

## IDC6004 – Research Methods in Technical Communication Syllabus

Fall 2014- 3 credit hours

**Online Course: All content delivered via Desire2Learn**

*Welcome to Research Methods! My name is Dr. Laura Beth Daws, and I'll be your instructor this semester. You can learn more about what we'll be doing on the welcome video, but before you watch it, please take a few minutes to carefully read the syllabus here.*

### Instructor Contact Information

**Instructor Name:** Dr. Laura Beth Daws. You can call me "Dr. Daws" or "Dr. D" or "Professor Daws."

**Website:** <http://educate.spsu.edu/ldaws/>

**Twitter:** [@lbdaws](https://twitter.com/lbdaws)

**Email:** ldaws@spsu.edu

**Cell (voice/text):** 678-250-3297.

*NOTE: this is a Google Voice number that I will respond to regularly on weekdays from 8 am-5 pm. Voicemails and texts received before/after that will be handled on the next business day.*

**Virtual Office Hours:** contact me to make an appointment. We can meet up via Skype, Facetime or Google Chat/Google+ Hangout.

### Required Textbook

Hughes, M. A. & Hayhoe, G. F. (2008). *A research primer for technical communication: Methods, exemplars and analyses*. New York: Routledge.

### Strongly Recommended Textbook

American Psychological Association (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

### Additional readings

You can expect multiple journal articles and book chapters to read each week. Readings not in your textbook will be supplied throughout the semester via Desire2Learn. You can find a list of the readings at the end of the syllabus on our daily schedule.

### **Technical requirements**

To be successful in this class, you will need daily access to a computer with the ability to connect to the Internet.

### **Course Description**

Introduction to how to make practical use of research to inform information design and communication decisions. Students learn to create and to be critical consumers of research reports by getting hands-on exposure to quantitative and qualitative methods, including interviewing, survey design, and analysis. The course teaches how to use standard software products such as MS Word and MS Excel to perform basic qualitative and quantitative analyses. Although students learn important statistical concepts, formulas and calculations are de-emphasized. **Prerequisite: IDC 6001.**

### **Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives**

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

- Recognize the difference between quantitative and qualitative research (Learning Objective 1)
- Write and administer questionnaires and surveys (both quantitative and qualitative) in technical communication research situations (Learning Objective 2)
- Analyze data gathered from surveys, interviews, and quantitatively and qualitatively coded media texts (Learning Objective 3)

### **General Structure of Course**

In order to complete all modules by the end of the semester, you are expected to complete roughly 1 module per week. All content is due for each **module on Sundays at 11:59 pm EST. In other words, if you haven't submitted your work by 11:58 pm** on Sunday, you are **really** cutting it close to meet the deadline! At 11:59 pm on Sunday, the module will close, and you will no longer be able to complete content in the module. Any work not completed by the due date will receive a grade of zero.

## Class Policies

### **Communication with Instructor:**

You may contact me through the D2L email client, but I'm much easier to get in touch with via SPSU Email – [ldaws@spsu.edu](mailto:ldaws@spsu.edu). I prefer SPSU email over D2L email because it's more convenient for me to check and respond to on my iPhone when I'm away from my computer. I check my email multiple times each day, Monday-Thursday, during the hours of 8 am – 4 pm, and usually once each night. My policy is to respond to emails within 24 hours.

Please contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns about anything relating to the course!

### **Turning in Assignments:**

All assignments must be submitted via the Dropbox function in Desire2Learn. I do not accept assignments via email or other method. All due dates and times for assignments are in Eastern Standard Time and are posted on the D2L course calendar. Unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be submitted as a .doc or .docx file. Please read the document called [Pace Yourself: Our Weekly Schedule](#) for more information about staying on schedule this semester.

### **Naming Conventions:**

Unless otherwise specified, when submitting documents, please adhere to the following naming conventions:

LastName\_Firstname\_Project1.docx

### **Late Work:**

Due to the nature of the online course, no late work will be accepted.

### **Feedback on assignments:**

I will be actively participating in your discussions with you, and you can generally expect to see grades for each module within 72 hours of their due dates. My goal is to provide prompt and detailed feedback for each written assignment (in this case, the four parts of your major project). Generally, you can expect a grade with comments within 48 hours of the assignment's due date.

My general philosophy on grading is to praise in public and reprimand in private. Whenever possible, I try to highlight student work that is exemplary. If you turn in work that is not so great, I will let you know - but I won't humiliate you in front of the class. You're here to learn, and part of my job is to make sure you are in a learning environment that is comfortable and safe. Specific feedback will always be private.

### **Plagiarism:**

Though collaboration is encouraged in this course, you are expected to turn in only your original work. **Plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstances and could result in failure of the course.** Cite all sources and do your own work. If you are ever in doubt about whether or not you are in danger of plagiarism, please ask me for help.

### **Communication with Each Other/Netiquette and Online Civility:**

We will have one discussion that involves you interacting with a group of your peers, but each week, you will be working as a group to discuss major issues relating to course content. Class discussions should facilitate an open exchange of ideas. Debates should be healthy, and each individual should be respectful of others' opinions. Hate speech, or racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic comments are not allowed.

Please use discussion posts and any other online interaction as a chance to practice professional communication. Make sure all postings are grammatically correct and free from typographic errors. Avoid using acronyms whenever possible. And, do not type in all caps.

For further information about guidelines on discussion posts, please see the document entitled [Discussion Post Guidelines](#).

### **Technical Support:**

If you need technical support or assistance with Desire2Learn, please contact the SPSU IT Help Desk. You may visit them online here: <http://www.spsu.edu/itdivision/help/> or call 678-915-HELP (4357).

### **SPSU Policies**

#### **ADA Procedures:**

Southern Polytechnic State University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students. In accordance with this policy, students in need of accommodations due to a disability should contact the ATTIC (Student Center 1<sup>st</sup> floor, extension 7361) for verification and determination of reasonable

accommodations as soon as possible after admission to the University, or at the beginning of each semester. More information is available at <http://www.spsu.edu/attic/index.htm>.

### **SPSU Honor Code:**

As a member of the Southern Polytechnic State University community of scholars, I understand that my actions are not only a reflection on myself, but also a reflection on the University and the larger body of scholars of which it is a part. Acting unethically, no matter how minor the offense, will be detrimental to my academic progress and self-image. It will also adversely affect all students, faculty, staff, the reputation of this University, and the value of the degrees it awards. Whether on campus or online, I understand that it is not only my personal responsibility, but also a duty to the entire SPSU community that I act in a manner consistent with the highest level of academic integrity. Therefore, I promise that as a member of the Southern Polytechnic State University community, I will not participate in any form of academic misconduct. I also understand that it is my responsibility to hold others to these same standards by addressing actions that deviate from the University-wide commitment to working, living, and learning in an environment conducive to a quality education. Thus, I affirm and adopt this honor code of Southern Polytechnic State University.

### **Grades**

Grades will be posted to the gradebook in Desire2Learn for you to access and review at any time.

**Quizzes – 15%: 150 points total.** At the completion of each module, you will be required to complete a quiz over the readings and lecture materials presented in D2L. Quizzes are worth 10 points each. You will take 16 quizzes in this class, so I will drop your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester.

**Discussion Posts – 20%: 200 points total.** Each module will include at least one question for discussion. Each module's discussion is worth a maximum of 10 points each. Specific instructions will be given in each module including how the points will be broken down by discussion topic.

**Tests – 30%: 300 points total.** There will be 3 tests in this course: one covering the introductory material/basics, one covering quantitative research, and one covering qualitative research. Each test is worth 100 points each.

**Corporate Case Analysis – 35%: 350 points total.** To apply the concepts discussed in class, you will conduct a comprehensive corporate case analysis. This large assignment will be broken up into smaller assignments due at various points in semester. The first

component will be due after completion of module 4, and is a short (3 page) literature review/executive summary of the corporation you've chosen for analysis. The second component, due after the completion of module 11, will be a description of the texts you've chosen to analyze (YouTube channel, Twitter, Facebook postings, website, corporate training materials, employees to contact, etc.) and your quantitative research tools. The third component, due at the conclusion of module 14, will be comprised of the tools you would use for qualitative assessment, any additional texts to analyze, and any other types of qualitative research you would include in your final report. The final component is a revision of the first three components, all tied together with the completed quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

### Grade Scale:

Total number of points to be earned in the class: 1000. A = 900-1000 points. B = 800-899 points. C = 700-799 points. D = 600-699 points. F = 599 points and below.

### Class Schedule

**Module 1: Course Orientation, Orientation to Research. Module 2: Research Ethics & Human Subjects. May 20-22.**

***All items due May 22, 11:59 pm EST.***

#### **Readings:**

Syllabus

Assignment Guides

Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 1

Babbie, E. (2004). *The practice of social research, 10th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (You will read Chapter 3 from this book.)

Dragga, S. (1996). "Is this ethical?" A survey of opinion on principles and practices of document design. *Technical Communication, 43*, 255-266.

**Module 3: Phases of Research: Getting Started, Research Questions & Hypotheses, May 23-26.**

***All items due May 26, 11:59 pm EST***

### **Readings:**

Gump, J. (2001). The readability of typefaces and the subsequent mood or emotion created in the reader. *Journal of Education for Business*, 76(5), 270-273.

Hughes & Hayhoe, Chapter 2

Steiner, D. G. (2011). The communication habits of engineers: A study of how compositional style and time affect the production of oral and written communication of engineers. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 41(1), 33-58. Doi: 10.2190/TW.41.1.c.

Williams, F. & Monge, P. (2001). *Reasoning with statistics: How to read quantitative research, 5th edition*. Belmont, CA: Thompson. (You will read Chapter 2 from this book.)

### **Module 4: Literature Reviews, May 27-29**

***All items due May 29, 11:59 pm EST***

### **Readings:**

Hughes & Hayhoe, Chapters 3 & 7

Quick, C. (2012). From the workplace to academia: Nontraditional students and the relevance of workplace experience in technical writing pedagogy. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 21, 230-250. Doi: 10.1080/10572252.2012.666639

**\*\*TEST 1: TAKEN AT COMPLETION OF MODULE 4\*\* due May 30, 11:59 pm EST**

### **Module 5: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 1: Descriptive Statistics. May 30-June 2**

***All items due June 2, 11:59 pm EST.***

### **Readings:**

Williams, F. & Monge, P. (2001). *Reasoning with statistics: How to read quantitative research, 5th edition*. Belmont, CA: Thompson (You will read chapters 3 & 4 from this book)

**\*\*MAJOR PROJECT PART 1 DUE at completion of module\*\***

## **Module 6: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 2: Reliability & Validity. June 3-5**

***All items due June 5, 11:59 pm EST.***

### **Readings:**

Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 4

Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (You will read Chapter 6, p. 112-118)

## **Module 7: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 3: Sampling. June 6-9**

***All items due June 9, 11:59 pm EST***

### **Readings:**

Amare, N. & Brammer, C. (2005). Perceptions of memo quality: A case study of engineering practitioners, professors and students. , 179-190. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 35

Babbie, E. (2004). *The practice of social research, 10th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (You will read Chapter 7)

## **Module 8: Quantitative Research in Context: Content Analysis. June 10-12**

***All items due June 12, 11:59 pm EST.***

### **Readings:**

- Boettger, R. & Palmer, L. A. (2010). Quantitative content analysis: Its use in technical communication. (4), 346-357. Doi: *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 53 [10.1109/TPC.2010.2077450](https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2010.2077450)
- Kian, E. M.; Mondello, M. & Vincent, J. (2009). ESPN – The women’s sports network? A content analysis of internet coverage of March Madness. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(3), 477-495. Doi: 10.1080/08838150903102519
- Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Read Chapter 1)

## **Module 9: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 4: Hypothesis Testing. June 13-16**



**All items due June 16, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 4 (refresher – re-read)
- Thomas, R. L. & Miller, M. G. (2008). The impact of failing to give an apology and the need-for-cognition on anger. *Current Psychology*, 27(2), 126-134. Doi: 10.1007/s12144-008-9025-y.
- Williams, F. & Monge, P. (2001). *Reasoning with statistics: How to read quantitative research, 5th edition*. Belmont, CA: Thompson. (You will read Chapter 6 from this book.)

**Module 10: Questionnaires & Surveys. June 17-19**

**All items due June 19, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 6
- Seok, S., DaCosta, B., Kinsell, C. & Tung, C. K. (2010). Comparison of instructors' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online courses. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 11, 25-36.

**\*\*TEST 2: TAKEN AT COMPLETION OF MODULE 10\*\* due June 20, 2013 at 11:59 pm EST**

**Module 11: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 1: Intro to Qualitative Research. June 20-23**

**All items due June 23, 11:59 pm EST.**

**Readings:**

- Conklin, J. & Hayhoe, G. F. (eds.) (2011). *Qualitative research in technical communication*. New York: Routledge. (You will read the Introduction and Chapters 1-2)
- Koerber, A. & McMichael, L. (2008). Qualitative sampling methods: A primer for technical communicators. *Journal of Business & Technical Communication*, 22, 454-473. Doi: 10.1177/1050651908320362.

**\*\*MAJOR PROJECT PART 2 DUE at completion of module\*\***

**Module 12: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 2: Interviews. June 24-26**

**All items due June 26, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Lindlof, T. & Taylor, B. C. (2009). . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (You will read Chapter 6)*Qualitative communication research methods: 3rd edition*
- Wahl, S. (2003). Learning at work: The role of technical communication in organization learning. *Technical Communication, 50(2)*, 247-258.

**Module 13: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 3: Focus Groups. June 27-30**

**All items due June 30, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Abbott, C. & Eubanks, P. (2005). How academics and practitioners evaluate technical texts: A focus group study. (2), 171-218. Doi: *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 1910.1177/1050651904272949*
- Eubanks, P. & Abbott, C. (2003). Using focus groups to supplement the assessment of technical communication texts, programs and courses. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 12(1)*, 25-45. Doi: 10.1207/s15427625tcq1201\_3
- Southwell, B. G., Blake, S. H. & Torres, A. (2005). Lessons on focus group methodology from a science television news project. *Technical Communication, 52 (2)*, 187-193.

**Module 14: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 4: Thematic Analysis. July 1-July 3**

**All items due July 3, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Bloch, J. (2011). Glorified grammarian or versatile value adder? What internship reports reveal about the professionalization of technical communication. (4), 307-327.*Technical Communication, 58*
- Lindlof, T. & Taylor, B. C. (2009). *Qualitative communication research methods: 3rd edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (You will read part of Chapter 7 & all of Chapter 8)

**Module 15: Qualitative Research in Context: Case Studies. July 4-July 7**

**All items due July 7, 11:59 pm EST**

**Readings:**

- Bowdon, M. (2004). Technical communication and the role of the public intellectual: A community HIV-prevention case study. (3), 325-340.

- Doi: 10.1207/s15427625tcq1303\_6*Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13
- Conklin, J. & Hayhoe, G. F. (eds.) (2011). *Qualitative research in technical communication*. New York: Routledge. (You will read Chapter 9)
  - Willerton, R. (2008). Writing towards readers' better health: A case study examining the development of online health information. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 17(3), 311-334. Doi: 10.1080/10572250802100428
- \*\*MAJOR PROJECT PART 3 DUE at completion of module\*\***

**Module 16: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 5: Ethnography. July 8-July 10**

***All items due July 10, 11:59 pm EST***

**Readings:**

- Brown, N. R. (2002). "Community" metaphors online: A critical and rhetorical study concerning online groups. (2), 92-100. Doi: *Business Communication Quarterly*, 6510.1177/108056990206500210
  - Conklin, J. & Hayhoe, G. F. (eds.) (2011). *Qualitative research in technical communication*. New York: Routledge. (You will read Chapter 12)
  - Zimmerman, B. B. & Paul, D. (2007). Technical communication teachers as mentors in the classroom: Extending an invitation to students. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 16(2), 175-200. Doi: [10.1207/s15427625tcq1602\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427625tcq1602_2)
- \*\*TEST 3: COMPLETION OF MODULE 16\*\* (due July 11, 11:59 pm EST)**

**FINAL PROJECT DUE: after completion of test 3 (due July 12, 11:59 pm EST)**