

COMM. 3534: GATHERING INFORMATION

Instructor: Taleen Washington, Email: Washington@uhcl.edu

Textbooks: Research Strategies by William Badke (now also available as an e-book)

Supplies: Accordion file folder(s) with a total of 16 divisions and tabs

Course description: This course, on how to locate information efficiently, is designed for communication students who are interested in becoming journalists, advertising agency personnel, public relations specialists, Internet practitioners, or any other kind of communicator. However, other students with other majors will also benefit from the course, since the search strategy taught here is applicable to all information-seeking efforts.

In order to master the search strategy, you will conduct two searches in this course:

1 **FIRST SEARCH – MAGAZINE ARTICLE:** During the first search, you will select a topic suitable for a magazine feature article and conduct what is known as a basic seven-step search strategy. At the completion of the first search, you will submit a synthesis that will take the form of: 1) a detailed report relating what you did at each step along the way and 2) a synthesis that will take the form of a short 2-3 page magazine feature article.

2 **SECOND SEARCH – FORMAL REPORT:** During the second search, you will pick a topic suitable for a comparison study. You will exhibit the skills you learned during the first search, incorporate new skills, and present your findings in a presentation format. You will conduct this search by repeating the exact steps of the first search plus additional steps that will be introduced during the second half of the semester. At the completion of the second search, you will submit: 1) a bibliography citing the search material gathered, 2) a synthesis that will take the form of a formal report, and 3) a PowerPoint presentation of 12-15 slides.

In addition, there will be quizzes and a mid-term exam to further ensure that you understand the search procedures explained in the first search before advancing to the second search. ***NOTE: All of the quizzes and midterm are timed. No sneak peeks. Once you open a test, you need to be prepared to take it.***

Objectives: The course has four major goals: 1) to learn – through reading, discussion, and practice – a general search strategy that will be useful for all occasions, now and in the future; 2.) to increase familiarity with some useful specific sources, such as the library and Internet; 3) to expand sophistication in analyzing gathered information; and 4) to regard with suspicion statistical information gathered from other sources.

Discussion Board versus E-mail: During the course of the semester, we will be corresponding using both the Web CT Discussion Board and Web CT E-mail. Questions concerning the course, homework or assignments should take

place in the Web CT Discussion Board. This way all students will benefit from the discussion -- and save the instructor valuable time by not having to answer the same question(s) repeatedly via each individual student. E-mail correspondence should be used when a student has a question of a personal nature that he/she prefers to remain a private matter between himself/herself and the professor. All correspondence sent via e-mail concerning questions about the course will be redirected to the Discussion Board.

Guidelines: No “convenience interviews” for step four of the seven-step search strategy: Expert Interviews. Do not interview people you already know or your mom knows or your significant other knows, etc. Do not interview professors from UHCL. We will be looking for nationally recognized experts. (NOTE: You must conduct the interviews yourself – you cannot use pre-posted quotes off of the Internet).

Finding experts who are willing to be interviewed takes some effort. – plan for this step as far in advance as possible by noting who the experts are at each step of the search strategy and writing down their contact information. Start the interviewing process as early as possible when we get to Step 4.

NOTE: The interviews and inclusion of noteworthy quotes from experts will represent a significant portion of your search grade. You cannot pass this course successfully without conducting expert interviews. Up to 30 percent of the research and synthesis grades for searches will be rewarded depending on credibility of sources, difficulty with obtaining interviews, and significance of quotes.

Do not suffer in silence. I will be checking on everyone’s progress each week, so talk to me if you run into difficulties.

Policy on late work: Submission for all of the quizzes and assignments are timed. Once the deadline has passed, BlackBoard will not accept submissions. Mark the cutoff dates and times on your calendar -- no late work will be accepted -- no exceptions; pleading and excuses won’t help.

Policy on extra credit: The pace of this course is very fast. No extra credit work will be offered to improve a grade because your time will be better spent concentrating on the carefully selected assignments.

Academic Honesty Policy: All UHCL students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UHCL catalog for the Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism, that is, using research without citations, or using a created production without crediting the source, will result in a grade penalty of “F” for the assignment and the possibility of failure for the course.

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and need a special accommodation, consult first the Coordinator of Health Disabilities Services, Bayou 1402, telephone (281) 283-2627, and then discuss the accommodation with me. A disability form should be turned in to me by the second week of class. I will make every effort to see that you are comfortable in the classroom.

Incompletes: A grade of “I” is given only in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that you have been making satisfactory progress.

Changes in the Syllabus: The instructor reserves the right to make appropriate changes in the syllabus. It is the student’s responsibility to keep updated on course information if he or she is absent.

New Student Information: If communication is to be your major and you have not yet declared it, please do so as soon as possible by visiting Ann Hinojosa or Cruz Florez in Bayou 1539, (281) 283-3334. Once you declare your major, you will be assigned an advisor who will work with you to complete a Candidate Plan of Studies (CPS). By filling out a CPS, you guarantee your degree plan. Among other things, your advisor will review the need to take and pass the Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation (GSP) test, the need to save work for your portfolio, and the coordination of an internship prior to graduation.