



## MEJO 860.1 Seminar in Content Analysis

Joe Bob Hester, Associate Professor

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**Spring 2021 Class Day, Time, Location:** Tuesdays, 12:30-3:15 p.m., remote only (via Zoom)/synchronous  
**Instructor Contact Information:** [joe.bob.hester@unc.edu](mailto:joe.bob.hester@unc.edu)

**Office Hours:** Virtual (Zoom) office hours are 2:00-3:00 p.m. on Wednesday or by appointment at other times. These hours are made available to provide you with time outside of the classroom for discussion of matters related to course work, as well as for academic and/or career advising.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** (from [UNC Catalog](#)) Students will use 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. Additionally, students will select a topic, produce a content analysis study, and submit the study to a peer-reviewed convention or journal.

**OBJECTIVES:** 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. While this is not a class in data mining or scraping, "hybrid" approaches involving human coding and algorithmic text collection/analysis may be considered.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Regular class attendance is a student obligation. Students are responsible for all of their work, including assessments, tests, and written work, and for all class meetings.

The complete University attendance policy is listed [here](#) for reference.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** The required text for this course is Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F., Watson, B. (2019). *Analyzing Media Messages*. New York: Routledge.

Available for free download at <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.4324/9780429464287> .

(Additional materials will be made available on Sakai.)

**GRADING:** Grading at the graduate level is intended to offer feedback to students on their performance in the course. All master's and doctoral programs administered through The Graduate School operate under the same grading system. The graduate grading scale in use at UNC-Chapel Hill is unique in that it cannot be converted to the more traditional ABC grading scale. Graduate students do not carry a numerical GPA.

**H (High Pass - Clear Excellence):** 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 (Pass - Entirely Satisfactory Graduate Work):** Student usually reads and engages critically with the assigned material. Able to apply material and extrapolate ideas. Consistently good work done on time.

**L (Low Pass - Inadequate Graduate Work):** 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 (Fail):** 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.

Grading rubric: An **F** is given for a late work. Work components will be weighted as follows:

**10% Class Participation:** 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.

**25% Homework Assignments:** Homework assignment grades are based on their completeness in addressing the specified assignment tasks, as well as presentation. Homework Assignments must be submitted to the instructor as specified on Sakai.

**20% Research Proposal:** The proposal will be assessed based on relevant criteria in the Outline of Steps in Research Design provided by the instructor.

**45% Completed Study:** 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. Submission to peer-reviewed venues requires that manuscripts be prepared according to the style requirements of those venues. For this seminar, students should adhere to The Chicago Manual of Style or APA for citations and other matters of style.

**HONOR CODE:** The Honor Code (<https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/>) forms a bond of trust among students, faculty, and administrators. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill operates under a system of self-governance, as students are responsible for governing themselves. As such, our University is transformed into a powerful community of inquiry and learning. The Honor Code embodies the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship, and governs the performance of all academic work a student conducts at the University. Acceptance of an offer of admission to Carolina presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in our century-old tradition of honor and integrity.

**SEEKING HELP:** If you need individual assistance, it is 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 University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined on the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office’s webpage (<https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/>). 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.

**SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:** If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Resources & Services site at <https://ars.unc.edu/>.

**ACCREDITATION:** The Hussman School of Journalism and Media’s accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: <http://hussman.unc.edu/accreditation>. 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. The values and competencies associated with this course include being able to:

- 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.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE:** See Sakai for specific reading assignments. Assignments are due by 5:00 p.m. on Friday of the week unless otherwise noted.

<b>Class Meeting Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
Tuesday, January 19, 2021	Content Analysis / Social Science	
Tuesday, January 26, 2021	Designing a Content Analysis	
Tuesday, February 2, 2021	Computational Research	Project Topic
Tuesday, February 9, 2021	Protocol Development	
Tuesday, February 16, 2021	No Class Meeting (UNC Wellness Day)	
Tuesday, February 23, 2021	Measurement	Literature Review
Tuesday, March 2, 2021	Reliability	Concepts & Measures
Tuesday, March 9, 2021	Sampling	
Tuesday, March 16, 2021	Validity	Coding Protocol
Tuesday, March 23, 2021	Data Analysis 1	Sampling Plan
Tuesday, March 30, 2021	Data Analysis 2	
Tuesday, April 6, 2021	Consultation / Discussion Workshop	Final Research Proposal
Tuesday, April 13, 2021	Consultation / Discussion Workshop	Reliability Analysis Plan
Tuesday, April 20, 2021	Consultation / Discussion Workshop	Data Analysis Plan
Tuesday, April 27, 2021	Case Study Presentations	*Case Study
Tuesday, May 4, 2021	Project Presentations	
Tuesday, May 11, 2021	Wrap-up & Review	*Completed Project Manuscript

\* Due by the beginning of the class meeting.

**FINAL EXAM TIME (noon, Tuesday, May 11):**

Your completed project manuscript is due by the beginning of this class meeting (note the 12 p.m. start time). Final exam times are based on the [University final exam schedule](#). We will use the meeting to debrief, review, and discuss next steps for your content analysis research.