

Professor Baesler

Spring 2012

Communication 604: Research Methods and Lifespan Communication

Office Hours: Bal 3018 (Prof. Office) T Th 3-4, W 4-5, & by appointment

Snail mailbox: Bal 3000 (Comm. Dept. Main office)

E-mail: JBaesler@odu.edu
Type "C604 Research in subject area line
I regularly answer e-mail on T, W, & Th by 7 pm.

Phone: 683-4866 (Prof. Office), 683-3828 (Comm. Dept.)

Course Description:

The course provides an overview of the social scientific methods used in lifespan developmental communication research including surveys, experiments, observations, and content analyses. Students will continue developing their understanding and appreciation of the academic research culture and the process of conducting social scientific communication research in a lifespan context. Students will become fluent in the language of social science, and demonstrate competency as communication researchers by completing an original data-based life-span project designed to serve as a pilot study for a thesis project and/or professional conference paper.

Specific Learning Outcomes:

As with many things in life, we learn by doing. Students conduct original research on lifespan communication topics that are meaningful/significant to them by:

- 1) Exploring research topics, approaches to asking questions, criteria for evaluating the merit of lifespan research topics,
- 2) Reviewing and evaluating the theoretical and empirical literature in a specific lifespan communication topic area,
- 3) Developing hypotheses and research questions based on a review of the literature and their own original/creative thinking,
- 4) Designing a method (survey, quasi-experiment, or field study) to test the hypothesis and answer the research question while adhering to ethical protocols like obtaining human subjects approval prior to collecting data,
- 5) Creating constitutive and operational definitions for independent and dependent variables, and employing measures with expert validity (for new measures) or predictive validity (for known measures), and acceptable inter-item reliability,
- 6) Collecting and analyzing data using a computer software package called spss (statistical package for the social sciences), and performing descriptive and inferential statistics appropriate to the type of variables and design of the study, and
- 7) Demonstrating proficiency for items 1-6 in: papers written in APA (American Psychological Association) writing style, class assignments, informal oral assessments, and an oral presentation.

Course Requirements:

Required (and additional) Reading: In place of a text, there are readings posted in the "modules" section of blackboard (see course calendar). These readings represent specialized knowledge areas that are designed to enhance your competencies as graduate student researchers in life-span communication. It is not possible to cover everything you need to know for a given research project in terms of research methodologies and statistical analyses; therefore, in addition to the assigned readings, there is a list of resources for further reading at the end of the syllabus for those that want to further develop their research competencies and/or locate specific knowledges related to their research project. Taking time to preview, read, MEDITATE, take notes, and prepare questions based on the assigned readings prior to class will benefit class discussion and greatly enhance your learning experience.

Research Papers: There is one major research project divided into four related papers: literature review, methods, results, and discussion. The professor will provide written feedback on the first three papers. The final paper consists of edited versions of the first three papers and a "new" discussion section. Papers are designed to be "learning experiences." Each paper builds on the previous. The idea is to improve previous papers prior to submitting the final paper. Each paper has a set of "rubrics" for evaluation. Rubrics are posted as course documents on blackboard under "assignments". Add (cut and paste) the relevant rubrics to the end of each paper. On completing each paper, use the rubrics to evaluate your paper by "scoring" the paper (assigning a number to each of the rubrics). The professor uses these scores as a guideline when assessing the paper.

All papers are written using Microsoft WORD and follow APA writing style. Papers are uploaded to the top of your wiki page on blackboard. I will create wikis for each student on blackboard. Use the following format for uploading papers: LitRevYourName.doc, MethodsYourName.doc, ResultsYourName.doc, and FinalPapaerYourName.doc. The professor will also provide detailed feedback for each paper using the "track changes" function of WORD and post this information next to your original upload on the wiki page using the same format as above except adding the word "fdbck" at the end of each file name, e.g. LitRevYourNamefdbck.doc.

Late Papers: Plan ahead. Allow for time to review the paper before you turn it in. Papers are considered "on time" if they are turned in by noon of the class period that they are "due." Papers turned in after 12 noon are assigned a late penalty of the equivalent of one letter grade for each day late.

Research Journal: To encourage self-reflection on your research journey, each student will keep a research journal. These e-journals will be kept on the student's wiki page and represent a "personal and public reflection" of the your unique research journey. Each time you work on the research project, add another entry to your journal (minimum of one entry every other week). Use the following format for journal entries (number them as follows and add whatever else you want to include after item number 2):

1. Date and Description of your learning activities (what did you do)? Of particular import is noting your personal goals, your progress toward those goals, and when you have achieved your goals.
2. What have you learned from your experience (self-reflection/meditation/learnings).

Conference Panel Presentation: Your final paper will be presented to the class as part of a "conference panel" simulation similar to panel presentations at professional communication conferences. Each student will present their paper, receive feedback from a reviewer (one of your classmates), and respond to reviewer comments. This is an opportunity to "test out" your research as a potential "conference paper." I expect all of you will produce quality papers that, with further data collection, analysis, and re-writing, could be presented at a professional communication conference. Rubrics for evaluating the presentations will be posted as a course document on blackboard along with the schedule of speaking times and a list of reviewers assigned to each paper. Students will turn in a one page outline of the presentation prior to presenting.

Exams: There are no "traditional" exams for this course. Consider the four papers as your "exams."

Academic Honesty: Students write out and sign the honor pledge for all work. This includes entries to the e-journal (type your name and add the words "Honor Pledge" for each journal entry). For the papers, on the title page, each person should add their e-signature and the words "Honor Pledge" after their name.

Participation in research: Students may be asked to participate in Communication related research as part of the course (usually there is some type of extra credit awarded for participation in the research). This is voluntary. No one will receive a lower grade if they choose not to participate.

Attendance and Class Participation: Participation includes: Arriving to class on time, staying the entire class, using the "research language", asking thoughtful questions, attempting to make substantive responses to questions, contributing in positive ways to the class discussion of assigned readings, taking notes, looking alert/attentive, listening without interrupting others, encouraging/supporting other classmate's research projects, and exhibiting a positive mental attitude.

Students with special circumstances: There are a variety of situations that may influence a student's learning during the course of the semester including (but not limited to): learning disabilities, student athletics, University sponsored activities, illnesses, military obligations, family crises, work schedules, etc. I do not have a set policy for any of these circumstances. I handle these situations on a case-by-case basis. If you feel that some life-circumstance is negatively impacting your learning in the course, please make an appointment to discuss your situation outside of class. I will do my best to work with you in your unique circumstances. We are in this learning/life-thing together.

Grading: Given the constraints of our University system, a final grade will be entered into your academic record that hopefully approximates the cognitive and affective learning during our short time together. Thus, grades will be earned/given in the traditional A-F format where 90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, and so forth...based on fulfilling the following course requirements, and on my human attempts to understand the "mysterious" part of our learning together. Note these percentages are approximate. They serve as guides for those that want to know the relative weight of different learning activities. I reserve the right to change these percentages based on the progress of the class.

Research Papers	55%
Literature Review	10%
Methods	10%
Results	10%
Final Paper (includes discussion)	25%
"Conference" Panel Presentation (including review of classmate's paper)	15%
Class Participation	30%
Individual	15%
Research Journal	15%

Course Calendar

Week # & Date	Topics & Activities	Readings	Reminders
1: 1/11	Intro to the course; Building community; Generating research topics in lifespan communication	Roam (2008) Back of Napkin Pecchioni et. al. (2005) Change & Methods Feldman (2011) Lifespan Dev.	Prepare research topic for next class
2: 1/18	Approve research topics Literature Reviews: /Theoretical & Empirical Social Science Research Cycle & Journey Publication Process	Link to Griffin's Comm Theories Link to Google Scholar	Begin theoretical and empirical review for research topic
3: 1/25	Research Q's & Hyp's APA writing style Rubrics for Lit. Rev. Paper	APA website link	Write literature review paper...due next week
4: 2/1	Ethics of Research Human Subjects (HS) Form Research Methods: General Designs & Specific Methods of Data Collection	See blackboard for HS's form Creasey (2006) Methods & Threats	Literature Review Papers Due Choose a research method
5: 2/8	Design Issues Campbell & Stanley notation Lifespan Issues in Design	Campbell & Stanley (1963) Design Creasey (2006) Developmental Designs	Create a research design
6: 2/15	Measurement Issues Validity & Reliability Semantic & Likert Scales		Create a measure

7: 2/22	Procedures Samples Data Collection Methods Paper Rubrics	Kraemer et al (1987) Statistical power & sample size Creasey (2006) Res. settings & access	Write methods paper...due next week
8: 2/29	Introduction to Statistics Descriptive Statistics Inferential Statistics	Stern (2010) Repeated measures in GLM	Methods Paper Due
9: 3/7	Spring Break--No Class		
10: 3/14	Continue Inferential Statistics Intro to SPSS SPSS Demo		Choose a statistic Begin data /collection
11: 3/21	Create mock data and run /spss for your study Assist with spss		Continue data /collection
12: 3/28	Assist with spss Interpreting Results Rubrics for Results paper	Morgan et al (2002) Numbers to words	Write Results Paper...due next week
13: 4/4	Review Rubrics for Panel Presentations		Results paper due Begin preparation /for presentation
14: 4/11	Discussion section of Paper Review Rubrics for Final /Paper		Add Discussion /to Final Paper Prepare for /Presentations
15: 4/18	Presentations		Edits to Final Papers
16: 4/25	Presentations		Edits to Final Papers
17: 5/2 No Final	Student Conferences 7-10pm		Final Paper Due 12 noon

Course readings:

Campbell, D., & Stanley, J. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Classic text: three summary tables, and list of in- and ex-ternal threats to validity.

Creasey, G. (2006). *Research methods in lifespan development*. Boston: Pearson.

Developmental designs appropriate for life-span research
 General methods (he calls them "designs", I prefer the term "methods") with life-span focus
 Research settings and access of participants for life-span research

Feldman, R. (2011). *Development across the lifespan* (6th ed.). NJ: Pearson.

Four page summary chart of life-span development from pre-natal to late life.

Kraemer, H. & Thiemann, S. (1987). *How many subjects? Statistical power analysis in research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

How many participants/cases do you need? The answer has to do with effect sizes, sample sizes, and probability levels. Summary of the cardinal rules and sample power table provided.

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

Copy of appendix: summary of "writing up results" for the most common statistics...translating numbers into words.

Pecchioni, L., Wright, K., & Nussbaum, J. (2005). *Life-span communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Issues related to measuring "change" across the life-span, and methodological issues in life-span research...some "new" approaches for further research: complexity and chaos theories and structural equation modeling.

Roam, D. (2008). *The back of the napkin: Solving problems and selling ideas with pictures*. NY: Penguin.

Exercising your imagination to "play with your research topic."

Stern, L. (2010). *A visual approach to SPSS for windows: A guide to SPSS 17.0*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

One approach to analyzing "within subjects data" for a single factor using the General Linear Model and repeated measures.

Additional Resources for Communication Research Methods

Writing Style for Social Scientific Communication Research:

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (2009, 6th Ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Most social scientific communication research is written in APA (American Psychological Association) style. Consulting this resource to ensure that your papers conform to APA writing style is a must. Note that there are some errors in this edition...go to the APA website to download free corrections at: [APA website link](#)

Basic Communication Research Methods

If you do not have a background in communication research methods (or if you are a bit "rusty"), obtain one of these books and read as much you can as soon as you can to create a foundation to build on. Without this foundation, learning advanced research methods is "very challenging" (A math analogy may make this clear: it's like trying to learn calculus without having taken algebra).

Treadwell, D. (2011). *Introducing communication research: Paths of inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Beginning text, short, readable, good overview for those with little or no research background.

Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (1999). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Excellent mid-range book, over 500 pages.

Wrench, J., Thomas-Maddox, C., Richmond, V., & McCroskey, J. (2008). *Quantitative research methods for communication*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Up to date introduction to communication research, over 500 pps, esp. good sections on specific methods (experiment, survey, content analysis) and on spss analysis & interpretation.

Lifespan Designs and Methods

Baltes, P., Reese, H., & Nesselroade, J. (1988). *Life-span developmental psychology: Introduction to research methods*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rigorous, technical, for advanced study.

Morrison, A., & Shaffer, L. (2002). *Research stories for lifespan development*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Using primarily journal articles from psychology, tells the "story" behind each article by explaining the research issues/decisions involved. Articles are almost exclusively from psychology, although the principles are relevant to communication research.

Basic unit of analysis for all research: The relationship between two variables.

Rosenberg, M. (1968). *The logic of survey analysis*. NY: Basic Books.

Well worth the read for examining the complexity of relationships between two variables: extraneous, component, intervening, antecedent, suppressor, distorter, conditional, and conjoint influences.

Time Series Analysis (both of these are technical works)

Kelly, J., & McGrath, J. (1988). *On time and method*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ostrom, C. (1978). *Time series analysis: Regression techniques*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Complexity Theory and Statistical Analysis with SPSS

Byrne, D. (1998). *Complexity theory and the social sciences: An introduction*. NY: Routledge.

Chapter 4 on Analyzing social complexity is especially relevant to life-span research. Somewhat technical at times, but well worth the attempt to understand. This is one of the "new methods" for life-span researchers that Pecchioni et. al. are recommending that life-span researchers begin to explore.