Syllabus Contract and Research Lab Agreement

Course: MC 501, Research Methods for Mass Communications (Fall 2026)

Instructor: Dr. Alex P. Leith

Student Information

Name: _____

Proposed Research Interest or Topic (preliminary idea):
_____

Terms of Agreement

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the full syllabus for MC 501. I understand that this course functions as a Research Laboratory, requiring specific computational tools and adherence to a scientific workflow, and that the work is expected to approach publishable quality. I agree to the following.

1. The Scientific Phases

The course is built around one continuous habit and four sequential stages. **The Journalist** runs the whole term. **The Architect**, **The Builder**, **The Analyst**, and **The Publisher** follow in order. I agree to work through them in sequence, recognizing that later analysis depends on the foundation laid earlier, and that the course totals 1,025 points.

2. Required Readings and the Graduate Edition

I read the course textbook with the **Graduate edition toggle on**, and the graduate extension in every chapter is required material. Each week carries **one assigned reading**, listed in the syllabus with access links, and I agree to read it before that week's meeting.

3. The Weekly Reading Journal

The reading journal is worth **150 points**. I agree to submit one entry per teaching week of **450 to 500 words** that engages both the chapter and the assigned reading. I understand that an entry addressing only the chapter receives a maximum of **7 of 10 points**.

4. Tools and Workspace

This course requires free and open-source software: **VS Code** as my single workspace, **R** run inside it, **Quarto** for publishing, and **Git and GitHub** for version control. I agree to have VS Code, R, and Git installed and working **by the end of Week 2**, using the setup walkthrough on the course website.

I understand that the analysis in Phases IV and V requires a desktop or laptop computer and **cannot be completed on a phone or tablet**, and that I am responsible for backing up my project to cloud storage. Technical problems are not an excuse for missed deadlines, though most can be resolved quickly if I ask early.

5. Attendance and Participation

This is a seminar, and it depends on people arriving prepared. I agree to engage on a weekly cadence: read the assigned chapter and reading, take part in the discussion built around them, and submit work on time.

6. Deadlines and Professionalism

Assignments are due **Friday at 11:59 PM**. Late submissions lose 10% of the assignment grade per business day for up to one week. After one week the assignment receives a zero, unless an accommodation has been arranged in writing before the original due date. Non-emergency extensions must be requested before the deadline. If I face an emergency, I will contact the instructor as early as possible, understanding that deadlines cannot be extended retroactively.

7. Iterative Research and Resubmission

Research is an iterative process. Assignments worth **50 or more points** may be revised and resubmitted within one week of grade posting. The final grade is the average of the original and the resubmission.

8. Research Topic Consistency

I agree to select a single research topic, theory, and media source during Phase III, The Builder, and to use that subject for my **Research Proposal**, **Extended Codebook and Reliability Protocol**, data analysis, and final **White Paper with its paired conference poster**. Changing topics mid-semester is not permitted.

9. Research Ethics

I agree to complete the **CITI ethics certification** by its deadline. Beyond that, I prepare the **non-human-subjects IRB determination** I would actually file, building familiarity with the protocol process. I will conduct my project within the ethical principles covered in the course, including honest reporting of what the data can and cannot support.

10. Methodological Transparency

I understand that my methods section carries three transparency markers: a **data provenance statement**, an **intercoder reliability report** giving the kappa value with the training protocol and threshold applied, and a **pre-registration disclosure** with its OSF URL. I agree that these are requirements rather than optional additions.

11. Publishing My Work

I understand that the final **White Paper is published to a public web address** through GitHub Pages, and that reproducibility is part of the grade: the document must render from its source rather than contain pasted numbers.

12. Recordings

Any recordings of class sessions are for the educational use of students enrolled in this course only. I will not copy, share, or distribute recordings without the instructor's written permission.

13. Academic Integrity and Generative AI

AI coding assistants are **permitted in this course as supervised aids, with disclosure**. This is a course-specific policy; SIUE's default is that AI use is prohibited unless a course states otherwise.

- **Permitted:** using AI to remember syntax, scaffold code I understand, or draft prose I then revise, provided I can explain everything I submit.
- **Disclosure is required:** when AI shapes work I submit, I will note in my weekly journal what I used it for and how I checked its output.
- **Not permitted:** submitting AI-generated work as my own without disclosure, using AI to fabricate citations, data, or results, or using AI to circumvent a learning objective. These are academic dishonesty.

I understand that graduate work carries a higher expectation that AI-assisted analysis is independently verified, and that I am accountable for everything I submit.

Signature

By signing below, I agree to treat this course as a professional scientific engagement and to conduct myself as a rigorous researcher within the lab.

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____