JOUR 717

Methods in Content Analysis Research

Jacob Long, Ph.D.
jacob.long@sc.edu
Office Hours*: TBD and by appointment*.

Spring 2021
Online Format: Blackboard + Teams
Tuesdays, 10:00am – 1:00pm

Course Description

This is a graduate course designed to familiarize students with how to evaluate, design, and conduct quantitative content analysis research with a focus on communication topics. Content analysis, for the purposes of this course, refers to a quantitative technique used in the social scientific research process. The content under analysis is most typically media, but can be any "text" — such as words in print or digital form, images, video, or audio. Content involves some manner of "coding" content into categories or quantities using a systematic, replicable technique. Coding may be conducted by humans, computers, or some combination of the two. For this course, students will conduct a content analysis of their own in addition to building some skills that will be useful for further work beyond this term.

Required Materials

Textbooks and readings

There is no required text for this course. All readings will be made available on Blackboard.

Technology requirements

Materials will be provided through Blackboard and you will be required to participate in some class discussions via Microsoft Teams. Therefore, you must have access to the Internet to view/hear lectures. No special software is required.

The links to articles, assignments, quizzes, and other materials are located on Blackboard. To participate in learning activities and complete assignments, you will need:

- Access to a working computer that has a current operating system with updates installed, plus speakers or headphones to hear lecture presentations
- Reliable Internet access and a UofSC email account
- A current Internet browser that is compatible with Blackboard (Google Chrome is the recommended browser for Blackboard)
- Microsoft Word as your word processing program
- Reliable data storage for your work, such as a USB drive or Office365 OneDrive cloud storage

If your computer does not have Microsoft Word, Office 365 ProPlus package is available to you free of charge and allows you to install Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Publisher, and Access on up to 5 PCs or Macs and Office apps on other mobile devices including tablets. Office 365 also includes unlimited cloud storage on OneDrive. To download Office 365 ProPlus, log into your student (University) email through a web

browser, choose Settings (top right corner), and select software. If you have further questions or need help with the software, please contact the Service Desk (https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/university_technology_services/support/servicedesk.php).

Minimal technical skills needed

Minimal technical skills are needed in this course. Most course work will be completed and submitted in Blackboard. Therefore, you must have consistent and reliable access to a computer and the Internet. The minimal technical skills you need to have include the ability to:

- Organize and save electronic files
- Use UofSC email and attached files
- Check email and Blackboard daily
- Download and upload documents
- Locate information with a browser
- Use Blackboard.

Evaluation

This class will use the standard USC grading scheme:

A	90-100%	**B+**	85-89.99%	**B**	80-84.99%
C+	75-79.99%	**C**	70-74.99%	**D+**	65-69.99%
D	60-64.99%	**F**	0-59.99%		

Assignments

The final grade in the class will tentatively consist of the following:

Response Papers	200 / 20%
Skills Assignments	250 / 25%
Codebook Assignment	150 / 15%
Participation	100 / 10%
Final Project	300 / 30%
Total	1000 / 100%

Response Papers

Each of you will pick three week's readings and prepare essays dealing with the themes contained in those readings or other materials, e.g. videos. Each paper should be around 500 words (about one page, single-spaced). They should be uploaded to Blackboard before the start of class for the week you are writing about. I want your reactions to the course materials – not the lectures or class discussions – so the idea is that you write these before hearing the lectures or classroom discussion.

In preparing the essay, first consider ALL the material that is assigned for the given week; that is, read any articles or chapters assigned, watch any films, etc., and think about a theme that runs through these materials. In your essay, provide a concise description of the theme, and explain it. Offer your reaction to the theme.

The best essays will articulate a point of view with respect to the materials and then use facts from the materials to support this argument. These papers should not be a summary of the main points. I am more interested in your reaction to the information. This might involve the usefulness of the information, the level of interest you

have in it, anything that you found particularly surprising or disappointing, etc. With that being said, your statements should have a factual basis. This is not a space for rants or speculation.

Note that although these essays are short, they should contain the elements of any well-written essay: A good, creative title, strong lead, and good introduction, transitions and conclusion. While you will not be graded for adherence to APA format, any external sources (other than assigned class materials) should be cited in a discernible way.

Skills Assignments

You will learn several technical skills throughout the semester, such as basic programming in R and the use of some other tools. There will be a series of assignments to assess your development of those skills.

Codebook Assignment

You will create a codebook, an essential part of human-conducted content analysis, and have classmates use it to code some sample media.

Final Project

The course builds to a final project, which involves you conducting a content analysis. You will need to identify a data source and try to answer a research question of your choosing with it. There will be several milestones throughout the semester in which students will show progress to ensure successful completion of the project.

Detailed explanations of the requirements for assignments will be provided as they come due.

Grade Disputes

Any dispute about a grade must be done within one week of the grade posting. You should compose an email, making clear that you are challenging the grade, with information about the assignment and details (using the rubric and guidelines) of why you feel you should receive a different score. There is no guarantee of a grade change in response to such a challenge, but you can rest assured that you will not be penalized even if additional errors are discovered.

Course Policies

Reasonable Accommodation Policy

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Student Disability Resource Center: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Student Disability Resource Center.

Late policy

Penalties on late work are as follows:

Time past deadline	Maximum grade
0-1 hour	95%
1-24 hours	90%
24-48 hours	80%
48-72 hours	70%
> 72 hours	0% (no credit)

In other words, an assignment that is just under 24 hours late will first be assessed as if it is not late, then that grade will be multiplied by 90%. A 90% paper would then be entered as a 81% in the gradebook (.9 × .9 = .81). If there are special circumstances that cause you to be unable to complete assigned work, you may contact me to

make arrangements. In all cases, I have discretion over whether the situation justifies excusing late work; furthermore, I may ask you to provide documentation of the issue (e.g., signed doctor's note). Generally speaking, I will be more accommodating if you are having problems that make it difficult to complete work on time.

Faculty feedback and response time

Allow 10-14 days for grades on major assignments, although sometimes you will receive feedback sooner. In general, expect a response to emails within 24 hours on business days. If you haven't gotten a response after a couple of days, feel free to reach out again.

Written assignments

All written work must be typed and must conform to APA formatting, citing, and referencing guidelines (see http://www.apastyle.org/ and https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/).

Unless otherwise noted, assignments must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. on the assigned due date.

Academic misconduct

Honor Code

Every student has a role in maintaining the academic reputation of the university. It is imperative that you refrain from engaging in plagiarism, cheating, falsifying your work and/or assisting other students in violating the Honor Code. Two important components of the Honor Code:

- Faculty members are required to report potential violations of the Honor Code to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.
- When a student is uncertain as to whether conduct would violate the Honor Code, it is their responsibility to seek clarification from the appropriate faculty member.

Your enrollment in this class signifies your willingness to accept these responsibilities and uphold the Honor Code of the University of South Carolina. Please review the Honor Code Policies. Any deviation from this expectation can result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.

Copyright

Lectures and course materials (which is inclusive of my presentations, tests, exams, outlines, and lecture notes) may be protected by copyright. You are encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for your own educational purpose. However, you are not to reproduce or distribute this content without my expressed written permission. This includes sharing course materials to online social study sites like Course Hero and other services.

Students who publicly reproduce, distribute or modify course content maybe in violation of the university's Honor Code's Complicity policy, which states: sharing academic work with another student (either in person or electronically) without the permission of the instructor. To best understand the parameters around copyright and intellectual property review http://www.sc.edu/policies/acaf133.pdf.

Collaboration

A student's grades are to represent to what extent that individual student has mastered the course content. You should assume that you are to complete course work individually (without the use of another person or un-cited outside source) unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. It is your responsibility to seek clarification if you are unclear about what constitutes proper or improper collaboration. For skills assignments, you will be given a

more specific definition of what constitutes collaboration because seeking outside help is one of the skills you should develop.

Reusing course materials

The use of previous semester course materials is not allowed in this course. This applies to homework, projects, quizzes and tests. Because these aids are not available to all students within the course, their use by any individual student undermines the fundamental principles of fairness and disrupts your professor's ability to accurately evaluate your work. Any potential violations will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity for review.

Diversity and inclusion

The university is committed to a campus environment that is inclusive, safe, and respectful for all persons, and one that fully embraces the Carolinian Creed. To that end, all course activities will be conducted in an atmosphere of friendly participation and interaction among colleagues, recognizing and appreciating the unique experiences, background, and point of view each student brings. You are expected at all times to apply the highest academic standards to this course and to treat others with dignity and respect.

Changing nature of this syllabus

The assignments, policies, and readings in this syllabus are subject to change at any time. If this occurs, the changes will be announced and an updated version of the syllabus will be posted to Blackboard.

Below is a summary of all changes:

- January 13 — first public version

Unless otherwise specified, quizzes, discussion posts, and other assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date they are due.

If the information on Blackboard contradicts this syllabus, assume the information on Blackboard is correct.

This schedule provides a broad overview. More details will be available on Blackboard, where you will access readings and other materials.

Week 1, 1/11 – 1/17: Course introduction

Week 2, 1/18 – 1/24: Defining content analysis

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). Defining content analysis. In *The content analysis guidebook* (Second edition, pp. 18–61). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). Defining content analysis as a social science tool. In *Routledge Communication Series*. *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (Third edition, pp. 18–31). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Week 3, 1/25 – 1/31: Sampling and units of analysis

Edy, J. A., Althaus, S. L., & Phalen, P. F. (2005). Using news abstracts to represent news agendas. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *82*, 434–446. (Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA). doi: 10.1177/107769900508200212

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). Message units and sampling. In *The content analysis guidebook* (Second edition, pp. 106–138). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Stryker, J. E., Wray, R. J., Hornik, R. C., & Yanovitzky, I. (2006). Validation of database search terms for content analysis: The case of cancer news coverage. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *83*, 413–430. doi: 10.1177/107769900608300212

Week 4, 2/1 – 2/7: Measurement principles and human coding

Archer, A. M., & Clinton, J. (2018). Changing owners, changing content: Does who owns the news matter for the news? *Political Communication*, *35*, 353–370. doi: 10.1080/10584609.2017.1375581

Kort-Butler, L. A. (2012). Rotten, vile, and depraved! Depictions of criminality in superhero cartoons. *Deviant Behavior*, *33*, 566–581. doi: 10.1080/01639625.2011.636718

Law, C., & Labre, M. P. (2002). Cultural standards of attractiveness: A thirty-year look at changes in male images in magazines. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *79*, 697–711. doi: 10.1177/107769900207900310

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). Measurement. In *Routledge Communication Series*. *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (Third edition, pp. 51–70). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Week 5, 2/8 – 2/14: Human coding and codebooks

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). Measurement and validity. In *The content analysis guidebook* (Second edition, pp. 169–233). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Van Kessel, P., Toor, S., & Smith, A. (2019). *A week in the life of popular YouTube channels*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from Pew Research Center website: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/07/25/a-week-in-the-life-of-popular-youtube-channels/

Weber, R. (1990). Content classification and interpretation. In *Basic content analysis* (pp. 15–40). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412983488

Wilke, J., Heimprecht, C., & Cohen, A. (2012). The geography of foreign news on television: A comparative study of 17 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, *74*, 301–322. doi: 10.1177/1748048512439812

Week 6, 2/15 – 2/21: Reliability and human coding

Hayes, A. F., & Krippendorff, K. (2007). Answering the call for a standard reliability measure for coding data. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *1*, 77–89. doi: 10.1080/19312450709336664

Krippendorff, K. (2004). Reliability. In *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed., pp. 211–256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lynch, T., Tompkins, J. E., van Driel, I. I., & Fritz, N. (2016). Sexy, strong, and secondary: A content analysis of female characters in video games across 31 years. *Journal of Communication*, *66*, 564–584. doi: 10.1111/jcom.12237

Mikhaylov, S., Laver, M., & Benoit, K. R. (2012). Coder reliability and misclassification in the human coding of party manifestos. *Political Analysis*, *20*, 78–91. doi: 10.1093/pan/mpr047

Week 7, 2/22 – 2/28: Linkage analysis

de Vreese, C. H., Boukes, M., Schuck, A., Vliegenthart, R., Bos, L., & Lelkes, Y. (2017). Linking survey and media content data: Opportunities, considerations, and pitfalls. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *11*, 221–244. doi: 10.1080/19312458.2017.1380175

Long, J. A., & Eveland, W. P., Jr. (2021). Entertainment use and political ideology: Linking worldviews to media content. *Communication Research*, *48*, 479–500. doi: 10.1177/0093650218791011

Miller, A. H., Goldenberg, E. N., & Erbring, L. (1979). Type-set politics: Impact of newspapers on public confidence. *The American Political Science Review*, *73*, 67–84. doi: 10.2307/1954731

Week 8, 3/1 – 3/7: Introducing computational skills

[No readings]

Week 9, 3/8 – 3/14: Dictionary methods

Conway, M. (2006). The subjective precision of computers: A methodological comparison with human coding in content analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *83*, 186–200. doi: 10.1177/107769900608300112

Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: LIWC and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *29*, 24–54. doi: 10.1177/0261927X09351676

Week 10, 3/15 – 3/21: Machine learning basics

Barberá, P., Boydstun, A. E., Linn, S., McMahon, R., & Nagler, J. (2020). Automated text classification of news articles: A practical guide. *Political Analysis*, 1–24. doi: 10.1017/pan.2020.8

Shane, J. (2019a). How does it learn? In *You look like a thing and I love you: How artificial intelligence works and why it's making the world a weirder place*. New York, NY: Voracious.

Shane, J. (2019b). What is AI? In *You look like a thing and I love you: How artificial intelligence works and why it's making the world a weirder place*. New York, NY: Voracious.

Week 11, 3/22 – 3/28: Sentiment analysis

Boukes, M., Velde, B. van de, Araujo, T., & Vliegenthart, R. (2020). What's the tone? Easy doesn't do it: Analyzing performance and agreement between off-the-shelf sentiment analysis tools. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *14*, 83–104. doi: 10.1080/19312458.2019.1671966

Week 12, 3/29 – 4/4: No class

Tuesday, March 30: Wellness day (no class)

Week 13, 4/5 – 4/11: Topic modeling and related methods

Blei, D. M. (2012). Topic modeling and digital humanities. *Journal of Digital Humanities*, *2*. Retrieved from http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/2-1/topic-modeling-and-digital-humanities-by-david-m-blei/

Boumans, J. W., & Trilling, D. (2016). Taking stock of the toolkit. *Digital Journalism*, *4*, 8–23. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2015.1096598

Guo, L., Vargo, C. J., Pan, Z., Ding, W., & Ishwar, P. (2016). Big social data analytics in journalism and mass communication: Comparing dictionary-based text analysis and unsupervised topic modeling. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *93*, 332–359. doi: 10.1177/1077699016639231

Week 14, 4/12 – 4/18: Free week

Week 15, 4/19 – 4/25: Final project prep