COMM 520: Strategic Communication Research

Shippensburg University, Spring 2025 (March 17-May 9)

Kyle Heim, Ph.D. ♦ **Email:** krheim@ship.edu ♦ **Phone:** (717) 477-1152 ♦ **Office:** Rowland 123

This course is **100% online**. Most instruction will be asynchronous, using the university's course management system, Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace (https://d2l.ship.edu). However, there will be **four required synchronous (live) meetings via Zoom (all times are Eastern time zone)**:

➢ **Tuesday, March 18,** 6:30-7:30 p.m.
➢ **Tuesday, April 8,** 6:30-7:30 p.m.
➢ **Tuesday, April 22,** 6:30-7:30 p.m.
➢ **Tuesday, April 29,** 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Zoom link: https://ship.zoom.us/j/96085108276
Passcode: 520
Meeting ID: 960 8510 8276

ChatGPT/DALL-E 3

Student consultation hours
In-person (Rowland 123):
Tuesdays, 11 – 12:30 p.m.
Schedule an appointment online at https://calendly.com/krheim/officehours

Virtual (via Zoom):
Mondays and Wednesdays: Noon – 2 p.m.
Schedule an appointment online at https://calendly.com/krheim/zoomhours

Don't hesitate to meet with me whenever you have questions. Sign up for an appointment at the links above. If none of the available times works, please email me, and we can arrange a different time.

D2L site and email communication
All course materials and announcements will be posted to the course D2L site (https://d2l.ship.edu), and all assignments must be submitted to D2L, not emailed. Materials are organized into weekly content modules. **It is your responsibility to check the D2L site regularly (multiple times per week)** to ensure you are completing all work and meeting deadlines.

In addition to checking the D2L site, please **check your Ship email account daily**. I frequently use email to communicate important class information to students. I will contact you at your Ship email address (not your Gmail or other account).

When corresponding with me by email, please **use your Ship account and include a subject line. Always mention that the email is regarding COMM 520**. Please allow 24 hours for a response or up to 48 hours on a weekend.

Course overview

Course description

COMM 520 introduces students to several common research methods and their application to the strategic communication field. Students will learn how to conduct surveys, focus group interviews and content analysis to examine communication messages and audiences. Students will learn strategies for analyzing and interpreting data to find solutions to practical communication problems.

NOTE: <mark>**This is a rigorous and demanding graduate-level course that will require several hours of work each week**</mark>. Budget your time accordingly. You must complete all assigned reading and watch all instructional videos to succeed in the course.

Required materials

Textbook: Boyle, M. P., & Schmierbach, M. (2024). *Applied communication research methods: Getting started as a researcher*. **3rd edition**. ISBN: 978-1032288819. **Please have the textbook accessible during our Zoom meetings.**

Technology: Access to a laptop or desktop computer with word-processing software or apps (Microsoft Word or Google Docs), Zoom, a webcam and microphone, and reliable Internet access.

Course goals

➢ To introduce the scientific method of inquiry used in the social sciences, particularly as it informs strategic communication research.
➢ To survey basic concepts of theoretical and empirical research in the field of strategic communication.
➢ To enable students to critically analyze communication research.
➢ To help students design and conduct communication research by training them to formulate research questions, develop appropriate methods for collecting the data needed to answer those questions, conduct data analysis and produce original work.

Course objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:
➢ Understand and appreciate the research process.
➢ Find and analyze existing research.
➢ Formulate research questions and hypotheses.
➢ Understand issues of validity and reliability.
➢ Understand sampling strategies and techniques.
➢ Conduct survey research and craft properly worded survey questions.
➢ Develop basic code for content analyses.
➢ Create focus group questions and a moderator's guide.
➢ Follow ethical standards and best practices for research conduct.

Professional competencies

In its guidelines for Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR), the Commission on Public Relations Education recommends that graduate curricula in public relations address several content areas. The content areas addressed in this course are indicated in bold:

➢ Strategic public relations management, best practices in a digital environment, crisis communication, risk communication, and written and oral communication skills
➢ Basic business principles and processes
➢ **Communications/public relations theory and research methods**
➢ **Ethics (ethical and legal issues)**
➢ Global influences on the practice of public relations (understanding of cross-cultural and intercultural communications, and public relations practices worldwide)

Academic dishonesty, plagiarism and use of AI

Academic dishonesty policy

Students are expected to complete individual and original work for this class. Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be handled according to the university's [Academic Dishonesty Policy](). All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the department chair and the Dean's Office. Penalties for violation of the Academic Dishonesty Policy include grade reduction, assignment of a failing grade for the course, suspension and expulsion from the university.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Generative artificial intelligence, including Large Language Models (LLMs) or chatbots, can be an excellent tool for brainstorming ideas and answering some simple questions. AI models are not search engines or research tools, however, and the information they provide is often fabricated or inaccurate. **Submitting work in this course containing content that was wholly or partially produced or edited by AI, unless you are explicitly instructed to do so, is a form of academic dishonesty and will be treated as such**, in accordance with the university's Academic Dishonesty Policy. Assignments in this course may be analyzed using multiple AI and plagiarism-detection tools.

Coursework and course structure

Course format and assignments

Zoom meetings: We will meet live on Zoom on four Tuesdays (March 18, April 8, April 22 and April 29) at 6:30 p.m. **Make sure you have access to a laptop or desktop computer during the Zoom meetings and have the textbook within reach.** Please be on camera (sharing your video), which will make the meetings more personal and more productive.

Weekly D2L content modules: Clicking "Content" in the menu bar at the top of the course D2L site will bring up a vertical listing of modules, organized by week. Clicking on a weekly module will bring up all materials for the week. Some material will be posted in advance, but other material may not be available in D2L until the week in which it is listed on the syllabus.

Assigned reading: Most weeks will include assigned textbook reading. The reading load is intense. Pay special attention to the key concepts and terminology. You are encouraged to take notes as you read.

Instructional videos: Watch all instructional videos posted to each week's module. I have uploaded the videos to YouTube and embedded them within the D2L modules. (Let me know if a video is not playing properly.) The videos will provide additional terminology, insights and examples beyond what is in the textbook. The videos are not a substitute for the textbook reading. You are encouraged to take notes. YouTube provides captions, and you may change the playback speed.

Weekly quizzes: You will complete seven quizzes on D2L. Each weekly module contains a link to the week's quiz; they may also be accessed via the "Quizzes" tab at the top of the D2L site. The quizzes will cover the week's assigned reading AND instructional videos. Make sure to complete those tasks before you take the quiz. **Quizzes will be available beginning on Tuesday of each week and must be completed by the end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday.** Failure to complete the quiz by the end of the day Sunday will result in a score of zero. Each quiz is worth up to 20 points. Some questions may include audio, so you will need audio access. The quizzes are open-book and open-notes, but you have only **20 minutes** to complete them. If you exceed the 20-minute time limit, you will receive a score of zero. You must complete a quiz in its entirety the first time you open it, and you are not allowed to move back and forth between questions. If you leave a quiz to go to another web page, you may be locked out of the quiz. **You may not retake a quiz**, so make sure that you have a reliable Internet connection and are free from interruptions before you begin. If you lose your Internet connection during a quiz, you should be able to log out, then log back in, reopen the quiz and finish it, but the timer will not pause. **Your six highest quiz scores will count toward your course grade, and your lowest quiz score will be dropped. There will be absolutely no make-up quizzes.**

CITI ethics training: You must successfully complete CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training to earn certification in research ethics by 5 p.m. Friday, March 28. CITI certification is required for all Ship students and faculty who conduct research involving human subjects. You will complete the Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers — Basic Course, consisting of 14 modules. Register at the CITI website with the **Organization Affiliation** option and select Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. **Do NOT register as an Independent Learner.** There will be quiz questions at the end of each module. You must earn an overall score of 80% or better on the quiz questions to successfully complete the training and earn the certificate.

Other assignments: You will complete four assignments to apply the research methods, techniques and concepts discussed in the reading and instructional videos. The assignments ask you to (1) summarize, analyze and contrast two scholarly research studies, (2) create a Qualtrics online survey for a client, (3) design a focus group moderator's guide for a client and (4) analyze quantitative and qualitative data. Handouts with full details and instructions will be provided in D2L. Submit assignments to the appropriate assignment submission folders in D2L. Do not email them. **All assignments must be submitted by the deadlines. Late assignments will receive a 10% deduction in points (approximately a full letter grade) for each day past the deadline**, unless appropriate arrangements were made in advance. **Assignments submitted more than a week after the deadline will earn a grade of zero.** Extensions are granted at my discretion and may require documentation of extreme circumstances, such as illness or an emergency. Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. I do not grant extensions after the assignment deadline has passed.

Keeping copies of assignments and emails
Keep an electronic copy of all assignments and course-related email messages. Do not delete any course-related files or emails until you receive your final grade at the end of the semester. If there are questions about assignments, you may be asked to produce the original emails and files.

Assessment and evaluation

Grades will be recorded on the course D2L site. A total of **400 points** are available during the term:

Assignments	250 points
CITI Ethics Training (certificate) – due 5 p.m. Friday, March 28	30 points
Scholarly Literature – due 5 p.m. Friday, April 4	40 points
Survey – due 5 p.m. Friday, April 18	80 points
Focus Group Moderator's Guide – due 5 p.m. Friday, May 2	60 points
Data Analysis – due 5 p.m. Thursday, May 8	40 points
Weekly Quizzes (7 quizzes, 20 points apiece; lowest score dropped)	**120 points**
Zoom Meeting Attendance	**30 points**
TOTAL	**400 points**

Point totals at the end of the term will be converted to letter grades using a percentage-based scale:

Point Total	Grade		Point Total	Grade		Point Total	Grade
372 – 400 (93%)	A		320 – 331.5 (80%)	B-		0 – 239.5	F
360 – 371.5 (90%)	A-		300 – 319.5 (75%)	C+			
348 – 359.5 (87%)	B+		280 – 299.5 (70%)	C			
332 – 347.5 (83%)	B		240 – 279.5 (60%)	D			

Questions about grades should be raised when an assignment grade is posted, not at the end of the term. **NOTE:** All Ship graduate students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better in their coursework to make satisfactory academic progress and remain in good academic standing. **NO incompletes will be issued in this course, except in emergency situations as defined by the University catalog.**

Technology

I am happy to answer any questions regarding course content and assignments, but technical questions should be addressed to people who are much more knowledgeable about the technology:

General information
More information about technology resources at Ship is available at this site.

D2L assistance
If you need technical assistance with the D2L system, contact the SU Student Helpdesk at (717) 477-HELP (x4357) or helpdesk@ship.edu. You may also call the D2L 24/7 Help Desk at (877) 325-7778. More information about D2L, including tutorials, is available at the at this site.

Microsoft Office
Microsoft Office 365 (including Word, PowerPoint and Excel) is available to download and install for free to all Ship students. Instructions are at this site.

Zoom
Information about setting up and using Zoom is available at this site.

University resources and policies

Graduate Writing Center

The Shippensburg University Graduate Writing Center helps students become more confident, effective writers and believes that all writers benefit from sharing writing with an interested reader. Graduate consultants work alongside graduate writers to offer collaborative writing consultations in a low-stakes environment. Highly trained consultants guide sessions to fit writers' goals at any stage of the writing process—from brainstorming ideas, developing an argument, revising drafts, improving clarity, to citing and documenting sources. Three appointment options provide scheduling flexibility for your busy schedule: in-person consultations, synchronous consultations via Zoom, and asynchronous sessions that provide written comments, a recorded video that explains feedback, and guidance for revision. For more information, visit the Graduate Writing Center website.

Accessibility resources

Shippensburg University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. The University welcomes all students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs and strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Accessibility Resources (OAR) to discuss specific needs. OAR is located in Mowrey Hall 252 and can be reached by phone at (717) 477-1364 or via email at oar@ship.edu.

Student support resources

More information about the support services that Ship offers to students, including academic support, professional support, physical health, mental health and spiritual health resources, can be found here.

Title IX - Commitment to a safe learning environment

Shippensburg University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to comply with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the university's commitment to offering supportive measures in accordance with the regulations issued under Title IX, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the university's Title IX Coordinator, Dr. John Burnett (JABurnett@ship.edu) or Title9@ship.edu. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a university-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred to the person designated in the university' Protection and Supervision of Minors on Campus Policy.

- Information on the reporting of sexual violence and the resources available to victims of sexual violence are available on the Office of Human Resources site.
- Link for the online reporting form: (This is for reporting an issue, not making a formal complaint)
- https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?ShippensburgUniv&layout_id=3
- Link for the formal complaint form: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?ShippensburgUniv&layout_id=21
- Link for campus resources: https://www.ship.edu/about/offices/hr/title_ix_statement/resources/

Tentative course schedule

This schedule is subject to change. The timeline for this course may need to be adjusted due to unforeseen circumstances. Changes will be announced via Zoom, email, and/or D2L.

NOTE: **This is an <u>abbreviated schedule</u>. Please see each week's module (on the D2L course site under "Content") for due dates and the full list of assignments, videos and other materials for the week, plus any updates to the schedule.**

WEEK 1 (March 17-23)
Introduction

- **Zoom meeting: Tuesday, March 18, at 6:30 p.m.**
  - **Introduction to the course; discuss CITI ethics training assignment due Friday, March 28**
  - **Zoom link:** https://ship.zoom.us/j/96085108276
  - **Passcode:** 520
  - **Meeting ID:** 960 8510 8276

- **Reading**
  - Chapter 1, Basic Principles of Research and a Guide to Using This Book (full chapter)
  - Chapter 3, Scholarly Research and the Creation of Knowledge, pp. 30-53 only (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Other Types of Articles")
  - **NOTE:** These readings have been posted as PDF files on the D2L site if you have not yet purchased the textbook.

- **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  - Research paradigms; Quantitative vs. qualitative research
  - Reading a scholarly research article

- **Key terminology**
  - research, empirical, intersubjective, systematic, self-correcting, research paradigms, positivist paradigm, interpretive paradigm, quantitative research, qualitative research, replication, triangulation, secondary analysis, parts of a research article (abstract, literature review, method section, results section, discussion section, future directions)

- **Quiz 1**
  - **On D2L; complete by the <u>end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, March 23</u>**

WEEK 2 (March 24-30)

Conceptualization, operationalization, measurement

➤ **NO ZOOM MEETING THS WEEK**

➤ **Reading**
   o Chapter 2, Basic Concepts of Research, pp. 9-14 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Mediation") AND pp. 24-27 (the sections on "Hypotheses" and "Research Questions" only)
   o Chapter 5, Concept Explication and Measurement, pp. 75-83 only (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Error")
   o Chapter 7, Effective Measurement, pp. 127-131 (the section on "Levels of Measurement," including Nominal-Level, Ordinal-Level, Interval-Level, and Ratio-Level) AND pp. 134-135 (the section on "Types of Items," including Likert-Type and Semantic Differential)

➤ **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
   o Concepts and variables
   o Measurement

➤ **Key terminology**
   o variable, unit of analysis, independent variable, dependent variable, third variable, positive vs. negative relationships, hypotheses, research questions, concept, conceptual definition, operational definition, indicator, attribute, dimension, index, levels of measurement (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio), Likert scale, semantic differential scale

➤ **Assignment due: CITI ethics training**
   o **Successful completion (certificate) due by 5 p.m. Friday, March 28**

➤ **Quiz 2**
   o **On D2L; complete by the end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, March 30.**

WEEK 3 (March 31-April 6)

Reliability and validity; Sampling

- **NO ZOOM MEETING THS WEEK**

- **Reading**
  - Chapter 8, Validity, pp. 141-144 only (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Measurement Validity")
  - Chapter 12, Reliability and Subjectivity, pp. 229-233 only (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Cronbach's Alpha")
  - Chapter 6, Sampling (full chapter)

- **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  - Reliability and validity
  - Samples and populations
  - Probability sampling
  - Nonprobability sampling

- **Key terminology**
  - validity, internal vs. external validity, generalizability, ecological validity, reliability, sample vs. population, representative sample, response rate, sample size, sampling frame, census, nonprobability vs. probability sampling, convenience sampling, deliberate sampling, quota sampling, snowball (or network) sampling, volunteer sampling, simple random sampling, cluster sampling, stratified sampling, systematic sampling, sampling interval

- **Assignment due: Scholarly literature**
  - Due by **5 p.m. Friday, April 4**

- **Quiz 3**
  - On D2L; complete by the **end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, April 6**.

WEEK 4 (April 7-13)

Survey research

➤ **Zoom meeting: Tuesday, April 8, at 6:30 p.m.**
  - ○ **Discuss scholarly literature assignment; preview survey assignment due Friday, April 18**
  - ○ **Zoom link:** https://ship.zoom.us/j/96085108276
  - ○ **Passcode:** 520
  - ○ **Meeting ID:** 960 8510 8276

➤ **Reading**
  - ○ Chapter 7, Effective Measurement, pp. 115-127 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Levels of Measurement") AND pp. 132-134 (the section on "Question Wording Problems")
  - ○ Chapter 9, Studying People Quantitatively, pp. 162-169 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Experiments")

➤ **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  - ○ Survey basics, pros and cons
  - ○ Survey design
  - ○ Types of survey questions
  - ○ Misleading survey questions

➤ **Key terminology**
  - ○ rapport, filter questions, contingency questions, response set, closed-ended vs. open-ended questions, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, equivalent, leading questions, social desirability, double-barreled questions, loaded questions, different survey approaches (face-to-face, telephone, mail, internet, opinion polls)

➤ **Quiz 4**
  - ○ **On D2L; complete by the end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, April 13**

WEEK 5 (April 14-20)

Content analysis

➢ **NO ZOOM MEETING THS WEEK**

➢ **Reading**
  - Chapter 11, Analyzing Texts and Other Artifacts, pp. 212-219 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Qualitative Analysis of Texts")
  - Chapter 12, Reliability and Subjectivity, pp. 235-236 (the section on "Intercoder Reliability" only)

➢ **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  - What is content analysis?
  - Steps in content analysis

➢ **Key terminology**
  - texts/social artifacts, content analysis, unitizing, unit of analysis (or coding unit), coding, coding guide, coding sheet, latent vs. manifest content, intercoder reliability

➢ **Assignment: Survey**
  - Due by **5 p.m. Friday, April 18**

➢ **Quiz 5**
  - On D2L; complete by the **end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Monday, April 21.** NOTE: You have an extra day to complete the quiz because of the Easter holiday.

WEEK 6 (April 21-27)

Focus groups and other qualitative research

➢ **Zoom meeting: Tuesday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m.**
  o **Peer review of survey assignments; discuss focus group assignment due Friday, May 2**
  o **Zoom link:** https://ship.zoom.us/j/96085108276
  o **Passcode:** 520
  o **Meeting ID:** 960 8510 8276

➢ **Reading**
  o Chapter 10, Studying People Qualitatively (full chapter)
  o Chapter 11, Analyzing Texts and Other Artifacts, pp. 220-222 (section on "Exemplars and Themes" only)

➢ **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  o Qualitative research
  o Focus groups

➢ **Key terminology**
  o case study, participant observation, complete observer, complete participant, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, funnel interview format, fully structured vs. semistructured vs. unstructured interviews, transcript, focus group, moderator, field research, ethnography, field notes, saturation, themes, exemplars

➢ **Quiz 6**
  o **On D2L; complete by the end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, April 27**

WEEK 7 (April 28-May 4)

Data analysis and statistics

➤ **Zoom meeting: Tuesday, April 29, at 6:30 p.m.**
  o **Content analysis activity; discuss data analysis assignment due Thursday, May 8**
  o **Zoom link:** https://ship.zoom.us/j/96085108276
  o **Passcode:** 520
  o **Meeting ID:** 960 8510 8276

➤ **Reading**
  o Chapter 13, Descriptive Statistics, pp. 245-253 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "Histogram")
  o Chapter 14, Principles of Inferential Statistics, pp. 262-274 (start at beginning of chapter; stop at "One-Tailed Versus Two-Tailed Tests")

➤ **Instructional videos (posted to D2L module)**
  o Descriptive statistics
  o Inferential statistics

➤ **Key terminology**
  o descriptive vs. inferential statistics, central tendency vs. dispersion, mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation, margin of error, p-value, statistical significance

➤ **Assignment: Focus group moderator's guide**
  o **Due by 5 p.m. Friday, May 2**

➤ **Quiz 7**
  o **On D2L; complete by the end of the day (11:59 p.m.) Sunday, May 4**

WEEK 8 (May 5-9)

Course wrap-up

➤ **NO ZOOM MEETING THIS WEEK**

➤ **Assignment: Data analysis**
  o **Due by 5 p.m. Thursday, May 8**