

**School of Communication  
CMS 260-3**

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**EMPIRICAL METHODS FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH**

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**Handout #1: Syllabus and Tentative Outline of Class Schedule**

**Overview:**

This course is an introduction to ways of conducting empirical research. Empirical research uses techniques of direct and indirect observation to test hypotheses and develop new ideas. The course will introduce students to basic principles and tools in research design and data analysis. It will spend more time on quantitative research methods than qualitative methods because qualitative methods are covered in more detail in upper-level courses.

The goal of this course is to help students develop the skills necessary to read and critically evaluate the use of findings in research reports and scholarly articles. The course provides useful knowledge for upper-level coursework and opportunities for students to learn skills many employers hope new university grads will have. Empirical research guides decision-making in matters that concern all of us. Understanding of how research is done is an essential step in assessing appropriate uses of research findings.

**Format**

As a general rule there will be two lectures and one tutorial each week.

**Textbook and Study Materials:**

Textbook: Baxter, Leslie and Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Communication Research*. Toronto: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003.

Other readings will be assigned.

**Preliminary Grading Scheme (to be confirmed in class)**

Tests (during class time)	30
Final examination (during exam sessions)	25
Assignments	30
Tutorial Attendance, Tutorial Tasks & Participation	15

**TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF CLASS SESSIONS**

This is a preliminary schedule intended to help you plan your study schedule. Changes to this schedule will be announced in class.

**Part One: Introduction to Scientific Enquiry** Textbook Chapters 1-5

Week 1 (January 9, 11): Introduction and course administration

- Scientific inquiry and types of empirical research
- The role of theory in research; Paradigms, differing approaches and their implications for research methodology
- Concepts & variables

Week 2 (January 16,18): Core elements of research design:

- Research questions, conceptualization & operationalization, levels of measurement, units of analysis
- Ethics & Contemporary Research Practices (Building ethics into your basic strategy)
- **Term Topic Description and Approval Form Due January 18<sup>th</sup>.**

### **Part Two: Basic Concepts in Measurements and Sampling**

Week 3 (January 23, 25): Measurement, Scales

Textbook Chapter 6

Week 4-5: (January 30- February 8) Sampling

Textbook Chapter 7

- Quiz 1 (February 1)

### **Part Three: Data and Information Gathering Techniques**

Week 6 (February 13-15)

Experimental Research & Quantitative Text Analysis

Textbook Chapters 9-10

Week 7 (February 20-22: Interviews & Survey Research

Textbook Chapter 8

Weeks 8-9 (February 22-March 1) Unobtrusive measures & research using available data

Textbook Chapters 13-15

- Quiz 2 (February 27)
- Participant Observation, Field research
- Qualitative text analysis
- Historical comparative research

### **Part Four: QUANTITATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS**

Week 9-12: (March 6-23):

- Data processing, cleaning and analysis
- Results with one variable (univariate analysis), measures of central tendency, dispersion, variance, standard deviation etc.
- Normal Distribution, sampling distributions, standard error
- Results with two variables (bivariate analysis), cross tabulation, frequency distributions, measures of association, etc.
- Covariance, correlation, regression
- The null hypothesis, statistical significance, chi-squared
- (if time) z tests, t-tests, ANOVA

Week 13: Catch-up and Review

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The School expects that the grades awarded in this course will bear some reasonable relation to established university-wide practices with respect to both levels and distribution of grades. In addition, the School will follow Policy T10.02 with respect to “Intellectual Honesty” and “Academic Discipline”. (See the current Calendar, General Regulations Section).