

Syllabus

Course Information

Course Number:	VIBS 658
Course Title:	Research Methods in Science and Technology Journalism
Section:	600
Time:	Mondays, 8:45-11:30 am
Location:	VIDI 127
Credit Hours:	3

Instructor Details

Instructor:	Yasha Hartberg, B.S., M.S., Ph.D.
Office:	VIDI 398
Phone:	(979) 458-7816
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Office Hours:	Whenever my door is open or by appointment. To set up an appointment, first consult the link to my appointment calendar in Canvas. If none of those times work, feel free to email me to see if I have other times we can meet. Also, when making your appointment, please specify if you would like to meet in person or via Microsoft Teams.

Course Description

Welcome to VIBS 658! As the title suggests, this is a methods course. I know that many of you come into this class with some research experience. For most of you, though, that experience is in disciplines far afield from Science and Technology Journalism.

No single course could hope to cover every methodology employed by researchers in any field, nor will we cover any single method in enough depth that you could apply it with confidence in your own research. The hope, rather, is that this class will provide you with a conceptual toolkit, an inventory of methods to consider as you move forward with your work.

We will spend significant time this semester delving into the primary literature in science and technology journalism research. Not only will this help you see how the methods we discuss have been applied to answer research questions, it will also give you a broader perspective on what kinds of problems the field engages. This should prove valuable for those of you considering the thesis option for Science and Technology Journalism. For those of you thinking of the internship option, a greater understanding of research methods will help you to write more effectively about scientific and technological developments.

Course Prerequisites

None

Course Learning Outcomes

Some of the specific goals for this course are to increase your ability to:

- Understand research methods commonly used in journalism, communication, and other related fields
- Evaluate research on science and technology journalism
- Perform research in science and technology journalism, both in academic and private sector settings
- Think critically about all research, regardless of the field
- Report meaningfully on science and technology

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

Most of our readings will come from two required sources:

- *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, 10th edition, by Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick
- *Naked Statistics: Stripping the Dread from the Data*, by Charles Wheelan

Note that *Mass Media Research* is an insanely expensive book to purchase new, especially considering its flimsy binding and poor page quality. I therefore *strongly* recommend that you find a used copy, which can usually be found readily online for far less. You would also be fine using an older edition of the book.

Grading Policy

You are all graduate students with proven records of excellent academic achievement. You wouldn't be in this program if you weren't. I therefore expect "A" quality work from each of you, and I work from the assumption that you will perform to those expectations. I see no reason, then, to fret about numerical grades in graduate classes.

For most assignments, I will provide marginal comments on drafts you will turn in through Canvas. These will be evaluated on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. If an assignment is unsatisfactory, you will be given a chance to revise it to address my feedback. In general, revisions should be turned in the following week. Note that the most frequent reason assignments get an unsatisfactory grade is because they neglected to address some key element asked for in a writing prompt, so please read prompts carefully.

Note that some assignments, such as the literature scavenger hunts, will simply be marked as completion grades and will not receive feedback.

Your grade in VIBS 658 will come from a combination of writing assignments, research summaries, and class participation. The contributions of the various components to your final grade will be as follows:

- Writing assignments: 40%
- Literature scavenger hunt: 20%
- Research summaries: 25%
- Participation: 15%

Late Work Policy

Again, due dates for assignments will be announced in class. Professional life is filled with competing deadlines and conflicts with personal obligations, so you are expected to turn assignments in on time. That said, life happens. If something comes up that will prevent you from meeting an assignment deadline, please let me know in advance so alternative arrangements can be made.

Course Schedule



Starting January 1, I got a new job title and, with it, rather drastically changed job responsibilities. Among many other things, this new position opens space for me to revamp VIBS 658. While I won't be developing it from scratch, I anticipate significant changes from previous semesters. This means that I can't map out the semester in as much detail as I usually provide.

I will assign readings each week that you should read before coming to class. Prompts for assignments will be given in class and posted to Canvas. I will probably post most assignment prompts the week before they're due. However, for the major writing assignments, I will try to post the prompts at least two weeks ahead of time. If a due date conflicts with major assignments in your other STJR classes, please let me know so I can make adjustments.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, you will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University’s goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University’s [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student’s academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in proper self-care by utilizing the resources and services available from Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS). Students who need someone to talk to can call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.