

MEJO 860.01: Seminar in Content Analysis
Spring 2020
Monday 12:30-3:15 P.M.
CA 338

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Purpose

This seminar provides understanding of and proficiency in content analysis of mass communication through extensive reading on the method's technical points, critique of published content analyses, and participation in all phases of content analysis application.

This course aims to provide a working knowledge of quantitative content analysis as a method of communication research. This will include appropriate research designs to collect content data for coding and analysis, *conceptual and operational definitions of variables for coding, reliability testing of coding protocol and procedures, and appropriate statistical analysis of collected data.*

Each class member will select a topic and produce a content analysis study by the end of the semester that will be submitted to a peer-reviewed convention or journal. The study will involve development of an appropriate research designs to collect content data for human coding and analysis, conceptual and operational definitions of variables for coding in a reliable coding protocol, reliability testing of coding protocol and procedures, and appropriate statistical analysis of collected data. This is *not* a class in data mining or scraping, though “hybrid” approaches involving human coding and algorithmic text analysis may be considered.

Text and Readings

The required text for this course is:

Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy, Brendan R. Watson, and Frederick Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, 4th Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019).

Supplemental Readings:

* These are available on Sakai or electronic reserve.

* One of the world's most useful books is W. Paul Vogt, *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences* 3rd edition (Thousand Oak, CA: Sage, 1990).

Course Requirements

Requirements for this class are based on the assumption that content analysis is learned best through hands-on work with fellow researchers. Consequently, course requirements include *participation*, completion of a series of *homework* assignments, *critique* of a published content analysis, defense of a study *proposal*, and a **completed single-authored study** suitable for peer-reviewed publication.

All assignments must be submitted by the deadline as digital (PDF) copies unless otherwise specified. Digital copies should be submitted in PDF format.

Consistent and enthusiastic class **participation** is assumed because scholarship is a shared endeavor among those who seek a better understanding of their discipline and who want to communicate that understanding to others. You will profit from the insights and concerns of others. Your own comments and suggestions will help others to do their best research. In addition, class members will help each other to establish coder reliability for research projects and to code study data.

Class members will prepare a series of **homework** assignments during the semester that relate to the study each student is doing. These assignments will help convey course concepts as well as keep class members moving forward toward their completed study. Details for homework assignments are attached. Please read all of the assignment descriptions ***now***. Some are sequential; others can be worked on as schedule permits.

The **study proposal** lays out your thinking and plan of action for the study you intend. It should be guided by the “Outline of Steps in Research Design” appendix to this syllabus. The proposal should be six to ten double-spaced pages, excluding endnotes, graphics, and appendices. The coding protocol and coding sheets for the project should be included as appendices to the proposal. **Assignment 1, Identifying the Topic for the Study, is due at noon on Wednesday, Jan. 22, and the final project proposal is due at the beginning of class on Monday, March 16. Students will also offer a formal oral presentation of the proposal during class on March 16.**

The **completed study** should be 15 to 20 double-spaced pages, excluding endnotes, tables, and appendices. It should include an introduction and literature review, etc., and must complete the work specified in the Study Proposal. **Guided by the basic structure and organization principles of a scholarly research article, the completed study manuscript is due at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5, but may be submitted earlier. Students will formally present (orally) the research findings in class session on Monday, April 20.**

NOTE: An additional homework assignment that is not tied directly to your study involves your presenting a **critique of a published content analysis case study**. Your critique should demonstrate your grasp of the semester’s work. You should specify the study’s independent and dependent variable(s), method and design, units of analysis, sampling employed, measures of reliability, etc. You should also provide a summary of the article’s key claims and point to the strengths and possible limitations of the study. **You’ll be assigned the case study by March 16 and your presentation will be in class on April 13.**

All assignments must be submitted by the deadline as digital (PDF) copies unless otherwise specified.

Grades

Work components will be weighted as follows:

Class Participation	10 percent
Homework Assignments	25 percent
Research Proposal	20 percent
Completed Study	45 percent

The participation grade will be assessed based on attendance at class sessions and demonstrated willingness to comment appropriately and helpfully during class meetings. Willingness and dedication to helping class members accomplish their studies is also part of class participation. Successful completion of the critique assignment is also included here.

Homework assignment grades are based on their completeness in addressing the specified assignment tasks,

as well as presentation. ****Every MEJO faculty member is a potential reference in your career**** and your reputation for the quality of your scholarship will extend far beyond your time in Carroll Hall. No graduate student in MEJO at UNC-Chapel Hill should ever turn in an assignment that is not perfect.

Homework Assignments must be submitted to the instructor **as specified in this syllabus**. **A 0 is given for a late assignment**. Assignments may be revised and resubmitted no later than one week after they are returned. Grades for revised assignments will be substituted for the original grades.

The **proposal** will be assessed based on relevant criteria in the Outline of Steps in Research Design at the back of this syllabus. The proposals may also be revised and resubmitted, with grades for the revised work being substituted for original grades. The deadline for proposal resubmissions is one week following their return to the class. Proposal revisions following that deadline will not be re-graded.

Evaluation of the completed study will be assessed based on standards used for a peer-reviewed journal or conference submission. Major review criteria include study purpose and conceptualization, study relevance to theory and past research, appropriateness of the content analysis research design, effectiveness of data collection and analysis, and appropriateness, relevance, and presentation of conclusions. Clarity and competence in organization, writing, and style will also be considered. The completed study may certainly also be revised later to bring it into range for conference or journal submission, but its original grade will stand. Submission to peer-reviewed venues requires that manuscripts be prepared according to the style requirements of those venues. Failure to do so is a sign of poor scholarship, planning, and upbringing. For this seminar, students should adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition) or APA for citations and other matters of style.

Those components will be used to determine a final assessment:

H Student reads and critically engages with all of the assigned material. Participation in discussion and written assignments exhibit the ability not only to apply the material, but also to extrapolate ideas, expand into new areas, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. Reserved for truly extraordinary work.

P Student usually reads and engages critically with the assigned material. Able to apply material and extrapolate ideas. Consistently good work done on time.

L Student reads and engages critically with only some of the assigned material. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances.

F Student occasionally misses class, does not always read the material, fails to critically engage with it, and is unable or unwilling to apply the material.

Special Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible, because of the structure of the seminar and the requirement that you participate fully. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

Honor Code

Each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor

system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean, or speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity

The Hussman School's commitment to diversity is detailed in its site at http://www.mj.unc.edu/diversity_home. The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Accrediting Principles

The School of Journalism & Media master's degree program strives toward a number of values and competencies that students should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate from our program. No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on ensuring that students:

- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts; and
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Organization of the Course

The first half of the course will focus on content analysis as a method of communication research. The emphasis will be on learning content analysis concepts and procedures. However, class members will also be able to develop their projects in the context of the homework assignments discussed in class during this period. This part of the course culminates with students presenting their project proposals in class. The remainder of the course will focus on data collection and analysis for the semester projects. Class members will work in teams in order to facilitate coding and coding reliability tests. Class sessions during this period will emphasize content coding and data analysis issues. As many as two sessions may be devoted to critiques of published content analyses. The last session of the course will focus on student presentation of the completed study.

Class Schedule

Note: Some assignments will be submitted *before* the class at which they will be discussed. **LCD** indicates lecture, consultation, and discussion “workshopping” sessions.

1. Week of Jan. 13: Course Introduction: Theory and Method in Mass Communication Research. Conceptualization, visualization, operationalization. The three pillars. Introduction to Content Analysis.

Assignment 1: Topic Selection due noon Wednesday, Jan. 22 (digital; PDF).

Readings: Riffe, Lacy, Watson, and Fico, Ch. 1-2 “Introduction” and “Defining Content Analysis.”

Stimulus package:

Michael R. McCluskey, “Activist Group Attributes and Their Influences on News Portrayal,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85 (winter 2008): 769-784.

Mark Leccese, “Online Information Sources of Political Blogs,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86 (autumn 2009): 578-593.

Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke, and Ingrid Bachmann, “Voices of Dissent in the Iraq War: Moving from Deviance to Legitimacy?” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 87 (autumn/winter 2010): 467-483.

Sei-Hill Kim, John P. Carvalho, and Andrew G. Davis, “Talking about Poverty: News Framing of Who Is Responsible for Causing and Fixing the Problem,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 87 (autumn/winter 2010): 563-581.

Stephen Lacy, Margaret Duffy, Daniel Riffe, Esther Thorson, and Ken Fleming, “Citizen Journalism Web Sites Complement Newspapers,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 31 (spring 2010): 34-46.

Josh Grimm and Julie Andsager, “Framing Immigration: Geo-Ethnic Context in California Newspapers,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 88 (winter 2011): 771-788.

Lindsey Meeks, “He Wrote, She Wrote: Journalist Gender, Political Office, and Campaign News,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90 (spring 2013): 58-74.

Kyle Heim, “Framing the 2008 Iowa Democratic Caucuses: Political Blogs and Second-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90 (autumn 2013): 500-519.

Week of Jan. 20: No class, Martin Luther King Day, Jan. 20.

2. Week of Jan. 27: Further Introduction to Content Analysis: Units of Analysis and Design; Feasibility and mucking around.

Assignment 2: Guerilla Literature Review due noon Weds., Jan. 29 (digital copy; PDF).

Readings: Riffe et al., Ch. 8 “Designing a Content Analysis.”

Michael D. Slater, “Content Analysis as a Foundation for Programmatic Research in

Communication,” *Communication Methods and Measures* 7 (2, 2013): 85-93.

Rasha Kamhawi and David Weaver, “Mass Communication Research Trends from 1980 to 1999,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80 (spring 2003): 7-27.

Daniel Riffe and Alan Freitag, “A Content Analysis of Content Analyses: 25 Years of *Journalism Quarterly*,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74 (winter 1997): 873-882.

Craig Trumbo, “Research Methods in Mass Communication Research: A Census of Eight Journals 1990-2000,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81 (summer 2004): 417-436.

3. Week of Feb. 3: Round-robin Discussion of Class Interests and Topics, Units of Analysis and Design, Feasibility and Mucking Around. Databases and Indices as Short-cuts and Sources of Invalidity.

Readings:

Stephen Lacy, Brendan R. Watson, Daniel Riffe, and Jennette P. Lovejoy, “Issues and Best Practices in Content Analysis,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 92 (winter 2015): 791-811.

Jill A. Edy, Scott L. Althaus, and Patricia F. Phalen, “Using News Abstracts to Represent News Agendas,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82 (summer 2005): 434-446.

David Weaver and Bruce Bimber, “Finding News Stories: A Comparison of Searches Using LexisNexis and Google News,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85 (autumn 2008): 515-530.

Jo Ellen Stryker, Ricardo J. Wray, Robert C. Hornik, and Itzik Yanovitzky, “Validation of Database Search Terms for Content Analysis: The Case of Cancer News Coverage,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83 (summer 2006): 413-430.

Liwen Vaughan and Yanjun Zhang, “Equal Representation by Search Engines? A Comparison of Websites across Countries,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 12 (April 2007): 888-909.

Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, and Alfred Hermida, “Content Analysis in an Era of Big Data: A Hybrid Approach to Computational and Manual Methods,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57 (1, 2013): 34-52.

Michael Karlsson, “Charting the Liquidity of Online News: Moving Towards (sic) a Method for Content Analysis of Online News,” *International Communication Gazette* 74 (4, 2012): 385-402.

Lei Guo, Chris J. Vargo, Zixuan Pan, Weicong Ding, and Prakash Ishwar, “Big Social Data Analytics in Journalism and Mass Communication: Comparing Dictionary-based Text Analysis and Unsupervised Topic Modeling,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93 (summer 2016): 332-359.

4. Week of Feb. 10: Variables, Variable Relationships and Content Analysis Research Design. Protocol “Dissection.” Content Analysis Units and Measurement Issues and Introduction to Measurement Reliability.

Assignment 3: Concepts and Measures due noon Friday, Feb. 14 (digital; PDF).

Readings: Riffe et al., Ch. 4 “Measurement.”

Daniel Riffe, “Data Analysis and SPSS Programs for Basic Statistics,” in G.H. Stempel III, D. H. Weaver, & G.C. Wilhoit (Eds.), *Mass Communication Research and Theory* (Boston,: Allyn & Bacon, 2003).

5. Week of Feb. 17: Deduction, Causal Inference, and Conceptual Issues: Relation to Theory and Past Research; Operationalization and Coding Protocols and the link to Data Collection.

Assignment 4: First draft of Coding Protocol and Coding Sheet (concepts and operational definitions) due noon Friday, Feb. 21 (digital PDF and hard copy version).

Readings: Riffe et al., Ch. 6 “Reliability.”

Cheryl Law and Magdala Peixoto Labre, “Cultural Standards of Attractiveness: A Thirty-year Look at Changes in Male Images in Magazines,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (autumn

2002): 697-711.

Mark Tremayne, "The Web of Context: Applying Network Theory to the Use of Hyperlinks in Journalism on the Web," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81 (summer 2004): 237-253.

Dennis T. Lowry, "Network TV News Framing of Good vs. Bad Economic News under Democrat and Republican Presidents: A Lexical Analysis of Political Bias," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85 (autumn 2008): 483-499.

6. Week of Feb. 24: Sampling and Data Collection Issues. Types of Samples. Sampling Error.

Assignment 5: Sampling Plan due noon Feb. 28 (digital; PDF).

Readings: Riffe et al., Ch. 5 "Sampling."

Joe Bob Hester and Elizabeth Dougall, "The Efficiency of Constructed Week Sampling for Content Analysis of Online News," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84 (winter 2007): 811-824.

Colleen Connolly-Ahern, Lee Ahern, and Denise Sevick Bortree, "The Effectiveness of Stratified Constructed Week Sampling for Content Analysis of Electronic News Source Archives: AP Newswire, Business Wire, and PR Newswire," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86 (winter 2009): 862-883.

Douglas A. Luke, Charlene A. Caburnay, and Elisia L. Cohen, "How Much is Enough? New Recommendations for Using Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis of Health Stories," *Communication Methods and Measures* 5 (1, 2011): 76-91.

Jennifer Manganello, Amy Franzini, and Amy Jordan, "Sampling Television Programs for Content Analysis of Sex on TV: How Many Episodes Are Enough?" *Journal of Sex Research* 45 (1, 2008): 9-16.

Lu Wu and Joe Bob Hester, "Sampling Strategy for Conducting Content Analysis of Digital Native Sites," paper presented at annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Minneapolis, August 2016.

Xiaopeng Wang and Daniel Riffe, "An Exploration of Sample Sizes for Content Analysis of the *New York Times* Web Site," *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, May 2010, no. 20, available at: <http://wjmc.org/vol20>.

7. Week of March 2: Protocol Refinement. Defining and measuring variables; Reliability and Validity. Planning for your reliability assessment.

Assignment 6: Second Draft Coding Protocol due at noon Friday, March 6 (digital PDF).

Readings: Riffe et al., Ch. 7 "Validity"

Jennette Lovejoy, Brendan R. Watson, Stephen Lacy, and Daniel Riffe, "Assessing the Reporting of Reliability in Published Content Analyses: 1985-2010," *Communication Methods and Measures* 8 (3, July-September 2014): 207-221.

Mike Conway, "The Subjective Precision of Computers: A Methodological Comparison with Human Coding in Content Analysis," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83 (spring 2006): 186-200.

Jennette Lovejoy, Brendan R. Watson, Stephen Lacy, and Daniel Riffe, "Three Decades of Reliability in Communication Content Analyses: Reporting of Reliability Statistics and Coefficient Levels in Three Top Journals," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93 (winter 2016): 1135-1159..

Week of Mar. 9: Spring Break. No class.

NOTE: Final Research Proposals due in class March 16, digital PDF copy and oral presentation.

8. Week of Mar. 16: Written and Oral Presentation of Research Proposals. Final Protocol and Reliability Issues. Discussion, Commentary and Suggestions. Planning for the end of the project.

Assignment of case studies for critique in class, week of April 13

Assignment 7: Plan for Reliability Analysis due Monday, March 23 (digital PDF or hard copy for tables).

9. Week of Mar. 23: Planning Reliability and data analyses.

Assignment 8: Plan for Data Analysis due in class, March 30 (digital PDF or hard copies for tables).

Readings: Riffe et al. Ch. 9 “Data Analysis”

10. Week of March 30: Data Analysis Strategies: Basic Statistical Concepts; Presentation and Display of Data. **LCD.**

April 1: AEJMC Paper submission deadline!

11. Week of April 6: Data Analysis Strategies: Basic Statistical Concepts; Presentation and Display of Data. Troubleshoot your data collection and analysis. **LCD.**

Assignment 9: Updated Draft of Literature Review due Monday, April 13 (digital copies).

12. Week of Apr. 13: Critique content analysis case studies. Troubleshoot your data collection and analysis. **LCD**

13. Week of April 20: LDOC: Oral Presentation of Study Results in Seminar

Week of April 27: Annual MEJO Spring Research Colloquium, Weds., April 29. Keynote speaker: Dr. Sue Robinson, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Week of May 4: The completed study manuscript is due at 4 p.m., May 5. (Digital PDF).

OUTLINE OF STEPS IN CONTENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH DESIGN

Adapted from the *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* by Delbert C. Miller.
A research project should consider and address the steps outlined below to assure a meaningful study.

I. SELECTION AND DEFINITION OF A COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEM

- A. Present clear, brief statement of the problem.
- B. Describe the significance of the problem with reference to one or more criteria below:
 - 1. Is timely
 - 2. Relates to a practical problem
 - 3. Relates to a wide population
 - 4. Relates to an influential or critical population
 - 5. Fills a research gap
 - 6. Permits generalization to principles of communication process or theory
 - 7. Sharpens the definition of an important concept or relationship
 - 8. Has many implications for practical problems
 - 9. Creates or improves an instrument for observing and analyzing data
 - 10. Provides opportunity for gathering data that is otherwise restricted

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- A. Describe the relationship of the problem to a theory or paradigm (if appropriate).
- B. Discuss previous research related to or relevant for the problem.
 - 1. Especially discuss any work related to your study's dependent variable.
 - 2. Especially discuss any work related to your study's independent variables.
- C. Present your own ideas on the problem and relate them to theory and past research.

III. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- A. Clearly state any hypotheses and explain their rationales, making explicit Independent and Dependent Variable relationships.
- B. Indicate the significance of hypotheses to theory and previous research.
- C. Define the concepts of the variables in the hypotheses at the conceptual level
- D. Draw a picture of the above using arrows to represent causal flows from Independent to Dependent variables and + or - signs to indicate positive or negative influences.
- E. Define any other relevant variables and include them in the drawing.
- F. If hypotheses are inappropriate, specify research questions, noting relevant parts of A to E above.

IV. STUDY METHOD

- A. Content Analysis Research Design:
 - 1. State why this design is appropriate to the problem
 - 2. Note any limitations of the design for the problem
- B. Content Sampling Procedures:
 - 1. Describe samples of content you will study
 - a. Specify the population to which the hypotheses or questions relate
 - b. Explain determination of size and type of sample
 - c. If the study uses a purposive (non-random) sample, justify why

- d. If the sample is randomly drawn, specify acceptable sampling error
 - 2. Specify the method of drawing sample and relate this to the study goals
- C. Data Collection
 - 1. Describe the Content of Interest (e.g., news stories, sitcoms, etc.)
 - a. Specify the content to be analyzed
 - b. Specify procedures for identifying the content of interest
 - c. Describe the bounds of the analysis in terms of time frame or material
 - d. Describe how the content will be processed prior to analysis
 - 2. Include the following in description of content analysis categories:
 - a. Specify and define content categories for independent and dependent variables. Specify and define content categories for other variables.
 - b. Describe the measurement of variables, including level of measurement
 - c. Describe how coders will be trained
 - d. Specify coder reliability procedures and tests to be used and report reliability
 - e. Address validity issues
- D. Data Analysis
 - 1. Specify method of analysis of collected data.
 - a. Use “hypothetical” data to illustrate how hypotheses and questions are addressed (Proposal only)
 - b. Specify and Illustrate (Proposal only) statistical measures needed
 - 2. If random sampling is used, note necessary tests of statistical significance
 - 3. Use tables, graphs, charts, etc. to illustrate how data will be presented

V. FINDINGS

- A. General Descriptions of Findings — Frequencies on main variables
- B. Findings for Hypotheses (if any)
- C. Findings for Research Questions (if any)
- D. Other Relevant Findings

VI. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

- A. Discuss how study outcomes relate to theory or past research (speculate for proposal).
- B. Discuss future research indicated by study outcomes (speculate for proposal).
- C. Discuss any practical implications of results (speculate for proposal).

VII. PUBLICATION OR REPORTING PLAN

- A. Convention Presentation
 - 1. Where might these findings be presented for scholarly review?
 - 2. To what lay audiences might these findings be relevant or important?
- B. Study Publication
 - 1. What peer-reviewed journal might publish this research?
 - 2. Why is this particular journal relevant for the research?

VIII. ENDNOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CONTENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL