

MCOM 490: Mass Communication Research Fall 2013

Professor Amy Becker, PhD

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Office Hours: Office Hours: M 9:30AM-11AM, 12:15pm-2:00pm; Wednesdays 12:15-2:00PM; Friday 1 – 2:30 pm (Friday is by prior appointment only; available at other times by appointment). Appointments outside these times can be scheduled in advance via email.

Department Web Site: <http://www.towson.edu/mccs/>

COURSE INFORMATION

Monday: Lecture

11:00am – 12:15pm in MC 009

Wednesday: Sections in MC100

Section 003: 9:30-10:45AM

Section 004: 11:00-12:15PM

Course Blog: <http://mcom490fall2013.blogspot.com/>

Course Description from Towson University Catalog:

Survey of methods and uses of research in mass media fields. Prerequisite: 18 credits of COMM or MCOM; senior standing. Open to MCOM majors/minors only.

Please note that students may not attempt a course for the third time without prior permission from the Academic Standards Committee. Information regarding this policy may be obtained through Enrollment Services.

Course Outcomes:

By the end of this semester, students should be able to achieve the following objectives:

- Explain the procedure for Mass Communication research.
- Understand the significance of research in communication fields, academically and professionally.
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research methods.
- Be able to design and implement research in various communication research settings.
- Explore and analyze relevant literature for specific research questions
- Analyze data using SPSS and be able to interpret results
- Prepare a research report and give a well-organized presentation on research projects.

Required Textbook:

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2010). *Mass media research: An introduction (9th edition)*, Belmont, CA: Thompson. **(listed as W&D in course schedule)**

Additional Readings (Required):

All of the additional readings are posted on blackboard (see Additional Readings folder).

Article 1: Qualitative Research (For class on Monday, 9/9)

Robson, D. (2000). Stereotypes and the female politician: A case study of Senator Barbara Mikulski. Communication Quarterly, 48(3), 205-222.

Article 2: Survey (For class on Monday, 9/30)

Becker, A. B. (2012). Determinants of public support for same-sex marriage: Generational cohorts, social contact, and shifting attitudes. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. doi: 10.1093/ijpor/EDS002

Article 3: Experiment (For class on Wednesday, 10/23)

Becker, A. B., Xenos, M. A., & Waisanen, D. J. (2010). Sizing up The Daily Show: Audience perceptions of political comedy programming. Atlantic Journal of Communication, 18(3), 144-157.

Article 4: Longitudinal Research (For class on Wednesday, 10/30)

Baumgartner, J. C., Morris, J. S., & Walth, N. L. (2012). The Fey Effect Young Adults, Political Humor, and Perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign. Public Opinion Quarterly, 76(1), 95-104.

EXPECTATIONS

Success is your choice! If you choose to be successful, I will be happy to help you. If you do not choose to be successful, I will honor your choice. EVERY STUDENT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

Do the reading! You are expected to complete all reading assignments by the date listed on the course schedule. It is your responsibility to consult the course schedule for particular assignments and to stay current with all chapters and assigned articles. All of the assigned reading material is "fair game" for the exams even if we don't directly discuss particular items in class. **During the course of the semester, there may be surprise extra credit quizzes to test recall of the additional readings.**

While we all love to multi-task, it is expected that you will refrain from using your cell phones (texting, calls, etc), Facebook, IM, email, etc. while in lecture and section. If you are experiencing an emergency and might need to step out and accept a call during class, etc. please let me know ahead of time. **Repeated cell phone offenses may impact your attendance/class participation score. The same thing is true for offenses involving laptops and tablets that are being used for activities other than taking notes.**

You are expected to contribute to discussions and be an active, engaged participant in the classroom. Participation and attendance make up 10% of the final grade. Be sure to maximize your contributions.

Part of being an engaged member of the classroom means respecting fellow classmates and their contributions to the discussion. In this class, I have a commitment to creating a positive and respectful learning environment. I expect all of us to contribute to a safe, productive and fun classroom environment, valuing each of our strengths and differences. In class discussions, everyone should be courteous and respectful of others; no rude, sexist, racist, or other disrespectful comments or behavior will be acceptable.

Ask questions. If you don't understand something or would like further clarification, please ask questions during class discussion. Don't be afraid to speak up.

I am open to your feedback about how I can best meet your needs as a student. I will actively solicit your feedback a few times in the semester through evaluations, but also welcome your comments at other times.

Each week's lecture slides will be made available by the Friday of the week before class. Students may bring printed copies to class for note-taking if they like. Posting will discontinue if attendance drops as a result of the posting or if there are attention problems in class (cell phones, non-class related laptop activity, etc.)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Attendance

Attendance is expected. I will follow the university policy with respect to attendance (see *Towson University Undergraduate Catalog 2010-2011*, p. 18).

Absences may be excused if you: (1) have an illness or injury precluding you from attending class; (2) observe a religious holiday that prevents you from class attendance; (3) are required to participate in a university activity by a recognized authority; or (4) experience a compelling, verifiable emergency beyond your control.

If you anticipate an absence in advance, you must contact me by e-mail **at least two weeks in advance** to let me know you will be absent during a class session. In the case of an emergency, you must notify me via email **within 24 hours after the absence**. Excused absences will be granted only when the reason for the absence is documented in writing. Supporting documents are required (doctor's notes, etc.). **All excuse notes must be turned in no later than 1 week after the absence(s). I will not accept notes turned in weeks after the absence(s) or at the end of the semester.** Other absences (funerals, weddings, etc.) will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. **You are responsible for obtaining lecture notes and announcements presented in the class session you missed. I will not provide notes for missed lectures or sections.**

Two (2) unexcused absences are allowed. Please use those wisely. You will **lose 2 points** for each absence you have over the limit.

The exam dates are set and fixed at the beginning of the semester. Alternate arrangements will only be made for those with an excused absence (see list above). I will not accommodate those who have travel plans or other non-excusable schedule constraints. Since you are being given the exam dates at the start of the semester, you will need to adjust your other plans accordingly.

Late arrivals and early departures are not allowed. Unless prior acceptable arrangements have been made with me, **2 "late and/or early departures" will count as one unexcused absence.**

Contacting Me/Office Hours

Email (abecker@towson.edu) is the best way to reach me. You can usually expect a response within 24 hours. Please be patient if you email me on a weekend or when I might be traveling or if you email after business hours (i.e., in the evening). **Please remember that you are emailing a professor and should treat this type of communication differently than an email or text message to a friend.**

I have tried to schedule my office hours at times that should work well with your schedules and the timing of assignments for the course. If you make an appointment to see me during Friday office hours for example, I expect that means you will show up on time and be prepared to discuss course material. If for some reason you can't make your appointment, I ask that you email me **at least 24 hours before the appointment to cancel**. I am available by appointment outside office hours. Please email me with your request directly. **If you make appointments and then do not show up, please don't be surprised if this is reflected in your class participation/attendance grade.**

Contacting You

I plan to contact you via email using your towson.edu account. I understand that many of you may use other email accounts/forwarding services. You are still responsible for checking your Towson email address. I will not keep track of personal emails, etc.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted. Work missed for a known, excused absence must be turned in prior to the absence in order to receive credit.

Missed Exams

If you are unable to take an exam, you must notify me at least 24 hours ahead of time. A make-up exam will only be administered given accompanying legitimate written documentation regarding the absence or conflict (see University policy on what qualifies as an excused absence). Otherwise, students who miss an exam and do not make alternate arrangements ahead of time will receive a zero.

Research Conduct

Students are expected to act in a professional manner when conducting research for their final projects. Students are not permitted to survey individuals who are under the age of 18 nor are students allowed to send blanket emails to students or professors with a request to participate in their survey. Research conduct will be discussed more fully later in the semester. Students are expected to follow all guidelines discussed in class and on written assignment documents.

Group Work Policy

This class requires that you work with other students for a substantial portion of your grade. Group work, however, must involve all members of the group and all members must make significant and ample contributions. Final paper and presentation grades may vary by group member and peer and self evaluations are taken into consideration when evaluating final papers and presentations. In addition, the final paper rubric includes a section for contribution worth 5 points while the total final paper grade is based on 50 points.

Despite all of this sometimes group work doesn't always "work" and individual members may end up offering less than an acceptable level of contribution. As such, the instructor reserves the right to deduct more than 5 points from an individual's group project grade in the case of extenuating circumstances. A group may also choose to remove a member from the project team. This removal policy is outlined below.

Removal Policy

If you form a group and at some point during the semester a member of the group is not participating fully or doing his/her share of the work (e.g., during the write-up of the rough draft of the literature review, during survey design and data collection, when analyzing and cleaning the data, preparing the presentation, or when completing the write-up for the final paper), all other group members may vote to remove that student from the group. To do so, all remaining members of the group must submit a written request to me via email (cc-ing all group members including the person you'd like to remove) that explains the reason for the removal. All group members must "sign" the email request. I will then notify the student that he/she is no longer a member of the group. If a group removes a student from the group, that student is still responsible for completing the project on his/her own and may not join another group.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using other people's work and ideas without giving them credit. Cheating or plagiarism of any kind may result in one of the following consequences, an F on the assignment, and/or a grade of "F" for the course. This applies to work on all individual assignments including quizzes, and papers. If you are unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty, please read the *Towson University Undergraduate Catalog*. The departmental policy on plagiarism and cheating can be found online here:

<http://www.towson.edu/mccs/docs/PlagiarismMemo.pdf>. You can also consult the university policy online at:

<http://www.towson.edu/provost/resources/studentacademic.asp>

Sexual Harassment

The University specifically prohibits sexual harassment in any form. Please consult the university's policies on this issue.

A Word on Liability

In all assignments, students must comply with all laws and the legal rights of others (e.g., copyright, obscenity, privacy and defamation) and with all Towson University policies (e.g., academic dishonesty). Towson University is not liable or responsible for the content of any student assignments, regardless of where they are posted.

Civility

Students are also responsible for complying with the COFAC Civility Code. The policy can be found online here: <http://www.towson.edu/mccs/docs/CivilityCode.pdf>

TU Weapons Policy

Weapons of any kind are forbidden on Towson University's campus. For additional information go to: <http://inside.towson.edu/generalcampus/tupolicies/documents/06-01.11%20weapons%20Prohibited.pdf>

Students with Disabilities

This course is in compliance with Towson University policies for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Disability Support Services (DSS) 7720 York Road, Suite 232, 410/704-2638 (Voice or TDD) <http://www.towson.edu/dss/index.asp>. Students who suspect that they have a disability but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact DSS for advice on how to obtain appropriate evaluation. A memo from DSS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made.

The Syllabus

This course syllabus is a contract. I will uphold my end and I expect you to do the same. I reserve the right to make minor scheduling changes as the semester unfolds.

ASSIGNMENTS

	Percentage	Points
Exam 1	20%	40
Exam 2	20%	40
Blog Posts (3 per semester)	7.5%	15
SPSS Assignment	10%	20
Group Project	25%	50
Group Presentation	7.5%	15
Class Participation & Attendance	10%	20
TOTAL:	100%	200

Two Exams (40%, 40 points each)

Both exams will feature short answer and objective (e.g., multiple choice, true false, etc.) questions about the material covered in lecture and the course readings.

- Exam 1 will take place on **Monday, October 14th** and will cover material from weeks 1-6 of the course.
- Exam 2 will take place on **Monday, November 25th** and will cover material from weeks 10-13 of the course

Blog Posts: NY Times Article Evaluations (7.5%, 15 points)

We will be reading *The New York Times* as part of the course. Free copies of the paper are available for pick-up M-F in both Van Bokkelen and the Media Center; you can also consult the online version. Three times during the semester, you will need to pick an article that mentions research findings (published survey results, results of a political poll, findings from an online study or focus groups, ethnographic research, interviews, etc) and write a 250 word review of the article on the course blog:

<http://mcom490fall2013.blogspot.com/>

The article can come from any relevant section of the *NY Times* (news, sports, science, arts & leisure, etc) but must include an author byline (an AP story is not acceptable). Your review should do three things: (1) summarize the key findings of the article, (2) comment on the research being presented, and (3) pose a question or discussion point for other students in the section to consider about the findings presented in the article. You must use an article from *The New York Times*. Assignments that feature articles from other papers will not be accepted.

Your post should be online by 9:30 am on the day that the assignment is due. I will invite you to join our blog via your towson.edu email address. Please be sure to create an account. You may need to do so with an alternate email address (gmail, yahoo, etc.). A more formal assignment sheet will be posted on blackboard before the first posting is due.

No late blog posts will be accepted. Only posts on <http://mcom490fall2013.blogspot.com/> will be accepted. I will NOT accept posts via email if you have trouble with the blog. It is your responsibility to make sure your account is working and that you can post without problems before the first assignment is due.

The due dates for the blog posts are:

Monday, September 23rd

Monday, October 21st

Monday, November 18th

All posts are due by 9:30am on those days. All articles used for the 1st post must be first available online after August 28, 2013. The article chosen for the second blog post must first be made available online between September 24th and October 21st and the article for the third post must be made available online between October 22nd and November 18th.

SPSS Assignment (10%, 20 points)

You will conduct data analysis to perform statistical tests and examine hypotheses and research questions using SPSS software. This is an in-class assignment that will take place in lab on **Wednesday, November 13th**. More detailed information will be provided later during the semester. It is suggested that you practice for the assignment. You can access SPSS in the labs when they are not in use for class, in the Cook library, or off-campus through Virtual Workspace. To learn more about Virtual Workspace, please visit: <http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/ots/trainingdoc/shr22-vw-remote.asp>

Group Project (25%, 50 points)

The research project is the integral part of the course. The best way to learn about research is to take part in the process. For the final project, you will work with your classmates to carry out a research project using a quantitative method discussed in the class. In groups of 3-4 students, you will do a thorough literature review on the topic of your interest. Based on the literature review, you will propose your own research questions or hypotheses. Then collect your own data, conduct analysis, and draw conclusions based on your findings. The paper should be about 20-25 pages excluding references and appendix. Your grade is based on the quality of the paper, your contributions to the research project during the course of the semester, and both self and peer evaluations. You will grade each of your group members' efforts and contribution as well as your own when submitting the final paper at the end of the semester. Likewise, you will also be graded by your peers. More information will be provided later during the semester. **5 points of the group project grade will be based on the quality of the rough draft of your literature review. The rough draft of the literature review is due on blackboard on Monday, October 28th. The final paper will be due on blackboard during the final exam period.**

Group Presentation (7.5%, 15 points)

At the end of the semester, you and your group will present your research project to the class. Your group's efforts and your individual contribution to that effort will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. **Presentations will take approx. 10-12 minutes per group and will take place during the last two lecture sessions. We will draw presentation slots later in the semester.**

Class Participation & Attendance (10%, 20 points)

You can earn up to 20 points or 10% of your grade for participation and attendance. Your score will depend on your contributions to classroom discussion and attendance in lecture and section. It is therefore in your best interest to be an active classroom participant.

Extra Credit

During the course of the semester, I may offer opportunities to earn extra credit in the course. Sometimes I may ask a 1 pt. quiz question about one of the readings in class. Other opportunities may involve participating in a research study or in other campus activities. Any extra credit points earned will be added to your final course grade at the end of the semester.

GRADING**Grading Calculations**

Percentage	Letter Grade	Points
93-100%	A	186-200
90-92%	A-	180-185
87-89%	B+	174-179
83-86%	B	166-173
80-82%	B-	160-165
77-79%	C+	154-159
70-76%	C	140-153
67-69%	D+	134-139
60-66%	D	120-133
Below 60%	F	Below 120

Papers and Other Written Assignments:An "A" paper:

1. Fully completes all parts of the assignment in a thoughtful manner.
2. Has an effective introduction and conclusion.
3. Includes a concise and clear thesis statement or topic sentence.
4. Provides support for arguments with adequate yet focused details.
5. Is well organized and free of grammatical and spelling errors.
6. Acknowledges and document sources.
7. Shows originality and creativity in completing the assignment.
8. Maintains a level of excellence throughout.

A "B" paper does all of the above (1-8) in a superior way, but without the level of originality or creativity of an A paper and/or has some minor errors or flaws.

A "C" paper does all of the above (1-8) in a satisfactory manner but includes more (or more serious) errors or flaws or is missing some of the above (1-8). Note: Rough drafts without additional work often resemble a C paper.

A "D" paper does a poor job with items 1-8 listed above and/or includes numerous errors or flaws.

An "F" paper is missing many of the above (1-8) and/or includes many serious and minor errors or flaws.

Grading Policy:

Students **earn the grades they deserve** based on the quality of the work completed; **students are not given grades**. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of their grades on blackboard and monitor their progress/status in the course. I will not calculate midterm grades during the course of the semester.

After the first exam, I may request that students who score below a certain point (e.g., below 30/40) come to see me **within 1 week** after the exam to discuss their grade and ways to improve their performance in the course moving forward. Overall however, since the syllabus outlines the possible points for each assignment and the percentage each assignment contributes to the final grade, it should be easy to keep a sense of your performance in the course.

In general, I do not change grades unless there is some sort of administrative error.

Students are always welcome to come to office hours to discuss grades 24 hours after the grade is posted on blackboard. **I will not discuss grades or grade complaints/concerns over email.**

Since I do not hand back the exams or SPSS assignment, you'll need to see me in my office hours to personally review your individual exam/assignment. **If you would like to review your exam or assignment, you need to make a point to see me in office hours within 7 days after the grades have been posted online.**

If you would like to review a blog post assignment, you must bring a printed copy of your individual assignment with you to office hours and we can discuss your concerns. Before meeting with me, you'll need to review the blog post grading rubric and bring in a written list of questions/concerns particular to your assignment. **I am of course happy to meet with you to talk in general about how to improve your writing/analysis in time for the next blog post assignment. If you want to question a grade on a particular blog post assignment, you must meet with me within 7 days after the grades have been posted online.**

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments
Week 1		
W 8/28	No Class – Dr. Becker at APSA conference	Follow email instructions to sign up for Blogger
Week 2		
W 9/4	Introduction & Understanding Research Conducting Research & Asking Good Research Questions	W&D Ch 1
Week 3		
M 9/9	Qualitative Research/ Brainstorm Research Topics	W&D Ch 5 Robson (2000) article
W 9/11	Research Ethics Group Discussions	W&D CH 3
Week 4		
M 9/16	Elements 1	W&D Ch 2
W 9/18	Elements 2	W&D Ch 11
Week 5		
M 9/23	Sampling	Blog Post 1 due online by 9:30 am W&D CH 4
W 9/25	Survey	W&D Ch 7
Week 6		
M 9/30	Introduction to the Literature Review	Read Article: Becker (2012) Exam Review Posted
W 10/2	Literature Review Session with Librarian	Project Introduction Due
Week 7		
M 10/7	Exam 1 Review	
W 10/9	Instrument Development	
Week 8		
M 10/14	Exam 1	
W 10/16	Group Meetings/Work on Instrument with Dr. Becker	
Week 9		
M 10/21	Introduction to Statistics	Blog Post 2 due online by 9:30 am W&D: Ch 10 (p. 267-279)
W 10/23	SPSS I	Start Data Collection Read Becker et al. (2010)

Week 10		
M 10/28	Statistics Part II	Rough Draft of Literature Review Due W&D: Ch 11 (review); Ch 12. (p. 312-315, 319-330)
W 10/30	SPSS II	Baumgartner et al (2012)
Week 11		
M 11/4	Longitudinal & Experiments	W&D: Ch 8 & 9
W 11/6	SPSS Practice/Data Work	
Week 12		
M 11/11	Methods, Results, Discussion	Exam 2 Review Posted
W 11/13	SPSS Assignment	
Week 13		
M 11/18	Exam 2 Review	Blog Post 3 due by 9:30 am Finish Data Collection
W 11/20	SPSS Work Session 1	
Week 14		
M 11/25	Exam 2	
W 11/27	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Week 15		
M 12/2	Presentations I	
W 12/4	SPSS Work Session 2	
Week 16		
M 12/9	Presentations II	
W 12/11	SPSS Work Session 3/Group Meetings with Dr. Becker	
EXAM SESSION: Papers due via blackboard no later than 10:15 am on Tuesday, December 17th Self/Peer Evals due at Dr. Becker's office by the start of the exam session		