

JCOM 1500 Media Knowledge Survey Results, 2015/16
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JCOM 1500 (Introduction to Mass Communication) is a pre-major core course students must pass with a C+ or better before being admitted to the Journalism and Communication major or minor, as well as a General Education course with a Breadth Social Sciences designation. It is designed to provide an overview of American mass media, incorporating historical, social, economic, and political perspectives. Students are encouraged to think about media's effects, the forces that shape media, and their own vulnerability and power as media consumers. One core expectation is that they will leave the course with basic factual knowledge about the First Amendment, current regulation of media, the roles of commercial and public media, etc., that will enhance their thinking about media.

To help document this basic learning, I initiated a pre/post survey during the fall 2015 semester and repeated it during spring 2016. Students were given a short true/false and multiple-choice survey at the end of the second day of class. They were told the survey was optional and intended only to help me document learning for the class as a whole. No identifying information (name, A-number) was collected. Identical questions were then included on the final exam.

During the fall, 165 of the 190 students registered completed the initial survey (response rate: 86.8%), while 161 of 170 registered at the end of the semester completed the final exam (94.7%). During the spring, 100 of the 139 students registered completed the initial survey (71.9%); 125 of 130 students registered at the end of the semester completed the final exam (96.2%). Almost all students who completed the initial survey answered all questions; a total of only five items were left blank during the fall and spring pretesting.

As shown below, knowledge improved significantly between the beginning and end of the course. The results also suggest that there is room for even more improvement. For example, at the beginning of the fall 2015 semester approximately half of the class incorrectly believed that the U.S. movie rating system was developed by Congress and enforced by a federal agency. At the end, more than a quarter still thought that was the case. The plan is to expand the survey to include additional fact-based questions and to use the results to guide efforts to sharpen class lectures, exercises, and assignments.

Summary of JCOM 1500 Pre/Post Media Knowledge Survey

<i>Survey question</i>	<i>Correct answers (in percentages)</i>	<i>Results</i>
	Semester: Pre / Post	
T/F: In the United States, all forms of speech—from political speech to obscenity—receive equal protection under the law. (<i>False</i>)	Fall: 43.6 / 86.3 Spring: 42.4 / 88.8	$X^2 = 65.07, p < .001$ $X^2 = 54.88, p < .001$
T/F: The right to bear arms is one of the rights specifically protected by the First Amendment. (<i>False</i>)	Fall: 69.1 / 94.4 Spring: 70.0 / 89.6	$X^2 = 34.79, p < .001$ $X^2 = 13.81, p < .001$
T/F: The U.S. movie rating system was developed by Congress and is enforced by a federal agency. (<i>False</i>)	Fall: 50.3 / 72.7 Spring: 47.0 / 82.4	$X^2 = 17.19, p < .001$ $X^2 = 31.33, p < .001$
The Federal Communications Commission is currently controlled by members of which party? a. Democrats b. Republicans c. Neither. The FCC is required to have equal numbers of commissioners who are Democrat and Republican. (<i>a. Democrats</i>)	Fall: 9.1 / 90.7 Spring: 10.2 / 88.8	$X^2 = 223.22, p < .001$ $X^2 = 138.85, p < .001$
T/F: Like other public media outlets, Utah Public Radio is a profit-oriented organization. (<i>False</i>)	Fall: 55.8 / 94.4 Spring: 51.0 / 96.0	$X^2 = 64.22, p < .001$ $X^2 = 61.68, p < .001$