

## **SYLLABUS**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Course number: MCM 330

Course title: Information Analysis

Credit hours: 3

Semester/year: Summer II 2008

Class times: MTWT noon-1:50 p.m.

Classroom: CJC A111

Instructor: Ruth Massingill

Office: CJ CL29

Office hours: 11-noon and by appointment.

Office phone: 936-294-1494

Email: rmassingill@shsu.edu

Do NOT send assignments via email except when specifically instructed to do so.

### **TEXTS**

Behind the Message: Information Strategies for Communicators by Hansen and Paul  
AND Math Tools for Journalists by Wickham

It is expected that you purchase and read the texts. Test material will be taken from the readings and the course notes.

### **OTHER MATERIALS**

You may wish to purchase a portable storage device for back-up storage of computer files.

### **CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION**

Comparative survey of communication investigation, including practical training in ethical gathering, interpretation and presentation of data. Students will be introduced to persuasive and research methods, including direct interviewing, questioning techniques, electronic document retrieval and manipulation, database management and Internet skills.

### **PURPOSE**

This course introduces students to skills and processes necessary to successfully complete advanced communication courses. Students will become competent in discerning methods of research gathering, problem solving and critical thinking necessary for the successful manipulation of information in the mass media. The goal is to give students a solid foundation in analysis, problem-solving and data gathering necessary for successful employment in mass media.

### **OBJECTIVES**

At the completion of this course, students will have

- 1) Developed stronger skills in expressing themselves orally and in writing,
- 2) Learned how to find and use resources for answering questions and solving problems,
- 3) Have gained experience in analysing and critically evaluating ideas, arguments, and points of view.

### **ATTENDANCE**

A commitment of your time to this course is essential. Regular attendance is expected and will be necessary for successful completion of the course. You are responsible for any assignment made during class in your presence OR absence. Save your late approvals for when you are ill or have an emergency (or for when the computers are cranky). Otherwise, NO late work will be accepted and you will lose the points allotted for that assignment. It will not be possible to make up missed class sessions. Deadline, for class purposes, is the minute the class begins the day work is due, unless otherwise designated. Do not come late to class. Follow professional procedures as you would for a job. Punctuality is essential; class attendance is expected and will be noted. After two (2) absences/tardies, 5 points will be deducted for each absence; 5 bonus points will be given at the end of the semester to those having no more than one (1) absence/tardy

Attendance will only be taken once during the class and there will be no changes of any type made once taken. If you are late and roll has been taken, you are absent unless you provide a letter to the instructor verifying that you were in class.

Students attending SHSU co-curricular activities will not be penalized for absences. Appropriate documentation should be presented to the instructor prior to the absence.

### **TIME REQUIREMENTS**

This class meets for 2 hours a day. Fridays will be quiz and catch-up days. You will also be assigned out-of-class readings, and you probably will need to work on your projects during scheduled open lab times. You should expect to allow at least two out-of-class hours of preparation for every hour you spend in class.

### **EQUIPMENT**

PC computers and software will be provided in this lab for all assignments given. You may use other computers, but software may not be compatible. Lab hours will be posted. You can store your work on both the server in the lab and the university server, but you may also wish to purchase a portable storage device for your work.

## **FORMAT FOR ASSIGNMENTS**

When an outside assignment requires written material, that material must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper. Hand-written assignments will not be accepted. Email assignments will NOT be accepted without prior agreement.

## **QUIZZES, CLASS PARTICIPATION**

You will be quizzed over reading material assigned as well as classroom discussion. (You will need to purchase the books.) No make-up quizzes are given. For a university-sanctioned absence, you may take a quiz early.

Class participation is part of your grade in this class. Students are expected to be present, to have completed the readings and to contribute during class discussion. In addition, participation points can be affected by the following:

- Beepers, ipods, cell phones and other electronic communication devices may not be brought into class. Anyone using any of these devices will be asked to leave the class.
- You may not read other material/newspapers/magazines and/or work on material for other classes during this class. If the classroom has computer stations, you may NOT surf the Internet, read email or conduct other cyberspace business not related to the class. Anyone doing so will be asked to leave the class.
- All students are expected to be attentive during presentations by class members or the instructor. Failure to render this common courtesy will result in being asked to leave the class.

## **GRADING**

Course grade will be based on a 500-point scale, which will include quizzes, research and writing projects.

Specifically, points will be accumulated as follows:

- 1) 5 quizzes @ 30 pts each: 150 possible points.
- 2) 2 individual projects @ 175 pts each: 350 possible points.

NOTE: Points may be added or subtracted for participation as outlined above and for attendance, as explained below.

Specific descriptions of all assignments can be found on the Blackboard class page, where grades will also be posted. Blackboard will show a grade percentage - This is not correct! Please ignore the stated number and follow the grade scale below.

Ultimately, letter grades must be assigned to evaluations of course work. Under the definitions established by Sam Houston State University, students who receive the

following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for journalism courses may be interpreted this way:

A= Excellent

B= Well above average

C= Average

D= Barely passing

F= Failure

Grading throughout the semester; however, is conducted on a point scale. The combined value of all assignments is 500 points. Points are added or subtracted from that according to standards described in this syllabus. In this class you will accumulate points toward a final grade. There will be no percentage weighting of assignments. The grade in the course will be determined using the following scale:

500 - 450 pts = A

449 - 400 pts = B

399 - 350 pts = C

349 - 300 pts = D

less than 300 = F

All grades will be posted on the Blackboard Class page and may be accessed by the student at any point during the semester. A final class grade will not be released over the phone or internet. However, students may determine their final class grades by comparing the totals to the scale above.

Students who cannot complete the course requirements due to illness or any other unforeseen issue may apply for an X in the course. To apply for the incomplete, the student must submit in writing to the instructor a documented explanation. The request will be submitted to the dean of CHSS for a final decision.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Ethics are the cornerstone of responsible journalism. Honesty is expected--and demanded--of all students. Violations of professional ethical standards have led to an automatic "F" in the course. All work in this class must be original work. No work that a student has already published or is in the process of publishing is considered original work. No work a student has used to meet requirements in a previous class is considered original work.

The University expects students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the

academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. Furthermore, the University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work that is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Students found guilty of dishonest behavior in this class will be asked to leave the class and will be given the grade of F for the entire course.

Plagiarized papers will not be accepted. For the sake of clarity, plagiarism is defined below:

Plagiarism occurs when one person claims credit for another person's work. It is a form of intellectual dishonesty that is treated with great severity by professionals and by the university. Students are encouraged to review the university's policy on plagiarism.

Students should be certain they understand the meaning of plagiarism: a paper using quotes without quotation marks and attribution is plagiarized. But plagiarism is more than unrecognized quotes. Conclusions that are not the student's, information that is not common knowledge, and specific facts must be attributed: tell who said it and cite or footnote it, even if this information is not a direct quote. Dates are important here, especially as on-line information is becoming more common.

### **PROPER CLASSROOM DEMEANOR OR CONDUCT**

According to the Student Handbook, "Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Please turn off or mute your cellular phone and/or pager before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking among themselves at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result in, minimally, a directive to leave class, or being reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy."

The students' right to speak on the topics of their choice will be upheld in the class. Choice of topic, values and beliefs will not be judged. Audience members are expected to respect the views of their classmates.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements

with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

### **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

### **VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

### **COURSE/FACULTY EVALUATIONS**

Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation toward the end of each long semester, using the IDEA system.

### **Q-DROPS**

Students are allowed no more than five Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of five Q-drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses to grant permission to drop the class, the student will be required to remain in the class.

The Q-drop limit took effect with the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall 2004 semester will not be included in the five Q-drop limit. Neither will Q-drops from other universities.

NOTE: A Q-drop is a drop made after the last day for tuition refunds (12th class day for fall/spring; 4th class day for summer) but before the date for which a drop would result in a grade of 'F' - as published in the Academic Calendar.

## **TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE**

### **WEEK 1 (July 7)**

Class overview and orientation.

Introductory discussion to gathering information.

Quiz #1

### **WEEK 2 (July 14)**

Primary and secondary sources

The art of interviewing

Citing sources according to established style

Validating data: quantitative and qualitative

Quiz #2

### **WEEK 3 (July 21)**

Project #1 due (Market report)

Surveys and polls

How to create a questionnaire

Media math

Quiz #3

### **WEEK 4 (July 28)**

Databases to answer every question

Journalistic style attribution

The value of spreadsheets and Excel

More media math

Quiz #4

### **WEEK 5 (Aug. 4)**

How media choice affects message presentation

Ethics of information gathering and dissemination

Project #2 due (New media and your career article and graph)

Quiz #5