

# SEMINAR IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

MEJO 860.1 • SPRING 2023

Joe Bob Hester, Associate Professor

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**Class Day, Time, Location:** Mondays, 2:00-4:45 p.m., in-person (Curtis Media Center--Rm 0303)

**Instructor Contact Information:** [joe.bob.hester@unc.edu](mailto:joe.bob.hester@unc.edu)

**Student Hours:** Student hours are 12:45 – 1:45 on Monday and Wednesday in my office (233 Carroll Hall) or by appointment at other times (in person or virtually). 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 DELIVERY:** As long as it is possible to do so safely, we will meet in person this semester. There is typically no option for attending class virtually, although there may be occasional exceptions. Class meetings will be recorded using Zoom. You will have access to those recordings for review purposes (via Panopto on Sakai). I understand the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may require changes to this plan and will be monitoring the situation closely. If I need to change the format of the course temporarily due to outbreaks of illness, I will announce this via email and the course Sakai site.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Students will use appropriate research designs to collect content data for coding and analysis, develop conceptual and operational definitions of variables for coding, conduct reliability testing of coding protocol and procedures, and propose appropriate statistical analysis of collected data. While the ultimate goal is to produce a content analysis study and submit it to a peer-reviewed convention or journal, this course will focus on the development of a high-quality research proposal.

**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 proposal by the end of the semester. The proposal 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 procedures for 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.

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**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** The required text for this course is Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F., Watson, B. (2019). *Analyzing Media Messages*. New York: Routledge. This text is available electronically in the *Course Reserves* section of the course Sakai site.  
(Additional materials will be made available on Sakai or in class.)

**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:

**15% 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. Also includes proposal presentation during the last class meeting (final exam period).

**35% Assignments 1-7:** Assignment grades are based on their completeness in addressing the specified assignment tasks, as well as presentation. Assignments must be submitted to the instructor as specified on Sakai.

**10% Research article presentation/discussion:** Each student will present a published research article involving content analysis to the class and lead a Q&A/discussion about the article. Articles will be assigned by the instructor based on the topic(s) being discussed that day.

**40% Completed Research Proposal:** The proposal will be assessed based on relevant criteria in the Outline of Steps in Research Design provided by the instructor. Major review criteria include study purpose and conceptualization, study relevance to theory and past research, appropriateness of the content analysis research design, and effectiveness of data collection and analysis procedures. Clarity

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and competence in organization, writing, and style will also be considered. Manuscripts be prepared according to the style requirements of major peer-reviewed publications. 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.

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The following schedule outlines the required readings and due dates for assignments. See Sakai for most current version.

NOTE: The online version (Sakai) of this schedule is a living document. Additional readings/resources/exercises will be added throughout the semester based on class progress and student interests.

Research article presentation/discussion dates are in green.

Assignment due dates are in red.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Monday, January 9, 2023 – First Class Meeting - Introduction to quantitative content analysis as a research method.

Please come to class prepared to:

- introduce yourself (tell us something interesting!),
- discuss what you already know/think about quantitative content analysis,
- share your general research interests, and
- share any thoughts about possible research topics that you are thinking about for this course.

Monday, January 16, 2023 – MLK Holiday – no class meeting

Monday, January 23, 2023 – Choosing a topic

Before class, please the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Defining Content Analysis as a Social Science Tool
- Chapter 8: Designing a Content Analysis in *Analyzing Media Messages*

In class, be prepared to:

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- Discuss different types of content analysis research designs.
- Further discuss topic selection for your project with particular emphasis on the requirements of Assignment 01 (rationale, RQs/hypotheses, data).

Friday, January 27, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 1: TOPIC SELECTION due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, January 30, 2023 – Computational methods / Measurement

Before class, please read the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 3: Computers and Content Analysis
- Chapter 4: Measurement

Also read:

- pp. 1-12 & 85-87 in Freelon, D., McIlwain, C.D., & Clark, M.D. (2016). *Beyond the hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice.* (pp. 1-12 & 85-87). [https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/beyond\\_the\\_hashtags\\_2016.pdf](https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/beyond_the_hashtags_2016.pdf)

In class, be prepared to:

- Discuss how computational research methods can be applied to content analysis, particularly in terms of data collection, data preprocessing, and data analysis.
- Discuss measurement issues in content analysis.
- Discuss your fellow class members' topic selections.

Research article presentation/discussion 1.

Monday, February 6, 2023 - Sampling

Before class, please read the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 5: Sampling

Research article presentation/discussion 2.

Friday, February 10, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 2: PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW due by 5:00 p.m.

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Monday, February 13, 2023 Well-Being Day – no class meeting

Monday, February 20, 2023 – Reliability / Protocol Development

Before class, please the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 6: Reliability, pp. 98-112

In class, be prepared to:

- Discuss the importance of reliability in content analysis.
- Discuss protocol development.

Research article presentations/discussion 3 & 4.

Friday, February 24, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 3: SPECIFYING CONCEPTS AND MEASURES due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, February 27, 2023 – Intercoder Reliability

Before class, please the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 6: Reliability, pp. 113-131

In class, be prepared to:

- Learn to compute intercoder reliability.

Research article presentations/discussion 5 & 6.

Friday, March 3, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 4: PROTOCOL AND CODING SHEET due by 5:00 p.m.

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Monday, March 6, 2023 - Validity

Before class, please the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 7: Validity

In class, be prepared to:

- Discuss different types of validity.
- Discuss the relationship between validity & reliability.

Research article presentations/discussion 7 & 8.

Monday, March 13, 2023    Spring Break – no class meeting

Monday, March 20, 2023 – Data analysis 1

Before class, please the following in *Analyzing Media Messages*:

- Chapter 9: Data Analysis

In class, we will work on various data analysis problems.

Research article presentations/discussion 9 (& 10 if needed).

Friday, March 24, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 5: SAMPLING PLAN due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, March 27, 2023 – Data analysis 2

In class, we will work on various data analysis problems.

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Monday, April 3, 2023

Consultation / Discussion Workshop - Today's class meeting is a workshop for individual consultations and discussion.

Wednesday, April 5, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 6: RELIABILITY ANALYSIS PLAN due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, April 10, 2023

Consultation / Discussion Workshop - Today's class meeting is a workshop for individual consultations and discussion.

Friday, April 14, 2023 - ASSIGNMENT 7: DATA ANALYSIS PLAN due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, April 17, 2023

Consultation / Discussion Workshop - Today's class meeting is a workshop for individual consultations and discussion.

Monday, April 24, 2023

Consultation / Discussion Workshop - Today's class meeting is a workshop for individual consultations and discussion.

Friday, April 28, 2023 LDOC - FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL due by 5:00 p.m.

Monday, May 1, 2023

Final Exam Period (8 a.m.) – Proposal presentations. Come to class prepared to give a short (15 min. max) summary of your project. Focus on obstacles you have faced, how you overcame them, and what you've learned during the process.