Finding Research Reports, i.) Special-Use Libraries, ii.) Finding Research Reports in Academic Libraries iii.) Internet Resources.
 HOW RESEARCH IS PRESENTED: READING SCHOLARLY JOURNAL ARTICLES: a.) A Typical Quantitative Scholarly Journal Article, i.) Review of the Relevant Literature, ii.) Methodology, iii.) Results, iv.) Discussion, v.) References.
 WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW.

Chapt 4 (IC) Finding, Reading, Using Research;
 CONCEPTUAL VERSUS OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS: a.) Evaluating Operational Definitions. MEASUREMENT THEORY: a.) Quantitative and Qualitative Measurements, b.) Levels of Measurement, i.) Nominal Measurement Scales, ii.) Ordinal Measurement Scales, iii.) Interval Measurement Scales, iv.) Ratio Measurement Scales, c.) Measuring Unidimensional and Multidimensional Concepts, i.0 Unidimensional concepts, ii.) Multidimensional Concepts.
 MEASUREMENT METHODS: a.) Self-Reports, b.) Others' Reports, c.) behavioral Acts.
 MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES: a.) Questionnaires and Interviews, i.) Closed versus Open Questions, ii.) Question Strategies and Formats, iii.) Relative Advantages of Questionnaires and Interviews, b.) Observations, i.) Direct Observation, ii.) Indirect Observation, iii.) Methods of Observation, iv.) Coding Observation.

Prendergast, Ward, & Pollock, "Healthy Eating";
 Vales, et. al.,
 Same Sex Marriage".

Section II: Planning and Designing Communication Research

Week IV Feb. 15 Chapt. 2 (TM) Measuring Media Alignment
 (Prominence

Scores and Media Vectors); Selected community structure papers;

Prominence Scores are measures of editorial judgment developed at TCNJ. Each article is given both "prominence" and "direction" scores:

Table 1: Prominence Score*
(for coding databases)

Dimension	4	3	2	1
Placement	Front page of first section	Front page of inside section	Inside of first section	<i>Other</i>
Headline Size (# of words)	10+	8-9	6-7	5 or fewer
Length of Article (# of words)	1000+	750-999	500-749	250-499
Photos/Graphics	2 or more	1		

* Copyright John C. Pollock 1994-2011

After each article is given a “prominence” score, it is awarded a “direction” category (e.g., favorable, unfavorable, or balanced/neutral; or government, society, balanced/neutral regarding the issue explored). Then a “media vector” is calculated.

Calculations of Media Vectors using a Coefficient of Imbalance

The prominence and directional scores were combined using

psychology’s Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance to calculate a

“Media Vector,” so called because of its similarity to a vector in

physics, which combines the magnitude (the prominence) and the

direction to attain a measure of impact. Effectively, the “Media

Vector” is essentially an assessment of issue “projection.” Media

Vector scores can range +1.00 and -1.00. The scores which fall

between 0 to -1.00 designate societal responsibility of the topic.

However, the scores that fall between 0 and +1.00 indicate

government responsibility of the topic (See Table 2).

Table 2: Calculating the Media Vector*

g = sum of the prominence scores coded “government action”

s = sum of the prominence scores coded “societal action”

n = sum of the prominence scores coded “balanced/neutral”

$r = g + s + n$

If $g > s$ (the sum of the government prominence scores is greater than the sum of the societal prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Government Media Vector:

$$GMV = \frac{(g^2 - gs)}{s^2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between 0 and +1.00})$$

If $g < s$ (the sum of the societal prominence scores is greater than the sum of the government scores), the following formula is used:

Individual Media Vector:

$$SMV = \frac{(gs - s^2)}{g^2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between 0 and -1.00})$$

*Media vector copyright John C. Pollock, 2000-2009

**Week V Feb. 22 Chapt 5 (IC): Observing and Measuring
Communication Concepts**

Measurement reliability. Three types of error: random, measurement, sampling, and what (if anything) can be done about each type of error. Different techniques to improve reliability: multiple administration techniques such as “test-retest” method and alternative procedure method. Single-administration techniques such as “split-half” reliability. Testing for internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient method. Intercoder

Reliability (specifically, calculating Scott's Pi Coefficient of Intercoder Reliability).

Measurement Validity: Content/Face Validity; Criterion-Related Validity; Construct (theory-derived) Validity. Threats to Internal Validity: Threats due to how research is conducted: a) procedure validity and reliability; b) history; c) sleeper effect; d) sensitization (subjects becoming "test-wise". Threats due to Research Participants: a) Hawthorne effect; b) selection; c) statistical regression; d) mortality; e) maturation; f) interparticipant bias. Threats due to Researchers: a) researcher personal attribute effect; b) researcher unintentional expectancy effect; c) researcher observational biases. Threats to External Validity: Sampling. Random Sampling: simple random sample, systematic sample, stratified sample. Nonrandom Sampling: convenience sampling, volunteer sample, purposive sample, quota sample, network sample. Ecological Validity.

Week VI	Feb. 29	REVIEW FOR MIDTERM. Ongoing second drafts of each section of prospectus: introduction, literature review, hypothesis section, methodology, references
Week VII	March 7	REVIEW FOR MIDTERM
	March 7	PROSPECTUS DUE ON March 9
	March 10	MIDTERM ON March 10
Week VIII	March 14	MIDTERM Break Mar. 14-18, class resumes on March 21
Week IX	March 21	CONTENT ANALYSIS AND DATABASE TRAINING

March 21 DATABASE TRAINING (class or library)

Week X March 28 Chapt 6 (IC): Designing Valid Communication Research;

ETHICAL ISSUES IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: a.) The Politics of Academic Research, i.) Research versus Teaching Institutions, ii.) The Effects of Tenure and Promotion on Research, iii.) The Importance of Grant Money, b.) Ethical Issues Involving Research Participants, i.) Provide Free Choice, ii.) Protect the Right to Privacy, iii.) Benefit People, Not Harm Them, c.) Ethical Decisions Involving Research Findings, i.) Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings, i.) The Public Nature of Scholarship, ii.) The Use of Research Findings.

Chpt. 10 (IC)"Textual Analysis," pp. 203-215; and "Unobtrusive Measures" pp. 224-228

Section III: Analyzing & Interpreting Quantitative Data

Week XI April 4 Chpts 12, 13 (IC) Theory of Stat; Analyzing Group Differences

Chapter 12

Estimation: a.) The normal distribution, b.) Use of random sampling, c.) Inferring a random sample to a population.
Significance testing: a.) The logic of significant testing b.) testing a null hypothesis, c.) rejecting a null hypothesis, d.) deciding on the probability level, e.) the practice of significance testing, 1.) step 1: posing a research question or hypothesis and a null hypothesis, 2.) step 2: conducting the study, 3.) step 3: testing the null hypothesis, i.) setting the significance level, ii.) computing the calculated value, iii.) comparing the calculated value to the critical value. f.) type I error and type II error, g.) statistical power.

Chapter 13

Types of Difference Analysis: a.) nominal data, b.) one-variable Chi-square test, c.) two-variable Chi-square test, d.) ordinal data, e.) interval/ratio data, f.) test, g.) analysis of variance, h.) one-variable analysis of variance i.) factorial analysis of variance.

Section IV: Oral Report Presentations and Revisions

**Week XII April 11 Begin Oral Reports Selected chapt. 3-9 (TM)
Pearson correlations;
Variables; and**

Chapt 14 (IC) Analyzing Relationships Between Epilogue (TB) Concluding Research

Types of relationships: a.) unrelated variables, b.) linear relationships between variables, c.) nonlinear relationships between variables.

Correlations: a.) correlation coefficients b.) interpreting correlation coefficients, c.) calculating correlation coefficients, d.) relationships between ratio/interval variables, e.) relationships between ordinal variables, f.) relationships between nominal variables, g.) correlation matrices, h.) causation and correlation, i.) coefficient of determination, j.) multiple correlation, k.) multiple correlation coefficient, l.) coefficient of multiple determination, m.) partial correlation.

Regression analysis: a.) linear regression, b.) multiple linear regression.

Advanced relationship analysis.

**Week XIII April 18 Continue Oral Reports Selected chapt. 3-9 (TM)
Regression**

analysis; Chapt 8 (IC) Experimental Research

THE PREVALENCE OF SURVEYS: a.) Applied Uses of Survey Research, i.) Political Polls, ii.) Market Research, iii.) Evaluation Research, b.) Use of Surveys in Communication Research.

SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN: a.) Selecting Survey Respondents, i.) Sampling Frame, ii.) Sampling Method, iii.) Sampling Unit of Analysis, iv.) Response Rate, b.) Cross-Sectional versus Longitudinal Surveys, i.) Cross-Sectional Surveys, ii.) Longitudinal Surveys.

SURVEY MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES: a.) Designing Questions for Survey Instruments, i.) Selecting Questions, ii.) Phrasing Questions, iii.) Question Format, b.) Questionnaire Survey Research, i.) Types of Self-Administered Questionnaires, ii.) Mail Surveys, c.) Interview Survey Research, i.) Training Interviewers, ii.) Face-to-Face versus Telephone Interviews, iii.)

Individual versus Group Interviews, iv.) Beginning the Interview, v.) Planning the Interview Questions, vi.) Responding to Answers. USING MULTIPLE METHODS IN SURVEY RESEARCH.

Week XIV April 25 Continue Oral Reports. Chapt. 10 (TM) Media Frames and Public

Opinion; Chapter 9 (IC) Survey Research.

Chapter 9: PURPOSES OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: a.) Types of Texts, b.) Acquiring Texts, c.) Approaches to Textual Analysis.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM: a.) Conducting Rhetorical Criticism, b.) Types of Rhetorical Criticism, i.) Historical Criticism, ii.) Neo-Aristotelian Criticism, iii.) Genre Criticism, iv.) Dramatic Criticism, v.) Narrative Criticism, vi.) Fantasy Theme Analysis, vii.) Feminist Criticism.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: a.) value of Quantitative Content Analysis, b.) Quantitative Content-Analytic Procedures, i.) Selecting Texts, ii.) Determining the Unit of Analysis, iii.) Developing Content Categories, iv.) Coding Units into Categories, v.) Analyzing the Data.

INTERACTION ANALYSIS: a.) Describing Interaction and Relating it to Other Variables, i.) Describing Interaction, ii.) Relating Interaction to Other Variables, b.) Conducting Interaction Analysis, i.) Obtaining a Sample of Interaction, ii.) Analyzing the Sample of Interaction.

May 2 FULL LENGTH PAPERS DUE

COURSE EVALUATION: EXPECTATIONS, TOOLS, DEADLINES

Examinations (20% for Midterm exam): The Midterm exam, scheduled for March 10, is based on multiple-choice identifications/definitions and short explanations. All questions on the mid-term will be discussed previously in class.

On-going Semester Communication Research Project (30% for prospectus; 40% for written final paper): Each person/group will complete a final

research project about some aspect of communication. Each person/group must submit a revised research prospectus (which includes the first four parts of the final paper -- introduction, review of the literature, hypotheses and methodology -- plus an *ongoing corrected* references) by March 7. After oral presentations in April, each project team is expected to deliver to the instructor, by the next class period, a draft containing: a) revised methodology; b) results description with tables; c) discussion of results; d) conclusion; and e) revised "reference" section. Two copies of the final paper are due on May 4, including database printouts, a copy of the paper in Word, two SPSS files and Word or Excel files of articles. A short, non-graded oral summary of the paper will be given during class prior to that date in order to allow the class and the instructor to provide ongoing feedback before final project writing.

Participation (10%): Because this course involves a significant amount of in-class participation, your verbal participation in class discussions and your work on any additional assignments for this class (such as finding and documenting various communication library sources, critiquing an article in a communication journal, homework assignments analyzing quantitative data, etc.) will be evaluated and assigned a grade. Class attendance is expected and noted. Any absences beyond four will result in a deduction of one full grade from the final grade.

Course Expectations and Assumptions

The dates on the syllabus refer to the Monday meetings of the weeks in which the topics will be discussed. Come to class having studied and prepared to discuss the assigned material. Research projects will progress simultaneously with readings and class lectures/discussions. Each student will be asked to report on work in progress periodically, with an overall oral report due in the last half of the course. Discussion of ongoing work will consume most of Thursday class time.

Since each of you will be pursuing different areas of investigation, you will be expected to read far beyond the formal assignments, sharing your progress and dilemmas with the class. Your project work increases in importance in the last half of the semester. Do not underestimate the

importance of integrating reading and primary research in the final phase of the course.

Some students encounter trouble by not keeping in touch with me or by not coming to class. Please make appointments with me or come in during my office hours to talk with me about any aspect of the course, in particular the research project. Please take advantage of this offer. The more I know about progress and problems, the better your likely outcome in the course.

Remember: There are three ways to contact me, ranked from “most” to “least” preferable:

1. **Sign up for an appointment, only during my office hours, in the daytimer outside my office in Kendall 210** (or look for me in any of the following: my office in Kendall #210; the Kendall student lounge; or Brower cafeteria); Office hours: Tues. 2:15 - 4:00; Wed. 2:30 - 3:45; Fri 2:15- 4:00 PM. This method of contact is preferable because you can be guaranteed a time slot.
2. by e-mail: pollock@tcnj.edu.
3. by telephone at home PREFERABLE (Cell) 732-371-7022; or (last resort) Office: 609-771-2338

GOOD LUCK!

GUIDELINES FOR ONGOING COMMUNICATION RESEARCH PROJECT (NOT a Term Paper)

This is not a term paper, which can be started and completed toward the end of a course. This is an ongoing, semester-long commitment that counts for one-half of each student's grade.

1. Select a Topic That Has Social and/or Political Transcendence.

Browse papers nationwide through Lexus/Nexus to estimate whether the topic merited at least 20 newspaper articles in major media markets. Topics are chosen in first two weeks. Examples of topics can be found on my website: <http://www.tcnj.edu/~pollock>.

2. Early Start

It is extremely important to start the literature search immediately in order to complete the **Prospectus** approximately one month after class begins. Assignments for oral reports will be made within the last five weeks.

3. Complete All Parts of Prospectus on Time: BY MARCH 7

Make sure you complete every section of the prospectus on time, including:

- a. Statement of the problem.
- b. Literature review going beyond a summary to *tell a story*, integrating article findings into a flowing narrative.
- c. Clear list of multiple hypotheses, together with justifications for each that are both reasonable and *based on literature*.
- d. Complete methodology section, paraphrasing previous research if appropriate.
- e. Assemble complete, fastidious reference section, according to APA style.

4. Each person completes at least one paper's data collection, coding and analysis within one week after handing in prospectus:

Please regard the preceding steps and deadlines as critical for the successful completion of the semester's most important activity: the ongoing research project that counts half of your grade.

Go to library's database room, collect all printout to be sampled from one newspaper,
keeping all coding (on Word or Excel files) and SPSS datafiles for coding.:

- a) code the paper for attention and direction scores, then calculate a Media Vector;
- b) calculate an intercoder reliability coefficient using all articles.

4. Enter and/or Analyze data three different ways:

- a) by calculating Media Vectors for each newspaper and then calculating a *Pearson correlation* comparing those vector scores with the demographic data for at least one city characteristic; and
- b) by entering data on the SPSS data analysis program, then calculating Pearson interval level correlations for *city-level data*; and
- c) by entering data on SPSS for all the attention score characteristics *for each article* for each city newspaper, plus city characteristics, plus Media Vectors.

5 Finish all Data Collection and Coding and Calculations of Media Vectors for paper by April 14, including:

Collection of data on city characteristics and statistical calculations of correlaton-order coefficients. Remember, count on the database experience in the library -- accessing newspapers -- to take longer than you think it will. Each two person team is responsible for 15 newspapers; for three person teams, 21 newspapers (about 15-20 articles for each newspaper); for four-person teams, 28 newspapers. Each person is typically responsible for coding 7 newspapers.

5. Oral Reports are due in April.

6. Abstract/Summary included in final report; abstracts will be presented orally at penultimate or last class.

7. Final Analysis and Writeup, based on recommendations made during oral reports, is (are) due on **May 5**. Included:

- o TWO hard copies of final paper; and CD-Rom/flashdrive versions of:
- o ONE Word file with final paper; TWO SPSS dataFILES: a) one showing

- city characteristics and Media Vectors for each newspaper studied; b) another showing article levels characteristics and Media Vectors.
- o ONE Word file with all newspaper articles collected and/or an Excel file with coded articles..

DEADLINES AND TIMEFRAMES FOR EACH STEP

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due</u>
Select topics and groups	Feb. 1
Hand in Introduction (include initial reference section) Feb. 4	
Hand in Literature Review (continue updating reference section) Feb. 11	
Hand in Hypothesis section (continue updating reference section) Feb. 18	
Hand in Methodology section (continue updating reference section) Feb. 25	
Hand in complete prospectus 7	Mar.
Hand in each team's collection of city characteristics for 35+ cities Mar. 28	
Finish all Data Collection and Coding and Calculations of Media Vectors for paper	April 14
After oral presentations in April: Each project team is expected to deliver to Ongoing the instructor, <u>by the next class period</u> , a draft containing: a) revised	

methodology; b) results description with tables; c) discussion of results; d) conclusion; and e) revised “reference” section.

Hand in final paper

May

5

SAMPLE TOPICS FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS SPRING, 2015

Recent or Current Topics: Newspaper Coverage of:

Urban marginal population segments (“homeless people”) in different cities

Rape and Rape Culture in Colleges and Universities

Rape and Rape Culture in the Military

Regulating Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)

Prescription Drugs for Seniors

Medicating Children

Accelerated Adolescence for Children/Girls

Obesity (especially among children)

Islam post-9/11 (already studied for first year: 9/11/01 - 9/11/02; studies needed both prior to 9/11 and after first year -- after 9/11/02)

Alternative Energy Sources

Universal Health Care (or extending health care to everyone)

Plan B (emergency contraception or the “morning-after” pill)

Immigration reform (more restrictive or less restrictive, general or Islamic)

Detainee Rights since 9/11 (or since the first announcement of abuses at Abu Gharib)

Same sex marriage, especially since New York state legalization in summer, 2011

Trying juveniles as adults

Gun control/gun safety since Aurora, Colorado, or Newtown, Connecticut (or some other massacre of innocents), shootings

Abortion (especially in the third trimester)

Global warming/Climate Change

Oil drilling in the Arctic

Genetically- modified Food (a major issue elsewhere in the world)

Fossil fuels vs. non-fossil fuels

Homeland Security

Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Ethnic/Racial Profiling

Warrantless Wiretapping

Police Treatment of Minorities

Minimum Wage

Keystone Pipeline

Mental health responsibility: How much government, how much “society”?

Post-traumatic stress

Pediatric Immunization