Craig Trumbo, Ph.D., Professor
Journalism & Media Communication
MS STUDENT ADVISING POLICY

This is to provide specific information for students who may wish to seek my guidance as thesis advisor toward the Plan A M.S. degree in Public Communication and Technology at CSU.

My Background:

Contextual interests and experience: public health communication, science communication, environmental communication. Social and attitudinal dimensions of natural and anthropogenic disasters. Natural resource conservation.

Areas of theoretical experience: agenda-setting, risk perception and risk communication, information processing, decision-making, optimistic bias.

Areas of methodological experience: quantitative analysis, surveys, content analyses.

Committee availability: varies depending on current commitments, will chair quantitative projects with preference toward relevant topics, available as second committee member for quantitative or qualitative projects regardless of topic.

References to previous advisees available on request. CV http://central.colostate.edu/people/ctrumbo/

Expectations:

Statistics: Students interested in approaching quantitative work must take an approved statistics course, preferably in the second term as a MS student (for full-time students), or have had the equivalent previously with demonstrated retention. Must have facility with either SPSS or STATA up to simple regression.

Proposal: Student must first present a 3-page prospectus on the thesis idea before the end of the second semester, prior to the summer session preceding enrollment in JTC698. The prospectus should briefly describe the problem to be investigated, theory to be employed, and the anticipated methods. The student will be expected to make progress toward the proposed project during the subsequent summer session (e.g., develop the literature review).

JTC698: During the third semester concurrent with JTC698 the student will A) enlist the second and outside committee members, B) complete the program of study and file the GS6, and C) complete and defend the full thesis proposal by the end of the third semester. The thesis proposal must consist of the first three chapters of the thesis (introduction, background, proposed methods) brought to final draft status as approved by the full thesis committee. A guide for writing the thesis proposal is included below.

Completion: The time from successful defense of the thesis proposal through data collection, analysis, and final defense will vary, so no deadline exists other than the Graduate School's (10 years). Students are encouraged to complete and defend by the summer session deadline in early July (completing students may still attend graduation at the end of their 4th term). Students are strongly discouraged from leaving campus before defending the thesis. Students who do leave must sign a contract that identifies the work remaining to be done and also specifies deadlines for completion, with the provision that if deadlines are not be met I may at my discretion step down as thesis chair.

Summary: It is my philosophy and practice that the thesis project should be approached purposefully and completed in a prompt and professional manner. Students working with me who adhere to these guidelines can expect to receive excellent access to my time, careful guidance through the entire process, and will earn their degrees in an appropriate period of time.
Craig Trumbo's MS Plan A Thesis Proposal Guide

All materials submitted for review must conform to the formatting requirement of the Graduate School: http://graduateschool.colostate.edu/documents/eTD-Formatting-Guide.pdf

FRONTMATTER

As per formatting requirements (title, TOC, etc).

ABSTRACT

This is typically written later on in the process. An abstract overview should be completed to cover the thesis proposal. It is then updated to include revisions and findings when the document is finalized.

1. INTRODUCTION (MS thesis, 3-5 pages)

This is essentially an expanded abstract. A broad overview with a clear statement of the project's specific aims. What is the problem you want to study, why is this important, what will you specifically do? Identify the theoretical framework(s) to be employed but do not review theory. Identify the data collection and analytical approach planned but do not expand on methods.

2. BACKGROUND (MS thesis, 25-30 pages)

2.1 Study context, problem statement

Most research projects are couched in some specific context (or problem) within which a theoretical concern is examined or employed. The context itself may be a primary motivator for the research (more applied work), or the theory may be the primary motivator and the context a vehicle (more theoretical). For either approach, provide general contextual background here. For example, you may be interested in studying health risk perception, and you're going to do it in the context of diet. Or you may be interested in studying diet as a health behavior, and you'll use risk perception as a theoretical tool. In either case, discuss diet in broad terms with the goal of making it clear why this is important to study.

2.2 Previous relevant research

Being very specific to what you want to study (e.g., health risk perception in diet), discuss previous studies that are similar to what you want to do. Be sufficiently narrow in focus that there are a limited number of studies to discuss. Also critique these studies to illustrate what they have not done that you will do (identify gaps in the research).

2.3 Theoretical approach

With the context described and the most relevant previous knowledge discussed now turn attention to the specific theoretical approach(s) you will use. Anything you're going to describe in the methods section later as something that will be observed must be introduced here first. This discussion should highlight relevant/salient general studies (those not tied to your context, often the most fundamental work on the concept), and also any studies that relate theory to your specific context. Open this section with a brief overview that provides a roadmap to the material ahead, then use subsections for each aspect of theory to be discussed.

2.3.1 - 2.3.n Specific concepts/theories

Each of these sections should be compact, citation dense integrative literature review. Avoid writing a study-by-study review when possible; rather discuss groups of previous studies by common characteristics.
2.4 Model, research questions, hypotheses

In this section tie the theory/concept reviews together. How do these ideas relate to each other? Why this particular set of ideas? How does theory inform your approach to the problem? Here it becomes important to bring the project to a very clear focus that identifies what you want to understand through the project. Formally state research questions and/or hypotheses. Do not discuss methods in this section, but end with a transition to the methods chapter.

3. RESEARCH PLAN (MS thesis, 6-20 pages + appendices)

This chapter is renamed METHODS after the study is done. Use an introductory statement to provide an overview of the chapter. The structure of this section can vary depending on your design. Within this chapter you should cite appropriate studies to justify your approach and to indicate the basis for your application of methods. Textbooks are not especially good citations; rather go to more focused and authoritative sources, including relevant previous studies. Overall, the following elements should be included, typically in this order:

3.1 Design

This may be fairly brief for a simple study. Identify the specific design to be employed in the study and why it is appropriate for the study problem and goals. If it’s a survey, discuss whether it’s cross-sectional or longitudinal and why one was selected over the other, for example. Or for an experiment identify whether it’s post-test-only no control versus any other design and why that decision is appropriate. If qualitative identify and justify the approach to be used (e.g., narrative, grounded theory, case study, interviews). This is a critical point where you need to convincingly justify the manner in which you will execute the work.

3.2 Population/Participants, sample

Human subjects as unit of analysis: Who will be studied (the population) and how will they be found (sample, or participants)? Why is this an appropriate population/sample for the study? What are the limitations of this study population/sample? If formally sampling (i.e., for an inferential survey analysis) what sampling design is being employed, why is it appropriate, and what are its limitations? If not formally sampling (e.g., an experiment, qualitative), explain how you will identify appropriate study participants, why they are appropriate for your study, and limitation in that approach. Do not elaborate on recruitment strategy here. Rather, reference to the IRB material in the Data Collection section below.

Artifacts as unit of analysis: What will be studied and how will it be found? Why is this an appropriate approach for the study? What are the limitations of this approach? If formally sampling (i.e., for an inferential content analysis) what sampling design is being employed, why is it appropriate, and what are its limitations? If not formally sampling, explain how you will identify appropriate study materials, why they are appropriate for your study, and limitations in that approach.

In either case do not discuss data collection details.

3.3 Measures/Observation

For each concept elaborated in the hypotheses/RQs provide the means by which you shall observe and measure if quantitative. For surveys the questionnaire should be provided in its entirety and as it will be formatted for fielding. For experiments any questionnaire should likewise be provided. For experiments all treatment materials must be provided in final form. If online data collection is to be used the website should be provided. For content analysis the coding scheme should be provided along with a demonstration of the content if available. For interviews, focus groups, or other qualitative approaches an appropriate script should be provided.
3.4 Data Collection

Describe the details of how you will collect data.

For human subjects describe the specific techniques you will use to obtain study participants, provide any recruitment materials as they will be fielded (fliers, invitations, etc). Describe and justify any incentives that will be employed (cash, extra credit, etc), and any special permissions needed to obtain participants (e.g., recruiting from classes -- include permission letter from instructor). Describe and justify the number of participants you will include in the study, including sample size, anticipated response/participation rate, and sample needs for analysis. There are various methods for determining how many data points you need for a quantitative design or how many participants for qualitative work, your advisor can assist. Include a subsection here that addresses IRB requirements. Complete and include an Informed Consent Statement to be used in recruiting (template provided below). Your advisor will complete and submit the appropriate IRB application materials following a successful proposal defense.

For artifacts, describe the specific techniques you will use to obtain materials. Describe and justify the number of observational units you will include in the study. There are various methods for determining how many data points you need for a design, your advisor can assist

3.5 Analysis

Specifically identify the quantitative and/or qualitative analytical tools that you will use. Relate these directly to your hypotheses/RQs.

4. REVIEW CRITERIA (3 pages)

Anticipate reviewer concerns.

4.1 Expected project significance

An effective manner to approach this is to address two aspects: Intellectual Merit (the potential to advance knowledge), and Broader Impacts (the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes). Consider these criteria. 1) To what extent does your proposed study suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts? 2) Is your plan for carrying out the proposed study well reasoned, well organized, and based on a sound rationale? 3) Does your plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success? 4) How well qualified are you to conduct the proposed activities (via your studies, previous experience, etc.)? 5) Do you have adequate resources to carry out the proposed study?

4.2 Contingencies

Discuss problems that may arise and how you would deal with them.

4.3 Timeline

Provide your anticipated schedule to completion.

Template for human subjects informed consent follows. Example is for a recent online survey of students. Provide an overview at the start and answer each of the form's questions.
Invitation to participate in research.

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study to help us better understand how college students view electronic cigarettes. By participating in this study and completing a brief online survey at the start and end of this semester you will be entered into a drawing for one of 50 $100 gift certificates to the CSU Bookstore, to be awarded in finals week (about a 3% chance). More details about the study are provided below.

To participate log into the survey website  http://ecigs.questionpro.com

All of the details about the research project are provided below. Please take a few minutes to look this information over and give consideration to participating in this project.

TITLE OF STUDY: “Electronic Cigarettes.”

INVESTIGATORS, WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This is a research project being conducted by JTC graduate student Yournamehere and faculty member Craig Trumbo.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of the project is to help us better understand how college students feel about a new nicotine delivery technology.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? At then end of the surveys all identifying information will be removed from this study so that your identity in this study is kept confidential. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? We are seeking participation from a random selection of college students.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The surveys are being conducted online and each takes about 12 minutes to complete.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? The survey contains questions about your tobacco use habits, your opinion about smoking in public, and your evaluation of a new nicotine device called the electronic cigarette. There are no potentially embarrassing or sensitive questions.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? If you would prefer not to disclose your tobacco use habits and to offer you opinion on smoking or nicotine use you might not want to participate in the survey.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you from participating in this research study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research study. In a broader sense there may be benefits to public health planners from an improved understanding of how people feel about electronic cigarettes.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR THIS STUDY? Chance to win a $100 gift certificate to the bookstore.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. You can contact the faculty supervisor, Craig Trumbo at 491-2077 or ctrumbo@colostate.edu. For information about your rights as a participant you can contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board Coordinator at RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu or 970-491-1553.