Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

This assignment was developed for my COM495 Great Ideas: Capstone in Communications (2), a senior seminar course all School of Communications students are required to take. The main task in the course is to write a good research paper so that it can be submitted to a journal, such as the Elon Journal, which has been published internally by the School of Communications.

Various types of students, such as journalism, broadcasting, strategic communications, communication science, and film students, come to my class. They have been exposed to different types of writing, but rarely to research paper writing. For students to write a research paper successfully in a 2-credit hour class, they need a framework, within which they can work. This long-term assignment is composed of four portions:

When students wrote a research paper in my previous classes, they had a hard time finding a topic that was grounded in theories and methodically feasible. To force students to think a topic, along with relevant theories and a feasible method, it is critical for an instructor to make them to consider theories and methods before they choose a topic.

Usually students came up with topic ideas very easily, but felt hard to find theories that were relevant to their ideas. To overcome the problem, this long-term assignment will ask them to explore theories first (assignment 1) and incorporate them into a topic by writing an introduction later (assignment 2). This reversed strategy would solve the critical issue of matching topic ideas with theories. Assignment 3 on research methods would allow students to think about a method before collecting data. Assignment 4 on peer review will help students think about their writing from readers' standpoint.

Ultimately I believe this long-term assignment will help students:

- find a topic that is grounded in theory
- find a method that is feasible
- be exposed to many communication theories
• be exposed to many methods that have been used in communication studies
• develop skills to evaluate research papers
• develop skills to read their paper from readers' standpoint

The Assignment I Distribute to Students

COM 495 - Great Ideas: Capstone in Communications
How to Write a Research Paper that is Theoretically Grounded and Methodically Feasible

General Instructions for Students
Before the midterm, you will complete four written assignments for a total of 160 points. Through these assignments, you will an opportunity to complete important components of a research paper, writing meaningful research questions, the introduction and the method section.

Goal
To identify and explore "great ideas" in the communication field through research.

Connection to Course Objectives
• You will explore a selected great idea in communication that is consistent with your specific major, concentration and area of interest
• You will demonstrate the ability to synthesize information for a primary or secondary level research project paper.
• You will be able to write clearly and accurately and demonstrate the ability to use an appropriate academic style for publication or presentation.
• You will conduct a research project and write a paper appropriate for submission to an academic journal or conference.

What you will have to do?
• Write assignment papers on a double-spaced A4 paper using APA format, and 12-point Arial font.
• Study and present a summary of a theory and a method chosen by you.
• Incorporate the theory and method into your paper.
• Engage in a group discussion and respond to others' questions and suggestions.

• When are these assignments due? I will prepare a semester outline with due dates for the following four assignments and place it in the Fall 2014 Syllabus on Moodle.

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**Assignment 1**  
**Summarize a Theory**

**Goal**  
You will get familiar with a communication theory you will use in your research paper.

**Task**  
Write a summary of a theory you choose from a list of theories below. 150-250 words; 40 points

**Process**
- select one of 16 theories below on a first-come, first-served basis. If you want to choose other theory, please see the instructor right away.
- summarize the theory you chose
- read two recent articles that cited the theory (APA style)
- write two potential topics that may take advantage of this theory
- find competing theories if there are and summarize them or play devil's advocate by arguing against the theory (at least 50 words)
- present your theory in class

**List of Theories you can Choose From**
1. Selective Perception Theory
2. Agenda Setting
3. Uses and Gratification Theory
4. Cultivation Theory
5. Semiotics
6. Social construction theory
7. Cognitive dissonance theory
8. Spiral of silence theory
9. Taylor's Six-Segment Strategy Wheel
10. Asch conformity experiments
11. Diffusion of innovation
12. Social media and public relations theory
13. Crisis management theory
14. One major film theory
15. Marxist media theory
16. Viral marketing

**Grading**

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Assignment 2
Write an Introduction for a Research paper

Task
Write the introduction of your paper. 300-500 words; 60 points

Process
• State your research question

• Explain why the research question is important (relevant to the theory you chose or significant to society)

• Describe the core concepts in your research question (definition of concepts) and the relationship between them.

• Write hypotheses (write possible answers to your proposed research question).

• Find scholarly articles that dealt with your topic and cite them in a bibliography (at least 5 sources)

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Assignment 3
Research Methods

Task
Explore a research method that might be used in your paper. 300-500 words; 40 points

Process
• select one of 10 research methods below by a group of two students on a first-come, first-served basis.

• summarize the method your group chose

• cite two recent articles that used the research method you chose (APA style)

• write why this method fits your research topic.

• find alternative methods if there are and explain the circumstances in which they could be used instead (50 words)

• present your group's research method and describe how you are going to use it in the method section of your paper.

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**Assignment 4**  
**Peer Review of Introduction & Method**

**Task**  
Write a peer review that will stimulate global revision of a draft to improve the ideas and organization of a paper. 200 words; 20 points

**Process**
- Each group will be composed of three students. Each student will read the paper by other two students. Do an oral peer review first and write a report at the end of the peer review session.
- Identify the merits of each paper. Give positive feedback first. Point out each paper’s strong points.
- Locate the research question and check whether its importance is well described.
- Ask questions about the meaning of unclear words, relevance of some concepts used or the organization of the paper.
- Ask for further information on key concepts; suggest more elaboration on points one found particularly important.

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