

**Department of Communication and Culture**  
**University of Calgary**  
**COMS 615 S01: Research Methods**  
**Winter 2013**  
**Tuesdays 17:00-19:50, SS 315**

**Instructor:** Tania S. Smith  
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### **Course Description**

A survey of research methods appropriate to the study of communication and culture.  
Prerequisite: Consent of Program Director.

### **Course Objectives**

- To examine major methodological traditions and research tools in communication and culture.
- To examine connections between theories and research methods.
- To experience the data gathering and analysis process.
- To develop skill in writing effective research proposals.
- To understand the social context of the research process, including the practical, political, and ethical dimensions of research.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Use electronic devices for course related functions only. Show professional courtesy and attentiveness to the instructor and fellow students by using technology silently and discreetly. Minimize visual distractions from your screen.

The Instructure Canvas course management system (<http://www.instructure.com/>) will be used instead of Blackboard. Students will be sent an email invitation and will register during the first two weeks of class. For convenient access, the course's area on Blackboard will provide a link to the course's area on Canvas.

### **Textbooks/Readings**

*Please ensure you get the THIRD edition of Seale.*

- Seale, C. (Ed.). (2012). *Researching Society and Culture* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications. Retrieved from <http://www.sagepub.com/books/Book234953>

- Links to additional required electronic readings will be provided on the course website by the instructor and student presenters.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### **1. Seminar presentation**

**Schedule by Jan 15**

**15%**

Once during the term, prepare to lead discussion on the readings for one of the research methods covered on a designated day of class. Two weeks before your presentation, meet with the instructor to approve your choice of an online published journal article exemplifying the method. Provide its link to be posted on our course website. Other students will be expected to read the study you've chosen. The presentation will require supplementary reading on the method. Cite this supplementary reading in your presentation materials. On the day of your presentation, upload your presentation notes or slides to Canvas before class begins, and provide a paper copy to the instructor to take notes. You will have 15-20 minutes to address the following aspects of the method: its theoretical underpinnings, including why and how the method developed (i.e. in response to particular theoretical and/or methodological debates or problems); a brief description of how the method is usually carried out; debates among proponents of the method; and critiques of the method. Be prepared to facilitate a post-presentation discussion of how your selected study illustrates the method's main characteristics, strengths, and limitations.

### **2. Literature review.**

**Chart: Jan 29 / Final: February 12**

**30%**

Write a literature review (2500 words + references + analysis chart appendix) that supports a larger research project. This assignment will give you practice in writing reviews of literature as part of proposals, journal articles, book reviews, or your thesis. A week before the final paper is due, submit a complete draft of a chart summarizing your analysis of 5-10 relevant sources (see examples in our readings). In your essay, review at least 5 article- or chapter-length primary research studies on your topic, and cite other sources as necessary. To introduce your paper, present a clearly conceived research question and outline your overall research design to contextualize the literature review as part of a larger study. Explain the methods and criteria you used to search for, select, and analyze the literature you reviewed. Present the findings of your analysis in sentences that occasionally cite two or more items at once, and select at least two sources to review in depth in the manner of a "review essay." When reviewing a piece of literature in depth, first introduce the article, and then describe and critically analyze it, focusing on what is most interesting about its theoretical approach, its methodological strengths and weaknesses as a study, and its findings. Critically evaluate the literature's relevance and usefulness to your own research project, explaining how it justifies, supports, and/or shapes your research. Use APA citation style throughout.

### **3. Methodology Essay**

**Draft: March 26 / Final: April 9**

**30%**

Write a critical essay (2500 to 3000 words + references) that examines theoretical issues related to your chosen method(s) and area of study. This essay may provide you with

material relevant to the methods section of your thesis, or a journal article. This assignment differs from your literature review in that you are not reviewing primary research studies on a given topic, but entering a dialogue with other scholars who are discussing research methodologies. Introduce the essay by outlining your selected topic and overall research design, and provide a thesis statement to unify your essay. Cite at least 5 articles or chapters beyond our assigned readings that explore issues and debates about at least one of your methods. Each method exists in a number of versions, each of which has strengths and weaknesses, proponents and critics. Discuss philosophical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of these debates, and the ways in which methodological and analytical choices are related to theoretical choices and the nature of the subject matter. Also discuss limitations of the method and the politics and ethics of its application. Explain how the insights from your investigation will affect how you approach your own study. Use proper APA citation throughout.

**4. Peer Reviews                                      Feb. 5, April 2, and as scheduled                                      15%**

There are three components of the peer review score:

*1. Complete, timely, and well-prepared drafts or outlines, 5%.* In order to undergo peer review on the designated dates above, students will submit online to the peer review forum 1) the analysis chart for the literature review by Jan. 30, and 2) a full draft of the methodology essay by Mar. 26. The chart and draft must be submitted on time and meet length and format standards. The complete draft of the final essay should be at least 70% of the required final length, should have a full introduction, and include all major headings or components and at least 5 references.

*2. Assignment peer reviews, 5%.* Students will be assigned to peer review groups of 3-4 students and review two designated peers' charts or drafts on each peer review day. Each student will come to class on Feb. 5 and Apr. 2 prepared with notes and materials for peer review. Student groups will provide each other feedback and advice while the instructor circulates. Students will also review one of their peers' methodology essay drafts in a 250-word peer review letter posted online on the peer review forum by April 2. Within two days after peer review, post on the forum a brief message about what you learned from the peer review experience, and your writing or revision plans.

*3. Presentation peer reviews, 5%.* Students will sign up for peer reviews of 2 student presentations during the term. Reviews are at least 250 words in complete sentences; should cover content, organization, style and delivery; should be respectful yet critical; and offer encouragement and revision tips or questions. They are due online in the peer review forum within two business days after the presentation.

Each of the sub-components above will be noted as complete/incomplete during term. Formative instructor feedback may be provided occasionally as time permits, or during an appointment. After the end of classes, the components will be scored for quality, completeness and timeliness.

## **5. Final exam**

**April 16**

**10%**

This 50 minute exam will be held during class time on the final day of class. Short- and long-answer questions will ask you to define, explain or discuss concepts from our assigned texts. There will be a range of choice among questions. The purpose of the exam is to demonstrate your broad understanding of research concepts and methods beyond those used in your own research project.

### **Assignment submission:**

All assignments will be submitted online and graded online. Do NOT email your assignments directly to the instructor. Submit your assignments online via the course management system, Canvas, in .doc, .docx, or pdf file format.

It is the student's responsibility to verify online submission and to keep a secure backup copy of each submitted assignment. After submitting a file, download your file from the course management system and open it to verify that it is the correct version and there were no file transfer errors.

If Canvas is not working, submit your assignment via the course's drop box on Blackboard and notify the instructor. If internet access is unavailable, submit in paper within the grace period. A daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox. *Re-submit the assignment electronically via Canvas as soon as possible when access is available.*

### **Assignment deadlines:**

Presentation materials, Drafts, and Peer Reviews must be submitted online to the appropriate discussion forum before the beginning of class.

Essay final versions are due online by 11:59PM on their deadline. A student is automatically permitted a 48-hour deadline extension if his/her Presentation is scheduled on a day an Essay's final version is due. A grace period of 12 hours is allowed for unanticipated technical difficulties, short-term illness, or unexpected scheduling challenges.

**Registrar-scheduled exam: No.**

### **Policy for late assignments:**

At the discretion of the instructor, assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. For peer review components, a late penalty may apply for each late item. Documentation may be

required to waive late penalties.

## Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. You will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up any assignments or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.

## Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow> . Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

## Grading System

The following grading system is used in the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent – superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
		Note: The grade point value (3.0) associated with this grade is the minimum acceptable average that a graduate student must maintain throughout the program as computed at the end of each registration anniversary year of the program.
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
		Note: A student who receives a B- or lower in two or more courses will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average unless the program recommends otherwise. Individual programs may require a higher minimum passing grade.
C+	2.3	
C	2.0	All grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements. A student who receives a grade of F will normally be required to withdraw unless the program recommends otherwise.
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1.0	
F	0.0	

## **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (MacEwan Student Centre 4th floor, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

## **Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Graduate Calendar at the following link:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-o.html>

## **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

## **Students' Union**

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts, see [www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su](http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su)

## **Graduate Students' Association**

For details on the Graduate Students' Association, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/>

## **Student Ombudsman**

For details on the Student Ombudsman, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/services/ombudsperson.html>

## **Emergency Evacuation and Assembly Points**

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

## **"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333**

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

## **Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (ie. Surveys, interviews, observation) as a part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) <http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb>

## **Reading List – to be provided online**

**Schedule of readings: To be provided online.**