

**Department of Communication and Culture**  
**University of Calgary**  
**COMS 615 Seminar 01**  
**Research Methods (in Communication and Culture)**  
**Winter 2012**  
**Thursday, 1-3:50, SS 315**

**Instructor:** Edna Einsiedel  
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### **Course Objectives**

- To examine major methodological traditions and research tools within communications studies and culture studies.
- 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.

### **Textbooks/Readings**

Seale, C. (Ed.). (2004). *Researching culture and society*. London: Sage.  
Additional readings on Blackboard  
Research articles TBA.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

<b>1. Seminar presentation</b>	<b>Various dates</b>	<b>15%</b>
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Once during the term, prepare to lead discussion on the readings for one of the research methods covered in the course (in pairs, depending on the number of students in the course). This requires that you do extra reading on the method in one of the research methods handbooks (on reserve at the library). You have 20 minutes for a presentation that addresses some of the following aspects of the method: 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; critiques of the method. You will be expected to meet with me and to provide an example of a published study

using the method related to either Communications Studies or Culture and Society two weeks before your presentation so I can approve it and it can be posted on Blackboard. Be prepared to lead discussion of how this application of the approach/method illustrates its main characteristics, strengths, and limitations. Other students will be expected to read the study. Please submit your presentation notes to me in written form after your presentation.

**2. Data gathering exercise**

**November 10**

**20%**

Carry out a research interview with someone who is a potential research “subject” for a research project related to your interests and write a paper (8-10 pages) discussing it. More information will be provided in class. I will obtain ethics approval for the class for this assignment.

**3. Research proposal.**

**November 24**

**25%**

Write a research proposal (5 pages) on a topic of your choice. If you are planning to carry out your thesis or Coms 790 research next year, I encourage you to begin (or continue) your planning with this assignment. If you are not yet ready to choose a topic and site for your final project, this assignment will give you practice in writing a research proposal.

A proposal typically has the following components. See the Kelly article (in Seale) for more detailed information.

Title

Background/Problem Statement (including research question(s))/Relevance of study

Literature review/Theoretical framework

Methods/Research design

Schedule of research

Bibliography

You must have a clearly conceived research question. Your literature review must cite at least five empirical studies on your topic (i.e. studies in which the author has conducted research on human subjects using one of the methods studied in the course). You may, of course, also cite theoretical sources. As this is a methods class, your methods section will be of particular interest. Please do not just mention the approach you will use; provide an elaboration of the application of this method. For example if you are planning interviews or focus groups, describe how you will carry out the interviews/focus groups and provide sample questions.

**4. Critical Essay (10-12 pages)**

**December 10**

**40%**

Write a critical essay that examines theoretical issues related to a method of your choice. If you know which method you will use for your thesis/project, I encourage you to discuss that method. This essay will provide you with material that will drop right into the method section of your thesis. 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 embedded in theoretical choices. Also discuss limitations of the method and the politics and ethics of its application.

**NOTE:**

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, 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.

**Registrar's- scheduled exam:** No

**Late Policy:** 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.

**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: [www.efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://www.efwr.ucalgary.ca)

**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 (SS 106, [efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://efwr.ucalgary.ca)) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

## 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/cfreb>

### **Reading List**

- Bryman, A. (1988). *Quantity and quality in social research*. London: Routledge. Ch. 2.
- Burawoy, M. (2000). Introduction. In M. Burawoy et al., *Global ethnography: Forces, connections and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coffey, A & Atkinson, P. (1996). Concepts and coding. *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Ch. 2
- Creswell, JW and VL Plano Clark (2011), *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Ch. 1.
- Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P. & Murdock, G. (2007). *Researching communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. London: Arnold. Ch. 6, 9.

Gubrium, J. F. & Holstein, J. A. (2000). Analyzing interpretive practice. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Sage handbook of qualitative research*, second edition. Pp. 487-508. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Kenney, K. (2009), *Visual communication research designs*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Reissman, C. K. (2002). Analysis of personal narratives. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *The handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 695-710). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*Other Readings TBA*