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ABSTRACT
        The most effective activity for teaching
communication research students the nature of the social science
research process is to provide students with the opportunity to
conduct an actual research study. Such an experience promotes and
emphasizes active, rather than passive, learning; students finish the
class with a strong understanding of the research process, the major
concepts associated with it, and the importance of ethics in
research. In order to integrate an actual research study into the
course, it is necessary to plan and prepare certain aspects of the
research process in advance. First, a complete description of the
assignment as well as the research evaluation form used to critique
the project was prepared in advance. Second, an initial design of the
research questionnaire was prepared in advance because there would
not have been time for students to do it during the course. Third,
the procedure for selecting a representative sampling was prepared
before the semester began. When the semester began, then, students
were ready to conduct a pilot test and then plunge into the project
itself, which focused on the campus radio station at the University
of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; its main methodology was a survey via
telephone. Such a project functions as an excellent example for
generating discussion concerning the numerous research terms and
concepts addressed during the semester. Students are provided with
the opportunity to apply the terms and concepts to training the
student to deliver a survey. (Includes an appendix of research
material.) (TB)

Experiential Learning in the Communication Research Methods

Course: Doing Research to Understand Research

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the importance of doing research to understand research; it provides an example of how educators can integrate a research study as a learning experience into the undergraduate research course. Specifically, this paper uses, as an example, a research study conducted during the Fall 1993 in the Communication Research Methods course at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. The topic of the research concerned the campus radio station, WUEC-FM. The research methodology of survey was employed; the invesigative strategy of the telephone interview was used to gather data.

One must learn by doing the thing;
for though you think you know it,
you have no certainty, until you try.

Sophocles

The purpose of the undergraduate course, "Communication
Research Methods," is to provide an introduction to the nature of
the social scientific research process involved in investigating
communication. This topic can be explored through lecture,
discourse, in-class exercises, library exercises, guest speakers,
videos, the integration of computer skills, and exams designed to
promote critical and creative thinking. The most effective
activity for teaching the nature of the social scientific
research process, however, is to provide students with the
opportunity to conduct an actual research study. Such an
experience promotes and emphasizes active, rather than passive
learning; students finish the class with a strong understanding
of the research process, the major concepts associated with it,
and the importance of ethics in research. As Berko (1993)
explains,"undergraduates...especially freshmen and sophomores,
may not really understand what...research studies entail. Since
many people only learn by doing, it is often a good experience

for them to learn about research, its difficulties and foibles by...doing a simple [research study]" (p. 1).

The purpose of this paper is to provide educators with an example of how they can integrate an actual research study into the undergraduate communication research methods course. The example provided in this paper concerns a research study which was conducted by the students in an undergraduate Communication Research Methods course at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire during the Fall Semester 1993. The research study, which focused on the campus radio station, WUEC-FM, employed the methodology of survey; the investigative strategy of the telephone interview was used to gather data.

It is important to note that the example provided in this paper is only one of several research projects conducted by students in the research class during the past few years. Every year, a new research study is conducted in the class. During the Fall 1992 course, the students conducted a content-analysis of the front-page of five different newspapers in order to assess the amount of coverage alloted to character/competence/image issues vs. platform/political issues in the Presidential campaign (Sims and Giordano, 1992). Students in the Spring 1994 class are researching sources related to violence on television. They will write a review of literature concerning the topic; in addition, they will design a survey instrument. The actual survey

data will be gathered by the students in the Fall 1994 research class.

In order to provide educators with an example of how such a study can be integrated into the communication research methods course, first, this paper reviews some areas that should be considered related to planning the research study; second, the research study is discussed in terms of how it was addressed during class time within the semester. The paper concludes with some thoughts concerning the benefits of integrating an actual research study into the communication research methods course, as well as the importance and advantages of providing students with an individual experience rather than a group experience.

Planning the Research Study

In order to integrate an actual research study into one's course, it is necessary to plan and prepare certain aspects of the research process in advance. As the research study reviewed in this paper was to be conducted during the Fall Semester 1993, it was necessary to address the following aspects of the study before the semester began:

(1) Description of the Assignment: A complete description of the assignment as well as the Evaluation Form which would be used to critique the project was prepared in advance (See Appendix A). Briefly, the individual project required students to

conduct telephone surveys designed to research WUEC-FM, the campus radio station, calculate the results from their research, and then submit a Results Repcrt (APA style) of the research study. The assignment required students to address the following information in their Results Report: methodology, results, and discussion.

It is important to note that instructors should carefully select the topic of research; topics which interest students can function to generate enthusiasm for the project. For example, the research study addressed in this paper concerned the student radio station; furthermore, it was made clear to the students that the administration and the management of the radio station intended to review the results of the study. The students were enthused about conducting research related to their radio station; they also were motivated to conduct rigorous research as they knew the results would be seriously reviewed.[1]

(2) Survey Questionnaire Design: Although it would have been an excellent learning experience for the students to both design and administer the survey questionnaire, there simply would not have been enough time during the semester. Thus, an initial draft of the survey questionnaire was designed in advance; it was reviewed by six experts knowledgeable in survey and/or broadcast research. After the semester began, students were given a copy of the first draft of the survey; they were

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instructed to practice delivery of the survey, review it for problematic areas, and then offer suggestions, if necessary, for minor changes in the survey. The students did offer some suggestions for minor changes, and they were addressed. Thus, the class did have the opportunity to offer some imput into the design of the survey. They also were informed of the steps taken to establish measurement validity of the survey; that is, they were informed about the six experts who reviewed the survey. Thus, the term "content validity" (face and panel) was introduced to the class.

(3) <u>Sample</u>: In order to expedite the research process, the procedure for selecting a representative and random sample was designed before the semester began. The purpose of the research was to investigate the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of both community members and university students concerning the campus radio station; thus, it was necessary to calculate the ratio of community members to university students in order to determine the sample. Two sources for telephone numbers were used; one source was the community telephone book, and the other source was a stratified random list of student telephone numbers prepared by the university administration. The student sample was stratified according to class status (freshman, sophomore, etc.). A ratio reflective of the number of students in each class status was calculated, and subjects were selected accordingly. The

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procedure for choosing a random sample also was determined in advance; clear instructions were provided for students (See Appendix B). Thus, when the terms "representative," "random," and "stratified" were reviewed in class lecture, it was possible to use the sample for their survey project as an example. The example was something with which they could relate; it was meaningful to them.

(4) Telephones: In order to lessen the financial burden of students, arrangements were made to ensure use of university telephones for the study. As a room with telephones for use by University Relations already existed, it simply was a matter of obtaining approval to use and reserve the room.

(5) Organization: Students were given a packet which contained a selected number of pages from the telephone book, a selected numer of pages from the student telephone list, a telephone log to record the research process, 25 survey questionnaires, and a sheet of instructions (See Appendix B).

The Semester Research Project

Students were informed at the beginning of the semester about the research they would be conducting; as indicated previously, a complete description of the project was included in their course packet. The first major area that needed to be addressed during the beginning of the semester concerned

training the students to deliver the survey. Thus, for the
first fifteen minutes of class during the first few weeks of the
semester, students practiced delivering the survey. This
exercise taught them the importance of interviewer training in
relation to procedure validity and reliablity.

After the class appeared to understand the importance of
administering and delivering the survey in a consistent manner,
they were instructed to begin a "pilot test." A specified period
of time was identified, and the students conducted the pilot
test. The pilot test provided an example of the steps that
researchers can undertake in order to reduce measurement error
and increase the reliability of a study.

Following the pilot test, the actual research study
began. Beginning and ending dates for the study were made clear
to the students as well as the approved times for delivering the
survey via the telephone. During the designated research time
period, a portion of class time was allocated to discussing the
progress of the study. Students often would ask questions related
to either the survey design or some of the answers they were
receiving from the respondents; such questions revealed that the
students were experiencing "discoveries" about the research
process.

As the due date for the Results Report approached, questions
arose concerning how to prepare the research report. Discussion

thus centered on both APA style and the type of information that is featured in the methods section (subjects, procedure, and data treatment), the results section, and the discussion section (importance of the results, problems and/or limitations, and suggestions for future research). It was at this point in the learning experience that students appeared to truly internalize their research studies. As they were required to describe the sample and procedure, calculate and report the results, and consider potential problems and/or limitations associated with their studies, they demonstrated a stronger understanding of the research process. They had learned by doing it; they thus were able to discuss the research process with some certainty and confidence.

Conclusion

Although the project of integrating an actual research study into the communication research methods course requires the instructor to visualize, plan and carefully organize in advance of the class, the outcome of the experience can be extremely rewarding and beneficial for both the students and the instructor. The project functions as an excellent example for generating discussion concerning the numerous research terms and concepts addressed during the semester; students are provided with the opportunity to apply the terms and concepts to

their individual projects.

Most certainly, instructors might prefer to organize group research projects in order to facilitate the evaluation stage; however, it is the individual experience that truly provides the student with a more in-depth understanding of the entire research process. The group experience can be valuable and can stimulate learning but often students only focus on one part of the process of research instead of the entire process. As Stack and Hickson (1991) make clear,

> although it is tempting to put students into research teams,
> the [research] course should be conducted solo. The team
> approach typically ends up with students doing only what
> they enjoy. Hence, some students will become quite
> proficient at questionnaire design or other measures and not
> at entering and analyzing data. Others will thrive in the
> library doing the literature review and avoid any
> interaction with participants. Still others will sit in
> front of a computer terminal and become enmeshed with
> statistical analyses. To become a well-rounded researcher
> and to understand the research process, the student must
> tackle each part of the process (p.353).

Communication Research Methods is a challenging course to teach. Usually, when students begin the course, they have little knowledge of the nature and language of the research culture. A

lot of information is presented and discussed. It is through the research project that students truly begin to understand and comprehend the course concepts and the language of the research culture. It is the process of applying both the concepts and the language through "doing" which creates such understanding.

Notes

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Following completion of the course, the instructor checked the results calculated by each student and then compiled all of the results into a final report for the radio station and the administration.

References

Berko, R. (1993, November). Integrating a research project into the nonverbal or interpersonal course. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Miami, Florida.

Sims, J. and Giordano, J. (1993, Fall). Newspaper coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign: A content analysis of character/competence/image issues versus platform/political issues. Journal of Communication Studies. 12 (1).

Stacks, D. and Hickson, M. (1991). The communication investigator: Teaching research methods to undergraduates. Communication Quarterly, 39, (4), 351-357.

Appendix A

Individual Project: WUEC-FM Research

Telephone Survey..................100 points (five points for
each completed survey)

Survey Results Report............100 points

As indicated above, this individual project consists of two
parts:

A. Each student will conduct telephone surveys designed to
    research WUEC-FM, the campus radio station. This section of
    the project is worth 100 points. Each completed telephone
    survey is worth five points. Students who complete 20
    telephone surveys will receive 100 points. On-campus
    telephones will be used.

B. Each students will prepare a Survey Results Report, which
    will be submitted in the form of a written (typed; 6-10
    pages) APA style document. See pages 85-89 of Frey, L.,
    Botan, C., Friedman, P., and Kreps, G. (1991) and your APA
    Manual for style guidelines. The Form used to evaluate the
    Survey Results Report is featured on the page following the
    description of this assignment. Please submit the Evaluation
    Form with your completed Report. The Survey Results Report
    should feature the following information:

    1. Title Page (section 1.06 APA); Be creative but clear!

    2. Methodology (section 1.09 APA)
        Describe for the reader how the research was conducted.
        Identify the Methods section with the appropriate heading
        level; the following subsections of the Methods section
        also should be identified with the appropriate heading:

        A. Subjects
        B. Procedures
        C. Data Treatment

3. Results (section 1.10 APA)
Provide a straightforward account of the findings. Do not interpret or discuss the findings in this section. Figures and/or tables may be featured, but please note Sections 3.59--3.82 of the APA Manual for proper style. (Figures and/or tables are referred to in the text of the Results section, but featured at the end of the Report). Identify the Results section with the appropriate heading.

4. Discussion (section 1.11 APA)
In this section, the author interprets the results reported in the preceding section. Address the following three areas:

   a. The importance and utility of the results
   b. Identify the problems and limitations of the study (See Chapter 15 FBFK)
   c. Suggest new topics worth studying, new questions worth asking, and new procedures worth trying.

5. In addition, please address the following issues at some point in your Report:

   a. Reliability
   b. Validity
   c. Ethical Considerations

This Evaluation Form should be submitted with your survey Results Report. Please write your name in the blank.

Evaluation Form for Individual Project:
WUEC-FM Survey Results Report (100 points)

Name: _____

1. Title page ....05%_____

2. Methods Section...............................20%_____

    Subjects
    Procedures
    Data Treatment

3. Results Section..............................15%_____

    Tables
    Figures

4. Discussion Section............................15%_____

    Importance/Utility of Results
    Problems/Limitations
    Suggestions for Future Research

5. Reliability Addressed in Report?................05%_____

6. Validity Addressed in Report?....................05%_____

7. Ethical Considerations Addressed in Report?......05%_____

8. Use of APA Style................................10%_____

9. Writing...20%_____
    Grammar/spelling/punctuation; appropriate use of
    language; sentence structure; transitions

        Survey Results Report Total................_____/100pts

        Completed Telephone Surveys......._____X5=_____/100pts

        Total Points for Individual Project......._____/200pts

Appendix B

Selecting the Random Sample

1. Your goal is to submit 17 completed interviews from the community telephone list. You will be given a student telephone list (stratified random) at a later point with instructions. You will be required to complete three interviews from that list.

2. Adhere to the following instructions when selecting a telephone number from the community list:

   a. For each new page, start with the third number in the first column (far left). Call each number after it until you successfully complete an interview. If you don't complete an interview from the first column of numbers, then begin at the top of the second column (middle). You should be able to complete an interview by the end of the second column. DO NOT select a number from the third column (far right) at this point. You will return to the third column at a later time.

   b. Use the green telephone log to record your progress. Please make note of the page number of the telephone number to the left of "number dialed" column. Use the back of the green page to continue recording your progress. Additional forms will be distributed at a later point.

   c. You may return to a page if you need to attempt a second or third try on a particular telephone number.

   d. After you have completed one telephone call from each page, THEN return to the first page and begin with the first number at the top of the third column (far right). Follow the same procedure as above but select numbers ONLY from the third column this time. After you have completed a total of 17 interviews, you may stop the process.

   e. If you lose your telephone pages, find another (1993-94) Altoona/Chippewa Falls/Eau Claire Area telephone book and pull out your assigned pages from it.

   f. You may mark the telephone book pages if it will help you to keep track of your place. You will be required to submit the telephone pages with the telephone log and the completed surveys.

   g. A specified number of completed survey telephone numbers will be called again for a reliability check. Please do not even think about falsifying data. Students who submit falsified data will not pass the class.

Other Instructions

1. Deliver the survey as instructed in class. Try to remain as
    consistent as possible in the administration and delivery of
    the survey.

2. If you reach someone whom you know, or they know you,
    continue with the survey. Make a note in the upper right
    hand corner of the survey of the "problem".

3. If you encounter any difficult situations, make a note in the
    upper right hand corner of the survey and plan to discuss it
    in class as soon as possible.

4. Please deliver the survey in a professional manner. Remember,
    you are serving as a public relations vehicle for WUEC-FM,
    the Communication and Journalism Department, this course in
    research methods, and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

5. You may begin survey administration Tuesday evening September
    28. We will designate Tuesday 9/28 and Wednesday evening
    9/29 as the official pilot study test time. After that
    point, we will discuss any problems in class and adjust
    procedures/forms if necessary. If possible, we will use
    pilot study data, so please keep it organized.

6. Telephones are located in Schneider 203 and are reserved for
    our use during the following times:

    9/28/93-10/2/93   Tuesday through Saturday 5:30pm-9:30pm

    10/4/93-10/6/93   Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 5:30-9:30pm

    10/8/93-11/06/93   ' Friday and Saturdays   5:30-9:30pm

7. Keep all of your work as organized as possible. Remember, you
    will be required to prepare a report regarding the nature of
    your individual research project; so you will have to be able
    to describe the how you implemented the method of survey.

*Interviews are to be conducted only between 5:30pm-9:30pm

TELEPHONE LOG   INTERVIEWER NAME_____
WUEC-FM SURVEY
FALL 1993

CODES   B = Busy   AM= Answering machine
          D = Disconnected/Etc. NE= No Eligibles
          R = Refuse   BZ= Business
          L = Language Problem
          S = Successful Completion
          NA= No Answer

NUMBER DIALED	FIRST TRY Day/Code	SECOND TRY Day/Code	THIRD TRY Day/Code

WUEC 89.7 FM SURVEY Fall 1993

Phone Number:_____

Interviewer: _____

Subject #_____

HELLO, MY NAME IS_____AND I'M CONDUCTING

SOME RESEARCH FOR A COURSE IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE. WE'RE NOT SELLING ANYTHING

AND WE'RE NOT ASKING YOUR NAME. WE'RE TALKING WITH PEOPLE 12

YEARS AND OLDER IN THE EAU CLAIRE AREA ABOUT WUEC-89.7 FM, THE

UNIVERSITY RADIO STATION. YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER WAS GENERATED BY

MEANS OF A RANDOM PROCESS. THESE QUESTIONS WILL TAKE ABOUT FIVE

MINUTES; DO YOU HAVE TIME TO HELP ME OUT?

[If you are uncertain about the respondent's age, ask: "are you
12 years or older?"

If yes, continue with the survey. If no, ask to speak to someone
in the house who meets the requirements].

THANK YOU, FIRST, I MUST INFORM YOU THAT YOU MAY DISCONTINUE YOUR
PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY AT ANY TIME, IF YOU SO CHOOSE.

1.   TO BEGIN, I DIALED, _____--CORRECT?

2.   IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU HAVE RESPONDED TO THIS
     TELEPHONE SURVEY?

     Yes_____   No_____

     If NO, thank respondent and discontinue the survey.

3.   HAVE YOU EVER LISTENED TO WUEC, 89.7FM, THE UNIVERSITY RADIO
     STATION?

     Yes_____   No_____
     If yes, continue with question number four.
     If no, skip to question number six.

Subject #_____

4. WHAT KIND OF MUSIC DO YOU PRIMARILY LISTEN TO ON WUEC?
    (Do not aid memory of respondent)

    _____   1. Classical
                                  2. Jazz
    (write in # of music)   3. Progressive/Alternative
                                  4. Heavy Metal
                                  5. Cultural Diversity
                                  6. Folk
                                  7. Blues
                                  8. Other (Please specify)

                                  _____

5. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RECEPTION OF WUEC?
    (read the list)

    _____EXCELLENT
    _____GOOD
    _____SATISFACTORY
    _____POOR

NOW, I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT MUSIC
PROGRAMMING,...

6. WHAT TYPE OF MUSIC WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR BROADCAST ON
    WUEC, THE UNIVERSITY RADIO STATION?

    [Do not aid memory of respondent]

    _____(write in number of music)

                                  1.   Clas Rock
                                  2.   Soft Rock
                                  3.   Hard Rock
7. IF YOU WERE TO CHOOSE A   4.   Rock Oldies
    SECOND TYPE OF MUSIC,   5.   Prog/Alt
    WHAT WOULD THAT BE?   6.   Heavy Metal
                                  7.   Grunge
                                  8.   Country
                                  9.   Folk
    _____   10. Reggae
    (write in # of music)   11. Blues
                                 12. R & Blues
                                 13. Disco   21. Rap
8. IF YOU WERE TO CHOOSE   14. Jazz   22. Top 40
    A THIRD TYPE OF MUSIC,   15. Opera   23. Cultural Div
    WHAT WOULD THAT BE?   16. Classical   24. No Opinion
                                 17. Big Band   25. Other
                                 18. Polka   (Specify)
                                 19. Show Tunes
    _____   20. E-Z Listen
    (write in # of music)

NOW, I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT OTHER TYPES OF
PROGRAMMING...

9. IS THERE ANY TYPE OF NON-MUSIC PROGRAMMING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE
   TO HEAR BROADCAST ON THE UNIVERSITY RADIO STATION?

   Yes _____   No_____

   If Yes, continue with question number ten.
   If No, skip to question number 13.

10. WHAT TYPE OF NON-MUSIC PROGRAMMING WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR
    BROADCAST ON WUEC? (do not read list)

a._____	1. National News
YOUR 1ST CHOICE?	2. Local News
	3. Talk Shows
	4. Call-in Shows
	5. Sports News
	6. Sports Play-by-play
b._____ __	coverage
YOUR 2NL CHOICE?	7. Public Affairs
	8. No opinion
	9. Other (Please specify_____)

11. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR SPORTS PROGRAMMING BROADCAST ON WUEC
    89.7FM?

    Yes_____   No_____

    If no, skip to question number 13.

12. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR WUEC BROADCAST PLAY-BY-PLAY
    COVERAGE OF UW-EAU CLAIRE SPORTING EVENTS?

    Yes_____   No _____

NOW, I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS ....

13. I'M GOING TO READ A LIST OF EDUCATION LEVELS. WHEN I COME
TO THE LAST FORMAL EDUCATION LEVEL YOU'VE COMPLETED, PLEASE
STOP ME.

_____GRADE SCHOOL OR LESS
_____SOME HIGH SCHOOL
_____HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
_____TECHNICAL SCHOOL
_____COLLEGE
_____SOME GRADUATE SCHOOL OR ADVANCED
DEGREE

14. ARE YOU CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN ANY COURSES AT UWEC?

_____Yes   _____No

15. I'M GOING TO READ A LIST OF AGE GROUPS. WHEN I COME TO YOUR
AGE GROUP, PLEASE STOP ME.

12-17_____   31-45_____
18-24_____   46 and over_____
25-30_____

16. TO CONCLUDE, IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SAY
REGARDING THE PROGRAMMING OF WUEC 89.7FM?

_____

_____

_____

17. THANK YOU FOR YOU TIME. YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE A GREAT HELP IN
OUR RESEARCH PROJECT.
(Interviewer, check the next one on your own).

Sex: _____Male   _____Female