IRLS506-011 Research Methods (Virtual Seavey)

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COURSE NAME, NUMBER AND PREREQUISITES:

IRLS 506-011 Research Methods

[Prerequisite: IRLS 504 or consent of the instructor.]

Instructor: Professor Charles Seavey

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is a classic example of "what goes around, comes around." 506 is the first pure online course I taught at Arizona many, many years ago. It convinced me that we can, in fact, teach online although it is not for everybody. Anyway, onward.

But first, a little techno test: a streaming video clip. About which- this is just a test I am using. I've gotten a lot better at making these things, so wait a bit and better production values will appear. Maybe.

An audio version in WMA format.
And in Real Player format, go to OSCR for assistance.
Assistance is also available at OSCR: 520-621-6727, or 24 hour help on the web.

A word of advice here. Read the whole syllabus now. If there is critical information in here somewhere, and you miss it because you did not read this thing, guess whose fault it is?

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

506, as taught by the Professor is a mixture of more or less mainstream social science research methodology and some exposure to research/evaluation in our field. The idea is not to make researchers out of you, but to make you better consumers of research, in both a theoretical and practical sense. Libraries and information agencies are frequent targets of research, as well as depositories of research. Some of that research is quite well done. Some, not so very good. We will spend some time with systems used to evaluate libraries, as they are frequently the basis for research articles. Many users are both producers and consumers of research, so it is best that the librarian involved have at least some idea of what the process is all about.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:
Some techno suggestions: Go get the Firefox browser from [http://www.mozilla.org/](http://www.mozilla.org/) and use it instead of Internet Explorer. That being said... My computer is an iMac with a Windows partition. I write my lectures in HTML and test the output in Firefox and Internet Explorer on the Windows side, and Firefox and Safari on the Mac OS side. Videos (for which you really need a high speed connection) are recorded in WMV, but I post them to YouTube and what emerges is some other format. Audio clips are in WMA and RealPlayer files. The audio and video files that I produce contain exactly the same content. Beyond that I cannot guarantee anything.

Other techno items you will need- Adobe Acrobat, mentioned below. For those of you without high speed access get an audio plug-in for your browser such as RealPlayer, Microsoft Mediaplayer, or some other streaming audio player. You can go to Microsoft or Realplayer directly, or go to [WinPlanet](http://www.winplanet.com) or [Tucows](http://www.tucows.com) and see what you like the looks of. There will be an audio component, so start looking.

Gizmos: A basic four function calculator will handle anything we are going to do in this class, but it will require a lot of notes and keeping track of in-between stages on your part. A reasonably priced calculator with one or two memory functions will work nicely, or something that has some statistical functions will do even better. Eventually I will let you use a spreadsheet, but first we must learn some basics. Pretty much any spreadsheet will do. There is a tutorial on the beasties at the Tutorial tab on D2L.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** I prefer that for class matters you use the D2L email system. If D2L is down, or I do not seem to be looking at it, use seavey@email.arizona.edu. On Skype I am Desert11Sailor and after the class gets up and running I'll have office hours there.

In general I expect that you will check in on the class website at least every other day to see if you have email. D2L email will be the primary email system here, so you do have to check in frequently. You have to check the News section of D2L because that is where I post things for the entire class to read. And check the various discussion boards in case there are interesting things going on there. If something is there, and you miss it because you were not checking in, guess whose fault it is?

**Text and Readings**

The texts for the course will be *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, University of Chicago Press. As of early July new paperback copies are on Amazon for $11.56, and used as low as $6.99. The other text will be *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Statistics* 2nd ed (although I think the 1st ed will do as well) by Robert A. Donnelly. New on Amazon for $12.32, used starting at $7.58. You have to wonder how they come up with those prices... The stats book contains way more than we are going to cover in this class, but it is among the most accessible stats texts I know. Don't panic over the content, we'll only be using parts of it.

Other readings will all be online, either in a database available through the U of A library at [http://www.library.arizona.edu/search/articles/](http://www.library.arizona.edu/search/articles/) or [http://sabio.arizona.edu](http://sabio.arizona.edu) or simply floating on the web.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

The course will consist of lectures and discussion of common readings. Heavy emphasis will be placed on the student's ability to analyze and critique published research in the field. Participation in class discussion sessions is essential. See the schedule below for due dates. Everything but the final will be due while class is in session.

Statistics exercises: Students will solve a set of statistical problems, outside of class. Some of the questions will be done using a calculator, the others using a spreadsheet program. In general I can read almost any version of Excel or QuattroPro, Windows or Mac. Work done on Microsoft Works for reasons that are totally mysterious to me, are difficult to translate.

### Guidelines on Stats Quizzi

I. Some of the questions are descriptive in nature. I'll provide you with some data and some relatively simple questions involving descriptive statistics. You answer the questions, and everything is fine. For the descriptive questions:
RULE 1: Do your own work. This is not a committee, or team assignment.
RULE 2: You may use a calculator, abacus, Ouija board, whatever, but no computers.
RULE 3: Lay out all your work and all your calculations in a reasonably neat fashion so I can figure out what went wrong if you come up with the wrong answer. I tend to give a lot of partial credit for these things, but I have to see what mistakes you made in order to figure out how much you know, or don't know, about what is going on.

II. The other stats questions, and data, will be provided. In this case you will have to work out the answers on a spreadsheet.
RULES: Rules 1-3 apply here except for the bit about no computers.
There is no rule 6.
Rules for submitting material are down below. Pay attention to them because I will return material ungraded if it is not done properly.

There will be two exams during the semester, at roughly the one-third, and two-thirds points. They will be a mix of objective questions, and one or two essays. I am looking for evidence that your little gray cells are working and you get, conceptually, what the class is covering.

A Final Exam Along with the last class I will post a final exam. The final will involve evaluating some published research, as well as a short essay or two. The final will be due Monday, December 14th by 6 p.m. Tucson time.

Grading  Students will be evaluated on the following:
Statistics Assignment: 30% taken together
The two "thirds" exams: 40%
Final Exam: 20%
Class Participation: 10%

All material will be graded on a numerical basis. The following standards apply in assigning final grades:

A= 90 or above
B= 80-89
C= 70-79

I'm not particularly happy with that scale, but it is what the university dictates.

Numerical scores are not rounded up when computing grades.

A word on grading.

This is graduate school. Simply doing the work on time in a reasonable fashion earns a grade of "B." The grade of "A" is reserved for work that shows evidence of going beyond the mere requirements of completing the assignment. Heavy emphasis will be placed on the student's ability to analyze and critique the subject at hand- in other words, critical thinking is a must. Participation in class discussion sessions is essential.

A few words on evaluating research:

The main thing to remember here when evaluating the journal and the articles is evidence evidence evidence evidence evidence evidence. I am not interested in the stories they collectively tell- I am interested in how you dissect each item as evidence. Think of the things you are reading as your unit of analysis- you are a researcher asking questions, the articles are the evidence you have collected. What can you tell me about each? Look at the evidence- how do you describe it? What questions does it answer? The research evaluation guide below provides at least one possible framework for an approach. This framework does not necessarily apply to all research, it is just a suggestion. There are many frameworks for research evaluation, and having such usually helps you approach the beast.

One Set of Criteria for Evaluating Research Reports
The following is presented as a guideline only. Not all of it will apply to all research pieces, nor are these the only possible criteria that should be addressed. Each piece will require additional thought on the part of the evaluator. There's a lot of language in here that you are not going to understand right away. Do not worry about it, by the time you get there, you will have the terminology you need.

I. Report of Prior Research:
Is the literature cited relevant?
Is the literature cited significant?
Is the literature cited sufficiently identified so that you could retrieve it?

II. Purpose and Justification
Is it sufficient, logical, and convincing?
Is there a general problem area identified?
Is a specific problem evident?
Are definitions given and are they clearly operationalized?
Are assumptions stated?
Hypotheses: Are they stated- implied, clear, precise? Are they directional?
Is lack of an hypothesis accounted for?

III. Sampling (if appropriate):
Is the population clearly described, implied?
Is the sample clearly described?
Is it representative, random, adequate in size?
Are limitations on generalizability presented?

IV. Instrumentation:
Adequately described?
Reliable?
Valid for the purpose?

V. Procedures:
Are they clearly described?
Are extraneous variables controlled?
Is procedural bias controlled?

VI. Data Analysis:
Are statistical methods appropriate?
Are limitations pointed out?

VII. Results
Clearly presented?
Written description consistent with data?
Are there a minimum of inferences?
Are they debatable?

VIII. Interpretation:
Is it consistent with the results?
Relevant to the purpose?
Does it place the study in a broader perspective?
What does it signal?

A Tentative Schedule

I have things noted in weeks here. Think of this as a once-a-week class that meets at 8 a.m. on Thursday. In fact, that is when the lectures will pop up on D2L. I don't expect you to be sitting at your computer at 8 a.m., but I would think that by Sunday evening you had best have the lecture read. Hence, Week 1 starts Thursday, August 28. Week 2 starts Thursday, September 4. Etc. Etc. I say tentative because I have rarely been able to stick to a syllabus in my life. Who knows what we'll get going on?
When in doubt as to what is going on check the SIRLS calendar at http://www.sirls.arizona.edu/calendar or the UA calendar at http://catalog.arizona.edu/calendar/0809cal.html paying particular attention to such things as drop and add dates.

I will be in Flagstaff, September 10-13, but there will be a class. Any northern Arizonans in the crowd, we can arrange a meeting. Thanksgiving is exactly when it usually is and there will be no class. And nothing due. Enjoy the massive overeating that ensues. The last class will post on Wednesday, December 9, because the UA has decreed that classes officially end that day.

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<tr>
<td>October 8: Week 7: Theories and Hypotheses; Evidence and Variables First Stats Exam posts</td>
<td>October 15: Week 8: Experimental Design Issues First Stats Exam Due First &quot;Third&quot; exam posts</td>
<td>October 22: Week 9: &quot;Compared to What?&quot; Standards First &quot;Third&quot; exam due</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 19: Week 13: Thinking About History Second &quot;Third&quot; exam posts</td>
<td>December 3: Week 14: Guest Page Research Second &quot;Third&quot; exam due</td>
<td>December 9: Week 15: Final Considerations Final Posts- due Monday, December 14th by 6 p.m. Tucson time</td>
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**COURSE, SCHOOL, AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES:**

**Academic Code of Integrity**

Students are expected to abide by The University of Arizona [Code of Academic Integrity](http://www.academicintegrity.arizona.edu). "The guiding principle of academic integrity is that a student's submitted work must be the student's own." If you have any questions regarding what is acceptable practice under this Code, please ask me. I expect you to know the meaning of the word "plagiarism" and not even think about treading those particular waters. I expect all work I see to be yours, and yours alone. This is something I take very seriously. Bad things will happen should I catch you plagiarizing or ignoring conventions for referring to the work of others.

**Accommodating Disabilities**

The University has a [Disability Resource Center](http://www.disability.arizona.edu). If you anticipate the need for reasonable accommodations to meet the requirements of this course, you must register with the Disability Resource Center and request that the DRC send me, the Instructor, official notification of your accommodation needs as soon as possible. Please plan to meet with me by appointment or during office hours to discuss accommodations and how my course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate.

**Incompletes**

The current Catalog reads:

> The grade of I may be awarded only at the end of a term, when all but a minor portion of the course work has been satisfactorily completed. The grade of I is not to be awarded in place of a failing grade or when the student is expected to repeat the course; in such a case, a grade other than I must be assigned. Students should make arrangements with the instructor to receive an incomplete grade before the end of the term ... If the incomplete is not removed by the instructor within one year the I grade will revert to a failing grade.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** 1. Late material will be graded down at the rate of 10% of the grade per day late.
Which means that a paper that would normally grade a 90 is a day late, the grade is 81. If two days late the grade is 72. After that you don't want to think about it. If, and only if, you let me know beforehand that there are going to be problems we can make adjustments. Problems do not include vacation, family reunions, or trips to concerts. I can be flexible, but remember you are a student in graduate school.

2. I expect submitted papers to be written in clear, concise, and grammatically correct English. Material not meeting these standards will be redone until they do so, losing points along the way. Suggestions on how to write for this course are below, and I expect you to pay close attention to the tutorial labeled "What a Paper Should Look Like" in the tutorials section. All material will be submitted in electronic format. Standards for submission are in the box below. Kindly read them and follow directions. My inclination towards mercy on this topic is not what it used to be.

Standards for Submitting Material in Electronic Format

In order to facilitate the whole process of grading and returning papers, quizzes, and anything else, in electronic form the following standards should be followed. If material is not submitted according to these standards it will arrive back in your lap with no grade assigned. I will accept submissions written in Word, or WordPerfect, and saved as .doc, .wpd, or RTF files. If you are going to use anything else, check with me first. Do not write papers in HTML- I think I said that somewhere already.

1. Formatting Your Submission

Word processed papers are the only kind I will accept. The following standards apply.

A. Margins.
Top and bottom margins: 1 inch.
Left and right margins: 1.25 inches, or as close as you can get. This largely has to do with what I can see on a screen. Trifocals and old age are not necessarily compatible with teeny tiny print.

B. Type Size.
Type size should be 12 points. I don't care about font, but have mercy on my trifocals and set it at 12 points. I recognize that larger point sizes are a way of artificially lengthening your paper, and will automatically reset anything larger than 12 points back to the required size. Please do not use the Courier typeface.

C. Heading. The heading of all submissions should include the following information:
Your name
The title of the paper, or whatever.
The class for which the paper has been written.
The name of the professor for whom the paper has been written.
The semester in which the paper has been written.
The word processor and version in which the paper is written.

Hence:

Another Country: Searching for the Southwest United States
Your Name
9450, Spring, 2008
Professor Seavey
WordPerfect version 11

I don't care if it is centered like, that, or in that particular order, but the information elements should all be present.

2. Checking Your Submission

A. Spell Checking.
Most, if not all, current word processors have a built in spell checker. Use it. Spell check dictionaries are not always comprehensive, so if the spell checker complains about a word that seems legitimate to you, have a dictionary handy just to make sure you have it correct. If my spell checker complains about something in your submission, that is what I do...
if it is a word that does not exist, or is spelled wrong, woe be unto you.

B. Proof Reading
The spell checker only catches spelling errors, it doesn't care about context. So if you are thinking "too many" and write "two many," the spell checker won't catch it. The prof once wrote a lengthy explanation of a statistical technique called "factor analysis," and distributed it to a doctoral seminar. Everybody was fascinated with my somewhat peculiar explanation of "factory analysis." The point is, read your paper, and see if it makes sense. Or have your significant other read it, or your next door neighbor. Most folks, after they have read their own work once or twice, see exactly what they want to see, not the mistakes.

C. Grammar Checking
Most word processors have a grammar checker. I have mixed feelings about these because most of them are set to something akin to standard business English usage, which may not be appropriate for academic papers. Word underlines things that it does not like in green. I at least look at those bits and see if I can figure out the nature of the complaint. The use of "that" and "which," in my work has improved considerably since I started using this.

3. Naming Your Submission
A. Filenames
The name of your submission will be your last name, and only your last name. Modifications are acceptable only where two classmembers share a common last name. In that case the form of entry will be: last name first initial: seaveyc, rather than just seavey. Note that capitalization is not necessary. Do not worry if you wind up sending in more than one thing with the same file name. The professor is old enough to understand folders, sub-directories, and tree structures. Trust me, I can keep all this stuff separate.

B. Extenders
Most wordprocessor (in fact most current programs) assign an identifier, known as a file extender, to files processed by that program. The file extender identifies the type of file to the user- human or computer- trying to look at the contents of that file. Some examples:

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<th>File Extender</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excel (a spreadsheet)</td>
<td>.xls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WordPerfect (most recent version)</td>
<td>.wpd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lotus Organizer</td>
<td>.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Joint Photographic Experts Group graphics file</td>
<td>.jpg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The program you are using will assign the file extender. Make sure that this is so. Experiment with whatever you are using and if file extenders are not assigned, ask the prof for advice.

That, I think, should do it. If there are questions, let me know.

3. Papers may be written in either Word or WordPerfect. I can translate pretty much any other wordprocessor, although if you are not using Word or WP please check with me first- send me a test file just to make sure I can translate before we get into difficulties. If you are using Microsoft Works, please try and find something else. For reasons known only to Bill Gates, Works is difficult to translate.

**HOW TO WRITE FOR THIS COURSE**

Because this course is about research we will follow the instructions to authors of *Library Quarterly*, the original library research journal, as far as citation styles go. Ignore the formatting stuff, do pay attention to citation style. Otherwise:

"Say a thing in one sentence as straight as it can be made, and then drop it." William James
I expect that papers for a graduate level course will be written as if for publication. Not only must the basic facts of the subject be mastered, and all the relevant sources explored, but the text must be written clearly:

1. Who, what, where, when, and exactly how much must always be obvious. Know what you wish to say, and say only that; define new terms or new uses of old ones.

2. Avoid ambiguity. "You can't put too much water in a nuclear reactor."

3. Link sentences and paragraphs logically and intelligibly. The reader shouldn't have to rearrange your ideas to make sense out of them.

4. Sentences should not be so long that the reader loses his or her way. Otherwise you are likely to lose the readers attention, as so often happened with the prose of 19th century essayists such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was not only a doctor, professor, and novelist, but also the father of the famous Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (an intriguing character who combined the ideals of New England humanism with the prejudices of the upperclass, wealthy society in which he moved)...and before you know it you will have wandered very far afield. For practice, read lots of Jesse Shera. Or Barbara Kingsolver.

5. Avoid irrelevant or tangential topics. Stick to the point. [see number 4]

6. No obstacle should come between you and your reader. When revising, imagine the reader over your shoulder and apply the rules listed above before typing your final product.

GRADING:

All material will be graded on a numerical basis. The following standards apply in assigning final grades:

A= 90 or above  
B= 80-89  
C= 70-79

INSTRUCTOR NAME AND CONTACT ADDRESSES:

Instructor: Charley Seavey

Email address: seavey@email.arizona.edu

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