



Faculty	Journalism and Media Communications
Programme Title	BA in Journalism
Year	2
Programme Level	Level 8
Module Title	Research Methods
Module Code	BAJH-RM
Module Lecturers	
Module Aims	<p>This course will examine a number of research methods that have been used by media outlets, reported on by media organisations and applied to media content. Topics include designing questionnaires, quantitative content analysis, interviewing (with specific focus on social research), focus groups and observation methods. The course aims to familiarise students with the main research theories and concepts and to enable students to acquire skills in the research process including planning, data collection and analysis. The module will also address the issue of ethics in research and the role and responsibilities of the researcher as distinct from a journalist.</p> <p>Journalists encounter research related topics in various aspects of their work both in terms of media products they create and how they relate to the consumers and purchasers of those products and this module introduces these research methodologies.</p>

Module Learning Outcomes	
On successful completion of this module students will:	
1.	Understand the purpose, value and role of research and be able to undertake a basic media research project
2.	Possess knowledge of the wide variety of information sources available to communication researchers
3.	Know how to gather authoritative evidence to support findings
4.	Appreciate the ethical considerations of conducting research
5.	Understand and comment critically on how media audiences are measured
6.	Discuss and comment on the relationship of research to the modern news media
7.	Understand the concept of news origination, news selection, news framing and infotainment
8.	Through the study of political opinion polls and other examples grasp the impact research and surveys can have on both media and the wider society

Delivery Methods	
Lecturing	3 hours per week
Tutorial	1 hour per week
Independent directed reading and research:	2 hours per week
Module Length	12 teaching weeks

Assessment Strategy	Weighting
Exam	40%
Assignment 1 (for Section B- Dr Robbie Smyth)	30%
Assignment 2 (for Section A – Dr Jane Carrigan)	30%

Topics & Readings -Section A

Introduction to Research Methods and Ethical Concerns

This section of the module will introduce key words in research methods such as 'quantitative', 'qualitative' and 'sample size' and explain what research involves. An important part of this introductory lecture is a description of common ethical principles and a discussion of how they can be applied to research projects. This topic will look at the ethical issues of various experimental research, including the work of Stanley Milgram. We will also look at different ethical guidelines in use today, as well as some recent research controversies. Examples of Consent Forms & Information Sheets will also be shown.

Readings:

Fifty Years Later: The Significance of the Nuremberg Code by Evelyne Shuster

Extracts from Stanley Milgram's *Obedience to Authority*

Website of the Stanford Prison Experiment: www.prisonexp.org

Healy, D. (2009). 'Ethics and Criminological Research: Charting a Way Forward'. *Irish Probation Journal*, 6, 171-181.

Deciding What to Research and How to Begin

This section looks at how to source information effectively. It also includes information on how to reference work correctly and covers topics such as:

- Sources of documents and issues such as authenticity and credibility
- Planning effective searches on the internet
- Using search engines effectively
- How to plan a project
- Referencing

This topic is crucial to the successful completion of the assignment component of this section of the module.

Reading:

Bell, J. 'The Literature Review' in *Doing Your Research Project*

The Art of Interviewing and Focus Groups

In this topic we examine the many different types of interviews and how and why they are used. The advantages and disadvantages of in-depth interviews (the most common type of research interview) are identified and discussed. A practical example of the use of interview as a research method is also analysed and considered in this section. We also define what a focus group is and examine the characteristics of a successful moderator. The many uses of a focus group are discussed. The topic also outlines what the moderator/researcher can and should do before a focus group is conducted. The advantages and disadvantages of the method are also identified.

Readings:

'Interviews' taken from the book *The Good Research Guide* by Martin Denscombe

Excerpts from *Convicted Survivors* by Elizabeth Dermody Leonard

'Focus Group interviewing' by Bruce Berg (taken from the book *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*)

The Ethics of Research by David Morrison (taken from the book *The search for a method: focus groups and the rise of mass communications*)

Quantitative Content Analysis

This topic describes the origins of quantitative content analysis and outlines the main strengths and drawbacks of the method. In this section, we also look at how practically to undertake a quantitative content analysis and examine examples of research that used this method. We will cover:

- Definition of method
- History of its use
- Advantages and disadvantages
- How to do it
- Examples of Quantitative Content Analysis

Readings:

Content Analysis by Anders Hanson

Worthy and Unworthy Victims by Chomsky and Herman (taken from the book *Manufacturing Consent*)

Excerpts from the Glasgow Media group (www.glasgowmediagroup.org), in particular, *Making a Drama out of a Crisis: Authentic Portrayals of Mental Illness in TV Drama* (Greg Philo, Lesley Henderson, Katie McCracken, June 2010)

Seen but not heard: how women make front page news. Source: Women in Journalism (UK)

Survey Research

This topic identifies the advantages and disadvantages of survey research and the many forms it can take including self-completion questionnaires and online surveys.

It also examines factors that may impact on surveys as a research strategy such as sampling and response rates. In this section we also look at *Growing Up in Ireland*, a national study of children which takes place over seven years and follow the progress of two groups of children; 8500 nine-year-olds and 11,000 nine-month-olds and we look at the surveys used and the data that emerged as part of the research with nine year olds.

Readings:

‘Surveys’ taken from the book *The Good Research Guide* by Martin Denscombe

Excerpts from *Growing Up in Ireland* study: www.growingup.ie

Examples of surveys

Participant Observation

This section defines participant observation and examines its relationship to other types of observation methods. Different types of observation; simple, experimental, and participant observation are identified and explained. The history of observation methods is outlined and a definition of participant observation and its advantages and disadvantages are detailed and discussed.

Readings:

Evaluation by Barbara Ehrenreich (taken from the book *Nickel and Dimed*)

Being an Observer by David Deacon et al (taken from the book *Researching Communications*)

Topics and Readings – Section B

(1) News Framing

Often journalists and media workers can view, participate and report on seemingly straight forward news events but produce differing observations about not just the context or value of the event but also the actual structure or nature of the event itself. In this case we engage in a small piece of media research and see can journalists ever fully produce a straight story.

Topic Readings:

- (i) *Telling Stories* by Alan Bell, from *The Language of News Media*, (1991)
- (ii) *Newsgathering Mythologies and Strategic Rituals* by Kay Johnson-Cartee, (2006)

(2) Political opinion polls

The use of opinion polls in the reporting of party politics and elections has had a profound impact on how the media and political parties interact, not just in Ireland but internationally. In the coming weeks we will see many opinion polls reported during the Leinster House elections.

In this topic we look at these trends and examine the impact of political opinion polls on how the media report on political issues and also on how political parties behave. We will look at in particular the Irish case but will also study examples from Britain, the USA and other states.

Topic Readings:

- (i) *It's ok for politicians to ignore public opinion*, Page, 2013
- (ii) *Poll Power*, by Scott Keeter, Wilson Quarterly, Autumn 2008.
- (iii) *Political Opinion Polls*, Oireachtas 2009
- (iv) *Public opinion*, Encyclopedia Britannica Article, 2008.
- (v) *The Bradley Effect - Selective Memory*, by V. Lance Tarrance, Jr. Real Clear Politics.com 2008, October 21st

(3) Writing About Research 1

The principles of reporting research

Another effect of our information and measurement obsession is how journalists report on research. This includes the emergence of the concept of infotainment and the visual representation of research in print and online. Reporting on research and survey findings has become a staple element of modern reporting, but are we accurately reporting on the information presented or are there other questions that journalists should be asking? Finally we introduce the idea of the journalist as a researcher.

Topic Readings:

- (i) *Data Analysis* by Robert Niles
- (ii) *How People learn from the Press* by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosensteil
- (iii) *Race to size zero*, Kate Spicer, Sunday Times 2007
- (iv) *Press Releases by Academic Medical Centres: Not So Academic?* By Steven Woloshin, MD, 2009

(4) Writing about Research 2

Reporting on research in practice:

In this section we will introduce examples of published research and look at the basics of reporting official statistics and surveys. We will examine examples such as reporting unemployment, poverty, inflation and other government data analysing how different media outlets report on this data. We will look at Irish and international examples. In this section we will look at the growing number of data sources open to journalists today.

Students will see how best to use statistics, percentages and other basic maths principles into their work.

We will also introduce the basic ideas of using word clouds and other visual aids to present and comment on research work.

Module Reading List

Readings will be made available on Moodle, however if you would like additional reading, the following books are useful.

**Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky

**Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich

**The search for a method: focus groups and the rise of mass communications*, David Morrison

Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram

Interpreting Audiences; The Ethnography of Media Consumption by Shaun Moores

Mass Media Research: An Introduction (4th edition) by Rodger D Wimmer and Joseph R Dominick

Qualitative Research in Sociology by Amir B. Marvasti

Researching Design, Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches by John W. Cantwell

The Export of Meaning, cross-cultural readings of Dallas by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz

The Practice of Market and Social Research by Yvonne McGivern

Doing Your Research Project by Judith Bell

It is important to regularly check Moodle for additional material and lecture notes.

Overall revision of the course will take place in the last class of the semester.

Assignment titles will be given in Week 2.

Assignment marks for this section and feedback on work submitted will be given before the end of the semester during class. If you are not present at that class, it will not be possible for us to meet up with you individually to give feedback. However, if you email us we will endeavor to reply before the exam period.

If you have any queries, email (jane.carrigan@griffith.ie or robbie.smyth@griffith.ie) or speak to us before or after class.



Research Methods Assignment Details Semester 2

Faculty	Journalism & Media Communications
Course	BA in Journalism & Visual Media Year 2 BA in Journalism Year 3
Module Title	Research Methods
Module Lecturers	
Due Date	Assignment #1 Assignment #2 Assignments will be collected in class during the lecture. Late assignments should be submitted to the Faculty Office during office hours. Remember though, late assignments will be subject to penalties as per Faculty guidelines.

The Learning Outcomes being assessed by these assignments are your ability to:

- Understand the purpose, value and role of research
- Possess knowledge of the wide variety of information sources available to communication researchers
- Know how to gather authoritative evidence to support findings and evaluate studies
- Understand the concept of news selection and news framing
- Discuss and comment on the relationship of research to the modern news media

Marking Scheme for both assignments:

70-100	Excellent. Answers all requirements set in the brief .Only given if the work is exceptional. Work shows evidence of independent reading and thinking.
60-69	Very good. Assignment displays a well-structured and convincing argument at a sophisticated level, based on clear analysis and showing critical ability.
50-59	Assignment shows a reasonably sophisticated argument showing a sensible arrangement of some/most of the appropriate material.
40-49	Satisfactory. Fulfils the brief requirements but just that. Only given if work is satisfactory but flawed and poorly executed. Some signs of understanding and organisation but an incomplete grasp of the material.

Assignment 1

*** hand in during class**

An exercise in News Framing

Collect at least five articles from English language newspapers or a news website on a common news story. The event must have happened in the period from January to March, and you must compare coverage from the same time and day.

Write an analysis that **compares and contrasts, headline text, article structure and an overview of what you think are the key themes, details or features** from the news event and what differences there are if any in how these themes are treated by the newspapers chosen. Also how does the news event fit in with media theories discussed in the module?

You can use the Internet or Lexis Nexus as a source. Google News is a good site to see if a news story is reported on multiple sites. Do not use local or regional papers in Ireland as they often replicate articles across a group with a common owner. *(No sport, sorry!)*.

The analysis with an **introduction** on topic selected, **review of headlines, text and key features** with **conclusion** should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words long. Text of articles & urls where used should be included.

Include a 300 to 500 word report (as part of the 2,500 word total) on your research journey in the project, what obstacles did you face, what sources did you discover?

Each student must email me at robbie.smyth@griffith.ie before 5pm on Wednesday March 2nd outlining which topic they are picking and what sources they come from.

Assignment 2

You are required to conduct a comprehensive literature review on one of the following areas:

- Media Coverage of mental health
- Young people and political engagement
- The effects of media violence on children

Your literature review should demonstrate that you have read widely and have consulted academic journals, published reports and books on the relevant topic and have evaluated a range of studies which used qualitative/quantitative research or both. Your concluding paragraph should summarise the main points of your literature review and identify areas where further research should be done.

Referencing:

It is essential to reference all work.

Your work should be referenced correctly and each assignment should contain a bibliography. The Harvard System is required for referencing. See Moodle under the Library section for more detailed instructions on how to reference correctly.

Presentation:

Minimum word count is 1,500 words. Do not exceed 2,500 words. Assignments should be typed using font size 12pt, with 1.5 or double line spacing.

Assignments will be taken up during the Research Methods class and must be accompanied by an assignment submission sheet.