

# COMM 3160

## Communication Research Methods

Spring 2026, 4 credits  
Hybrid Course

### Faculty Instructor:

**J. Alex Bonus, Ph.D.** [bonus.l@osu.edu]

pronouns: he/him

Office hours: by appointment [[Zoom Link](#)]

### Graduate Students Instructors:

**Kate Stewart** [stewart.2337@osu.edu]

pronouns: she/her

Office hours: by appointment [[Zoom Link](#)]

In-Person Labs (Journalism 342)

- [Canceled – low enrollment]
- Monday, 10:05-11:55am

**Lucy Brown** [brown.8728@osu.edu]

pronouns: she/they

Office hours: by appointment [[Zoom Link](#)]

In-Person Labs (Journalism 342)

- Monday, 12:10-2:00pm
- Monday, 2:15-4:05pm

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Is a “digital detox” good for your mental health? Questions like this are increasingly emphasized in news headlines and social media debates. But how do we find reliable answers? This course examines how communication researchers move beyond opinions and anecdotes to evaluate ideas rigorously and systematically. You’ll learn how to design empirical studies, collect data, and interpret evidence—all the skills needed to separate truth from clickbait.

The course unfolds in three stages. First, you’ll master the foundations of research methods and develop hypotheses for your own study. Second, you’ll build an online study and recruit participants. Finally, you’ll learn how to analyze data and put your hypotheses to the (statistical) test. These skills will prepare you for careers in media analysis, market research, and academia.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to...

1. ...identify and evaluate core research methods, including surveys and experiments.
2. ...design and conduct a research study that tests a communication-related hypothesis.
3. ...analyze and interpret study results using appropriate statistical tests.

## GRADE DISTRIBUTION

This class has 100 possible points. Points are distributed as follows:

Exams (3 total)	45 points
Checkpoints (10 total)	10 points
Data Analysis Report	30 points
Lab Assignments (10 total)	10 points
Participant Recruitment	3 points
Mid-Semester Evaluation	2 points

## LETTER GRADE DISTRIBUTION

You must attempt each assignment to receive a grade. Your final grade will be determined based on the combined score of all assignments. The grading distribution is as follows:

$\geq 92.5$	A	72.5 – 76.4	C
89.5 – 92.4	A-	69.5 – 72.4	C-
86.5 – 89.4	B+	66.5 – 69.4	D+
82.5 – 86.4	B	59.5 – 66.4	D
79.5 – 82.4	B-	$\leq 59.4$	F
76.5 – 79.4	C+		

## COURSE STRUCTURE

This is a hybrid course, with each week consisting of one in-person lab meeting, one in-person lecture, and several online tasks.

**Monday Lab:** During each lab session, you'll complete an assignment that builds toward your Data Analysis Report (e.g., developing a hypothesis, selecting measures, programming a survey, analyzing data). At the end of each lab session, you'll draft and submit a component of the report to receive feedback from your instructor. Lab sessions will also include time for reviewing lecture concepts and preparing for exams.

**Tuesday Lecture:** In-person lectures will expand on concepts introduced in the assigned course readings and online videos. These sessions are interactive, so come prepared to discuss and apply what you've learned. We'll work through participatory exercises that bring course concepts to life, and we'll explore how those concepts manifest in published research studies and in popular news reports.

**Online Tasks:** Most weeks include three online tasks: reading a textbook chapter, watching a pre-recorded lecture video, and completing a brief quiz that assesses your understanding of those materials. These tasks lay the foundation for in-person lectures and are essential for active participation in class.

## MATERIALS

Although there is no required textbook, students will complete an assigned reading each week and use two computer programs for data collection and analysis.

**Required Readings:** All required readings are posted on Carmen. You'll read chapters from three textbooks: [Applied Communication Research Methods: Getting Started as a Researcher](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), [An Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods for Marketing](#) (1<sup>st</sup> edition), and [Quantitative Research Methods in Communication: The Power of Numbers for Social Justice](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Dr. Bonus has carefully curated these chapters to keep your workload manageable, while ensuring that topics build logically and align directly with our course learning goals.

**Required Computer Programs:** You will need access to a computer/laptop, a high-speed Internet connection, current web browser with video-related plugins, the survey program [Qualtrics](#), and the statistics program [JASP](#). These programs are necessary for collecting and analyzing research data, and they are both free to OSU students.

## OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS

The following descriptions provide an overview of all course assignments. More detailed information is available on Carmen.

**Exams:** Three exams will assess your understanding of course concepts through applied examples. Each exam is 30 questions, consisting of 20 multiple-choice and 10 true/false questions. Exams occur during lecture and require scantrons, which are provided to you. You may not use course materials, but you may take notes on a 3x5-inch notecard and reference it during the exam. Study guides are provided, and exams are not cumulative.

Late Policy: Exams will occur during lecture unless students require accommodations through Student Life Disability Services (SLDS). Make-up exams are only permitted under exceptional circumstances, such as serious illness, family emergency, or university-approved activities (e.g., participating in an athletic competition).

**Checkpoints:** Checkpoints are structured as brief multiple-choice quizzes, which review key concepts from the assigned readings and online videos. They also preview the question formats that you'll see on exams. Each checkpoint is worth 1 point. You'll have two attempts, and only your highest score will count. Checkpoints are due Sundays at 11:59 pm.

Late Policy: Completing checkpoints is essential in preparing you for lecture and exams. You may submit checkpoints late for half credit as long as it's before the next exam. No credit will be awarded after that time.

**Data Analysis Report:** At the end of the semester, you will synthesize your lab assignments into a Data Analysis Report. This report asks you to summarize the study you developed and conducted during the semester (i.e., hypothesis, measures, descriptive statistics, analyses, conclusions). A detailed rubric is provided on Carmen.

Late Policy: Late reports will not be accepted. This policy ensures we have sufficient time to complete grading before the official grade submission deadline.

**Lab Assignments:** Each lab session will focus on a single component of the Data Analysis Report (e.g., developing a hypothesis, selecting measures, programming a survey, analyzing data). Each lab assignment is worth 1 point, and you will receive instructor feedback before the next lab session. There are 12 lab assignments in total, but your two lowest scores are dropped. In other words, you only need to complete 10 lab assignments to receive full credit.

Late Policy: Weekly lab assignments are due at the end of each lab session. If you miss a lab session, you may still submit the assignment for half credit by Thursday at 11:59 pm of the same week. This deadline ensures that your lab instructor can provide feedback before the next lab session. No credit will be given after that time.

**Participant Recruitment:** After we have finished programming our online study in Qualtrics, each student will be responsible for recruiting three friends to complete it. This assignment ensures that we will have enough survey responses to analyze for the Data Analysis Report. This assignment is worth 3 points (one point for each participant).

Late Policy: Late recruitment will not be accepted. This policy ensures that we have sufficient time to prepare the dataset for analysis in lab.

**Mid-Semester Evaluation:** Halfway through the semester, you will complete a brief survey about your experiences in the course. Dr. Bonus will use this feedback to make modifications to the course, and we will review these results during lecture to illustrate the concept of sampling. This evaluation is worth 2 points and is graded for completion.

Late Policy: Late evaluations will not be accepted. This policy ensures we have sufficient time to review and incorporate student feedback into the course.

### **AI POLICY**

We will occasionally use AI tools in lab to assist with research tasks, such as brainstorming hypotheses and revising survey measures. AI can also be helpful for studying—for example, you may input questions from checkpoint assignments and ask for alternate versions to test your understanding of course concepts. However, AI must not be used when preparing your Data Analysis Report. This report is designed to synthesize the work you have completed in lab throughout the semester, so AI assistance should not be necessary. Evidence of AI use on the Data Analysis Report will result in a zero for the assignment.

### **STANDARD SYLLABUS STATEMENTS**

Ohio State policies regarding academic misconduct, religious accommodations, disability services, intellectual diversity, grade grievances, and discrimination are all [available online](#).

# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

## STAGE I: Designing Research Studies

### Week 1 [Jan 12 – Jan 18]

- **Lab:** None
- **Lecture:** Research Hypotheses
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Concept Explication and Measurement (p. 101-115)
  - **Watch:** Measuring Variables
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 1

### Week 2 [Jan 19 – Jan 25]

- **Lab:** None
- **Lecture:** Measurement Error
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Causation (p. 391-406)
  - **Watch:** Causal Claims
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 2

### Week 3 [Jan 26 – Feb 1]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 1 – Formulating Hypotheses and Identifying Confounders
- **Lecture:** Alternative Explanations
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Effective Measurement (p. 160-179)
  - **Watch:** Survey Construction
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 3

### Week 4 [Feb 2 – Feb 8]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 2 – Finding Published Survey Measures
- **Lecture:** Improving Surveys
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** None
  - **Watch:** None
  - **Complete:** Exam I Study Guide

### Week 5 [Feb 9 – Feb 15]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 3 – Exam I Review
- **Lecture:** **EXAM I**
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Experiment (p. 299-306)
  - **Watch:** Experimentation
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 4

# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

## STAGE 2: Collecting Research Data

### **Week 6** [Feb 16 – Feb 22]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 4 – Programming Surveys in Qualtrics
- **Lecture:** Online Experiments
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Ethical Research (p. 81-94)
  - **Watch:** Research Ethics
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 5

### **Week 7** [Feb 23 – March 1]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 5 – Designing Online Experiments
- **Lecture:** Beyond Self-Report
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Sampling and Representation (p. 116-127)
  - **Watch:** Sampling
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 6 & Mid-semester Evaluation

### **Week 8** [March 2 – March 8]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 6 – Finalizing Our Online Study
- **Lecture:** WEIRD Sampling
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** None
  - **Watch:** None
  - **Complete:** Exam 2 Study Guide

### **Week 9** [March 9 – March 15]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 7 – Exam 2 Review
- **Lecture:** **EXAM 2**
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Calculations and Complexity (p. 231-235)
  - **Watch:** Univariate Statistics
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 7 & Participant Recruitment

### **SPRING BREAK** [March 16 – March 22]

- **SPRING BREAK** - no labs, lectures, or assignments

# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

## STAGE 3: Analyzing Research Data

### Week 10 [March 23 – March 29]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 8 – Calculating Univariate Statistics (Practice Data)
- **Lecture:** Bivariate Statistics
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Calculations and Complexity (p. 244-250)
  - **Watch:** Multivariate Statistics
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 8

### Week 11 [March 30 – April 5]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 9 – Calculating Univariate Statistics (Real Data)
- **Lecture:** Statistical Significance
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Textbook Chapter – Inferential Statistics (p. 391-405)
  - **Watch:** Statistical Significance (Review)
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 9

### Week 12 [April 6 – April 12]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 10 – Calculating Bivariate & Multivariate Statistics (Practice Data)
- **Lecture:** Practical Significance
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** Research Article - [Przybylski et al. \(2021\)](#)
  - **Watch:** Practical Significance (Review)
  - **Complete:** Checkpoint 10

### Week 13 [April 13 – April 19]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 11 – Calculating Bivariate & Multivariate Statistics (Real Data)
- **Lecture:** Replication
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** None
  - **Watch:** None
  - **Complete:** Exam 3 Study Guide

### Week 14 [April 20 – April 26]

- **Lab:** Lab Assignment 12 – Exam 3 Review
- **Lecture:** **EXAM 3**
- **Online Tasks**
  - **Read:** None
  - **Watch:** None
  - **Complete:** Data Analysis Report (due Sunday 11:59 pm)