

GUIDELINES FOR:

COMM 492 Independent Study and COMM 497 Independent Research

Department of Communications

Salisbury University

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What are COMM 492 Independent Study and CMAT 497 Independent Research?

These courses are designed to give you the opportunity to work one-on-one with a Communications faculty member on a subject you choose in consultation with the professor.

You can study an area in which we do not offer a course, such as *Freedom of Speech* or *Gender Portrayals in Media*. You might expand on a subject you began in another course by studying it in more detail, like conducting surveys on *Deception in Interpersonal Relationships*. You could also do a creative project, building off your course knowledge, such as designing a film script or a magazine. Projects must have a communications component, be well designed and executed, and be approved by a faculty supervisor and the Department Chair. Students generally complete a paper for COMM 492 and COMM 497. While there may be some variation by instructor, the general rule on length is ten pages per credit hour taken: 10 pages for 1 credit hour, 20 pages for 2 credit hours, 30 pages for 3 credit hours, and 40 pages for 4 credit hours.

Students who choose to undertake COMM 492 or COMM 497 are expected to possess the requisite skills for the task. First, you should have strong writing skills. This means having a firm grasp of correct grammar and usage, as well as a proficiency with good essay form and structure. A familiarity with the elements of a scholarly paper is preferred. Second, you need solid research skills, including the ability to obtain resource materials both online and in the library, plus the ability to design your own project in consultation with the professor. Third, you should have an interest in and prior knowledge of the subject. It is preferred that you have completed previous work with the subject and are pursuing an already established avenue of study. Finally, you should be a motivated self-starter who works well independently with minimal supervision.

What are the differences between COMM 492 Independent Study and COMM 497 Independent Research?

COMM 492 Independent Study

Students must choose a topic for investigation with the advice of an instructor prior to registration. The student must then submit a proposal including a letter of intent, an outline of the proposed study and an abstract of the intended topic area. Prior familiarity and work with the topic are recommended. Prerequisite: Permission of the department chair. **Hours arranged.**

COMM 497 Independent Research

This course has been designed to encourage students to pursue an important area of research in communication. This course allows a student to study a subject area in more depth than possible in the traditional classroom setting. With the advice of an instructor, the student must submit a proposal including a letter of intent, an outline of the proposed study with bibliography and an abstract of the intended topic area. Ideally, the topic should be new research with an addendum to an earlier project. A public presentation of research is required. Prerequisites: C or better in COMM 297, (at least 3.0 GPA in COMM courses), permission of the department chair, and approval and cooperation of supervising instructor. **Four hours per week.**

While the descriptions above may seem more similar than different, there are two important distinctions:

1. COMM 497 is considered “traditional” scholarly research. The student will prepare a research report that follows the rules of the *American Psychological Association Style Manual*. COMM 492, by contrast, is not limited to projects and limitations that fit those constraints.
2. COMM497 requires a public presentation of the research project. Ways to fulfill that requirement include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Presentation at the annual Salisbury University Student Research Conference
 - b. Presentation before the COMM faculty

Independent Study and Independent Research Eligibility Checklist

- _____ 1. For COMM 497, I have a grade of C or better in COMM 297: Communication Research. For both COMM 492 and COMM 497, the following criteria must be met:
- _____ 2. I am an SU student majoring or minoring in Communications.
- _____ 3. I have completed these core courses for my major: For COMM: 101, 102, or their equivalents.
- _____ 4. I have completed all of the core courses for my track.
- _____ 5. I have a sufficient GPA to handle the course expectations. An overall GPA of at least 2.5 and COMM GPA of at least 3.0 are recommended for COMM 492, and are **required** for COMM 497.
- _____ 6. I have read this Independent Study and Independent Research packet.
- _____ 7. I have a developed project idea and have asked a Communications faculty member in the field in which I am conducting this project to supervise me.
- _____ 8. My faculty supervisor and I have completed the COMM 492/497 Project Proposal Form (located at the end of this packet).
- _____ 9. I have submitted a COMM 492/497 Project Proposal to the Department Chair so that he/she can assess my materials and determine if I am eligible to register for COMM 492/497.
- _____ 10. I received my registration code from the Department Chair and have registered for the course on GullNet.

What Types of Papers Might I Write?

As stated earlier, COMM 492 and COMM 497 offer the opportunity for different forms of inquiry. In COMM 492, the student investigates a topic area of interest to learn more about. On the other hand, in COMM 497, the student actually engages in performing original research. As a result, the types of papers associated with each option differ.

For COMM 492, the student might produce a traditional research paper or a critical analysis of a text or group of texts. In contrast, for COMM 497, the student would produce a more formal, scholarly work complete with a literature review, and descriptions of methodology, results, and conclusions. Supporting data might be presented in tables and charts, and exhibits containing data collection instruments such as coding sheets and surveys may be included as well.

Descriptions of sample assignments for COMM 492 and COMM 497 are presented in the next sections.

Sample Instructions for a Summary and Critique of Directed Readings

The following paper might be written for COMM 492. It is designed for students who compile a reading list to learn about a particular topic area and then wish to summarize and critique the works they have encountered.

Give your paper a title. Start your paper with a paragraph that introduces the reader to your topic. The paragraph should define your issue and give the reader a sense of why knowledge and understanding about it is relevant for them. Provide a few specific examples of your issue to illustrate it for the reader. You only need to briefly mention them. Don't describe them in great detail because you can assume that the reader already knows about them. You are just establishing some common ground. Then, say that your issue has been documented in several important works, and list the titles and the authors of each one. Finally, tell that you are going to summarize and critique the works.

In the body of your paper, address each of the works separately. You don't necessarily need subheadings; however, it will be much easier for you and the reader if you deal with each work one at a time. In treating each work, first determine the main points you want to address. Isolate the arguments you feel are critical to conveying the writer's message. Then, summarize the writer's main points and arguments and present them in your paper. When necessary, include examples the writer uses to illustrate his/her points.

As you summarize the writer's arguments, points, and examples, provide your own commentary. Tell when you believe the writer is making a good point and explain why you feel this way. Also, tell when you disagree and explain why.

At the end of the discussion of each work, provide a paragraph where you put the writer's work into perspective for the reader. Explain the significance of the writer's work and tell what it has contributed to the scholarship/discourse on your topic. Here, you will be providing your assessment of each work. Finally, this section should provide a transition to your next work. (Your last one will provide a smooth transition to the conclusion.) Don't force these transitions, but when possible, try to make as smooth a shift as possible from one work to the next.

At the end of your paper, you will need to provide a conclusion which brings the works and your issue into perspective for the reader. Explain the significance of the writer's work and tell what it has contributed to the scholarship/discourse on your issue. You might accomplish this by answering the following questions: Do these works address all the important aspects of my issue? If not, what have they left out? Do these works offer plausible solutions to the problems associated with my issue? If not, what problems do you see with their solutions? Finally, tell how you think your issue will ultimately play out. Will it continue? If so, what effect will it have?

Provide a page at the end entitled "References" wherein you provide bibliographical entries for each of your books. Keep direct quotes to a minimum. Instead, summarize the authors' points and put them in your own words. Then, provide your own analyses and critiques of the authors' thoughts. In your introduction and conclusion, rely on your own words. Use a quote only if absolutely necessary. Include no more than one quote each in the introduction and the conclusion.

Sample Instructions for a Scholarly Paper

Introduction

Familiarize the reader with the subject you will address in your paper. Lay out the particular aspect of your topic you are researching and explain why research is needed in this area. You might refer to the subject of your study as a research problem. Also, you need to show what your research will add to the canon of knowledge on this topic and who specifically will benefit from your research.

Review of the Literature

In this section, you need to describe the research that has already been accomplished in this area and then prove how your study is original and does not simply duplicate the work that has already been done. To achieve this, you need to cite the relevant studies and briefly summarize their findings. You might also indicate if you are expanding on a previous study (or group of studies), or are embarking on a completely original approach.

Methodology

Here, you describe how you accomplished your study. You will identify the specific method you used and explain how you employed it in performing your research. Carefully go through each step you performed and describe what was involved. Be sure to describe the coding instrument you used to collect your data from the sample.

Results

In this section, you will report what you found. This section can be approached in several ways and is generally tailored to the particular project you are working on. In more quantitative studies, the data collected (frequency counts, percentages, statistics, etc.) are reported here, usually without any interpretation or discussion. Then, in another section, usually labeled "Discussion," the implications of the findings are discussed.

For qualitative or critical textual projects, you might combine the results and discussion sections into one section called "Analysis." (Actually, you can label these headings with your own titles that most appropriately convey what the sections contain.) Here, you would describe what you found and then evaluate your findings and explain what they imply.

Conclusion

Here, you will put your significant findings into perspective for the reader. You will identify all of your major findings and explain their implications for your topic and area of study. You will

Also explain what ramifications your findings potentially have for interested and affected parties.

If, in performing your study, you have become aware of any limitations in your methodology (it might have ignored some data), you need to inform the reader and suggest what this means about your conclusions.

Finally, you need to suggest how subsequent research might build on your study. What other research is needed in your area? What other questions about your topic need to be answered?

Coding Sheet

You need to include a clean copy of the coding instrument you used to collect your data as an appendix in the back of your paper.

Tables

You might present any numerical data collected and used in your study as a table in an appendix in the back of your paper.

Sample Syllabus for COMM 492

Week 1	Proposal for Project
Week 2	Approve reading List
Week 3	Discuss readings
Week 4	Discuss readings
Week 5	Discuss Readings
Week 6	Discuss readings
Week 7	Outline of Paper
Week 8	Draft of Introduction
Week 9	Draft of First Half of Body of Paper
Week 10	Draft of Second Half of Paper
Week 11	Discuss Revisions
Week 12	Draft of Conclusion
Week 13	Draft of Entire Paper
Week 14	Discuss Revisions
Week 15	Final paper

Sample Syllabus for COMM 497

Week 1	Proposal for Research Project
Week 2	Ten Sources with Summaries
Week 3	Draft of Introductions; All Sources Collected
Week 4	Draft of Literature Review
Week 5	Guidelines for Collecting Sample
Week 6	Coding Instrument; Sample Collected
Week 7	Draft of Methodology
Week 8	Entire Sample Collected
Week 9	Mid-semester Evaluation
Week 10	Draft of First Half of Analysis
Week 11	Draft of Second Half of Analysis
Week 12	Complete Draft of Analysis
Week 13	Draft of Conclusion
Week 14	Draft of Entire Paper
Week 15	Final Paper Due

Communications Faculty Supervisors

You must meet with a faculty member in the area of your proposed study, discuss your planned project, have the professor agree to supervise you, complete the COMM 492/497 Project Proposal Form, and give the completed form to the Department Chair. Available faculty members and their specialties are listed below:

Vinita Agarwal

Strategic Communication
Research Methods
Public Health Communication

G. Doug Barrett

Audio Production
Sound Art
Digital Media
Music, Media and Contemporary Art

David Burns

Electronic Journalism
New Media Production
International Reporting

James Burton

Media Industries
New Media and Convergence
Media and Cinema Studies
Cultural Memory

Jennifer Cox

New Media/Online Journalism
Newsroom Culture
Community Journalism

Lori Dewitt

Small Group Communication
Religious/Ideological Communication
Intercultural Communication
Interpersonal Communication

Chrys Egan

Freedom of Speech and Media Effects
Interpersonal Communication
Research Methods and Academic Publishing
Alternative Magazine Writing and Music
Promotion

Aaron Gurlly

Video Production
Critical Identity Studies

Michael Moeder

Mass Communication
Media Criticism and Analysis
Writing for Broadcasting

Darrell Mullins

Interpersonal Communication
Rhetoric in the Popular Culture
Organizational Communication

Shannon O'Sullivan

Media Studies
Print and Online Journalism
Critical Race Theory and Ethnic
Studies Women and Gender Studies
Qualitative Research Methods

Paul Scovell

Organizational Communication
Communication Technology
Parliamentary Procedure

Andrew Sharma

Television/Radio Production
International Media
Advertising

Melany Trenary

Instructional Communication
Interpersonal Communication

Amanda Welch-Hamill

Public Speaking
Human Communication Studies
Arts Administration

**COMM 492/CMAT 497 INDEPENDENT STUDY/INDEPENDENT RESEARCH
PROPOSAL OUTLINE**

In order to be considered for COMM 492/497, you must write a proposal of 2-4 pages organized as follows:

1. Topic/Purpose: What is the research project about? What question(s) will the project address? Why is the project worthwhile?

2. Existing Knowledge: what do you already know about this topic? For COMM 496, this will require the specification of existing theory or concepts that are relevant. For COMM 492, the same may apply or it might be that there is relevant practical knowledge that the student has acquired through experience.

3. Method: What is the process for the project? In other words, how will you attempt to answer the questions articulated for number one above? NOTE: If the project requires the approval of the Salisbury University Committee on Human Research, be sure to acknowledge that in this section.

Attach your proposal to the form below with appropriate signatures and submit it to the Department Chair.

NAME _____ PHONE _____
EMAIL _____

COMM 492 INDEPENDENT STUDY _____ COMM 497 INDEPENDENT RESEARCH _____

SEMESTER _____ YEAR _____ CREDITS (1-4) _____

TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT

PROJECT ADVISOR SIGNATURE _____ APPROVED _____
NOT APPROVED _____

DEPARTMENT CHAIR SIGNATURE _____ APPROVED _____
NOT APPROVED _____