MLIS 7700 **Research Methods**
**Course Syllabus**
Valdosta State University
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Instructor: Wallace C. Koehler, PhD
Email: wkoehler@valdosta.edu
Voice: 229 245-3732
Fax: 229 259-5055

Address: MLIS Program, Odum Library
Valdosta State University
1500 N. Patterson St.
Valdosta, GA 31698


This course is a Web based course. We will never meet "in person" The course consists of sixteen modules, each addressing aspects of research methods for the library and information science disciplines.

## Purpose

MLIS7700 introduces library school students to social science research methods. Student will be exposed to the various approaches to social science research qualitative – the case study – and quantitative approaches. Students will perform small-scale research projects. They will also develop skills in the research uses of libraries and the needs of patrons they may serve in the future.

## Course Objectives

I have several objectives I wish to achieve with this course. These are:

To quiet the fears and anxieties many students have with quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. If we achieve nothing more than a comfort level with the use and interpretation of research methods, we will have reached a level of success.

Most students in schools of library and information sciences will not pursue research careers where these methodologies will be used as tools of the trade. It is, however, almost certain that working librarians and other information professionals will need to prepare periodic reports. And even more of you will read and interpret the work of others. In order to interpret the work of others, it is necessary that you have the skills to evaluate their research methodologies. Good results derived from bad research are garbage. This is the more abstract and generalized form of GIGO.

A few of you will become researchers. There are many career opportunities ranging from information brokerage through academic research and teaching where research skills are required.
Finally, different kinds of research problems are "solved" using different qualitative and quantitative approaches. We will address these different strategies and learn to select the "best" research design to meet our particular needs. Be Warned: I am very picky about this. Given very friendly computer software, there is NO excuse (where once ease of calculation was used) for sloppy statistical choices. I can only accept two excuses for less than full rigor in methodological choices: time constraints and limited financial resources.

**Computer Equipment Needs**

In order to successfully complete this class, students should have access at minimum to a 486 PC or equivalent, 56K Internet connection, an email client, a Word compatible word processor, an Excel compatible spreadsheet, Adobe Acrobat Reader (free from Adobe), and RealPlayer (free from Real). There are two hardware needs: speakers and a CD.

In the last third of the class, you will need to have access to a computer loaded with SPSS. There are several choices open to you. You may buy SPSS or you may use SPSS products at a University System of Georgia school near you.

**Text Books**

Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 9ed.

Thomas Mann, *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*
The Mann text is an excellent discussion of the hows and whys of library research, use of facilities, and so forth. To be read during the first three weeks of class.

**Required Reading:**

Thomas Mann, *Library Research Models*

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 or subsequent editions)

C.P. Snow, *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, 1959

Martha Williams, "The State of Databases Today" see most recent edition of *Gale Directory of Databases*

Wallace Koehler, Digital libraries and World Wide Web sites and page persistence *International Research* 4, 4, 1999.
http://informationr.net/ir/4-4/paper60.html

T. Michael Ciolek, The six quests for the electronic grail: Current approaches to information quality in WWW resources. *Revue Informatique et Statistique dans les Sciences Humaines* (1-4), 45-71, 1996. Also on line: http://www.ciolek.com/PAPERS/six-quests1996.html

D. Shaw, "The Human-Computer Interface for Information Retrieval," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 26, 1991.

American National Standards Institute, American National Standard for the Preparation of Scientific Papers for Written or Oral Presentation, ANSI Z39.16-1979

## Course Requirements

**Research Exercises** 1-4: 60 percent of grade (15 percent for each exercise). Research Exercises 1, 2, and 4 are not to exceed five pages each. For exercise 2, tabular appendices, if used, are not included in the page count. Each of the three statistical exercises assigned under research exercise 3 is not to exceed two (2) pages, including tables.

(1) Case Study.
(2) Bibliometric Exercise.
(3) Statistical exercises using SPSS
(4)Critical Thinking
(5) Research Project (Group Exercise)

**Final Exam 15 percent of grade**. Comprehensive take home open book exam. Remember that everything presented in "class" or assigned as required readings can be asked. In addition, where appropriate video tapes will also be shown. Examination questions can also be built around these.

Practical Exercises Several practical exercises in the use of SPSS and in research observation are planned toward the end of the semester. These are not graded, EXCEPT that a good faith effort and participation is required. Work sheets, printouts, and other working papers are to be turned in. Failure to participate will cost two (2) percentage points from the final grade average each.

## Research Speak

For a little research "humor" click here. There is more truth to this than you know.

## Course Calendar

## Grades

Individual assignment weights are provided above. Final grades will be assigned as follows:

A – 91-100
B – 81-90
C – 71-80
D – 60-70
F – 0-69