

# Communication Research Methods

CMJ 402

**Faculty:** Bridie McGreavy, Ph.D.

**Course Schedule:** T. & Th., 2:00 to 3:15 pm

**Location:** Dunn Hall, Room 1

**E-mail:** [bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu](mailto:bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu)

**Office Hours:** T./Th., 11 am to 1 pm and by appt., 438 Dunn Hall

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## Course Description & Learning Outcomes

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Communication research explores questions about the many ways in which we as humans use symbols; make meaning; form relationships; and interact with one another, with media and technologies, and within organizations and environments. In this course, you will learn about and develop skills in a range of approaches to communication research. The course emphasizes both qualitative and quantitative research methods and includes a semester-long communication research project.

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

1. Design and implement communication research
2. Collect, code, and identify patterns in qualitative data
3. Describe and adhere to standards for the ethical conduct of research
4. Apply descriptive statistics to quantitative data
5. Communicate research in presentations and papers

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## Texts & Technology

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### Course Texts

There are two required texts for this course both of which are available in the bookstore:

Venkatesh, S. (2008). *Gang leader for a day: A rogue sociologist takes to the streets*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

We will use Blackboard to access course materials and grades throughout the semester. Grades will be posted to Blackboard so that you can keep track of your semester average. Grade concerns should be handled early and often, if necessary. I will send relevant course announcements through e-mail. All assignments will be uploaded to Blackboard. You also have access to a CMJ 402 Library Resource page with link to academic databases, books, articles, and other materials that will support your work in this course this semester (<http://libguides.library.umaine.edu/cmj402>).

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## Attendance and Important Institutional Policies

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### Attendance

Learning depends on showing up with a willingness to work with new information and experiences. Attendance is therefore a basic course requirement and will be graded through frequent participation activities that will occur during class time. You will not succeed in this course if you regularly miss class. If you are an athlete and have frequent excused absences, you will be required to complete all of the participation activities and it is your responsibility to e-mail Dr. McGreavy to access missed in-class assignments.

*Respect for Diversity and Inclusive Dialogue*

In this course, we will work to promote dialogue to examine and discuss complex issues, such as ethical issues related to research and how research has negatively impacted minority groups. We will likely have different views and life experiences related to the course content, and as a group we will work to include and respectfully discuss all perspectives. In the first week of class, we will develop shared expectations for how to create an inclusive, equitable, and respectful community. Further, it is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs are addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be approached as a resource, strength and benefit. It is also my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions and feedback about how to do this are encouraged.

If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Student Accessibility Services, 121 East Annex, 581.2319, as early as possible in the term. Students who have already been approved for accommodations by SAS and have a current accommodation letter should meet with me privately as soon as possible.

*Sexual Discrimination Reporting*

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity. If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

- For confidential resources on campus: Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000.
- For confidential resources off campus: Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or Partners for Peace: 1-800-863-9909.
- Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:
- For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406, Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409, University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911. Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>

**Grading & Assignments**

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1.0 Participation.....	15%
Attendance, small group work, invitation to participate in research project	
2.0 Reading Comprehension and Application (RCAs).....	20%
3.0 Communication Research Project.....	50%
3.1 Invitation to Participate (participation points above)	
3.2 Literature Review and Methods (15%)	
3.3 Transcript, Analysis and Codebook (15%)	
3.4 Final Presentation and Poster (20%)	
4.0 Quantitative Research Quiz.....	15%

**Grade scale:** A 94-100; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73; D+ 67-69; D 60-66; F 0 -59

## **1.0 Participation**

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Participation is an essential part of meaningful learning. I will evaluate your participation based on attendance, contributions to in-class discussion, and specific participation assignments throughout the semester. For example, you will be expected to finish a certification for the ethical conduct of research, known as a Human Subjects Training. Consistent participation in large and small groups, finishing in-class assignments, and the ethics certification will shape your participation grade.

## **2.0 Reading Comprehension and Application (RCAs) (4 out of 5)**

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Reading methods texts and reviewing relevant literature are essential to becoming an ethical and effective researcher. You will be required to demonstrate that you have read the material and are incorporating the content into the development of the research project. The RCAs should provide an outline of 5 to 8 major concepts from the reading and a 1-paragraph discussion of how the concepts help inform the development of your research project. The discussion should address this question: How will you use this material to shape your own research?

You are required to complete 4 out of 5 RCAs; if you do, your lowest score will be dropped. If you only complete 3 out of 5, your lowest scores will not be dropped. RCAs need to be uploaded to Blackboard by 2 pm on the due date in Word or PDF format. Failure to upload in Word or PDF will result in a score of "0." An example RCA is provided in Appendix I.

## **3.0 Communication Research Project**

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The best way to learn how to do communication research is to do communication research: dive into a research project by getting a pulse on existing knowledge, asking question, inviting participation collecting and analyzing data, and sharing what you learn with others. The bulk of your grade will be based on the successful completion of multiple phases of a qualitative communication research project. You have two options for the semester-long research project.

### **Project One: Communication and Place Research Project**

One of the unique things about college is, for many, it is the first time living away from home in a new place. Forming a connection to this new place is shaped by communication. In this project, students will explore what this place, Marsh Island, means to college students and faculty at UMaine and characterize the ways in which communication shapes what people know about this place and what it means to them.

Working independently or in a small group (n=3), you will define what you mean by both communication and sense of place. You will then conduct at least two interviews that focus on what people know and how they communicate a sense of place. After you conduct the interviews, you will transcribe and analyze the qualitative data to identify and describe themes about how people communicate about this place.

### **Project Two: Communication and \_\_\_\_\_ Research Project**

The second project option is for those who have specific communication-related research or career interests and who want to work independently. You may identify your own research area and conduct an independent project that includes at least one interview (preferably two) and that

explores a communication related phenomena. You must have a prior connection to your research context and be able to identify at least five people you could potentially interview for this project.

Students in the past have addressed the following questions:

- What communication factors shape early childhood development?
- What does belonging mean to students and how can one promote a sense of belonging on college campuses?
- How do scientists communicate their research to public audiences?
- How do public relations specialists define success in their work?
- How do coastal landowners communicate about aquaculture?
- How, through communication, can health centers promote student well-being?

### **3.1 Invitation to Participate, due Thu. 3/14**

This assignment has two parts. First, using a template provided in class, you will identify three people you intend to interview and list them with their contact information in order of preference. Second, you will provide documentation, either a forwarded e-mail or date that interview is scheduled, that you have invited at least one person to participate in the interview. This assignment counts towards your participation grade.

### **3.2 Literature Review and Methods, due Thu. 3/28**

Conducting research and producing knowledge is like joining an ongoing conversation. One of the most important parts of effectively joining this conversation is to learn what has already been said and what still needs to be added to the conversation. The literature review will be a minimum of 5 pages and contain two parts. In the first part, you will produce an annotated bibliography to summarize each of the five (minimum) articles you reviewed. In the second part, you will write a literature review that summarizes major themes and compares the methods used across the set of articles.

### **3.3 Interview Transcript (due Thu. 4/11) and Analysis and Codebook (due Thu. 4/18)**

Once you have conducted your interview, you will fully transcribe the interview. The interview transcript should follow a well-organized format that shows interview questions and participant responses. The transcript should be close to word for word (i.e. verbatim) though you do not need to include verbal fillers (e.g., um, ah, like, etc.). The analysis shows how you systematically interpreted the transcript to identify codes and then connect those codes into descriptions and themes. The codebook organizes your codes, descriptions, and themes into a single table to help the reader make sense of the patterns you observed in your data.

### **3.4 Final Presentation (due 4/30 or 5/2) and Final Poster (due 5/8)**

The final poster is an opportunity to bring your literature review, methods, interview, and analysis together to share what you learned in a way that also allows you to practice an important research communication skill. You will use PowerPoint or Publisher to design a 36 x 42 poster that includes a title, author names, key findings, an introduction, a list of your methods, major themes, and plans for your next steps.

### **4.0 Quantitative Research Quiz, due 4/25**

The Quantitative Research Quiz tests and refines your understanding of basic quantitative research techniques, including developing quantitative research questions, identifying hypotheses, constructing survey questions, and analyzing descriptive statistics such as frequency and central

tendency in datasets. This quiz is open note, open book, and collaborative and you have one week to complete it.

## Extra Credit

There are **three options** for extra credit:

1) Many departments on campus offer weekly research seminars. For example, the Department of Communication and Journalism hosts communication research presentations on Mondays at noon in Dunn 424. As another example, the Mitchell Center hosts research presentations in a weekly seminar series on Mondays at 3 pm in Norman Smith Hall. The Human Dimensions of Climate Change film series at 6 pm on select Tuesdays in March and April would also qualify.

Attending a research presentation and sending a selfie at the end of the talk is worth **2 participation points per event**. You may attend up to 3 events for credit, earning an additional 6 participation points. If you attend environmentally-themed presentations, you can also earn your Level I Engaged Black Bear Environmental Stewardship Badge for another 2 participation points.

2) Attend the Maine Water and Sustainability Conference on Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at the Augusta Civic Center, (5 participation points for all day, 3 points for half day). If there is enough interest (minimum of 4 people), I will rent a van. There is a \$30 registration fee.

3) Present research at the Student Research Symposium on Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> for **3 points added to your final grade**. The research may be from this class, another class, or from your active participation in a research team on campus. Abstracts are due on Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>.

## Course Calendar

Date	Content and Guiding Questions	Reading and Assignments
<b>Week 1: Connecting with Communication Research Methods</b>		
Tue. 1/22	Connecting with the course	
Thu. 1/24	What is research and how can research enrich our lives?	– Finalize syllabus – <b>Read:</b> Venkatesh (pp. 1-15)
<b>Week 2: Introducing Communication Research</b>		
Tue. 1/29	What do communication researchers study?	– <b>Read:</b> Baxter and Babbie, Ch. 1
Thu. 1/31	How does communication research matter?	– <b>Read:</b> Venkatesh, pp. 15-111 – <b>Due:</b> RCA #1 (Baxter & Babbie)
<b>Week 3: Introduction to research ethics</b>		
Tue. 2/5	What are research ethics?	– <b>Read:</b> Venkatesh, pp. 113-218
Thu. 2/7	A case study of research ethics: <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>	– <b>Read:</b> Venkatesh, pp. 219-290 (includes Acknowledgments) – <b>Due:</b> RCA #2 (Venkatesh, all)
<b>Week 4: Training in research ethics</b>		
Tue. 2/12	Why do research ethics matter?	– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 4 (with special attention to Table 4.1)

Thu. 2/14	How do we as researchers uphold ethical commitments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 5 (pp. 57-78)</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Upload Human Subjects Training Certificate of Completion</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5: Exploring the relationship between theory and method</b>		
Tue. 2/19	What is theory? Introduction to paradigms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
Thu. 2/21	How does theory shape method?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 3</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> RCA #3 (Creswell and Seidman)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 6: Designing research: How do we understand what is known and identify questions?</b>		
Tue. 2/26	How do we identify what is already known and the gaps in knowledge we can fill? Library session with Jen Bonnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 6, pp. 123-132</li> <li>– Meet in the library classroom in Fogler Library to start literature review.</li> </ul>
Thu. 2/28	Library day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 6, pp. 132-138</li> <li>–</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7: Designing research: How do we review literature and refine questions?</b>		
Tue. 3/5	What are research questions? How do we ask meaningful questions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 7</li> </ul>
Thu. 3/7	Practicing our literature review skills: Annotating and analyzing articles for shared themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 3</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> RCA #4 (Creswell, Seidman)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8: Connecting questions with methods</b>		
Tue. 3/12	What methods allow us to address our questions? Sampling and data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 9</li> </ul>
Thu. 3/14	What is qualitative social science and how do we do it? Panel of social science experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 6</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Invitation to Participate, including e-mail confirmation</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9: Spring break (3/18/2019-3/22/2019)</b>		
<b>Week 10: Collecting qualitative data through interviewing</b>		
Tue. 3/26	How do we conduct an interview? Practicing interview techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 7</li> </ul>
Thu. 3/28	No class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Extra credit:</b> Maine Water and Sustainability Conference</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Literature Review and Methods</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11: Interpreting qualitative data</b>		
Tue. 4/2	How do we interpret qualitative data? Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 8, pp. 112-118</li> </ul>
Thu. 4/4	How do we identify patterns in qualitative data? Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Seidman, Ch. 8, pp. 119-132</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> RCA #5 (Creswell, Seidman)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12: Quantitative research</b>		
Tue. 4/9	How do we design quantitative research? How do these designs compare to qualitative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Creswell, Ch. 8</li> </ul>

Wed. 4/10	Class attends the Student Research Symposium in Bangor. Take photo of research poster that interests you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Upload photo of research poster. Be prepared to discuss posters on Thu. 4/11.</li> <li>– <b>Note:</b> Attendance at this event is required. To be excused from attending, students will need to send evidence of course or related schedule conflict.</li> </ul>
Thu. 4/11	How do we collect quantitative data? <i>Survey Design Part I</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Walonick (2010), pp. 1-12</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Interview transcript</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13: Survey design</b>		
Tue. 4/16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Walonick (2010), pp. 12-24</li> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Start Baxter and Babbie, Ch. 11</li> </ul>
Thu. 4/18	How do we collect quantitative data? <i>Survey Design Part II</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Baxter and Babbie, Ch. 11, pp-257-262</li> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Analysis and Codebook</li> </ul>
<b>Week 14: Descriptive statistics</b>		
Tue. 4/23	Quantitative data analysis: Descriptive statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Read:</b> Baxter and Babbie, Ch. 11, pp. 262-268</li> </ul>
Thu. 4/25	Quantitative data analysis: Descriptive statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Quantitative Research Quiz</li> </ul>
<b>Week 15: Producing and sharing knowledge</b>		
Tue. 4/30	Poster session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Poster presentations</li> </ul>
Thu. 5/2	Poster session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Due:</b> Poster presentations</li> </ul>
<b>Week 16: Posters due Wed. 5/8 at 5 pm</b>		

## Appendix I. Reading Comprehension and Application (RCA)

There are two objectives for the RCAs: 1) identify core concepts related to research design; and 2) apply these concepts to your semester-long research project. Your RCA must be typed and contain the following components:

- Name
- Date
- Details about the author, chapter # and title and page numbers
- List of 5 to 8 core concepts from the chapter
- 1-paragraph summary of how the reading informs your research design

**Name:** Bridie McGreavy

**Date:** 1/25/2019

**Reading Details:** Creswell (2014), Chapter 2, Review of the Literature, pp. 25-50

### Core Concepts

- 1) A literature review is important because it allows the researcher to understand how his/her research fits within and contributes to a broader body of knowledge.
- 2) A literature review is an early step in designing research. A researcher may already have general research questions s/he is asking, but these questions should remain open to changing based on what is learned in the literature review.
- 3) Literature reviews require that a researcher develop a system for organizing notes and articles.
- 4) There are many software tools available, like RefWorks, that can help researchers organize and categorize articles
- 5) There are several online databases that can assist with literature reviews, including EBSCO Academic Search Complete and Communication and Mass Media Complete.
- 6) When conducting a literature review, a researcher must also critically examine the research, paying attention to the source of information, how recent the research is, and the rigor of the research design.
- 7) A literature review can also help a researcher identify scholars who s/he can then ask specific questions to help guide the development of the research.

### Application

This chapter helped me understand at what stage in the research design process I need to do a literature review. A literature review will help me identify and revise my research questions. As a researcher, I may have questions that I am asking that seem relevant but as I review the literature, if these questions have already been answered or if there are other ways of asking these questions that I had not considered I can revise them before I start developing interview or survey instruments and collecting data. Finally, I learned that if producing scholarship is like stepping into an ongoing academic conversation, the literature review gives me the knowledge I need to effectively step into and contribute to that conversation.

## Appendix II. Reading Comprehension and Application (RCA) Rubric

The following is a rubric Dr. McGreavy uses to grade all RCAs. You may also request additional example RCAs if need be.

Category	10 to 9	8 to 7	6 to 5	5 and below
<b>Format</b> 2 points	Exact format followed, with name, date, readings assigned and major sections.	Format mostly followed with all of the major components and minor errors in details.	Major sections (reading details, core concepts application) present but format not consistently followed and/or contains errors.	No attention to format guidelines.
<b>Core concepts</b> 4 points	At least seven core concepts are identified and written in full descriptive sentences covering main points from all or most of the assigned readings.	At least five core concepts are identified and are written in full sentences and cover select main points drawn from the readings.	Three to five core concepts are listed but are not written in full sentences nor cover relevant material from the readings.	Core concepts are undeveloped, are not be written in full sentences, the details are thin and/or do not cover multiple readings.
<b>Application</b> 4 points	All of the core concepts are described in ways that provide specific detail about how these concepts connect with the development of research skills. As the Communication Research Project is developed, the connections focus on how the readings help the student advance this final project.	At least three core concepts are described in ways that relate to the development of research skills. As the Communication Research Project is developed, the selected concepts are applied to help the student advance this final project.	The student identifies core concepts from the readings but the connection to learning about research skills and the Communication Research Project is vague or general.	Core concepts are not discussed thoroughly and the connection to the development of research skills is not made.