

JOUR 8501
The Process of Quantitative Mass Communication Research
M/W 9:45-11 a.m., Murphy 15
(3 credits)

Professor

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Contact Information

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Course Description

This course is intended to be an introduction to the concept, process, and conduct of social science-oriented quantitative research. The readings are chosen to serve as a primer on how to do research as well as an illustration of how research is applied in mass communication.

Our time together in class will serve to examine and elaborate on the core ideas presented in the reading through what is hoped to be a lively and open conversation among all members of the class. Hence, this class will only be successful if students come to class having completed the reading and prepared to actively participate in class discussions. In addition, an important aspect of this course is the hands-on experience that will be gained from the design and implementation of a research project from start to finish.

Prerequisites

Graduate student standing in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication or permission of the instructor.

Course Objectives

One overarching objective of this course is to cultivate an appreciation of the scientific method with an understanding of how the principles of scientific research are applied within mass communication research. In particular, the course will focus on quantitative research methods, though that is not intended to imply that scientific principles can not apply to qualitative methods as well.

The second broad objective is to establish an understanding of the execution of research. In other words, becoming familiar with the nuts and bolts of designing and implementing

¹ It is best to reach me by email. I check my email regularly, but try to only respond to students' emails when I am sitting in front of a computer and can compose a thoughtful reply. Please do not expect prompt replies outside of normal business hours, 9-5 p.m., Mon.-Fri. Short, direct replies are not meant to be rude, but are the result of my attempt to provide more prompt replies to urgent questions from a mobile device.

quantitative research within a mass communication context. This includes adept knowledge of the different steps of the research process, issues to consider at each step, the role of theory, and why ethics and error are a significant matter. This also includes the development of important fundamental skills such as formulating targeted empirical research questions; operationalizing concepts through well-crafted experimental manipulations, survey questions, or content analysis code books; and conducting basic statistical analysis.

Course Website

The course’s Moodle website can be accessed through my Portal at <http://myu.umn.edu>

Required Text

Babbie, E.R. (2012). *The practice of social research* (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning. ISBN: 978-1133049791

It is recommended that students acquire their own copy. However, the textbook is also on reserve in the Eric Sevareid Journalism Library in the basement of Murphy Hall, Room 20.

Texts Suggested for Grad Students’ Bookshelves

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Tabachnick, B.G. and Fidell, L.S. (2012). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th edition). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Vogt, W.P. (2005). *Dictionary of statistics & methodology: A nontechnical guide for the social sciences* (3rd. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Components of the Course

All assignments should use APA formatting and citation guidelines.

Assignment	Due Date *	Percentage of Grade	Grade Received
Research problem statement	Mon., Sept. 29	5% (50 pts.)	
Survey sketch	Wed., Oct. 22	10% (100 pts.)	
Experimental sketch	Wed., Oct. 29	10% (100 pts.)	
Research proposals due	Wed., Nov. 5	20% (200 pts.)	
Content analysis sketch	Wed., Nov. 10	10% (100 pts.)	
Secondary data sketch	Wed., Nov. 19	10% (100 pts.)	
Group research project**	Tues., Dec. 16, 10 a.m.	35% (350 pts.)	
Total		100% (1000 pts.)	
Class Participation		5% of total	

* Except for the final group project, all assignments must be uploaded to Moodle prior to

class the day that they are assigned. No late assignments will be accepted.

**It is ok to use portions of the literature review that you develop in 8001 for the purposes of this course. However, be cognizant of the fact that Dr. Huh and I may have slightly different expectations for the literature review — for example, I expect that the literature review will not only focus on previous theoretical approaches to your topic, but the strengths and weaknesses of previous methodological approaches.

Description of Research Project Assignments

This semester you will *work in pairs* to complete a theoretically-driven, social-scientific mass communication research proposal and original pilot study. Students will form their own teams based on common research interest. Students should *equally share responsibility* for the project through each step of the research process, and will receive the same grade based on the group's overall performance.

The research process is broken down into a series of assignments described below. This step-by-step approach is to make sure you receive feedback on your research through each step of the research process.

Ideally, this project will result in a completed study that is ready to submit to a national conference, such as the International Communication Association (ICA), or Association for Education in Journalism in Mass Communication conferences (AEJMC).

Realistically, however, your papers will conclude with a small-scale pilot study that will give you hands-on experience with original data collection and will help inform follow-up studies.

I. Research problem statement (due Mon., Sept. 29) — 5% (50 pts.)

This assignment addresses Section I of the “Outline of Steps in Research Design.” First, state a (tentative) title for your study. Second, give a concise 2-3 sentence statement of a topic of interest to you that falls under the umbrella of theoretically-driven, social-scientific quantitative mass communication research. Next, in two to three paragraphs, describe the significance of the problem:

- Does your study relate to a practical problem?
- Does your study relate to a wide population?
- Does your study relate to an influential or critical population?
- Does your study fill a significant research gap?
- Does your study permit generalization to principles of communication process and theory?
- Does your study sharpen the definition of an important concept or relationship?
- Does your study creates or improves an instrument for observing and analyzing data?
- Does your study provide opportunity for gathering data that is otherwise restricted?

And last, in one to two paragraphs, please briefly describe how you might go about getting the data you need to complete the study, specifying a specific social-scientific, quantitative research method to the extent that you are able.

This assignment should not exceed 4 double-spaced pages.

II. Research Proposals — (Wed., Nov. 5) – 20% (200 pts.)

For this assignment you should write a first draft of your research papers, minus the results and discussion sections. The proposal should include an introduction; thorough literature review that synthesizes the strengths and weaknesses of previous theoretical and methodological approaches to your topic; research questions and/or hypotheses; and a description of the methods you plan to use to answer those research questions/hypotheses.

Let sections I-III of the research outline guide you as appropriate.

This assignment should be no more than 18 pages double-spaced, excluding title page and citations.

III. Final papers (Due Tues., Dec. 16, 10 a.m.) — 35% (350 pts.)

For this assignment you'll turn in a final version of your research paper, which should reflect substantial revisions based on feedback received on your previous research assignments. You should use the "Outline of Steps in Research Design" to make sure that your paper has all applicable parts.

Your data collection/analysis should be as complete as possible, but I fully realize that the constraints of this course may not permit you to complete data collection and analysis. Depending on the complexity of the proposed project, I will work with each group to determine realistic data collection/analysis goals for this semester.

This assignment should be no more than 25 pages double-spaced, excluding title page and citations.

Grades

Grades are based accumulative score of students' performance on the course assignments. Final accumulative scores are rounded to the nearest whole number (e.g., 89.5% is rounded up to 90%, a grade of A; 89.4% is rounded to 89%, a grade of B). There are no extra credit opportunities in this course.

Registration in this course is by A-F only.

A – Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

A=93-100%

A-=90-92%

B – Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

B+=87-89%

B=83-86%

B-=80-82%

C – Achievement that meets course requirements in every respect.

C+=77-79%

C=73-76%

C-=70-72%

D – Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.

D+=67-69%

D=63-66%

D-=60-62%

F – Represents failure and signifies that the work was either completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or was not completed.

F=0-59%

I (Incomplete) – assigned at the discretion of the instructor. An incomplete grade will be considered only when documented, extraordinary circumstances beyond control, or ability to anticipate, prohibit timely completion of the course requirements. Incomplete grades are rare. Requires a written agreement between instructor and student.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Attending and actively participating in class is part of the expectations of this course, and is crucial to your success in this course specifically, and as a graduate student more generally.

Participation: Active participation means that you've read the assigned materials and are prepared to discuss your observations about the readings; ask questions about concepts that were unclear (and are prepared to help answer your peers' questions); and to voluntarily pose and respond thoughtfully and constructively to discussion topics without having to be called upon. If you are serially unprepared for class and/or do not participate in class discussion unless called upon to do so, your final grade may be reduced up to 5% of the total points earned in the course. E.g., if your original grade is 85% (B), a poor record of class participation will reduce your grade to 80% (B-).

Attendance: At the end of each class, you'll write down one new thing that you learned either from the readings assigned for that day's class, or one concept that is still not clear to you (you're encouraged to write more than that if you have additional questions). These notecards are used for me to gauge student learning and to make sure I can clarify material that is unclear; they will also be used to take attendance. *For each unexcused absence greater than one, students' grades will be lowered half a grade.* E.g., to build on the example used above, if you have both a poor record of class participation and attendance, your grade would be lowered further from a B- to a C+. *Two tardies are equivalent to one absence.*

If you miss class, you're responsible for asking a peer for notes on what you missed that day in class.

Course Grade Changes

Questions about course grade changes should be directed to Professor Watson. You may also contact the Student Conflict Resolution Center at 612-624-7272 for assistance.

Grade changes will be made only when there is evidence of an error in grading and/or recording of a grade. Grades on individual assignments/exams must be appealed to the TA and/or instructor within one week of the assignment/exam being returned to students; appeals of final course grades must be made within one week of course grades being posted. Appeals made after a week will not be considered.

SJMC Writing Expectations

Writing is a core competency in every course at the SJMC. The school's commitment to student writing is reflected in its participation in the University's "Writing-enriched Curriculum" program.

Students are expected to consistently improve their writing as they progress through the curriculum. Proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, style and construction are among the most basic expected competencies. Writing should be concise, and papers should be well organized, reflecting thoughtful consideration of an effective introduction, valid arguments supported by evidence, clear analysis and an effective conclusion. It should display an ability to synthesize information from a variety of credible sources.

Students should read the [Expected Writing Competencies for Mass Communication Courses](#) for more about these and other writing skills that students are expected to master before graduating. Other skills specific to this course are listed below.

Scholastic Misconduct – Definition

Scholastic misconduct is broadly defined as *“any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work or that involves misrepresentation of your own work.*

Scholastic dishonesty includes, (but is not necessarily limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student's work.”

The SJMC has its own policy on plagiarism and fabrication, which are considered extremely serious breaches of academic conduct AND professional practice in the media industries. See <http://sjmc.umn.edu/about/plagiarismfabrication.html>. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism or fabrication, you may complete a tutorial on the topic found here: <https://ay14.moodle.umn.edu/course/view.php?id=1646> (cut and paste this URL into your browser – it will not work as a direct link).

Proven scholastic misconduct will result in a course grade of F.

In order to help you avoid issues with plagiarism in this course, all assignments will be uploaded to a Turnitin module on Moodle. Turnitin checks submitted assignments against websites, journal articles, students' assignments at the University of Minnesota and other universities, among other existing sources. The tool highlights any commonalities that exist between the student's assignment and existing texts in the Turnitin database, whether they are properly cited or not.

Note: Just because Turnitin flags a passage of your assignment as having potentially been plagiarized does not mean that it is (if you've properly cited it). Conversely, just because Turnitin does not flag a passage does not mean that it has not been plagiarized. *You should carefully examine any passages that Turnitin flags to make sure that you properly cited that passage.* If there are any passages that Turnitin flags as needing more attention when you upload your assignment, you'll be able to delete your assignment, fix those portions of your assignment, and re-upload a corrected version prior to the due-date of the assignment.

We'll discuss plagiarism and demonstrate how to use the Turnitin module prior to your first major writing assignment. If you have any questions regarding academic integrity and plagiarism, you should ask Professor Watson *before* turning in an assignment.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Further information is available from Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center). Note: Students with special needs may receive this syllabus and other course materials in alternative formats upon request. Contact the SJMC Student Services Center for more information, 612-625-0120.

Sexual Harassment

University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the 12/11/98 policy statement. Copies of the 12/11/98 policy statement on sexual harassment are available at 419 Morrill Hall or [online](#). Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University Office of Equal Opportunity at 419 Morrill Hall.

Student Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>

Sale of Notes

Lectures given in this class are the property of the instructor. They may not be recorded without prior permission from the instructor. They may not be used for any commercial purpose. This includes the sale of notes to a retail distributor who reproduces them for resale to other students. Students found to be in violation of this policy may be subject to discipline under University policies.

Technology Policy

Students computers, e-readers, cell-phones, etc. should not be used for purposes other than taking notes, accessing readings, looking up information relevant to the class, etc. Professor Watson reserves the right to ask students whose technology use is distracting to themselves or others around them to not use technology in the classroom.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Wed., Sept. 3 – Introduction to course: What is quantitative research?

Read: Schwartz, M.A. (2008). The importance of stupidity in scientific research. *Journal of Cell Science*, 121, 1771. doi: 10.1242/jcs.033340

Week 2

Mon., Sept. 8: Social Science and Mass Communication Research

Read: Babbie Chap. 1, Human inquiry and social science

Carey, J. (1978). A plea for the university tradition. AEJ Presidential Address. Retrieved from <http://www.aejmc.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Journalism-Quarterly-1978-Carey-846-55.pdf>

Neuman, W. R., & Guggenheim, L. (2011). The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six- Stage Model of Cumulative Research. *Communication Theory*, 21, 169-196. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01381.x

Wed., Sept. 10: Ways of knowing and theorizing

Read: Babbie Chap. 2, Paradigms, theory, and social research

Anderson, J.A. & Baym, G. (2004). Philosophies and philosophic issues in communication, 1995-2004. *Journal of Communication*, 54, 589-615. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02647.x

Review: Neuman, W. R., & Guggenheim, L. (2011). The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six- Stage Model of Cumulative Research. *Communication Theory*, 21, 169-196. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01381.x

Week 3

Mon., Sept. 15: Ways of knowing and theorizing

Review: Babbie Chap. 2, Paradigms, theory, and social research

Bryant, J. & Miron, D. (2006). Theory and research in mass communication. *Journal of Communication*, 54: 662-704. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02650.x

DeFleur, M. L. (1998). Where have all the milestones gone? The decline of significant research on the process and effects of mass communication. *Mass Communication and Society*, 1, 85-98. doi: 10.1080/15205436.1998.9677848

Wed., Sept. 17: What makes a good study?

Read: Babbie Chap. 4, Research design

Berkowitz, L., & Donnerstein, E. (1982). External validity is more than skin deep: Some answers to criticisms of laboratory experiments. *American Psychologist*, 37, 245-257. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.37.3.245

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84, 231-259. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.84.3.231

Week 4

Mon., Sept. 22: What makes a good study?

Review: Babbie Chap. 4, Research design

Pan, Z. and McLeod, J.M. (1991). Multilevel analysis in mass communication research. *Communication Research*, 18, 140-173. doi: 10.1177/009365091018002002

Wed., Sept. 24: Operationalizing your study

Early Term Assessment

Read: Babbie Chap. 5, Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement
Eveland, W.P., Hutchens, M.J., & Shen, F. (2009). Exposure, attention, or “use” of news? Assessing aspects of the reliability and validity of a central concept in political communication research. *Communication Methods & Measures*, 3, 223-244. doi: 10.1080/19312450903378925

Ki, E., and Hon, L.C. (2007). Reliability and validity of organization-public relationship measurement and linkages among relationship indicators in a membership organization. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84, 419-438. doi: 10.1177/107769900708400302

Week 5

Mon., Sept. 29: Measurement

Read: Babbie Chap. 6, Indexes, scales, and typologies

Review: Babbie Chap. 5, Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement
Soh, H., Reid, L. N., & King, K. W. (2009). Measuring trust in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 38, 83-103. doi: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367380206

Wed., Oct. 1: Sampling

Read: Babbie Chap. 7, The logic of sampling

Week 6

Mon., Oct. 6: Sampling

Read: Babbie Chap. 7, The logic of sampling

Watson, B.R., Zamith, R., Cavanah, S., & Lewis, S.C. (2013). Are demographics adequate controls for cell-phone only coverage bias in mass communication research? Paper was presented at the 2013 Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research Conference and is under review for publication.

Henrich, J., Heine, S.J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavior and Brain Sciences*, 33, 61-83. doi: 10.1017/S0140525X0999152X

Wed., Oct. 8: Research ethics

Read: Babbie Chap. 3

Goel, V. (2014). As data overflows online, researchers grapple with ethics. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/technology/the-boon-of-online-data-puts-social-science-in-a-quandary.html>

Wood, M. (2014, July 28). OKCupid plays with love in user experiments. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/29/technology/okcupid-publishes-findings-of-user-experiments.html?_r=0

Week 7

Mon., Oct. 13: Research ethics and academic integrity

Read: Babbie Chap. 3

School of Journalism & Mass Communication Plagiarism Policy

Wed., Oct. 15: Survey research

Read: Babbie Chap. 9

Watson, B.R. and Riffe, D. (2013). Perceived threat, immigration policy support, and media coverage: Hostile media and presumed influence. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25, 459-479. doi: 10.1093/ijpor/eds032

de Zúñiga, H.G., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individual's social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17, 319-336. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01574.x

Week 8

Monday, Oct. 20: Survey research

Review: Babbie Chap. 9

Read: Joe Bob Hester & Rhonda Gibson (2007). The agenda-setting function of a national versus local media: A time-series analysis of the issue of same-sex marriage. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3, 299-317. doi: 10.1080/15205430701407272

Ragas, M.W. & Tran, R. (2013). Beyond cognitions: A longitudinal study of online search salience and media coverage of the president. *Journalism &*

Mass Communication Quarterly, 90, 478-499. doi:
10.1177/1077699013493792

Wed., Oct. 22: Experimental research

Read: Babbie Chap. 8

LaMarre, H.L., Landreville, K.D., Young, D., & Gilkerson, N. (2014). Humor works in funny ways: Examining satirical tone as a key determinant in political humor message processing. *Mass Communication & Society*, 17, 400-423. doi: 10.1080/15205436.2014.891137

Week 9 Data analysis

Mon., Oct. 27: Experimental research

Review: Babbie Chap. 8

Huh, J. & Shin, W. (2014). Trust in prescription drug band websites: Website trust cues, attitude toward website, and behavior intentions. *Journal of Health Communication: International Perspectives*, 19, 170-191. doi: 10.1080/10810730.2013.798386

Bailard, C. S. (2012). A field experiment on the Internet's effect in an African election: Savvier citizens, disaffected voters, or both? *Journal of Communication*, 62, 330-344. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01632.x

Wed., Oct. 29: Content analysis

Read: Babbie Chap. 330-342

Li-Vollmer, M. (2009). Race representation in child-target television commercials. *Mass Communication and Society*, 5, 207-228. doi: 10.1207/S15327825MCS0502_6

Watson, B.R. (in press). Is Twitter an alternative medium?: Comparing Gulf Coast Twitter and newspaper coverage of the 2010 BP oil spill. *Communication Research*.

Week 10

Midterm Assessment

Mon., Nov. 3: Content analysis

Read: Stryker, J.E., Wray, R.J., Hornik, R.C., & Yanovitzky, I. (2006). Validation of database search terms for content analysis: The case of cancer news coverage. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83, 413-430. doi: 10.1177/107769900608300212

Luke, D.A., Caburnay, C.A., & Cohen, E.L. (2011). How much is enough? New recommendations for using constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis of health stories. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 5, 76-91. doi: 10.1080/19312458.2010.547823

Lovejoy, J., Watson, B.R., Lacy, S., & Riffe, D. (in press). Assessing the reporting of reliability in published content analyses: 1985-2010. *Communication Methods and Measures*.

Review: Babbie Chap. 330-342

Wed., Nov. 5: Making use of secondary data

Read: Babbie Chap. 342-355

Lee, J.K. & Coleman, R. (2014). Testing generational, life cycle, and period effects of age on agenda setting. *Mass Communication and Society, 17*, 3-25. doi: 10.1080/15205436.2013.788721

Mesch, G.S. (2006). Family characteristics and intergenerational conflicts over the Internet. *Information, Communication, & Society, 9*, 473-495. doi: 10.1080/13691180600858705

Watson, B.R. & Riffe, D. (2011). Structural determinants of local public affairs place blogging: Structural pluralism and community stress. *Mass Communication & Society, 14*, 879-904. doi: 10.1080/15205436.2011.611922

Week 11

Mon., Nov. 10: Qualitative and mixed-methods research

Guest Lecture by Dr. Nagler

Read: Babbie Chaps. 10 & 12

Additional readings TBA

Wed., Nov. 12: Data analysis

Read: Babbie Chaps. 14 & 15 and pages 460-469

Week 12

Mon., Nov. 17: Data analysis using R; Descriptive Statistics

Bring laptops to class

Read: Babbie pages 469-480

Watch: Installing and loading data into R (Mac or PC, depending on your personal computer)

Download: Political advertising and the third person effect dataset

Wed., Nov. 19: Data analysis using R; Inferential Statistics

Bring laptops to class

Read: Babbie pages 469-480

Week 13

Mon., Nov. 24: Data analysis Using R; Correlation and Regression

Bring laptops to class

Additional readings TBA

Wed., Nov. 26: Big Data and Big Problems

Read: Mahrt, M., & Scharnow, M. (2013). The Value of Big Data in Digital Media Research. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 57*, 20–33. doi:10.1080/08838151.2012.761700

Crawford, K., Gray, M. L., & Miltner, K. (2014). Critiquing Big Data: Politics, Ethics, Epistemology. *International Journal of Communication, 8*, 1663–1672.

boyd, danah, & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*, 662–679. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878

Fairfield, J., & Shtein, H. (2014). Big Data, Big Problems: Emerging Issues in the Ethics of Data Science and Journalism. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 29*, 38–51. doi:10.1080/08900523.2014.863126

Happy Thanksgiving

Week 14

Mon., Dec. 1: Writing methods and results sections

Read: Babbie Chap. 17

Wed., Dec. 3: Writing methods and results sections

Review: Babbie Chap. 17

Week 15

Mon., Dec. 8: Research presentations

Wed., Dec. 10: Research presentations

Final Papers Due

Tues., Dec. 16, 10 a.m.