

**COMM 501: Communication Research Methods**  
Boise State University  
Communication Department

Instructor: erin d mccllellan

E-mail: erinmccllellan@boisestate.edu

Course Website: <http://www.commstudy.com/501.html>

Office: Communication Building, C-104

Office Hrs: **M:** 3:00-4:00 pm **W & F:** By appointment

**Course Description:** This course provides an overview of foundational methodological approaches to research in the field of communication and media studies. Introduces students to issues of epistemology, scholarly inquiry, and criticism as aligned with common approaches to the study of communication.

**Course Objectives:** (1) Articulate the benefits and limitations of adopting various methodological approaches to studying communication; (2) Appropriately apply various methodological approaches to specific communication studies; (3) Develop a research proposal explicating appropriate methodological approach(es) to studying a specific communicative problem, issue, or question; (4) Regularly demonstrate consistent, engaged, and informed in-class participation with our entire classroom learning community (both peers *and* professor).

**Required Textbooks:**

Lindlof R. T., & Taylor, B. C. (2017). *Qualitative communication research methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Strunk, W. & White, E. B. (2000). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Longman.

**Supplemental Readings:**

Abbott, Andrew (2004). *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. [Excerpt]

Alvesson, Mats & Deetz, Stanley (2001). *Doing Critical Management Studies* [2000]. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. [Excerpt]

Anderson, James A. (1987). *Communication Research: Issues and Methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. [Excerpt]

Arellano, Amy (2019). Permutations of Permanency: Negotiating Tattoo Citizenship. Top Faculty Paper, Northwestern Communication Conference, April 19, 2019. Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Ashley, Seth (2014). Making the Case for War: A Comparative Analysis of CNN and BBC Coverage of Colin Powell's Presentation to the United Nations Security Council. *Media, War, & Conflict*, pp. 1-21.  
DOI: 10.1177/1750635214541031.

Burghardt, Carl R. (2010). *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, 4th ed.* Strata College, PA: Strata Publishing [Excerpt].

Castañeda, Nivea (2019). "Using Testimonios to Untame Our Silent Tongues: Exploring Our Experiences of Child Sexual Abuse Through an Anzaldúan Perspective", in *This Bridge We Call Communication: Anzaldúan Approaches to Theory, Method, and Praxis*, eds. Leandra Hinojosa Hernández and Robert Gutierrez-Perez. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Conquergood, Dwight (1991). Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs*, 58, 179-194.

Crano, William D. & Brewer, Marilyn B. (2002). *Principles and Methods of Social Research* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. [Excerpt]

Deetz, Stanley (1992). *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life*. Albany: State University of New York Press. [Excerpt]

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2008). Introduction: Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry, in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (Chapter 1), eds. Denzin, Norman K., Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Hauser, Gerard (2002). *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. [Excerpt]

- Hicks, Manda V. (2011). Making My Narrative Mine: Unconventional Articulations of a Female Soldier. *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(5), 461–465.
- Ivey, Christina L. (2017). “Going Home: Alienating Emotional Relational Talk with Brecht-ology,” in *Doing Autoethnography* (Chapter 11), eds. Sandra L. Pensoneau-Conway, Tony E. Adams, and Derek M. Bolen. Boston: Sense Publishers.
- Lamott, Anne (1995) *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* [1994]. New York: Anchor Books. [Excerpt]
- Lane, Julie B. (2018). Positioning for Battle: The Ideological Struggle over Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Establishment. *American Journalism* 33(1): 61-85.
- Lewis, Laurie, Matthew G. Isbell & Matt Koschmann (2010). Collaborative Tensions: Practitioners' Experiences of Interorganizational Relationships, *Communication Monographs*, 77(4): 460-479.
- mcclellan, erin daina. (2013) “An ‘Official’ Account: Delivering Occupy Portland’s Eviction Notice,” in *Understanding Occupy from Wall Street to Portland: Applied Studies in Communication Theory*, eds. Renee Guarriello Heath, Courtney Vail Fletcher, Ricardo Munoz (pp. 167-188), New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McClellan, John G. (2011). Reconsidering Communication and the Discursive Politics of Organizational Change. *Journal of Change Management*, 11(4), 465-480.
- Middleton, Michael K., Danielle Endres & Sandra Senda-Cook (2011). Articulating Rhetorical Field Methods: Challenges and Tensions, *Western States Journal of Communication*, 75(4): 386-406.
- Moore, Rick Clifton (2012). As Predicted: Fact and Improbability in News Coverage of Astrology. *Journalism Studies*, 13(3), 447-462.
- Nothstine, William L., Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland (2003). *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. [Excerpt]
- Park, David W. (2018) Introduction to Media History and Democracy. *Media and Communication*, 6(1):1–4.
- Phillips, Nelson and Hardy, Cynthia (2002). “Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction,” *Qualitative Research Methods*, vol. 50, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. [Excerpt]
- Reeder, Heidi (2003). The Effect of Gender Role Orientation on Same- and Cross-Sex Friendship Formation. *Sex Roles*, 43(3/4), 143-152.
- Rossetto, Kelly R. (2014). Qualitative Research Interviews: Assessing the Therapeutic Value and Challenges. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 31(4): 482-489.
- Van Maanen, John (1988). *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Excerpt].

All readings are to be completed **BEFORE** each class period under which they are listed. *Be sure to bring the text and all relevant readings to class on the day they are discussed.*

**Prerequisites:** Graduate standing is a prerequisite for this course. Students are expected to have a general foundation of the role of communication theory in the discipline, a general knowledge of communication studies as a field of academic inquiry, and an ability to write in accordance with graduate standing. If you are concerned that you do not meet these prerequisites, please discuss any questions or concerns as soon as possible.

**Attendance:** Class attendance is important and expected as a vital part of understanding material happens through discussion and participation in class activities. If you know you will be missing class in advance, a discussion prior to the absence is strongly suggested. For illness, an e-mail no later than the end of class is required to be considered for any make-up work. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes and any additional information presented on that day *before* you meet with me. It is not, however, your classmates’ responsibility to provide you with notes for prolonged absences. Your participation grade is highly correlated with your attendance – if you are not in class, you cannot participate nor benefit from the learning community a graduate class is intended to provide.

**Cell Phones/Wireless Devices:** Due to the large number of cell phones in our daily lives, I unfortunately must now include consequences of failing to respect this class as a “cell-phone free zone.” You are *always* expected to turn your phone OFF when you are in this classroom (this does not mean it is on vibrate, making noise against your notebook in your bag when someone next to you is trying to concentrate). It also means that you may not read or type text messages during class at any time. All cell phone use is *prohibited* during class. If there is a pressing reason for your phone to be on vibrate or to text during class time, please be sure you do so as discreetly as possible *outside the classroom*. When other students are presenting, this is of utmost importance (just like in the “real world,” there is a time and a place to make sure your phone is off!).

**Assignments:** All assignments are due during the class period listed on the syllabus. **Late work is not accepted**, nor are make-up or extra-credit assignments allowed. Make-up work can be arranged for legitimate absences (e.g., verified health condition, participation in university-sponsored activities, serious family emergencies, and religious observances). If the absence is known ahead of time, you *must* make arrangements before the date the assignment is due. This class will include group work, homework, and participation in activities; you are expected to participate in all of these with your highest level of integrity, preparation, and effort.

**Grades:** In this course, you will be required to turn in short writing and reflection assignments and otherwise actively participate in class discussion that will count toward your final participation grade. You are responsible for turning in all major assignments. Your final project will be in the form of a research proposal and will be discussed in greater detail in the second half of the semester.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Participation	200 pts.
Midterm Exam Review	50 pts.
Midterm Exam	200 pts.
Peer Review Workshop	100 pts
Final Research Proposal	100 pts
Final Research Proposal "Defense"	100 pts
<b>Total</b>	<b>750 pts.</b>

The letter grade for the course will be assigned as follows:

A	705-750	B-	600-629	D+	495-524
A-	675-704	C+	570-599	D	480-494
B+	645-674	C	555-569	D-	450-479
B	630-644	C-	525-554	F	0-449

Your work is expected to be of high quality, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the subject matter. The following offers insight into how I grade.

**A is outstanding.** Such work presents sophisticated, complex, and intellectually challenging argument. Resources are adroitly used to explore the thesis. Papers and presentations are structured and delivered in a way that successfully employs standard form. It takes intellectual risks and succeeds in them, exploring topics thoroughly and within the prescribed time or page limit. The A paper or presentation concludes by exploring the assumptions and implications of the thesis and argumentation (rather than merely summarizing previous points), drawing significant and insightful conclusions out of the analysis that has been presented.

**B is commendable.** Often similar to A work, it may offer slightly less complex or intellectually engaging argument. It is fairly successful in its use of analysis. The B paper or presentation does more than fulfill the assignment by going beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning; it takes risks and succeeds fairly well, showing originality and intellectual enthusiasm. Oftentimes, the B paper or presentation lacks the polish or sophistication of the A paper or presentation or does not have the same success in organization or argumentation.

**C is acceptable.** This work adequately fulfills the assignment in a routine way. Although it engages the topic and offers a thesis argument, it may not offer a fresh or challenging approach. It needs to delve deeper with analytical questions and approach the topic more imaginatively. The delivery and organization are acceptable but not thoughtfully or carefully constructed. The C paper or presentation often tries to prove rather than explore an argument or interpretation. The supporting materials become merely a means for substantiating a thesis instead of serving as a tool for further exploration of the issues raised in the thesis. Often, supporting materials are not convincingly used in support of the thesis. In addition, the conclusion does not move much beyond the initial thesis.

**D is deficient.** The D paper or presentation may be similar to the C paper or presentation but not as completely argued. The thesis is often bland or does not present a clear argument. Supporting materials are often poorly used or left unexplained. There are often serious organizational flaws or problems with the logic of the arguments and conclusions. In spite of these flaws, however, the D paper or presentation does address the topic and attempts to construct an argument with support.

**F is failing.** Although there can be many reasons for not receiving credit, the most common are: (a) summary without an argument or interpretation of the supporting materials, (b) absence of a thesis argument, (c) serious misreading of the text or absence of supporting materials, and (d) plagiarism of outside materials. Plagiarism, as will be discussed later, will minimally result in an F in the course, and also possible expulsion or formal academic reprimand.

I am always happy to discuss the evaluation of your work. If you believe that I have made an error in grading your paper or presentation, please bring your concerns to my attention. **I will not discuss grades during or after class or via e-mail.** To discuss a grade change I expect you to (a) bring your paper or presentation comments to your meeting with me and (b) have reviewed your feedback and prepared a coherent dissent to the comments provided. I will reevaluate the paper or presentation on the condition that I also may find errors that I did not catch in the initial grading process. Your grade, therefore, is subject to gain and/or lose points in this process. Please be aware that any discussion of an assignment that is not contesting a grade is ALWAYS welcome and very much encouraged to allow for future improvement.

**Academic Misconduct:** All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Boise State University Student Code of Conduct, available on the following webpage: <https://www.boisestate.edu/deanofstudents/student-conduct/>

It specifically reads:

“The Student Code of Conduct exists to assist in providing the best possible learning and living environment for all students. The University upholds the shared values of academic excellence, caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, responsibility and trustworthiness as the foundation for a successful academic environment. As a tool, the Student Code of Conduct helps promote growth and learning as students interact with their environment and accept responsibility for decision-making....”

**Academic Misconduct** is prohibited at Boise State University. Academic Misconduct can be intentional or unintentional and includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of information, inappropriate or unauthorized collaboration, and research misconduct...

**Cheating** involves the unauthorized possession, use, or attempt to possess or use information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise (including but not limited to an assignment or examination), or any unauthorized communication with another person during such an academic exercise, that would result in an unfair advantage over fellow students...

**Plagiarism** is the unacknowledged use or incorporation, without specific or proper acknowledgment or citation, of ideas, data, or language of another person’s work in, or as the basis for, one’s own work that is offered for academic consideration, credit, or public presentation... Lack of knowledge of proper citation is not a valid excuse for plagiarism. It is the responsibility of the student writing the material to know the proper methods for appropriate citation and/or to seek guidance/help when attempting to learn the proper methods for citation or use another’s work so that proper attribution is given to the other person. Plagiarism can be committed in any type of academic exercise by representing as one’s own, without proper attribution, another individual’s words, phrases, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode, or content of expression...”

**Educational Access Statement:** Students with disabilities needing accommodations to fully participate in this class should contact the Educational Access Center (EAC). All accommodations must be approved through the EAC prior to being implemented. To learn more about the accommodation process, visit the EAC’s website at <https://eac.boisestate.edu/new-eac-students/>.

**Boise State University Firearm Policy:** Idaho law permits concealed carry of firearms on the Boise State University campus by some students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Other than qualified law enforcement officers, only persons who have been issued and are in possession of an Idaho enhanced concealed carry license are permitted to do so. Firearms must remain concealed at all times. If a firearm becomes visible it is a violation of university policy and the person may be removed from campus. Please notify Boise State Campus Security (call 208.426.6911) or the Boise Police Department (call 911) for any reports of firearms on campus. Use of firearms is prohibited on campus.

**Course Schedule:** The following is a *tentative* course schedule for the next 17 weeks. Each day, we cover a new topic through a combination of lecture and discussion. The items in bold text are readings to be completed before the class period that are assigned (see website for specific daily assignments). *The readings are short and pointed, and imperative for effective class discussion and processing. Please make sure that you have all reading completed prior to the start of class.* Please check the class website for the weekly detailed assignments and due dates:

<http://www.commstudy.com/501.html>. **Be sure to visit the website before each week to find out the daily reading assignments as well as check for any announcements, notes from your professor, or changes to the general schedule below.**

Week 1

*Introduction* Jan 13 Introduction to course; Discussion of expectations and development including academic research, writing, and citation style, and communication studies as a field of inquiry

Week 2

*Engaging in Scholarly Inquiry – Role of Theory & Methodological Benefits/Limitations* Jan 20  
 NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY  
**Readings: Lindlof & Taylor Preface, CH 1 (Introduction to Qualitative & Communication Research); CH 2 (The Diversity of Qualitative Research in Communication); Deetz CH3; Anderson CH1**  
**HW: Reflection Assignment Due via e-mail attachment Tuesday 1/21**  
 How does a methodological approach help us to study “communication”?

Week 3

*Quantitative Methods* Jan 27  
*Content Analysis*  
*Qualitative Methods*  
*Interviewing & Focus Groups*  
*Media & Rhetorical Criticism*  
*“Text”-Based Analysis*  
**Anderson CH 4; Crano & Bruner CH 13; Reeder (2003); Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann (2010); Rossetto (2014)**  
**Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland CH 1; Moore (2012); Ashley (2014); Burghardt CH 1 (p. 1-3); Hauser CH 2 (p. 32-37); McClellan (2013)**  
**HW: Reflection Assignment Due in class Monday 1/27**  
 How do these types of methodological approach help us to study communication differently?

Week 4

*Interpretive Approaches (Auto)Ethnography* Feb 3  
*Critical Approaches*  
*(Inter)Cultural Approaches*  
**Van Maanen CH 1 & CH 2; Conquergood (1991); Hicks (2011); Ivey (2017); Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith CH 1; Castañeda (2019)**  
 How is this methodological approach to studying communication useful?  
**HW: Reflection Assignment Due in class Monday 2/3**

Week 5

*Interpretive Approaches* Feb 10  
*Discourse Analysis*  
*Rhetorical Field Methods*  
*Historical Criticism*  
**Phillips & Hardy CH 1; Alvesson & Deetz CH 1; McClellan (2011); Middleton, Endres & Senda-Cook (2011); Arellano (2019); Park (2018); Lane (2016)**  
**HW: Reflection Assignment Due in class Monday 2/10**  
 How are these methodological approaches to studying communication useful?

Week 6

Feb 17  
 NO CLASS – PRESIDENT’S DAY  
**HW: Midterm Exam Review Discussion Board Post Due Tues 2/18**  
 How does this type of methodological approach help us to study “communication”?

Week 7

*Midterm Exam* Feb 24 **BLACKBOARD-PROCTORED MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 8

*Beginning a Research Proposal* Mar 2  
**Lamott; Lindlof & Taylor CH 4 (Design I: Planning Research Projects) & CH 5 (“The Research Proposal” section ONLY)**  
 The research proposal form  
 Crafting a coherent and clear topic of inquiry

Week 8

*The Method-Theory Relationship* Mar 9  
**Abbott CH 1 & 2; Lindlof & Taylor CH 3 (Theoretical Traditions and Qualitative Communication Research)**  
**HW: Assignment Due in class Monday 3/9**

Week 10

*Writing a* Mar 16  
**APA Intro, CH 1 & 2; Strunk & White CH 1 & 2**

<i>Literature Review</i>		Background Research – Finding <i>useful</i> academic sources Moving from literature to literature review <b>HW: Assignment Due in class Monday 3/16</b>
<u>Week 11</u>	Mar 23	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
<u>Week 12</u>		
<i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i>	Mar 30	<b>Lindlof &amp; Taylor CH 9 (Sensemaking I: Analyzing, Coding, and Managing Data) &amp; CH 10 (Sensemaking II: Creating, Evaluating, and Enhancing Interpretations of Data)</b> <b>HW: Assignment Due in class Monday 3/30</b>
<u>Week 13</u>		
<i>Qualitative Writing</i>	Apr 6	<b>Lindlof &amp; Taylor CH 11 (Writing, Authoring, and Publishing)</b> Finding the “best” approach to writing <b>HW: Assignment Due in class Monday 4/6</b>
<u>Week 14</u>		
<i>Peer Review</i>	Apr 13	<b>REQUIRED PEER-REVIEW WORKSHOP (Full Proposal)</b>
<u>Week 15</u>		
<i>Wrap-up</i>	Apr 20	In-Class Final Research Proposal “Defense” Q&A <b>FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE</b>
<u>Week 16</u>		
<i>In-class “Defense”</i>	Apr 27	<b>FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL “DEFENSE” (Day 1)</b>
<u>Week 17</u>		
<i>In-class “Defense”</i>	May 4	<b>FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL “DEFENSE” (Day 2)</b>

### **Assignments**

**Participation:** This class is dedicated to active, open, and informed class discussion. The quality of your participation will be based not only on your consistent attendance but on a consistent demonstration of your ability to produce thoughtful contributions to class discussion. This requires a clear integration and interrogation of course material assigned for that week’s discussion as well as crafting appropriate questions for both me and your peers about the material as it applies to topics and studying communication generally beyond the class readings.

**Reflections/Critical Questions:** You will be assigned weekly writing reflection assignments as homework throughout the semester. This is geared towards demonstrating your comprehension of the assigned readings and will provide an opportunity to synthesize a large quantity of information from the readings in a way that can produce informed and thoughtful questions *before* you arrive in class. That said, class discussion should be used to collectively learn from one another as we discuss the usefulness and specific benefits/limitations of each methodological approach we will address. By the end of the class, the hope is that your question/s can be answered. Your homework assignments will be typed and printed so that you can use them to guide your participation in class each week. You should use your typed reflections to help both your participation in discussion as well as provide a written version of the question you hope to have answered in class that day. You will receive weekly participation points based upon the quality of your reflection/s and question/s. Please see the Reflection Assignment for more detail and grading criteria.

**Midterm Exam:** Your midterm exam will be an open note/readings exam. It will ask you to explain specific methodological approaches discussed in class and in class readings. You will be asked to demonstrate your ability to relate different methodological approaches to 1) each other, 2) various traditions of research, 3) particular subfields of communication studies, and 4) specific examples of communication phenomena appropriate for studying with each methodological approach. Thoughtful and thorough reflection homework assignments can be a good way to organize your ideas so they can be more easily connected during the exam. We will review expectations and logistics closer to the date of the exam. We will *not* meet in class on the day of the Midterm Exam. You will be required to access Blackboard for the entirety of the class period during which you will complete and submit an essay. If finding a

suitable place and way to access Blackboard during this time is challenging for you, please let me know as soon as possible so we can assure you have an appropriate way to take the exam.

**Research Proposal/“Defense”:** We will discuss three separate parts of the Research Proposal in the weeks leading up to the full draft peer review: (1) Topic of Inquiry & Methodological Approach, (2) Literature Review, and (3) Data Collection & Analysis. I will distribute a Research Proposal Assignment after the midterm exam so that as we discuss these parts of the proposal in class, you can simultaneously engage in homework assignments that can help you develop your own ideas in relation to these parts of the assignment. We will be using these homework assignments to inform in-class discussions and writing workshops. These homework assignments will be explained in more detail when the Research Proposal Assignment is handed out.

The Research Proposal and “Defense” Assignments will demonstrate your ability to think through and articulate various stages of the research process in an informed manner. We will specifically discuss: (1) choosing a communication topic of inquiry, (2) identifying relevant literature, (3) crafting an appropriate literature review for your topic of inquiry, (4) defining and explaining an appropriately related methodological approach to studying your topic of inquiry, (5) drafting a comprehensive and cohesive research proposal, (6) engaging in peer review of class members’ research proposals, and (7) practicing the “defense” of a research proposal as a useful and coherent contribution to the field of communication studies.

The last two days of the semester will focus on “defending” your research proposal in the same way you might for a Thesis Prospectus Defense before embarking on your Thesis project for graduation. We will also discuss this assignment and its evaluation as we get closer to when it is due.

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**Remember—explore your interests. Challenge your understandings. Learn new things. Most importantly, have fun making new discoveries as you think about the world around you in new ways!**