

**IDC6004 – Research Methods in
Technical Communication
Summer 2013 - 3 credit hours
Online Course
All content delivered via Desire2Learn**

Instructor Information

Dr. Laura Beth Daws - educate.spsu.edu/lbaws. **Twitter:** @lbaws

Email: lbaws@spsu.edu (**the best way to reach me!**)

Cell (voice/text & preferred phone number): 678-250-DAWS (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.

Office phone: 678-915-7208 (*NOTE: I am rarely in my office this summer. I do not recommend you contact me in my office. Email, Twitter or Google voice is more effective.*)

Virtual Office Hours: contact me to make an appointment.

Textbooks

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

Conklin, J. & Hayhoe, G. F. (2011). *Qualitative research in technical communication*. New York: Routledge.

Additional readings: will be supplied throughout the semester via Desire2Learn.

Technical requirements: 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 or Co-Requisites:** IDC 6001, IDC 6030.

Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives

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

- Recognize the difference between quantitative and qualitative research
- Write and administer questionnaires and surveys (both quantitative and qualitative) in technical communication research situations

- Analyze data gathered from surveys, interviews, and quantitatively and qualitatively coded media texts

Class Policies

Communication with Instructor:

Email – ldaws@spsu.edu - is always the best way to get in touch with me. I check my email multiple times each business day during the hours of 8 am – 5 pm. I respond to email messages on Mondays-Fridays as quickly as possible. You can expect a reply to your email within 24 hours during the week. My availability is limited on weekends and holidays, and messages received over the weekend will likely be handled on the next business day.

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.

Late Work:

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

Feedback on assignments:

Quizzes in Desire2Learn will be graded within 24 hours (unless they are completed on a weekend, in which case the quiz will be graded on the next business day). Tests will be graded within 48 hours of the due date. 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.

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.

Netiquette and Online Civility:

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.

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 1st 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.

Weekly Quizzes – 15%: Each week, you will be required to complete a quiz over the readings and lecture materials presented in D2L. The quizzes will be timed – you may take no more than 1.5 hours. Quizzes are worth 10 points each.

Discussion Posts – 15%: Each week, I will post at least one question for discussion. You will be expected to respond to it. Example responses will be posted in the grading rubrics/examples area on D2L. Each week's discussion is worth a maximum of 10 points each. Specific instructions will be given each week including how the points will be broken down by discussion topic.

Tests – 30%: 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 – 40%: 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. Each component is worth 100 points.

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.

Tentative Class Schedule

Module 1: Course Orientation, Orientation to Research

Readings: Syllabus, Assignment Guides, Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 1;

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering concepts in readings

Action items: complete discussion postings: Introduction of Self, "Research Matching" assignment; difference in quantitative and qualitative research

Assessment: Quiz 1

Module 2: Research Ethics & Human Subjects

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 3 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering concepts in reading

Action items: complete discussion postings on research ethics, IRB approval

Assessment: Quiz 2

Module 3: Phases of Research: Getting Started, Research Questions & Hypotheses

Readings: Hughes & Hayhoe, Chapters 2, 3, 7; Williams & Monge, Chapter 6 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering concepts in reading

Action items: complete discussion postings on outlining/starting research projects; submit a potential hypothesis and research question for your project

Assessment: Quiz 3

Module 4: Literature Reviews

Readings: TBA (will be at least 3 TCOM research articles with literature reviews)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action items: write an outline for your literature review and post it in the discussions

Assessment: Quiz 4

****TEST 1: TAKEN AT COMPLETION OF MODULE 4****

Module 5: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 1: Descriptive Statistics

Readings: Williams & Monge, Chapters 3 & 4 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action items: MAJOR PROJECT PART 1: Literature Review Due! Also, calculate measures of central tendency and post in discussions; complete interactive quiz matching types of scales to data (ungraded)

Assessment: Quiz 5

Module 6: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 2: Reliability & Validity

Readings: Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 4; Williams & Monge Chapter 4 (provided on D2L); Neuendorf Chapter 6 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action Items: critique a data set for reliability and validity. Post answers to discussion board.

Assessment: Quiz 6

Module 7: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 3: Sampling

Readings: Babbie Chapter 7; Davies Chapter 4 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action Items: discuss pro's and con's of random and nonrandom sampling; discuss which sample of texts you'll analyze for your final project – justify your answer

Assessment: Quiz 7

Module 8: Questionnaires & Surveys

Readings: Hughes & Hayhoe Chapter 6; Babbie Chapter 9 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action Items: Create a survey for final project – post in discussions. In groups, take existing survey data & calculate margin of error & confidence interval

Assessment: Quiz 8

Module 9: Conducting a Quantitative Study Part 3: Hypothesis Testing

Readings: Williams & Monge, Chapter 6 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action Items: write a research and null hypothesis in a group; analyze a data set and determine which type of error was committed

Assessment: Quiz 9

Module 10: Quantitative Research in Context: Content Analysis

Readings: Neuendorf, Chapters 1, 5, 6; TCom research article using content analysis (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over covering main terms

Action Items: Develop a tentative code book for one of the texts to be analyzed in the final project

Assessment: Quiz 10

****TEST 2: TAKEN AT COMPLETION OF MODULE 10****

Module 11: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 1: Intro to Qualitative Research

Reading: Conklin & Hayhoe Chapters 1-3

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: MAJOR PROJECT PART 2 DUE: Sampling of texts with quantitative analysis tools; respond to discussion postings

Assessment: Quiz 11

Module 12: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 2: Interviews

Readings: Davies, Chapter 10; Lindlof & Taylor, Chapter 6 (provided on D2L)

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: Discussion postings on effective/ineffective interview questions; responses to interviews in an ethically murky area

Assessment: Quiz 12

Module 13: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 3: Focus Groups

Readings: Davies, Chapter 11; TCom manuscript on a focus group

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: Discussion posting about effectiveness & appropriateness of focus group use in research article

Assessment: Quiz 13

Module 14: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 4: Thematic Analysis

Readings: Lindlof & Taylor Chapter 7; manuscript on thematic analysis in TCom

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: In discussion postings, create draft thematic analysis code scheme for final project

Assessment: Quiz 14

Module 15: Qualitative Research in Context: Case Studies

Reading: Conklin & Hayhoe Chapter 9

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: MAJOR PROJECT PART 3 DUE: Additional texts with qualitative analysis tools; discussion about utility of case studies in tcom research

Assessment: Quiz 15

Module 16: Conducting a Qualitative Study Part 5: Ethnography

Reading: Conklin & Hayhoe Chapter 12

Lecture: PowerPoint with voice over

Action Items: discussion posting about benefit of ethnography in final projects

Assessment: **TEST 3: COMPLETION OF MODULE 16**

Last action item: FINAL PROJECT DUE: after completion of test 3