

**TCOM2030 – Research Methods in
Technical Communication
Spring 2014 - 3 credit hours
Section 001: T/R, 4-5:15 pm
Room J133**

Instructor Information:

Dr. Laura Beth Daws * ldaws@spsu.edu (**the best way to reach me!**) * educate.spsu.edu/ldaws
Twitter: @lbdaws * **Office phone:** 678-915-7208 (voice only) **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 Hours: J318. Mondays & Wednesdays, 12-1; Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:15-4. Other times by appointment. *(Please come by anytime my door is open if you have questions, concerns or just to say “hi!” If you need advising or have a more serious issue for which you need my undivided attention, though, please schedule an appointment with me. That way, you get priority in my schedule!)*

Required Textbook: Davies, M. B. (2007). Doing a successful research project using quantitative or qualitative methods. New York: Palgrave.

Additional readings: You can expect additional readings in the form of websites, online articles and journal articles to be supplied throughout the semester via Desire2Learn.

Course Description as stated in the SPSU Catalog:

Research in Technical Communication provides an introduction to research methods used by practitioners and scholars in technical communication. Students explore the relationship between theory and research and learn how to design and carry out empirical studies using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Emphasis is placed on the research methods used in workplace settings to design user-centered information products and to test their usefulness and usability.

Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives

Students will be able to:

- conduct advanced Internet research;
- understand the research phase of the user-centered design process;
- plan and conduct various forms of user research; and
- communicate research findings.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is expected each class period. You earn participation points for attending class. Under no circumstances may you make up participation points if you miss a class. To

accommodate for times when you might not be able to avoid missing a class, I will drop your three lowest participation grades at the end of the semester.

Late Work:

Don't say I didn't warn you: I'm a stickler for turning things in on time. **I do not accept late work**, except in the case of a documented excused absence (death in the family, car accident with accident report, etc.).

Here's where it could get confusing, so read carefully: **written assignments are due at the beginning of class – 4:00 pm**. I will accept assignments up until 11:59 pm on the day they are due, with a 10% late penalty assessed on your grade. The D2L Dropbox will close at 11:59 pm on the day assignments are due; work not submitted by that time will be given a grade of 0 except in the case of an excused absence.

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.

In Case Of Emergency, Weather Crises, Impending Apocalypse, Zombie Attacks, etc.

If you haven't done so already, please sign up for Hornet Alert by going to www.spsu.edu/hornetalert. This is SPSU's way of communicating with you in the event of a crisis/emergency that impacts campus (such as class cancellations due to weather). If I have to miss class unexpectedly (it RARELY happens), I will alert you via Desire2Learn – so it's not a bad idea to check in there before class starts. Oh, and in case of a zombie apocalypse... aim for their heads.

Classroom Policies:

- Part of my job is to help you learn how to communicate in a variety of contexts. You should treat every written communication to me as a chance to practice professional written communication skills, and I expect you to adhere to standard conventions of grammar, spelling and language when writing to me. **I will ask you to correct grammar, spelling and punctuation in your emails just like I would correct them in a written assignment.** This is a class in communication, after all, and I'd hate to know you left my

class thinking it was acceptable to contact potential employers, bosses, or other professionals with sloppy emails!

- Texting during class is rude and distracting; if you must communicate via cell phone during class hours, please walk out of the room to do so. Do not be surprised if I ask you to leave class after you've been caught texting in my class on more than one occasion.
- If you would like to use a laptop or tablet to take notes in this course, that's fine – as long as you disable your wireless connectivity so you won't be tempted to browse the Internet during class time or use the technological device to distract others. I reserve the right to ask you to cease use of electronic note taking devices if they become distracting to yourself or others.
- 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.
- All written assignments must be submitted to the D2L Dropbox for that corresponding assignment.
- **Plagiarism can result in failure of the course.** In this class, you are rewarded for correctly citing information, and severely punished for failing to credit where your ideas came from. If you are ever uncertain, ask me ahead of time.

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>.

Grades:

Grades will be posted to the gradebook in Desire2Learn for you to access and review at any time. However, I recommend that you keep a record of your grades here as well.

Assignment	MAX VALUE
Quizzes	100
Midterm exam	50
Blog	250
Mini projects (3 at 25 points each)	75
Outline/references for final report	50
Draft of final report	25
Final report	100
Presentation of final report	50
Class participation	125
Final project presentations	50
	Total max: 875 points.

Grade Scale: 875 points maximum. A=787.5-875 points. B= 700-787.4 points. C= 612.5-699.5 points. D= 525-612.4 points. F= 524.9 points and below.

Short Description of Assignments (*Detailed grading rubrics will be provided on D2L*)

In-class participation: Class participation will be measured based on the quantity and quality of your comments, discussions and questions raised during our regular class meetings. You must be present in order to earn participation points! This semester, we have a total of 28 “participation days” (we’re not counting the first day or midterm day). You can earn up to 5 points per day. Being present on time and actively participating will earn you 5 points. Being tardy to class or leaving early will earn you 3 points. Being absent will earn you 0 points. Due to the nature of the course and the nature of participation grades, you cannot, under any circumstances, make up participation points. However, I will drop your three lowest participation grades at the end of the semester to accommodate for those days in which you have to miss class unexpectedly. And, as a bonus, if you have perfect attendance, you get to keep those extra points!

Discussion leading: Two different times over the course of the semester, you’ll be asked to discuss an example of research methods that you’ve seen in media (newspapers – online or print, magazines – online or print, television, websites, social media... really anywhere). I highly encourage you to base the discussion off one of your blog posts – don’t make more work for yourself! Spend the first 15 minutes of class discussing your example. Graded on your ability to explain connection to course concept and engage classmates in discussion/get them to ask you questions. You’ll go in alphabetical order. Dates will be assigned to you at the beginning of the semester. Should tie into something we’ve already discussed in class.

Quizzes: You’ll be asked to complete 10 quizzes over the course of the semester. These quizzes will test whether you’re understanding concepts in the reading, but most importantly, they’ll make sure you’re prepared for our daily class discussions. **Quizzes are due an hour before class starts!**

Blogs: Throughout the semester, you’ll do ten response papers, each at least 250 words. The blogs should be written in response to a prompt I provide you at least one week before the due date, available on D2L.

Mini Projects: throughout the semester, you’ll be asked to complete three mini-projects. These are not full-length papers – they are creative projects that will test your understanding of technical communication research methods basics.

Major Project with Presentation – Your major project in this class will be a pair project. You’ll work in groups of 2 (or one group of 3 if we have an odd number in class) to conduct a form of market research that you might be asked to do in the world of technical communication. You’ll pick a company or non-profit organization and prepare a formal report for them that addresses several issues, including (but not limited to) how to increase business/awareness via social

media campaigns, how to best reach their target audience, and their existing social media presence. The good news: your mini-projects will all feed into the major final project at the end of the semester! Projects will be due on the final exam period day, and the presentations of these projects will all take place on the final exam day, too.

Tentative Class Schedule

Date	Topic/Readings	Assignments Due
Jan 7	Syllabus, Intro to Course, discussion of assignments, discussion of how to start a blog	
Jan 9	Chapter 1: Introduction to Research	Quiz 1: Syllabus & Ch. 1
Jan 14	Chapter 2: Research Questions & Methodologies; define groups for final project Discussion 1	Blog Post 1
Jan 16	Chapter 2: Continued with additional readings TBA Discussion 2	Quiz 2: Chapter 2 & Readings
Jan 21	Ethics in Research: additional readings TBA Discussion 3	Quiz 3: Ethics readings
Jan 23	Chapter 3: Literature reviews/APA format Discussion 4	Blog 2
Jan 28	In-class workshop: Mini-project 1: Literature Reviews	
Jan 30	Chapter 4: Sampling Discussion 5	Quiz 4: Chapter 4
Feb 4	Chapter 4: Sampling continued Discussion 6	Mini Project 1 Due
Feb 6	Chapter 5: Surveys Discussion 7	Blog 3
Feb 11	Chapter 6: Questionnaires Discussion 8	Quiz 5: Chapter 5 & 6
Feb 13	Chapter 9: Intro to Qualitative Research Discussion 9	Blog 4
Feb 18	Chapter 7: Survey Interviewing Discussion 10	Quiz 6: Chapter 7 & 9
Feb 20	MIDTERM Date – test taken in class	Midterm Exam
Feb 25	LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW WITH W Additional reading on surveys/questionnaires/interviews Discussion 11	Blog 5

Feb 27	In-class workshop: Mini Project 2: surveys & questionnaires	
Mar 4-6	<i>SPRING BREAK! NO CLASSES!</i>	Have fun & stay safe!
Mar 11	Chapter 10: Qualitative Sampling Discussion 12	Blog 6
Mar 13	Chapter 8: Analyzing Qualitative Data Discussion 13	Mini Project 2 due
Mar 18	Chapter 12: Analyzing Survey Data Discussion 14	Blog 7
Mar 20	Additional Reading on data analysis w/class discussion Discussion 15	Quiz 7: Chapter 8, 10, 12
Mar 25	In-class workshop: Mini Project 3: analysis of existing social media presence	Blog 8
Mar 27	Visual Representations of Data, additional reading TBA Discussion 16	Quiz 8: readings
April 1	Chapter 11: Ethnography Discussion 17	Mini Project 3 due
April 3	Chapter 11: Focus Groups Discussion 18	Quiz 9: Chapter 11
April 8	Chapter 12: Case Studies Discussion 19	Outline of final report due
April 10	Data analysis of survey/interview results Discussion 20	Blog 9 due
April 15	Additional reading: samples of tcom research reports Discussion 21	Quiz 10: chapter 12
April 17	Doing formal group presentations Discussion 22	
April 22	Course evaluations/In-class workshop day	Draft of final report due
April 24	In-class workshop day for final projects	Blog 10 due
FINAL TBA	Final exam TBD by SPSU	Final report due; FINAL PRESENTATIONS