

**COMM 672: RESEARCH DESIGN**  
**Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey**

**Fall 2015**  
**Mon 11:50am-2:30pm (HU 101)**

Prof. Keith Hampton  
Office hours: Mondays 3:00-4:00 (SC&I Annex, Room 204)  
Email: keith.hampton@rutgers.edu

All course correspondence, including posted grades, announcements, additional readings, etc. will be posted on the Sakai website for this course: <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides a basic overview of social science research methods. The emphasis of the course is on appropriate method selection and the strengths and weakness of different approaches. Students will form a critical perspective on a range of methods, develop skills to evaluate existing empirical studies, and learn to select appropriate methods for use in their own research. The course covers a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Topic covered include validity and reliability; hypothesis formation; ethical issues in conducting research on human subjects; and survey, experimental and observational data collection.

**PREREQUISITS**

None.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Understand and use a basic vocabulary of concepts relating to social science methodology.
- Knowledge of key methodological issues, such as operationalization, levels of measurement, sampling, and causation.
- Critically analyze published research and identify threats to validity and reliability.
- Familiarity with the requirements for the treatment of human subjects in social science research and apply principles for ethical research to specific study designs.
- Develop elements of a social science research study that uses both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

**ASSESSMENT**

Final grades will be based on the completion of three in-class exams (15%), five assignments (25%), two critiques (10%), critique participation (5%), two chapter presentations (10%), a proposal presentation (5%), a research proposal (25%), and in-class participation (5%). All assignments are due at the beginning of the class and must be submitted in-person and on paper; assignments cannot be submitted online or by email.

Final grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

A:	90-100%
B+	85-89%
B	80-84%
C+	75-79%
C	70-74%
F	below 70%

## **Grading of Assignments and Presentations**

An A grade will be awarded to an assignment that both fills the terms of the assignment and shows evidence of out-of-the-ordinary, creative, analytical, and interesting thought. A B grade will be awarded if the terms of the assignment have been fulfilled thoroughly and thoughtfully, with some evidence of originality and creativity. Assignments that merely fulfill the terms of the assignment will receive a C grade. Assignments that fail to fulfill the terms of the assignment will receive an F. All grades are final. Please do not ask to have your grade changed for reasons other than mathematical error. A grade of “incomplete” will not be assigned except in the most unusual, extreme (and generally emergency) circumstances.

## **Class Participation**

Class meetings will be in a seminar format, there will be a limited amount of lecturing, instead students and instructor will explore key concepts through a guided dialogue. Students are expected to have read all of the week’s readings in advance of the course meeting. Participation grades will be based on demonstrated familiarity and critical reflection on the readings, involvement in classroom activities and exercises, and engagement in discussions. The participation grade is assessed above and beyond your attendance, just showing up for class will not earn you any participation points. You must do the readings, or this class will be a waste of time. You can expect that the instructor will call on students at random to provide a summary of specific readings and to provide a basic comparison to prior course content.

Use of mobile phones and computing devices in class, for purposes unrelated to note taking and direct class participation, will adversely affect your grade. Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website – <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> – to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email will automatically be sent to the instructor from this system. Note that if you miss classes for longer than one week, you should contact a dean of students to help verify your circumstances. Students are responsible for getting course notes from their classmates, the instructor will not provide you with notes, slides or exam guides. Students are never granted permission to make audio, photographic or video recordings of the class.

## **Exams**

In-class exams may include multiple choice, fill in the blank, or short answer questions. For each exam, students will have 30 minutes to complete approx. 20 questions. The exams will cover all readings and class materials, this includes the textbook, lectures, videos, additional readings, and all material discussed in class. The exams will not be cumulative. Any student who arrives late will not be allowed to take the exam.

Exam #1 (5%): Sep 28

Exam #2 (5%): Oct 19

Exam #3 (5%): Nov 2

## **Critiques**

On two occasions (5% each), each student will present a critique of a research article. For the first critique, students must select from a list of articles identified by the instructor. For the second critique, students must select a quantitative study published in the prior 18 months in the *Journal of Communication*, *Human Communication Research*, or the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. For both presentations, the student responsible for the critique is expected to distribute a handout and make a 10-15 minute presentation of the article to the class, followed by 5 minutes of questions from the instructor and the class. Each critique will be graded based on: a) identification of the research question, b) an explanation of the social importance and/or scientific relevance, c) identification and description of key concepts, d) an overview of the findings, e) a detailed methodological critique of the study that includes a discussion of threats to validity and reliability, ethics, an alternative explanation for the findings, and suggestions for ways to expand or redesign the study.

## **Critique Participation**

Students will be graded based on the quality of their participation in other students' paper critiques. Students are required to read the assigned article ahead of class, and to come prepared with their own observations of the paper, questions and suggestions. A grade for critique participation (5%) will be assigned based on an average score across all critique presentations over the duration of the class.

## **Chapter Presentations**

Each student will be responsible for leading the discussion for two weeks of the course (10%). The primary responsibility of the student is to review the key terms and concepts covered in the assigned chapters from the Schutt textbook (and select chapters from Lindlof & Taylor). Students are expected to prepare a 30 minute PowerPoint presentation, distribute printed copies of the presentation to members of the class, and present the key ideas/concepts that are covered in the chapter(s). Students are encouraged to actively engage the class through their chapter presentations. Students will be evaluated based on the thoroughness and accuracy of their presentation.

## **Assignments**

### *Assignment #1 (5%): Human Subjects Certification (Due: Oct 5)*

Students must demonstrate an understanding of the issues important in conducting research involving human subjects. Access the online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Human Subject Protections Course and, working independently, successfully complete all 16 modules of the "CITI Human Subject Protections Basic Course" for "Social / Behavioral / Epidemiologic Research Investigators". A letter of certification indicating successful completion of all modules must be submitted to the instructor by the due date (instructions are provided at <https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi>).

### *Assignment #2 (5%): Problem and Hypotheses Formulation (Due: Oct 12)*

Select a research topic and develop an annotated bibliography, a research question and hypotheses. Your research question can only be one sentence long, and must be something from social science research that could be answered using a cross-sectional, close-ended questionnaire, such as the relationship between Internet use and depression. Prepare an annotated bibliography of at least 10 peer reviewed articles of importance to your research question (it is recommended that you print, and keep a copy of these papers). In preparing your bibliography you should search major peer reviewed journals and conference proceedings from your field (e.g., communication, media studies, information science) and related fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, management, medicine). Your bibliography should focus on the most important peer reviewed research related to your question. While you can include additional articles, the 10 articles you select should not be review articles, or articles that are primarily theoretical in nature, they should report on a specific quantitative or qualitative study. For each annotation, you should identify the major constructs, methods and findings (e.g., how constructs were operationalized, how participants were selected, etc.). Each annotation should be in paragraph format and be no more than half a page (single spaced). At the end of your bibliography, create a running list of variables analyzed (approx. one page). Your list of variables should include outcome variables, predictors, and confounding variables. Prepare a minimum of two testable hypotheses based on your research question (no more than two variables per hypothesis). All references must conform to the APA 6th edition style guide.

### *Assignment #3 (5%): Conceptualization (Due: Oct 26)*

Select a main construct from the research question or hypotheses you developed for the previous assignment (you can revise based on the instructor's feedback). In no more than five double spaced pages (plus references): 1) explain how other people have defined this construct, 2) identify issues/problems as well as the strengths of these prior definitions, 3) propose a definition of your construct, 4) explain how the construct you defined is different from related constructs, 5) defend why you chose to define your construct as you did. All references must conform to the APA 6th edition style guide.

**Assignment #4 (5%): Operationalization (Due: Nov 9)**

For the construct you defined in the prior assignment (you can revise based on feedback from the instructor) develop an operational definition. Explain how other researchers have operationalized your construct. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. Based on how you defined your construct, as well as prior attempts at operationalizing this construct, detail how you will operationalize your construct (i.e., precise indicators or measures). You must be able to measure your construct through the use of one or more index, scale or questions on a cross-sectional, close-ended questionnaire. You may use multiple indicators or multidimensional measures. Defend why you chose to operationalize your construct in the way that you propose. Your assignment should be no more than five double spaced pages, excluding references. All references must conform to the APA 6th edition style guide.

**Assignment #5 (5%): Qualitative Observations (Due: Nov 23)**

Based on the research question you identified in the second assignment (you can revise based on feedback from the instructor), develop a methodology for answering your question using a qualitative methodology (e.g., not a survey, experiment, or computer log data). If you propose a study that involves participant observation, describe your role as an observer and how you will enter the field. For interview based studies, provide a list of your main questions and an outline of the interview topic. For all proposals, provide a detailed rationale for why you are adopting a qualitative approach, provide a plan for systematic sampling of people/events, note taking or data recording procedures, discuss ethical considerations, and provide a plan for the analysis of your data. Your assignment should be no more than five double spaced pages in length (excluding references). All references must conform to the APA 6th edition style guide.

**Proposal Presentation (Due: Nov 30)**

The in-class presentation is as an opportunity for students to explore individual interests and to receive immediate feedback from the instructor and classmates on plans for their final project. The presentation should be 20 minutes long, use PowerPoint, and follow the format of a formal conference presentation. A copy of your presentation (on paper) must be given to the instructor at the time of your presentation. Presentations should include all of the elements required in the final research proposal.

**Research Proposal (Due: last day of class)**

The final assignment is a multi-method research proposal. The proposal can be on any social science topic of your choice. Your proposal must include at least two distinct methods from the domains of survey methods, experimental methods, and observational methods. The suggested approach is for students to revise and expand assignments 1-5 into a coherent proposal. Your proposal must be no longer than 20 double spaced pages (excluding references) and contain the following sections:

1. *Title page and abstract* (300 word max).
2. *Introductory statement of the research problem.* Use this section to clarify what you are going to study, the purpose of the research, and the significance of the research.
3. *Literature review.* Explain how what you plan to study builds on existing literature on your topic, why the previous work needs to be continued with new research, and provide the rationale for your specific hypothesis or research question (or a set of them). This section should include a clear conceptualization of your key constructs.
4. *Methodological plan.* This is the heart of your proposal and the area of primary concern. Be as detailed as possible. Clearly operationalize key constructs. Provide a comprehensive explanation for how you are going to observe/measure the necessary variables/context to answer your research question(s) and hypothesis(es). This section should include a procedure to test your ideas and to enact your study as well as to evaluate the data.
5. *Ethics statement.* Identify any human subjects issues and how you plan to address those issues.
6. *Discussion of limitations.* Discuss issues of validity and reliability as they pertain to your proposed research. What are the main limitations, and why is your proposed approach better than alternative options?
7. *Timeline.*
8. *References.* All references must conform to the APA 6th edition style guide.

### **Late Assignments and Missed Exams**

If you miss an exam, to be allowed to make up the exam, you must: 1) have an acceptable excuse, and 2) contact the instructor before the time of the exam. The only acceptable excuses to miss an exam or submit a late assignment are a) an illness that can be substantiated by a note from a medical professional, b) a family death documented by a death certificate. Students should pay close attention to due dates, late assignments will not be graded.

### **Academic Integrity**

The consequences of scholastic dishonesty are very serious. Evidence of plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of dishonesty, academic sabotage, criminal activity, or other violations of research or professional ethics will be dealt with severely – at a minimum students will receive a grade of “F” in the course. Rutgers academic integrity policy is at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

### **COMMUNICATING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR**

I’m here to help, please ask questions, share your ideas, and visit me often during office hours. However, keep in mind that when seeking advisement and support, email is no substitute for an in person meeting. Students seeking help with the content of this course should consult with me at the start of class, during office hours, or by requesting a separate appointment. Plan ahead and consult with me in advance of any due dates. Do not expect a detailed response by email to requests for advice or review of materials (some things are still best done in person!)

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

The following books are on reserve at Alexander Library and are available for purchase at the Rutgers bookstore and at other outlets.

#### **Required Texts:**

Schutt, Russell K (2014). [\*Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research, 8th ed.\*](#) Sage.

It is important that students acquire the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of this textbook.

American Psychological Association. (2009). [\*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed.\*](#) Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

It is important that students acquire the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of this book.

#### **Other Required Material:**

All other readings, files, and grades will be available from the course website (generally in the form of a PDF or a link to content): <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>.

## COURSE OUTLINE

This portion of the syllabus is subject to change as the course evolves. I may add or remove material based on the interests and pace of the class. At times, I will distribute new and timely material that appears in the news or has been recently published. It is your responsibility to learn of any changes by regularly attending class, visiting the course website, and reading your email.

### WEEK 1 – Introduction to the Research Enterprise

**Sep 8** (Note: This is a Tuesday class meeting due to Rutgers' change of designation day)

**Readings:** None.

### WEEK 2 – The Research Process

**Sep 14**

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapters 1-2, Appendix A and Appendix B.

**Reading:** Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 6-13.

**Reading:** "Trouble at the lab." (2013). *The Economist*.

<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21588057-scientists-think-science-self-correcting-alarming-degree-it-not-trouble>

**Reading:** Fox News article on "Watching SpongeBob Can Lead to Learning Problems?"

### WEEK 3 – Conceptualization and Measurement

**Sep 21**

**Guest:** Lily Todorinova, Rutgers Librarian

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 4

**Reading:** Appel, Lora, Punit Dadlani, Maria Dwyer, Keith N. Hampton, Vanessa Kitzie, Ziad A. Matni, Patricia Moore, & Rannie Teodoro. (2014). Testing the Validity of Social Capital Measures in the Study of Information and Communication Technologies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(4): 398-416.

**Reading:** Babbie, E. (2007). *The Practice of Social Research*. (Ch5: pp 120-142). [optional].

**Reading:** Nardi, P. (2005). *Interpreting Data: A Guide to Understanding Research*. (Ch5: pp 93-104). [optional].

### WEEK 4 – Research Ethics

**Sep 28**

**Exam:** Exam #1 (includes weeks 2-3)

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 3

**Video:** Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Study (43 min) (NOTE: view prior to the class meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRlpE7wSFIA>)

**Video:** Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment-Guatemala (16 min) (NOTE: view prior to the class meeting <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nha9MsSSKvE>) [optional].

**Audio:** Freakonomics podcast "Fear Thy Nature": <http://freakonomics.com/2012/09/14/fear-thy-nature-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/> [optional].

## WEEK 5 – Sampling

Oct 5

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 5

**Reading:** Schober, Michael, Pasek, Josh, Guggenheim, Lauren, Lampe, Cliff, & Conrad, Frederick (2014). When are big data methods trustworthy for social measurement? Working paper.

**Reading:** Hargittai, E. (2015). Is Bigger Always Better? Potential Biases of Big Data Derived from Social Network Sites. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 659(1), 63-76.

**Reading:** RetailMeNot.com’s Shoppers Trend Report

**Reading:** Plimus Survey Finds Virtual Gifts Top Everyone’s List

**Assignment:** Assignment #1 due.

## WEEK 6 – Causation

Oct 12

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 6

**Reading:** Pullman, Geoffrey (2013, Feb 28) “Predicting Prudence From Tense Marking?”. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2013/02/28/predicting-prudence-from-tense-marking/>

**Reading:** Pullman, Geoffrey (2013, Mar 4) “Spurious Correlations Everywhere: The Tragedy of Big Data?”. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2013/03/04/spurious-correlations-everywhere/>

**Assignment:** Assignment #2 due.

## WEEK 7 – Experiments

Oct 19

**Exam:** Exam #2 (includes weeks 5-6)

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 7

**Reading:** Dill, KE, Brown, BP, & Collins MA (2008). Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44(5): 1402-1408.

## WEEK 8 – Survey Research

Oct 26

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 8

**Reading:** Hampton, K. N., Goulet, L. S., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2011). Social Networking Sites and Our Lives: How People’s Trust, Personal Relationships, and Civic and Political Involvement are Connected to Their Use of Social Networking Sites and Other Technologies. Washington, DC: Pew Research.

**Reading:** Bernard, Russell, Killworth, Peter, Kronenfeld, David, & Sailer, Lee (1984). The problem of informant accuracy: The validity of retrospective data. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13: 495-517.

**Reading:** Goulet, Lauren Sessions (2012). Friends in all the right places: Social resources and geography in the age of social network sites. PhD Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania. (read pages:38-39, 63-75).

**Assignment:** Assignment #3 due.

## WEEK 9 – Survey Research

Nov 2

- Exam:** Exam #3 (includes weeks 7-8)
- Reading:** Emanuel, Gabrielle. (2014). Post a survey on Mechanical Turk and watch the results roll in. *NPR*. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/03/05/279669610/post-a-survey-on-mechanical-turk-and-watch-the-results-roll-in>
- Reading:** Yeager et al (2011). Comparing the accuracy of RDD telephone surveys and internet surveys conducted with probability and non-probability samples. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75(4): 709-747.
- Reading:** Keeter, S., Kennedy, C., Dimock, M., Best, J., & Craighill, P. (2006). Gauging the Impact of Growing Nonresponse on Estimates from a National RDD Telephone Survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70(5), 759-779.

## WEEK 10 – Qualitative Research: Ethnography

Nov 9

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 9
- Reading:** Lindlof, T., and Taylor, B. (2011). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Chapter 5)
- Reading:** Goffman, A. (2009). On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto. *American Sociological Review*, 74(3), 339-357
- Reading:** Duneier, M. (2011). How not to lie with ethnography. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 1-11.
- Reading:** Duneier, M. (2006). Ethnography, the ecological fallacy, and the 1995 Chicago heat wave. *American Sociological Review*, 71(4), 679-688.
- Reading:** Neyfakh, Leon (2015, June 18). The Ethics of Ethnography. *Slate*. [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/crime/2015/06/alice\\_goffman\\_s\\_on\\_the\\_run\\_is\\_the\\_sociologist\\_to\\_blame\\_for\\_the\\_inconsistencies.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2015/06/alice_goffman_s_on_the_run_is_the_sociologist_to_blame_for_the_inconsistencies.html)
- Assignment:** Assignment #4 due.

## WEEK 11 – Qualitative Research: More observation

Nov 16

- Reading:** Lindlof, T., and Taylor, B. (2011). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Chapters 6 & 8)
- Reading:** Small, Mario Luis. (2009). 'How many cases do I need': On the science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography* 10(1): 5-38.
- Reading:** Hampton, Keith, Oren Livio, & Lauren Sessions (2010). The Social Life of Wireless Urban Spaces: Internet Use, Social Networks, and the Public Realm. *Journal of Communication* 60(4), 701-722
- Reading:** Hampton, K. N., Goulet, L. S., & Albanesius, G. (2015). Change in the social life of urban public spaces: The rise of mobile phones and women, and the decline of aloneness over thirty years. *Urban Studies*, 52(8), 1489-1504.

## WEEK 12 – NO CLASS

Nov 23

- Assignment:** Assignment #5 due

## WEEK 13 – Proposal presentation

Nov 30

**WEEK 14 – Discussion of individual research proposals and critiques**  
**Dec 7**

**WEEK 15 – Final proposal due**  
**Dec 14**