

**Media audience and research: Fan culture in contemporary popular media.**

Syllabus

Title: Media Audience & Research - 41695 - MS 205 – 01  
Class meeting time: Tuesday and Thursday, 4:35 pm - 6:20 pm.  
Class location: Lone Mountain 244B

Instructor: Professor Michael E. Lenert, JD, PhD  
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:30 – 7:30 PM (after class) and by appointment. (We will arrange a mutually convenient place to meet).  
Email: [Lenert@me.com](mailto:Lenert@me.com)

Course description: MS - 205. Media Audience and Research (4).

Prerequisite: MS - 100. Theory and practice of media and communication research methodologies including content/text analysis, ethnographic methods, interview, and survey methods.

This section of the course primarily concerns the investigation and understanding of *fans* in contemporary popular media. We are primarily interested in the question: “What do fans do and think?” Indeed, we will consider audience members as “active and participatory” as opposed to “passive and isolated.” A wide range of fan cultures and behaviors will be considered, including but not limited to television programs, movies, printed materials and video games. We will also take a look at “Web 2.0” sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Second Life and Wikipedia.

Students will learn to use a variety of conventional audience research tools and techniques. Although our focus is on fans and fan culture (fandom), the principles and methods of audience research that the student will acquire are applicable to a wide range of professional, business and academic activities.

Required texts:

1. *Practice of Social Research* (edition: 12<sup>th</sup>) by Earl R. Babbie.
2. *Handouts and readings posted online by the instructor.*

Instructional methods: This course is taught using a variety of instructional including lecture, class discussions, small group work, and term project research. There will be a midterm exam.

Assignments:

- 20% Research notebook (described below)
- 20% Two short papers (4-5 pages, to be described in class).
- 20% Midterm exam.
- 30% Term research audience project and presentation (10-15 pages).
- 10% Class attendance and participation in-class exercises.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 100% of your final grade

**Important:** For the assignments in this class you will need a *Research Notebook*. Ideally, this will be a slim (1 inch) 3-ring binder that you will bring to class each day. Your Research Notebook must be kept separate from your lecture and discussion notes. You will place all of your Research Notebook assigned work in this binder, to be reviewed by the instructor. As you move toward the completion of your term project, you should often refer to the work that you have already done in your research notebook. Occasionally, as requested, you will meet with the instructor to discuss the contents of your Research Notebook, and your research progress. (The assignments that are to be completed and included in your notebook are listed as “Notebook” in the assignments column).

### Schedule: Detailed list of readings and assignments

Date	Topic/ Readings due	Assignments due <i>(this is the date the assignment must be completed by)</i>
8/24	Introduction to class	
8/26	Topic: Technological change and the concept of the <i>active audience member</i> or <i>fan</i> . ... Or put another way: “Does media do things to people or do people do things with media?”	
8/31	Topic: Human inquiry and science. Exploring the range of fan culture. Reading: Babbie, ch. 1:	Paper #1: Write 4-page paper describing your own history as a fan of popular culture; in-class presentation and discussion.
9/2	Topic: Looking for reality in a <i>mosh pit</i> . Concepts, variables and attributes. Inductive and deductive research. Reading: Babbie ch. 2	Notebook: One-paragraph statement of your preliminary interest. (Students will form into 2-4 person work-groups based on interests).
9/7	Topic: Ethics in social research; Discussion: The Stanford Prison experiment. Reading: Babbie ch. 3	Notebook: Draft a short “informed consent to participate in research” that you might use.
9/9	Topic: Research design Reading: Babbie ch. 4	Notebook: Briefly (a) outline <i>the purpose of your research</i> – exploration, description, and explanation; and (b) <i>your unit of analysis</i> .
9/14	Topic: Reading social research Reading: Babbie ch. 17; Jenkins, ch. 1, “Get a life” (available on-line)	
9/16	Library research: No class meeting.	Notebook: Locate a piece of scholarly research (a journal article) on your general topic of interest. Write a brief summary that covers the theory, research design, measurement and evaluation of the subject understudy.

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9/21	Topic: Reading social research, part 2 Topic: Discussion of Jenkins, ch. 1, "Get a Life".	Notebook: Present in class (5 minutes) a summary of the research article that you selected.
9/23	Topic Research design, part 1 Reading: Babbie ch. 4	
9/28	Topic: Research design, part 2 No lecture; individual student-instructor conferences by sign up.	Notebook: A 2-page outline of your research design
9/30	Topic: Conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, part 1 Reading: Babbie ch. 5	
10/5	Topic: Conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, part 2	Notebook: Apply Babbie's framework of "conceptualization, operationalization, measurement" to your own research project. Focus on the question, "What is a fan?"
10/7	Topic: Indexes, scales, and typologies. Reading: Babbie ch. 6.	
10/12	Topic: The logic of sampling Reading: Babbie, ch. 7	Notebook: Apply Babbie's framework of "indexes, scales and typologies" to your own research project. What are ways you can measure the degree of "fan-ness?" of an individual?
10/14	Topic: Experiments Reading: Babbie, 8	
10/19	Topic: Survey Research, part 1 Reading: Babbie ch. 9	
10/21	Topic: Survey Research, part 2	Notebook: Bring a 10-item survey to class and pre-test it on your classmates
10/26	Topic: Qualitative field research, part 1 Reading: Babbie ch. 10	
10/28	Topic: Qualitative field research, part 2 Topic: Unobtrusive research Reading: Babbie ch. 11	Notebook: Describe how you will use a qualitative research method in your work.
11/2	Topic: Qualitative data analysis Reading: Babbie, ch. 13	
11/4	Topic: Quantitative data analysis, Reading, Babbie ch. 14 Topic: Review for midterm examination.	Notebook: Describe how you will use a quantitative research method in work.

11/9	No class: Individual student-instructor meeting by sign-up to discuss formal research proposal	Paper #2: Write a 4-5 page formal research proposal. (See handout for details.)  Due date for instructor's formal review of all your Research Notebook assignments. (Bring your complete Research Notebook to the meeting).
11/11	No class: Conduct your investigation, part 1. Student-instructor meetings by appointment.	
11/16	In-class midterm examination	
11/18	No class: Conduct your investigation, part 2	
11/23	No Class and individual student-instructor meetings (by sign-up).	Meeting with instructor to go over your research results.
11/25	No class. Thanksgiving holiday	
11/30	Student research presentations, Group 1	Details concerning the specifics to be announced.
12/2	Student research presentations, Group 2	Details concerning the specifics to be announced.
12/7	Student research presentations, Group 3	Details concerning the specifics to be announced.
12/16	(no final examination)	Formal written final project due.

More details concerning the assignments for this class will be presented in class and distributed as printed handouts or posted online.

### Course policies

It is a condition of your continued enrollment in this course that you conform your conduct to the usual norms and practices of a university education. Class attendance and participation is required. Each unexcused absence may result in a 5% deduction from your final grade. Please contact the instructor in advance (or as soon as possible in the event of an emergency) if you wish to be eligible for an excused absence. A student must take the midterm examination as scheduled. All work must be completed this semester. No grade of "incomplete" shall be given without the prior written request of the student and the instructor's consent. Class attendance is required. The use of cell phones, beepers, or other communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore prohibited during class. Except in emergencies, those using such devices must leave the classroom. Students are permitted to use computers during class for note-taking and other class-related work only. Those using computers during class for work not related to that class must leave the classroom. Students in this course seeking accommodations to disabilities must first consult with the Office of Disability Services and follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations. All students are required to read and abide by USF's Code of Student Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code of Student Academic Integrity, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Please see your instructor if you have questions or need more information.

Media Audiences  
Prof. Lenert  
November 4, 2010

**Final Project Worksheet**

Instructions: *Your formal research proposal is due on Tuesday, November 11, 2010 at 4:30 PM.* This is a firm deadline. Unexcused late papers will be subject to a full-letter grade penalty. Please use this worksheet to write your formal research proposal, make a copy, and attach this worksheet to your formal research proposal with a staple.

1. In just a few words, state your *Research Question*.

2. What is your *unit of analysis*?

3. Exactly what are you attempting to measure? *Conceptualize* each important variable and then "*operationalize*" it. (Use more space on back of this sheet if necessary).

Variable	Conceptualization	Operationalization
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4. What is the *Independent Variable* and what is the *Dependent Variable*, and what relationship do you expect to find between the Independent variable and the Dependent variable? (I.e., *This causes that.*)

*Independent variable* (most likely level of fandom)

*Dependent variable* (most likely your specific research interest as an operational concept)

5. What is your expected relationship between the variables that you selected to study?

Overall, is your approach to your research question more ideographic or more nomothetic? Why? (Use more space on back of this sheet if necessary).

6. What is your research schedule?

<b>Quantitative Research Tasks</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Already completed: Research design; Conceptualization and operationalization of variables	11/1/10
Draft Survey. Your survey needs to have an introduction, a brief statement of your research ethics, and your contact information.	
Pre-test survey	
Correct and adjust survey in light of pretest	
Select sample population	
Target sample with surveys; Deliver surveys to survey-takers	
Collect responses	
Analyze data	

<b>Quantitative Research Tasks</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<i>You already should have completed:</i> Research design; Conceptualization and operationalization of variables. (This list assumes in-depth interviews -- please see the instructor for assistance if you are going to use another qualitative method such as observation).	11/1/10
Write your in-depth interview questions (usually no more than 4-5 questions).	
Pre-test questions	
Target sample population	
Schedule and conduct interview. Get interviewee's consent.	
Write up each interview (to include as appendix in your final project)	

7. What is your writing schedule?

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Paper Writing Tasks	Due Date
Formal Research Proposal due	11/09
Finish collecting data	
Analyze your data`	
First draft of paper	
Oral presentation of initial findings to class	11/30 12/02 12/07
Review and revise paper in light of discussion	
Proof-read paper and check for errors	
Turn in final paper and Appendix (Your survey questions and results, and your in-depth interview questions and results.)	12/16

**Important:** The final research project papers are due at 4:00 PM on December 16, 2010. in the Department of Media Studies Office. This is a firm deadline and unexcused late papers will be subject to a full-letter grade penalty. A grade of "Incomplete" cannot be awarded in this class unless there are documented circumstances and the prior written approval of the Instructor. Failure to turn in the final research paper by the last day of the semester usually results in a failing grade being assigned to the student.

Please be sure to fill out this form, make a copy,  
and turn in the copy with your Formal Research Proposal.

**Outline for Formal Research Proposal (due 11/9):**

I. State your topic, and define the purpose of your project – exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory?

II. Specify the Problem (Chapters 5, 6, 12)

Determine whom /what to study

Specify the *meanings* of each *concept* you want to study

III. Review the Literature (Chapters 2, 17)

What is already known about the subject you are studying?

IV. Create the Research Design (Chapter 4)

Determine how you will measure the results  
(I.e., *operationalize your conceptualizations*)

V. What are your research methods?

*Quantitative*

*Qualitative*

VI. Reflect on any *Ethical Issues* (Chapter 3)

VII. Select Research Subjects (*Sampling*) (Chapter 7)

How will you choose the people you will study?

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**Your final paper (due 12/16) will include the following:**

Do the Data Collection (Chapters 4, 8, 9, 10, 11)

Do the Data Analysis (Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16)

Write up the data analysis, and offer your conclusions or observations concerning your research question.

Analyze the data

Report your findings in a formal paper