



... **RQ:** How has the proliferation of social media platforms transformed the nature of interpersonal communication and the formation of online communities? ... **RQ:** To what extent do media representations influence public perceptions of social and cultural issues, and how do these portrayals contribute to the construction of stereotypes and biases? ... **RQ:** What role does media play in shaping political discourse and public opinion, and how has the rise of digital media affected the dynamics of political communication, including fake news and echo chambers ... **RQ:** In what ways does the use of emojis, GIFs, and other visual cues in digital communication platforms alter the nuances of nonverbal communication and emotional expression in online interactions? ... **RQ:** What is the relationship between media exposure and body image dissatisfaction, and how do traditional and digital media contribute to the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards and ideals? ...

# Media Inquiry

MSTU 3613 • Fall 2023

MWF 10-11 AM • Oliphant 141 (mostly!)

**Thomas Conner, PhD** | Visiting Assistant Professor of Media Studies

[thomas-conner@utulsa.edu](mailto:thomas-conner@utulsa.edu) | [thomasconner.info](http://thomasconner.info) | [@thesonginmyhead](https://www.instagram.com/thesonginmyhead)

*Office hours:*

*In person:* 11 a.m.-noon Tuesdays @ Oliphant 113

*Online:* 11 a.m.-noon Thursdays @ (see link on Harvey)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

You've had some academic writing instruction by now, and you've likely tried your hand a time or two at some basic research. This course will step up those skills — focusing the tools of scholarly inquiry on our field of media studies. We'll explore, consider, and practice: the logical structure of **scientific investigations**; different **methodological traditions** used in the study of media and the social sciences; **how to present empirical findings** in a professional manner; the **critical examination of information sources**, and strategies for doing so; and **issues of ethics** surrounding the study of empirical data — again, especially as all this fits into *our* wheelhouse.

We will begin with the basics of **formulating research questions, conducting scholarly research, and constructing compelling research proposals**. We then will explore individual approaches — quantitative (e.g., surveys, statistics, content analysis, experiments), textual (semiotics, rhetoric, discourse), and qualitative (historical analysis, interviews, ethnomethodologies). Students will write self-directed research proposals for *each* of those three categories and will end the course by presenting one of their proposals in a classroom academic conference.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:*

- Formulate original research inquiries specifically targeted to the study of media and human communication, and pursue those inquiries through skilled use of libraries, scholarly databases, and other information sources (ILO 1).
- Evaluate and critique existing information and scholarly conversations, synthesizing research into an original argument (ILO 2) — one that deeply considers and addresses ethical implications (ILO 4) and social issues of identity, equity, and justice (ILO 5).
- Design and propose a well-defined media research project (ILO 1 and ILO 2), and communicate their planning clearly and persuasively in both writing and oral presentations (ILO 3).

*As such, our learning objectives fulfill the Department of Media Studies' Program Objectives, which articulate that students will:*

1. Evaluate and critique abstract categories, and to use these categories in the analysis of empirical data.
2. Apply concepts of social science methodology to rigorously critique and compare empirical studies, or to construct their own empirical study.
3. Effectively use writing to accurately convey their ideas, and to demonstrate the basic ability to think logically and critically, through their writing.
4. Demonstrate a basic competence in communicating ideas through oral presentations before a group of people.
5. Critique visual images with the use of fundamental theoretical concepts.
6. Be able to understand their lives within a wider social and environmental context, to thoughtfully consider their responsibilities towards other people and the natural world, and to take appropriate and ethical actions based upon those considerations.

***This syllabus** is the menu for your intellectual nourishment this term, and it constitutes a contract between you and me. After the first days of the semester, however, **Harvey will serve as the repository of all active information about the course** — readings, videos, assignments, and communication. This PDF will not be updated with any scheduling changes, but the schedule page on Harvey will be. If you have a question about the course, always check the syllabus and Harvey first. If they don't contain the answer, then you may contact me for help.*

## **LOGISTICS & AGREEMENTS**

**Course modality:** This course will be conducted in a hybrid modality — meaning **we'll be in class every Monday and Wednesday but online on a few Fridays**. Pay attention to the schedule (as well as ongoing course announcements and adjustments) so that you remain clear about where to be on which days. **Online sessions will occur on some Fridays**, chiefly as a means of facilitating more fluid Q&A with out-of-town guest speakers.

**Grading:** You can expect clear instructions and explanations on all course assignments, followed by consistent procedural support and detailed written feedback on your performance (via Harvey). I make every effort to return assignments with feedback and grades **within two weeks after submission**. I am happy to discuss feedback, but I do not entertain regrade requests.

- In this class, a **B grade** (80-89%) means that the work successfully satisfied all instructions and goals for the assignment; an **A grade** (90% and above) exceeds those expectations. A **C grade** (70-79%) is applied to work that is only satisfactory or falls below expectations; a **D grade** (60-69%) applies to unsatisfactory efforts; and a **failing grade** (below 60%) is for unacceptable work.

**Course communications:** Check your messages and email regularly! Urgent announcements or schedule/location changes will be communicated to you via email. Please contact me via the messaging available in Harvey. When writing to me, please remember that you are writing in a professional context. I will make every attempt to answer messages quickly, at least within 24 hours, except on Saturdays. You may address me as Professor Conner or Dr. Conner, and my preferred pronouns are he/him/his.

**Diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging:** We pursue this coursework together in order to learn more about our shared world — and our individual worlds. In doing so, we seek to acknowledge, respect, and encourage each of our diverse perspectives, as every one of these adds vital dimension to our understanding of the world. As a community, we (*students, instructors, guests*) will behave courteously and respectfully to everyone within our shared space, **respecting differing ideas as well as different levels of comprehension** and building awareness of our own positionalities, perspectives, and backgrounds, including categories of identity like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and religion — overall, respecting the magnificent diversity of experience that a university education affords us.

**Academic integrity:** The university has strict rules and severe punishments for cheating, plagiarism, and other violations of academic integrity. These will not be waived under any circumstances. Read the Academic Misconduct Policy of the College of Arts and Sciences (<https://artsandsciences.utulsa.edu/advising/academic-misconduct-policy/>), and if you have the *slightest* question about *any* of these parameters, ask me. (You don't get in trouble for *asking*!) If you weren't capable of doing the work, you wouldn't be here. Don't blow it.

**Technology:** Please **silence cell phones** and any alerts on your various devices. Also, give yourself a break — avoid the social media and other distractions while in class. You're here, and you or some very nice person is paying for this experience: *so focus!*

**Student Access and Success:** Students who have or believe they may have a disability and would like to set up accommodations should contact **Student Access within Student Success** to self-identify their needs and facilitate their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws. Student Access provides private consultations to any student. Contact Student Access staff at [studentaccess@utulsa.edu](mailto:studentaccess@utulsa.edu) or by phone at (918) 631-2315. The application for accommodations may be obtained online at <https://sierra.accessiblelearning.com/s-UTulsa/ApplicationStudent.aspx>. Student Access staff will assist students in the implementation of approved accommodations, and students should submit requests as early as possible for full assistance. Students who qualify for accommodations should meet with the instructor privately (during office hours or by appointment) *as soon as possible* to arrange for their needs and obtain support for the class. Instructors are entitled to notice of 5 business days before the implementation of any required accommodations and all accommodations should be requested by the 12th week of classes for use in that semester, absent an extraordinary and unforeseeable circumstance. TU maintains a list of accessible features for all buildings (e.g., entrances, parking) at [maps.utulsa.edu](http://maps.utulsa.edu).

**Know Your Title IX:** Sexual misconduct is prohibited by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") and will not be tolerated within the TU community. Sexual misconduct encompasses all forms of sex and gender-based discrimination, harassment, violence, and assault, as well as dating violence, domestic violence, interpersonal violence, stalking and sexual exploitation. For more information about your rights under Title IX, visit <https://utulsa.edu/sexual-violence-prevention-education/policies-laws/>. If you or someone you know has been harassed, assaulted, or stalked, or if you have questions about violence prevention resources available to you, please contact any of the following campus and community resources:

**Title IX Coordinator** 918-631-4602

**Office of Violence Prevention** 918-631-2324

**TU Counseling and Psychological Services** 918- 631-2241

**Campus Security** 918-631-5555

**Domestic Violence Intervention Services** 918-585-3163 or 918-743-5763

**Tulsa Police Department** 918-596-9222 or 911 (emergency situations)

## **ASSESSMENTS**

*To achieve our objectives, we will meet regularly to discuss course concepts and texts, and students will complete the following assignments throughout the term:*

### **Lit reviews — 15%**

For each methods section of the course (quantitative, textual, qualitative), students will write one evaluation of a selected peer-reviewed text, following specific criteria for its assessment.

- 3 reviews, 5% each
- Due on Sept. 29, Oct. 20, Nov. 10

### **Research proposals — 45%**

Also for each methods section of the course, students will write one research proposal, consisting of a thorough design, literature review, and plan of inquiry for a research project based on one of each section's methods.

- 3 reviews, (for 10%, 15% and %20)
- Due on Oct. 2, Oct. 27, Nov. 13

### **“Pro tools” questions — 8%**

In advance of visiting scholars on Fridays, students will read their assigned texts and submit questions for the discussion.

- 8 Q&A visits, 1% each
- Due the Wednesday before each scheduled Friday visit

### **Reading quizzes — 12%**

Students will demonstrate currency and competency with the assigned texts via occasional quizzes (in class and/or via Harvey).

- 6 quizzes, 2% each
- Follow course announcements

### **Final presentations — 20%**

Students will refine one of their three research proposals, adding at least one visual element, and present their argument and research plan in a preparatory academic conference in the classroom at the end of the course.

*See Harvey for detailed assignment descriptions, instructions, and rubrics.*

**A word about ‘participation’:** Every student is expected to have read or watched *completely all* assigned texts prior to class, and they are expected to be able to respond to basic questions from the instructor and fellow students about those texts and their ideas — **to arrive to each session with something *relevant* and *productive* to contribute or ask about.**

Engagement and attendance, however, are not included among the above assessments —

*directly*. Your engagement with the course (inside or outside of our classroom) will be *readily* apparent in each assignment — in how properly and deeply you demonstrate a mastery of course concepts and objectives, in the originality of your thinking, and in the vibrancy of connections you make not only between texts but to the wider world. I will maintain a record of your attendance and engagement levels throughout the term; I may speak to you about these as we proceed, and you may speak to me about this at any time. Encouraging student engagement not only addresses your success in this specific course but your ultimate performance as a scholar from a university of this caliber.

**Illness, emergencies, OMGs:** If you fall ill or have other difficulties this semester, your health and wellbeing are your top priority. Deadline extensions are available for most assignments, if needed. Make sure you contact me as soon as you're able so we can devise a plan together. Know *I am here to support you* in this class. If you're having any trouble — from illness or family emergencies to caregiving responsibilities or the struggle for basic needs — please reach out so that I might connect you with the multitude of assistive resources available on campus. *Life happens*: we will work through it together.

- If you are required to miss class to participate in an event related to athletics or a student organization, please let me know ASAP. No doubt you already have the dates and information about these events, so the sooner you share the easier we can make a make-up plan.

## **SCHEDULE OF WORK**

*The following schedule is subject to slight or radical changes throughout the term. Pay attention to all course announcements as we go.*

### **One textbook is required for the course:**

Berger, Arthur Asa. *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage, 2020.

### **Week 1: Getting started**

*Typical first-week stuff: I'll introduce the course and myself, and we'll introduce each other. Then we'll meet some of the primary social-science methods for conducting it — the very ways you'll go about answering your important questions about media, here and beyond!*

#### **MONDAY, AUG 21**

##### **Location: Oliphant 141**

— *Read*: The course syllabus and Harvey site

#### **WEDNESDAY, AUG 23**

##### **Location: Oliphant 141**

— *Read*: Berger, chapter 1 (“What Is Research?”) [textbook]

**FRIDAY, AUG 25** — **“Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #1**

**Location: ONLINE**

- Guest: It’ll be me this first time ’round!

**Week 2: The research process**

*How do you decide what to research? How do you ask useful questions about the world? Let’s figure out what bugs you, what you want to find out, what you want to solve — and how.*

**MONDAY, AUG 28**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 2 (“The Research Process”) [textbook]

**WEDNESDAY, AUG 30**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Booth et al., “Topics to Questions” & “Questions to a Problem” [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, SEP 1** —

**Location: McFARLIN LIBRARY**

- We’ll be meeting at the library today for a media-specific tour and a bunch of helpful tips & tricks for maximizing its resources for *our* inquiry.

**Week 3: Research design**

*You’re starting to ask solid, interesting, valuable questions — now what? Where will your answers come from — people? data? observation? all (or a mixture) of the above? We’ll start figuring out how to marry your inquiry to the right method and plan for the actual labor.*

**MONDAY, SEP 4** — **NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)**

**WEDNESDAY, SEP 6**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Babbie, “Research Design” [PDF]
- Read: Mullaney and Rea, *Where Research Begins*, chapter 3 [PDF]

**FRIDAY, SEP 8** — **“Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #2**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Guest: Dr. Mark Brewin, Assoc. Professor of Media Studies @ TU
- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

**Week 4: ‘Writing it up’**

*What to do with all that amazing data you’ve compiled? The next step is to communicate your communication research — the chief mode of which is through the crafting of sharp, succinct, compelling prose, which conveys an original, important scholarly argument.*

### **MONDAY, SEP 11**

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 17 (“Writing Research Reports”)
- Read: Selections from my “Proposal-writing toolbox”

### **WEDNESDAY, SEP 13**

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Booth et al., “Making Good Arguments: An Overview” [PDFs]

### **FRIDAY, SEP 15** —

#### **Location: TBA**

- Guest: A consultant from the campus writing center

## **Week 5: QUANTITATIVE — Surveys & stats**

*The person with the clipboard at the mall is asking for a moment of your time to answer some survey questions. The pundit on TV is quoting a variety of statistics in defense of a social argument. They’ve both chased down those numbers because that data speaks a certain way.*

### **MONDAY, SEP 18**

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 13 (“Surveys”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

### **WEDNESDAY, SEP 20**

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 15 (“Descriptive Statistics”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

### **FRIDAY, SEP 22** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #3

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Guest: Travis Scott Lowe, Assoc. Professor of Sociology @ TU
- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

## **Week 6: QUANTITATIVE — Content analysis**

*What is so important about saying something’s “important” in our particularly important context? Because repetition (or lack thereof) implies importance — and content analysis is a way of counting and calculating words, images, and more to support important arguments.*

### **MONDAY, SEP 25**

#### **Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 12 (“Content Analysis”) [textbook]



- *Read:* Kimberley A. Neuendorf, “The Content Analysis Handbook,” chapter 1 (then *skim* the rest)

**WEDNESDAY, SEP 27**

***Location: Oliphant 141***

- *Read:* Sample studies [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, SEP 29** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #4

***Location: ONLINE***

- Guest: Dan Hallin, Professor Emeritus @ UC San Diego
- *Read:* Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

***Due: Study review #1 (Quantitative)***

**Week 7: Individual student conferences, Round 1**

**MONDAY, OCT 2**

***Due: Research proposal #1 (Quantitative)***

*Regular classes do not meet this week.* Instead, each student will meet with me individually for 20 minutes by appointment.

In these meetings, we will discuss your first research proposal and any questions you have regarding the course and upcoming work. These conferences are meant to be helpful and informative for you, and we will spend most of the time talking about your own writing. Come prepared with questions and concerns.

***Before your conference:***

- Read my feedback on your first research proposal
- Complete your pre-conference worksheet

**Week 8: TEXTUAL — Semiotics & rhetoric**

*Sign, sign, everywhere a sign — but (to paraphrase the next line of that old song) how do these go about forming your mind? We’ll dip a toe into the complex but rich waters of semiotics to make visible what we “see” every day, and dissect arguments in order to strengthen our own.*

**MONDAY, OCT 9**

***Location: Oliphant 141***

- *Read:* Berger, chapter 3 (“Semiotic Analysis”) [textbook]
- *Read:* Sample studies [PDFs]

**WEDNESDAY, OCT 11**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 4 (“Rhetoric Analysis”) [textbook]

**FRIDAY, OCT 13** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #5

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Guest: Emily Contois, Assistant Prof. of Media Studies @ TU
- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

**Week 9: TEXTUAL — Discourse & ideology**

*We’ll look through and beyond language this week to uncover where discourses lurk, following how those discourses get attached to specific social groups to become ideologies, or even whole societies as hegemonies — and how we can deploy such analysis for effective social critique.*

**MONDAY, OCT 16**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 7 (“Discourse Analysis”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**WEDNESDAY, OCT 18**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 5 (“Ideological Criticism”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, OCT 20** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #6

**Location: TBA**

- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

**Due: Study review #2 (Textual)**

**Week 10: QUALITATIVE — Interviews**

*Could you tell us something about yourself (and when it’s best to use open-ended questions)? Do you agree with this issue (or is a yes-or-no question not really advancing our study)? I’m sorry, is my note-taking distracting you? What to do when data collection is face to face.*

**MONDAY, OCT 23**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 8 (“Interviews”) [textbook]

**WEDNESDAY, OCT 25**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, OCT 27** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #7

**Location: TBA**

- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

**Due: Research proposal #2 (Textual)**

## **Week 11: QUALITATIVE — Ethnography**

*Who’s that sitting in the corner, watching us? Why, it’s your friendly neighborhood ethnographer, stirring up rich data by (instead of studying society from the remove of a classroom or library) actually living among people in order to observe and explain behaviors.*

**MONDAY, OCT 30**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 10 (“Ethnomethodological research”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**WEDNESDAY, NOV 1**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 11 (“Participant observation”) [textbook]
- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, NOV 3** — “Pro Tools” Practitioner Q&A #8

**Location: TBA**

- Read: Visiting practitioner’s 2 selections

## **Week 12: QUALITATIVE — Historical analysis**

*We study history in order to better understand where we are, how we got here, and where we might go. This week, we’ll look at methods for making the most out of the past, for situating it in and among the present, and for making arguments about the future.*

**MONDAY, NOV 6**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Berger, chapter 9 (“Historical analysis”) [textbook]

**WEDNESDAY, NOV 8**

**Location: Oliphant 141**

- Read: Sample studies [PDFs]

**FRIDAY, NOV 10** — **NO CLASS!**

**Due: Study review #3 (Qualitative)**

## **Week 13: Individual student conferences, Round 2**

### **MONDAY, NOV 13**

***Due: Research proposal #3 (Qualitative)***

*Regular classes do not meet this week. Instead, each student will meet with me individually for 20 minutes by appointment.*

In these meetings, we will discuss your third research proposal and any questions you have regarding the course and upcoming work. These conferences are meant to be helpful and informative for you, and we will spend most of the time talking about your own writing. Come prepared with questions and concerns.

#### ***Before your conference:***

- Read my feedback on your third research proposal
- Complete your pre-conference worksheet

## **Week 14: Thanksgiving holiday**

***NO CLASSES!***

## **Week 15: Presenting research**

*After writing comes talking about your writing. The business of academia is conducted largely at seminars, conferences, and “talks,” at which scholars address other scholars in order to share their research or pitch their projects. We’ll make sure you’re ready to stand up and be counted!*

### **MONDAY, NOV 27**

***Location: Oliphant 141***

- *Read: Public-speaking tips & conference advice TBA*

### **WEDNESDAY, NOV 29**

***Location: Oliphant 141***

- *Read: Booth et al., “Communicating Evidence Visually” [PDF]*

**FRIDAY, DEC 1** — Conference workshop

***Location: Oliphant 141***

## **Week 16: Summations**

### **MONDAY, DEC 4**

***Location: Oliphant 141***

**Finals week: Class conference!**

*Per the final project assignment listed above, students will refine one of their three research proposals from the term and prepare a presentation about it — showing slides, explicating visuals, and speaking eloquently and persuasively (to the class, but possibly also to guests).*

**9-11 a.m. THURSDAY, DEC 14**

***Location: TBA***

-30-