

Introduction to Graduate Study in Mass Communication—JCOM 6000
Fall 2006

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Materials To Help You Learn: Required Texts

Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., & Piele, L. J. (2000). *Communication research: Strategies and sources* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (Order through Amazon.com, half.com, or Borders)

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (2001) (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. (Amazon.com, half.com, or Borders)

Course packet (will be available at bookstore), handouts and other readings as assigned (JCOM graduate faculty will meet with the class and provide handouts/readings and lead discussions on their research interests and expertise).

Suggested Text:

Rossman, M. H. (2002). *Negotiating graduate school: A guide for graduate students* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Course Description—This course will:

- 1) introduce you to the culture and expectations of JCOM graduate study at USU;
- 2) assist you in planning and initiating a successful course of JCOM graduate study at USU;
- 3) provide you with an understanding of the expertise and research areas of JCOM faculty;
- 4) introduce you to the theory and practice of research within the social sciences generally and in the mass communication field in particular.

The course will involve a consultative process between students and graduate faculty members. In addition, the course also will provide a beginning understanding of the philosophical, historical, and methodological grounding in mass communication research: the concepts, epistemological issues, and methods central to the study of mass communication, its history and evolution, structures, processes, practice, roles and responsibilities in a democracy, and effects on and relationships with other major social institutions.

The focus of this course is two-fold: on the research process itself in its various approaches to the study of mass communication — historical, critical, qualitative, quantitative & interpretative — and on your growth process in developing your own research interests, expertise and professional relationships as part of the process of graduate study.

Course Goals—Students successfully completing this course will have the following:

- 1) Communication skills:** Basic understanding of scholarly writing and research; synthesis of ideas, theories and research in mass media.
- 2) Philosophical Grounding:** Basic understanding of the philosophical, historical, ethical, theoretical and conceptual antecedents of contemporary mass media research in a variety of areas. Students gain an understanding of the theory and practice of research within the mass communication field.
- 3) Critical Skills:** An introduction to critical writing and thinking skills necessary to interpret, evaluate and conduct mass media research.
- 4) Professional and Personal Responsibility:** Skills to plan and initiate a successful course of JCOM graduate study at USU.

How To Demonstrate What You Learn & Determine Your Course Grade: Your final grade will be based on the following assignments, subject to modifications as necessary:

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| 1) Written abstracts of three research studies from faculty readings | 15% |
| 2) In-class participation and assignments | 5% |
| 3) Midterm | 15% |
| 4) Annotated bibliography | 15% |
| 5) Completed research prospectus and literature review | <u>50%</u> |
| | 100% |

Grades: Assignments will be graded rigorously on standards of expectations for graduate school success, with weight placed on clarity, completeness, conceptualization, coherence, structure and mechanics. Each assignment will be evaluated for the degree to which it reflects accomplishment of the assignment and the course objectives, and meets program expectations of graduate performance. Graduate students in JCOM are expected to maintain a 3.0 GPA overall, and will be subject to remediation, course repetition or more dire measures in the case of any course grade below B.

Grade Negotiations: In order to be fair to everyone in the class, I do not negotiate grades. Please don't ask to be an exception to this policy. I also do not give incomplete grades except for reasons stated in university policy.

Grading criteria:

Grade A: Exceptional. In addition to meeting the criteria for grades B & C, this work also:

1. Demonstrates superior skill and thought, skillful use of language to represent your ideas as a probable, believable and fair interpretation of the specific media issues, theories and concepts.
2. Provides insights and demonstrates in-depth understanding of the topic, theories, etc.
3. Arguments and conclusions are exceptionally well developed, coherent, and well-organized. The best possible research sources and evidence are used to support arguments and conclusions. It is obvious you have thoroughly researched your topic.

Grade B: Above Average: In addition to meeting the criteria for grade C, work also:

1. Exhibits a thoughtful and thorough understanding of the issues being examined.
2. Shows fine insight, critical reflection and creativity.
3. Arguments and conclusions are organized clearly and very well supported with examples and evidence.
4. Fine writing.

Grade C: Average: Meets **all** of the **minimum** criteria for the specific assignment.

1. Writing errors are minor and language is used correctly.
2. Arguments and conclusions are adequately supported with specific examples.
3. Work is completed by the deadlines and conforms to page requirements.
4. All sources are cited correctly.
5. Demonstrates some insight or critical reflection. Work relies mostly on description or, goals, conclusions are unclear. May state the obvious or simply re-state points already made in class/texts/videos, etc.
6. Overuse of direct quotations or lengthy paraphrases from others' work.

D or F: Below average. Does not fulfill minimum criteria for a grade of C. Overall, below average work that may have one or more of the following problems:

1. Excessive writing and/or language errors.
2. Work is based primarily on unsupported opinions; fails to use specific examples and evidence.
3. Misses the point of the assignment; lacks depth — demonstrates minimal effort.
4. Demonstrates minimal insight, interpretation or critical reflection.
5. Work is plagiarized.

Making The Course More Useful: Both you and I have important responsibilities in this course. My responsibility is to organize a course and individual class sessions to maximize your learning of the course material. Your responsibility is to attend class, do the necessary preparation and participate fully in class discussions. Guidelines are listed below:

1. Attendance: You cannot get maximum benefit from the course if you are not present and not participating. If you come to class, complete your assignments on time, participate in discussion and exercises, and keep up with the readings, your grades will be better. Guaranteed. Aside from adversely affecting your course performance, skipping or being late or leaving classes early will make me irritable and send a message of rudeness to me and the rest of the class. If you miss more than one class meeting, your final grade will be reduced accordingly.

2. In-class participation: You can expect to be called upon in class to explain ideas found in the readings. The learning process is also accelerated and improved by asking questions, making observations, volunteering examples and participating generally in class discussions of the readings. At the graduate level, students are expected to take an active role in the learning process, which means participating in class discussions with the faculty and students in the class. Making the intellectual shift from undergraduate to graduate study requires practice and that's what this course is for.

The primary way I evaluate your class participation is through the questions you ask and the answers you volunteer. So don't hesitate to speak up if you are confused or need clarification or disagree. Instead, approach our class discussions as an opportunity to improve your critical ability. Simply attending class and never taking part in our discussions will not

guarantee full credit. Keep in mind—this is a seminar class; you are expected to take an active part in class discussions.

Your attitude toward the class and the material we cover is also an important part of the class. Every class has its norms, and an important norm in our class is a willingness to be open to, and considerate of, the thoughts and ideas of your classmates. Let's say we have 10 people in our class—that means we will have at least 10 different perspectives toward the readings, films, etc., based on our individual life experiences. Although you may disagree with the thoughts and perspectives of others, including me and those presented in your readings, it is essential that we all respect each others' views and beliefs. All viewpoints are valid and important—one view is not more valuable than another. Other norms for JCOM 6000 are: consideration, respect, non-judgment, courtesy and attentiveness. In addition to regular attendance, your participation points will reflect how closely you choose to adhere to these norms.

3. Reading assignments: There is a lot of reading required for this course. It is your responsibility to read the assignments listed on the syllabus before coming to class. We'll be discussing the readings during class sessions and you will not be able to participate if you have not read the assignments. It will be very tough to catch up with the readings if you start falling behind. If you want to do well in this class — and in graduate school generally — you must keep up with assigned readings. Students who do the readings when they are assigned invariably do better on quizzes, in class discussions and on exams. Grad school is a process of assimilating information, concepts and theories; osmosis takes time.

4. Conferences: If at any point during the semester you feel you have a problem with the class, please come see me right away so we can work problems out instead of letting them grow into major problems.

Some Important Policies/Requirements:

1. Deadlines: I make all class assignments well in advance of due dates and therefore all deadlines are final. Missed assignments receive a grade of "F" and any oral assignments will not be rescheduled. If you fail to do an assignment, your final course grade will be lowered one letter grade for each missed assignment.

2. E-Mail Accounts. You are required to have an e-mail account, and should check your e-mail regularly throughout the semester for messages from me. Your e-mail address is due to me no later than Friday, Sept. 1.

3. JCOM Lab Passes: You are required to have a pass for our JCOM computer lab. There is no charge for lab passes for grad students. Please see Reid Furniss, to set up your lab pass.

4. Academic Honesty: The University expects students and faculty alike to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty (for a complete definition, see University Catalogue or the Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University, Article V, Section 3). The policy states: "[C]heating, falsification or plagiarism can result in warning, grade reduction, probation, suspension, expulsion, payment of damages, withholding of transcripts, withholding of degrees, removal a class, performance of community service, referral to appropriate counseling" or other penalties as the university judiciary may deem appropriate.

• **JCOM Department Academic Honesty Policy:** Because public trust and personal credibility are essential to journalists and other professional communicators, the JCOM department observes a zero-tolerance policy regarding academic dishonesty: As per USU Student Code, any documented form of academic dishonesty— including plagiarism—will result in an automatic F in the course and a report to the department head, the dean of the college and the USU vice president for student services. JCOM students who engage in documented academic dishonesty may be dropped from the major, upon a hearing with the student, the instructor, and the department head. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database.

If you have any questions about what's acceptable work under strict codes of academic honesty, see the USU Code of Policies and Procedures for Students, or consult your professor. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database. FYI: Plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

5. Course repeat policy: Students can take JCOM classes a minimum of three times; failure to achieve minimum grades will cause students to be dropped from the major.

6. Disability accommodations: If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of examinations, etc., must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in alternative format, large print, audio, diskette, or Braille.

Course Schedule: This will serve as our schedule of readings and assignments. Other articles may be added and we may have to make adjustments to our schedule during the semester. This is a seminar class—the majority of class time will be spent in discussion of our readings. As with most graduate courses, the readings are hefty, and it will be difficult to catch up

if you get behind in the assignments. Please note: **RRP** = Rubin, Rubin & Piele text. Readings must be completed before we meet for class.

Week 1 **Course overview**

Aug. 30

Week 2 **Studying & researching journalism & communication**

Sept. 6 RRP: Chapters 1 & 9/ Additional readings TBA

- **Survivor! Grad School.** Advice from veteran master's students & recent master's grads.

Week 3 **Understanding relevant sources for graduate research**

Sept. 13

Research topic selection

RRP: Chapters 2-8

- **Library research session:** Everything you ever wanted to know about library and internet resources for graduate research at USU. With Ms. Britt Fagerheim. Meet in the library at 4 p.m.

- **Submit a topic(s)** for your research prospectus and formulate at least three research questions and three objectives that provide a rationale for your proposed research. Send by email, no later than 8 a.m.

Week 4 **Designing research projects**

Sept. 18

Last day to drop classes without a notation on your transcript

Sept. 20

RRP: Chapters 11 & 12

Week 5 **JCOM faculty research presentation**

Sept. 27

Readings TBA

Week 6 **JCOM faculty research presentation**

Oct. 4

Readings TBA

- Narrow your research prospectus: Revised research questions and rationale due

Week 7 **Midterm/Writing research projects**

Oct. 11

RRP: Chapter 10

Week 8 **JCOM faculty research presentation**

Oct. 18

Readings TBA

Week 9 **JCOM faculty research presentation**

Oct. 25

Readings TBA

Week 10 **Writing research prospectuses**

Oct. 31

Last day to drop classes with a "W" notation on your transcript.

- **Annotated bibliography due** to me by email, 7 a.m., Monday, Oct. 31.
- Individual sessions on annotated bibliography

Week 11 **JCOM faculty research presentation**

Nov. 8

Readings TBA

Week 12 • **First draft of literature review & revised RQ due** to me by email, 7 a.m.

Nov. 15

- Individual sessions on annotated bibliography and literature review

Week 13 **Thanksgiving Break—No Classes**

Nov. 22

Week 14 **Writing and refining research prospectus**

Nov. 29

- **First draft of research prospectus due**
 - In-class prospectus critiques (bring two copies)

Week 15

Dec. 6

Oral Defense day: 15- 20-minute presentation of your prospectus.

Provide an outline for class.

Final Exam

Wednesday, Dec. 13, 3:30-5:20 p.m.

Final version of prospectus due at beginning of final exam period.