

## COMM 4982 - Research Practicum in Communication

Coordinator: Dr. Sara Stifano  
Email: sara.stifano@uconn.edu

Office: Arjona 232 or WebEx  
Office hours: T/Th 8-9 a.m.; Th 2-3 p.m.  
Please request **all** appointments via email

### Course Information

COMM 4982 is a Research Practicum course designed to give undergraduate students experience in conducting communication research. Students act as **research assistants**, aiding faculty and graduate students across a range of tasks, which may include library work, coding, data analysis, running lab sessions or focus groups, conducting interviews, and more. COMM 4982 meets formally once at the beginning of the semester. Faculty and graduate students are invited to attend a session to meet potential undergraduate research assistants and to present planned research projects. Course credits are earned for hours of work completed; 25 hours of work are required for each credit (3 credit maximum per semester). Prerequisites include the completion of COMM 1000 and at least 12 hours of Communication courses at or above the 2000-level, one of which must be COMM 2000Q: Research Methods in Communication.

It is important that students note that they are assisting with *important* research projects that often come with high stakes. Graduate students may be working on graded research projects and dissertations and faculty may be working on large-scale grant funded projects. As such, students are expected to produce high quality work, regardless of the task they are completing. Students should demonstrate discipline and commitment to the projects by meeting all deadlines, attending all meetings and training sessions, engaging in effective and timely email communication, in addition to meeting the requirements of a given project. In other words, students should approach this course with the same level of dedication as they would any other course or professional opportunity.

**NOTE: If you took this course during a previous semester, please note that the policies and procedures may have changed. You will be expected to follow the policies and procedures outlined in the current Course Syllabus.**

### **COURSE FORMS, REQUIREMENTS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### ***Research Ethics & Training***

The UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires UConn faculty, students, and staff at the Storrs and regional campuses, who are conducting research as investigators or key personnel, to take the research-appropriate course on the [CITI Program website](#) and complete certification before protocol applications for initial approval,

amendment, or reapproval of such research will be approved by the IRB. Training is required of all key personnel regardless of whether the study qualifies for exempt, expedited, or full board review. The **CITI Basic Course** certification is good for three (3) years at which time, the [CITI Refresher Course](#) must be taken to maintain certification.

There are two basic CITI Courses for Human Subjects. Group 1 is the basic Biomedical Research course and it consists of the following [modules](#) and Group 2 is the basic Social and Behavioral Science course and it consists of the following [modules](#). In most cases, **students working with researchers in this department should complete the Social and Behavioral Science course**. Please note that the Responsible Conduct of Research Courses DO NOT satisfy the human subjects training requirement.

**All students enrolled in COMM 4982 must complete the CITI Basic Course or must be up-to-date on their CITI training.** Students will be asked to provide documentation upon completion of the CITI training. CITI training is a required component of this course, regardless of the tasks with which a student is assisting. Permission from a research supervisor to forgo CITI training will not exempt a student from this component of the course.

CITI training should be completed before a student begins a project with a research supervisor and no later than the end of the third week of the semester.

**Please note:** Time spent completing CITI training does not count toward the number of contracted research hours.

### ***COMM 4982 Student-Supervisor Contract***

When students connect with a faculty or graduate student researcher, they should set up a time to discuss the project, the tasks they will be expected to perform, any relevant deadlines, how many hours they are expected to complete, and other important logistics. During that meeting, the student should work with the supervisor to review the Student-Supervisor Contract (a template is provided on HuskyCT) and complete the contract on Microsoft Forms (linked on HuskyCT).

The **Student-Supervisor Contract** should be completed and submitted by the student. When the coordinator receives the contract, they will notify the research supervisor, at which point the supervisor will confirm or deny the agreement as written by the student. If confirmed by the research supervisor, the information will be sent to all parties for record-keeping purposes. This is a contract, which guarantees: 1) the supervisor will make a certain number of research hours available to the student and 2) the student will put in a certain number of hours in assisting the supervisor. The contract ensures all parties will be held accountable. The Student-Supervisor Contract should be completed and submitted to the coordinator (Dr. Sara Stifano) *before* the student begins working.

Contracts should note the research tasks the student will complete. Ideally, the student should not be asked to spend more than 25 hours on a specific task. The goal is to make sure the student is exposed to different research-related duties and does not spend the whole time doing the same thing.

Contracts can be altered by mutual consent. If the tasks change or the number of research hours need to be adjusted, the student should complete and submit a new Student-Supervisor Contract.

### ***Research Hours Tracking & Checking In***

Students will keep track of all working hours and tasks using the **Track It Forward** web application. Students should track their hours as they complete tasks; students should NOT wait until the end of the semester to enter all tasks and all hours. The purpose of using this application is to keep a running total of items completed and hours accrued as the semester progresses. Using the application provides an additional layer of transparency between the students, the research supervisors, and the coordinator, which helps to circumvent issues related to incomplete work and confusion at the end of the semester. More information will be provided during our first meeting of the semester and posted to HuskyCT.

Students should track their hours regularly throughout the semester, but there will also be monthly required check-ins with the course coordinator. Check-ins allow me to anticipate any potential issues related to availability of work before it gets too late in the semester. We would like to avoid issuing Incompletes and credit changes to the extent possible. The check-in dates for the spring 2024 semester are listed below:

- Friday, February 23
- Friday, March 22
- Friday, April 19

More information regarding check-ins will be provided as the semester progresses.

### ***How much time should a given research task take to complete?***

Some research tasks are logically connected to the time it takes to complete them; for example, if you are running a lab session that requires 2 hours of your time, you know that you worked on that specific task for 2 hours.

Other research tasks and their time requirements are variable, which means students and supervisors should discuss how much time a given task should take to complete. For example, a supervisor may ask you to find and summarize research about a specific topic. This task is more abstract compared to running a lab session for a specific amount of time. **You should ask your supervisor about their expectations regarding how much time it should take to complete a specific type of task.** Some examples are provided below:

- Literature search and summary: Dr. Stifano's general rule of thumb is 60-90 minutes per article. This means I would expect a student to find and summarize 20-25 articles in 25 hours.
- Content coding: Will differ by content and supervisor, but here are examples from previous semesters:
  - Newspaper articles - 1 hour to code 4 articles
  - Tweets - 2-3 hours to code 100-200 tweets
  - Open-ended survey responses - 5-6 hours to code ~450 responses
- Transcription:
  - Manual coding (no coding software) - 2 times or 2.5 times the length of the recording
  - With coding software - the length of the recording, or 1.5 times the length of the recording

Please note that you can count meetings with your supervisor and any additional trainings (beyond the CITI training) in your hours worked.

### ***Evaluation of Hours Completed***

When the student has completed their work on a given project, the student should complete the Evaluation of Hours form on Microsoft Forms (linked on HuskyCT). The form will ask the student to indicate the number of hours completed for a given project. If the student does not complete the minimum amount of hours contracted, the student must indicate the number of hours not completed as well. The evaluation form will then be sent to the research supervisor for approval.

### ***Final Reflection***

At the end of the semester, all students should compose and submit a short paper reflecting on their research experience. The paper should be 2-3 pages in length, and submitted on HuskyCT no later than 5 p.m. on the last day of classes in a given semester (i.e., the week before finals week). A separate document will be provided with additional information.

### ***Syllabus Quiz***

Following our first meeting of the semester, I may ask students to complete a Syllabus Quiz, which they will be required to pass before completing any research work in a given semester. The quiz will be graded pass/fail. If the student cannot pass the quiz after multiple attempts, the student will need to meet with the coordinator to determine if this course is the appropriate choice for them.

### **RESEARCH SUPERVISORS**

It is primarily the student's responsibility to connect with a faculty member or graduate student in the Department of Communication. Research opportunities within the department will be communicated to students by the coordinator on a regular basis, but

students should take the initiative to reach out to those potential supervisors to obtain information, set up meetings, express interest in collaborating, and so on. If a student is having trouble connecting with a supervisor, they should reach out to the course coordinator for assistance.

If a student wishes to work with a faculty member outside of the Department of Communication, they will need to clear this with the coordinator prior to committing to anything. Permission to work with someone outside the department will only be granted in extenuating circumstances; if there are available opportunities to assist Communication faculty and graduate students with research, students should prioritize those.

Please note that you may need to work on more than one project and coordinate with more than one research supervisor to complete your required hours. It is very rare that a single research supervisor can provide 75 hours of work, so if you are enrolled in the course for 3 credits, you should expect to work on more than one project.

## **GRADING**

The grading for this course is Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (previously Pass/Fail). Students who complete their contracted research hours to the satisfaction of the supervisor will receive a Satisfactory grade for the course. Students who do not complete their contracted research hours in a satisfactory manner will receive an Unsatisfactory grade. It is imperative, then, that students and supervisors communicate clearly about expectations and abilities *before* signing the Contract.

***Satisfactory*** completion of work indicates the following:

- required CITI training was completed and documentation was submitted by the end of week 3;
- the contracted work was completed; mistakes that could compromise the research were minimal, and any mistakes made were corrected; student attendance met expectations (e.g., research meetings, lab sessions); deadlines were met; communication was prompt and timely; students conducted themselves in a professional manner when engaging with researchers, participants, and key personnel; and the student made a good faith effort to complete the work as contracted.
- a final reflection is completed and submitted by 5 p.m. on the last day of classes (not the last day of the final exam period).
- the student did not commit any form of academic dishonesty or misconduct, which includes, but is not limited to the following: plagiarizing or passing off another's work as their own, plagiarizing oneself or using work from another course to fulfill the requirements of this one, and relying on AI software to complete tasks.

Upon enrollment, students should specify the number of credit hours they wish to earn:

3 Credits = 75 hours of research

2 Credits = 50 hours of research

1 Credit = 25 hours of research

### **LATE ADDS, INCOMPLETES, AND MISCELLANEOUS**

The last day to add or drop a course is set by the university each semester, and is typically the Monday of week 3. Students who add COMM 4982 during this two-week period should first review all information on the HuskyCT course site and then contact the coordinator about how to connect with faculty and graduate student researchers. After the add/drop period has passed, the course coordinator may allow a student to enroll, but the coordinator may not be able to guarantee research availability. Before committing to the decision to enroll in the course after the add/drop deadline, students are strongly encouraged to discuss research opportunities with faculty and/or graduate students in the department to ensure feasibility.

When a student agrees to complete a specified number of research hours (reflected in the number of credits enrolled), they are agreeing to complete that work prior to the end of the semester in which they are enrolled. If a student does not complete the contracted work by semester's end due to extenuating circumstances, they may request an Incomplete. Students should keep in mind, though, that many projects have specific timelines and hard deadlines, and work may not be available beyond the current semester. In the event that an Incomplete is not granted, students will earn credit for the number of hours that were completed to the satisfaction of the research supervisor; if no work was completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor, or if less than 25 hours of work was completed, the student will receive an Unsatisfactory grade for the course and may re-enroll in the following semester. If an Incomplete is granted, the final reflection should still be submitted by the specified deadline, though the content of the reflection may be revised.

If students or supervisors have any questions, please contact Dr. Sara Stifano at [sara.stifano@uconn.edu](mailto:sara.stifano@uconn.edu)

Happy Researching!