

## **J381.1 (08170)**

### **Content Analysis**

Dr. Tom Johnson

Fall 2014

TTH CMA 6.146 11-12:30 p.m.

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Office hours: T 2-3:30, W 1:30-3, by appointment or when you least expect it

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

Kimberly A. Neuendorf *The Content Analysis Guidebook* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 2002

The Content Analysis Guidebook Online

[http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf\\_ka/content/](http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf_ka/content/)

Readings on Canvass

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Content analysis is the systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of message characteristics. Content analysis is one of the fastest growing methods used in communication research. Content analysis is a systematic way to analyze the content of documented communications, whether they are written, audio/visual or digital.

The emphasis of the course will be to examine the methodological steps involved in conducting content analysis so that you will be able to design and execute content analysis studies, whether they be traditional manual approaches or more recent computer-based techniques.

### **GRADING**

The majority of the grades from the class will come directly or indirectly from the content analysis project you undertake. I have undertaken a research project with the Digital Media Research Program downloading content from the social news site Reddit. We have downloaded two months already and will download content from Sept. 1 until election day. We will be sure to download data from Texas politics as well as from states where women are running for the Senate. We will be downloading the news and politics

subreddits in addition to the ones regarding the elections, so there are a wealth of subjects you can examine. You can also ask to examine a specific subreddit as long as it is primarily text based. We will be working in concert with the Twitter group headed by Dr. Lawrence. You are welcome, but certainly not required, to do research from these data sets.

In this course you will be conducting an entire research project from choosing a specific topic you want to examine to defining and measuring your variables, to constructing a codebook and conducting a pilot study. This content analysis project will serve as the basis for your term paper. In order to systematically develop the project I will ask you to submit seven different memos (explained on a different sheet). The paper will also be submitted in five stages 1) topic statement 2) introduction and problem statement 3) literature review and methods 4) rough draft (optional) and 5) final paper. The paper is explained in more depth in a separate sheet.

Research memos.....	100 points
Topic selection.....	10 points
Introduction/problem statement.....	15 points
Literature review/methods.....	35 points
Final Draft of Term paper.....	100 points
Participation.....	50 points

Participation will be based on how active you are in discussions, how active you have been in your group project as well as your participation on individual in class exercises. In addition, I have created a Facebook group, J381 Content Analysis: Count on it! as a place to post notices and material from class. It is also a place where you are free to post notices, or to use to get your research groups organized.

### **ORGANIZATION OF THE CLASS**

Listed below are the tentative topics to be discussed in the course. The order of discussion might change, as might due dates, but I will give you at least a week notice about due date changes.

#### **Week 1: Aug 28**

Introduction to the class

## **Week 2: Sept. 2-4**

1. An overview of content analysis and its major decision points

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chaps. 1 and 3

[http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf\\_ka/content/flowchart.html](http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf_ka/content/flowchart.html) Flow chart examining the content analysis process

2. **Guest speakers:** Krishnan Vasudevan (sentiment analysis) Logan Molyneaux (analyzing big data)

## **Week 3: Sept 9-11**

Topic selection; Message units and sampling

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chapt. 4

**Suggested Reading:** Daniel Riffe, Charles F Aust and Stephen R. Lacy. (1993)

“The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis,” *Journalism Quarterly*, 70, 133-139.

## **Week 4: Sept. 16-18**

Message Units and Sampling (cont)

Decision point 2: **Selection of messages**

**Laboratory:** discuss what issues will be measured, over what period of time, and whether to do census or sample

**Assignment: Research Memo 1:** Topic for your research paper

## **Week 5: Sept. 23-25**

Variables and Predictions

Decision point 3: **Defining content categories**

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chapt. 5

**Laboratory:** Conceptualize variables and develop hypotheses and research questions

**Assignment: Research Memo 2:** What issues will be analyzed over what period of time?

## **Week 6: Sept. 30-Oct. 2**

Variables and Predictions (Cont)

**Assignment: Research Memo 3:** Conceptualize key variables from your study and develop hypotheses and research questions

## **Week 7: Oct 7-9**

Measurement Techniques

Decision point 5: **Operationalizing content categories**

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chapt. 6

**Assignment:** Introduction and problem statement are due

## **Week 8: Oct. 14-16**

**Hand-coding vs. Computer coding:**

Guest Speaker Oct. 14: Dean Roderick Hart, creator of the Dialog computerized content analysis program.

[http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf\\_ka/content/cata.html](http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf_ka/content/cata.html) Discussion of various computer-assisted programs out there.

**Recommended Readings:**

Susan Herring. (2010). Web content analysis: Expanding the paradigm. In Hunsinger, M. Allen, & L. Klastrup (Eds.), *The International Handbook of Internet Research*. Springer Verlag.

Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, & Alfred Hermida. (2013). Content analysis in an era of big data: A hybrid approach to computational and manual methods. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*.

Merja Mahrt and Michael Scharkow. (2013). The Value of Big Data in Digital Media Research. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*.

Danielle Riffe, Stephen Lacy, & Frederick Fico. (2014). Computers. In *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*.

**Assignment: Research Memo 4:** Operationalize key variables from your study

## **Week 9: Oct. 21-23**

Discuss how to develop codebooks

[http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf\\_ka/content/coding.html](http://academic.csuohio.edu/neuendorf_ka/content/coding.html)

Examples of Codebooks from Neuendorf site.

## **Week 10: Oct. 28-30**

**Laboratory:** Discussing constructing codebooks if necessary

**Assignment: Research memo 5:** Constructing your Codebook

**Week 11: Nov. 4-6**

**Decision Point 5:** Establishing Reliability

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chapt. 7

**Laboratory:** Revise codebook based on pilot study

**Nov. 11-13**

Establishing reliability

**Laboratory:** coding content and checking reliability of document

**Assignment: Research Memo 6:** Testing your codebook

**Recommended Reading:** Klaus Krippendorff, "Testing the reliability of content analysis data: What is involved and why. In Krippendorff, K. & Bock, M, A. (Eds.) *The Content Analysis Reader*

**Assignment:** Literature Review and methods sections due

**Nov. 18-20**

Results and Reporting

**Decision Point 6:** Data analysis

**Readings:** Neuendorf, Chapt. 8

**Laboratory:** Data collection and coding

**Nov 25**

Rough draft is due (optional)

**Dec. 2-4**

**Laboratory:** Data Analysis

**Assignment: Research Memo 7** Checking Intercoder reliability on measures

**Final Paper due by 4:30 p.m. Dec. 12**

# Attendance

This is a course where you will learn about how to conduct content analysis. Also quite a bit of class time will be devoted to working on the class research project as well as in-class assignments. Attendance, therefore, is vital. If you cannot make it to class, please contact me in advance to get an excused absence. If you have more than two unexcused absences, I will reduce your score by half a letter grade.

## Religious holy days

A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

## Absence for military service

In accordance with section 51.9111 of the Texas Education Code, a student is excused from attending classes or engaging in other required activities, including exams, if he or she is called to active military service of a reasonably brief duration. The maximum time for which the student may be excused has been defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as "no more than 25 percent of the total number of class meetings or the contact hour equivalent (not including the final examination period) for the specific course or courses in which the student is currently enrolled at the beginning of the period of active military service." The student will be allowed a reasonable time after the absence to complete assignments and take exams. Policies

affecting students who withdraw for military service are given below.

<<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>>

## Students with Disabilities

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities:

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

## University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

## Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties,

including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php).

For the University's official definition of scholastic dishonesty, see Section 11-802, Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities.

<http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi08-09/app/gi08.appc03.html#sec-11-802-scholastic-dishonesty19>



## Research Topic and Research Memos

We will be downloading data from Reddit from Sept. 1 until election day as well as Dr. Lawrence with Twitter. For the Reddit data we will be downloading the two major subreddits, news and politics, as well as libertarian, conservative and liberal subreddits. We will also download the Texas politics subreddits as well as the politics subreddits for the seven states in which women will be running for the Senate. We have already downloaded two months of Reddit content that you are free to analyze. You are free to work with the Twitter and/or Reddit data, although this is not required. You may choose to work on another topic as long as it involves mass or digital communication and content analysis. Your project can involve either manual or computerized content analysis. I ask that this be an original project rather than collecting additional data for a study you have completed. You are certainly welcome to use a previous content analysis project as the basis for a new one.

Examining how Reddit covers the election is obviously too broad a topic. Through the research memos you will explain what specific topic you want to examine, what will be the unit of analysis, what time period you will examine, and how you will conceptualize and operationalize each variable. You will construct a codebook and conduct a pilot study based on your codebook. You will also train someone else to code your data and have him or her conduct intercoder reliability. We will conduct lab sessions in class to check on your work. At some point in the semester I will divide you all into pairs so that you can train someone in your codebook to conduct intercoder reliability. I try to put similar people together so that you can help each other in suggesting improvements in the other's measures or you may choose to adopt some of the variables of your partners. All the research memos will be due at the **beginning of the Tuesday class the week they are due**. Here is a description of the memos:

**Research Memo 1 (due Sept 16): 10 points (term-paper grade):** Each of you will propose a specific topic that will be the focus of your term paper. Be as specific as you can. For instance, you may choose to compare how Wendy Davis and Greg Abbott are framed in articles appearing on Reddit. Or maybe you are just interested in retweets. What are the major issues that are retweeted during the presidential election? Be as specific as you can about

what your paper will examine. Give the specific topic, variables you might address, media you might want to look at, and if you can link your work to a specific theory that would be wonderful.

**Research Memo 2 (due Sept. 23) 10 points:** This is where you will flesh out research memo 1, refining your specific issues you will examine. In what media and over what period of time? What I am particularly interested in is your unit of analysis and your sampling method. Be aware that sometimes a study involves different units of analysis. For instance, if you are looking at how Wendy Davis and Greg Abbott are framed in Reddit posts, you may first look at whether the article mentioned either candidate or both candidates. This would be at the story level. You could then look for what frames are apparent. Depending on your study, you may be looking at the entire population of content or you may need to sample to get the content coded to a reasonable amount. Because I am only requiring a pilot study, chances are you will sample. Be as clear as you can about how you will sample from the entire population.

**Research Memo 3 (due Sept. 30) 10 points:** This is where you conceptualize key variables (three to five) in your study. It is best if you rely on past studies to come up with definitions to improve validity of the measures. Also develop preliminary research questions and/or hypotheses. If there are several of you doing studies based on the Reddit and/or Twitter data, we may discuss in class the variables we will examine. If we adopt your conceptualization scheme for a certain variable you will get 5 bonus points.

**Research Memo 4 (Due Oct. 14) 10 points:** This is where you operationalize key variables (three to five) in your study. It is best if you rely on past studies to come up with specific measures to improve validity of the measures. Also develop refined research questions and/or hypotheses. If there are several of you doing studies based on the Reddit and/or Twitter data, we may discuss in class the variables we will examine. If we adopt your conceptualization scheme for a certain variable you will get 5 bonus points.

**Research Memo 5 (Oct 28) 25 points:** You develop the codebook for your study. A good codebook not only contains the variables to be measured but also provides detailed instructions on what is the sampling unit as well as how you will determine what category content will be coded under so that there are no questions on how each variable should be coded.

**Research Memo 6 (November 11) 25 points** This is where you will test your codebooks through a pilot study. You will be coding at least part of the data from your partner's study. The pilot study will help you determine if the codebook is clear enough in explaining how to code variables. Also, you can tell if the content categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive and if there are problems distinguishing between values in the variables. You should also code your own variables so that you can compare your results with your partners and see what variables either need to be changed or explained better.

**Research Memo 7 (Dec. 3) 20 points:** This is actually an extension of the pilot study, coding 5 to 10 percent of the content for three to five variables from your partner's study and check intercoder reliability.

**J 381.1 Content analysis**  
**Term-paper assignment**  
**Fall 2014**

Each of you will write a 15-25 page research paper on a pilot study of your research project. The paper will be submitted in five stages 1) topic selection 2) introduction and problem statement 3) literature review and methods 4) rough draft (optional) 5) final draft

1. Topic: This is actually research memo 1. Please give me a brief (one page or less) description of what the focus of your term paper will be. Be as specific as you can about what your paper will examine. Give the specific topic, variables you might address, media you might want to look at. If you could link it to a specific theory that would be great.

The topic is due **Sept. 16 at the beginning of class**

2. Introduction and problem statement: The introduction typically is a 1-3 paragraph that introduces the topic you will explore and tries to do so in an engaging manner. The problem statement explains what is missing from the literature, and how your work will address that “hole” in the literature. Then you explain what your paper will examine. This is like a thesis statement that clearly sets out what you plan to do. The introduction and problem statement is due **Oct. 7 at the beginning of class**

3. Literature review and methods section: The literature review, as the name implies, reviews the relevant literature linked to your specific topic. The literature review ends with hypotheses or research questions. It is often better to begin with the hypotheses or research questions, then write the literature review based on what does the reader need to understand to put the hypotheses and research questions in context. The literature review and methods is due **Nov 11 at the beginning of class.**

5. The rough draft of your paper with results and discussion (and ideally bibliography) is not required. However, if you are thinking of submitting your paper to a conference with a December deadline you are **STRONGLY URGED** to do a rough draft. You can also choose to resubmit your literature review and methods. The rough draft is **due Nov. 25 by 4:30 p.m.**

6. Your final paper: Your final paper will include all the previous stages as well as results, discussion and reference. Any of the standard footnote or bibliographical styles is acceptable. My suggestion is that you look at the journal you hope to send it to and adopt that style. The final draft of the paper is due **Friday, Dec. 12 by 4:30 p.m.**

