COMM 494 SYLLABUS

COMM 494 – Spring 2015 – Units: 2 or 4
Mondays and Wednesday, 5pm to 6:20pm

Content Analyses of Characters and Content Creators in Popular Film & Television

Marc Choueiti
Project Administrator
choueiti@usc.edu
ASC 223H
(213) 740-9447

Stacy L Smith, PhD
Associate Professor
stacysmi@usc.edu
ASC 222
(213) 821-1546

Course Overview

In this course you will be taking part in a research investigation that examines portrayals of males and females in popular media content and the individuals responsible for those films. Specifically, we are quantifying 1) speaking characters and their various demographic and occupational data, and 2) men and women working behind the camera in the contemporary film industry.

This course is designed to provide first hand experience with conducting quantitative research in the field of communication, specifically content analytic preparation, execution, and reliability diagnostics, while contributing to research intended for academic diffusion.

You are expected to learn, comprehend, and apply all information discussed in each training session; complete your lab assignments on-time each week; and complete the assigned readings before attending class meetings. It is your responsibility to save course materials, bring them to class and to the lab when you perform your tasks and research. Once a sufficient level of reliability for all variables has been achieved in our quantitative investigation, you are expected to work independently in the lab for a designated number of hours per week on assigned content.

Your workload and assignments will be adjusted based on how many units you are enrolled for in this course. After the training sessions are complete, students registered for 2 units will be required to complete 8 hours of laboratory work each week; 4 units will be required to complete 10 hours of laboratory work. Additionally, those registered for 4 units will be given supplemental work related to the written assignment (see below) once training is complete.

The reading material will be a content analysis codebook that will serve as the instruction manual for the course. It will be provided to you in stages as specific sections are discussed and assigned in the training sessions. You are required to read, absorb and apply all of the information throughout the project. Please refer to the manual during the class and at all times while analyzing content.
Course Policies

Grading: Your grade will reflect the quality of assignments you complete as well as each aspect of the course listed below. These 5 items will make up 100% of your grade:

70% The successful completion of your hours for each week of the semester once training is complete. Completing less than the total number of hours required will result in a lowered grade. If one or more University Holidays occur during a particular week, students will only need to complete a fraction of the week’s requirements.

10% Coding the provided content during the training process and from the sample. During training students will analyze the same material independently. Note: Midterm standing will be based on training performance. You will be evaluated on unitizing, applying the measures, and overall reliability**. After training, content will be randomly assigned to students.

10% Turning in a written assignment (tailored for this particular term’s investigation) that is evaluated based on the guidelines set forth in the assignment. The ‘Writing Your Own Variable’ assignment instructions and guidelines will be handed out once training is complete, as it will reflect the unitizing methods that are made clear during training.

5% Attendance: not only for training, but also the frequent meetings on content throughout the term (discussing the data collected, any disagreements and the correct analysis).

5% Correcting all errors and completing any assigned tasks unrelated to coding. Completing Final Agreement files in your assigned groups or pairings.

**For each assignment, we compute unitizing agreement. We also quantify reliability on assigned variable values in the form of a reliability coefficient. We strive for 100% unitizing agreement and reliability for each variable. As with most content analyses, agreement among coders is one of the most important factors – without any reliable agreement the data collected is essentially useless.

Quality of Work: When assessing a student’s quality of work we consider how close or far they are to the most frequently prescribed A) amount of characters and B) attributes assigned to those characters in a given diagnostic. Our tried and true method guarantees that it is possible for almost all students to be reliable almost all of the time. Some students might have difficulty agreeing with their fellow coders or their judgments may include individual or systematic error. By adhering to the procedures in this document and in the codebook, these issues should be at their minimum. All research assistants are expected maintain objectivity in their research and to double-check every decision they make to reduce individual error.

To ensure their grade is not negatively affected, unreliable students have the option of being retrained and given additional diagnostics to test for greater agreement. Alternatively, students cease collecting data by discontinuing the course or participate in other tasks surrounding the project for the remainder of the semester if available. The timeliness and completion of these takes will contribute to quality of their grade.
COMM 494 SYLLABUS

*Ethical Guidelines:* We require and maintain the utmost integrity in our research investigations. All judgments should be independent, all evaluations should be fair and accurate, and all station conduct should be professional. Any individual in violation of these ethical guidelines will be told to leave the project. Below are the overarching guidelines of the course:

**Independent Judgments:** In the process of analyzing content and collecting data, each individual is expected to make independent judgments.

1. All judgments in lab assignments should be an individual’s independent and original work. If a research assistant’s coding decisions are influenced by means of plagiarizing (copying or examining another’s judgments) they will be told to discontinue their involvement and their data cannot be used (all of their data, pre- and post-training).
2. Everyone is allowed and encouraged to seek advice, suggestions, and explanations in the training and while coding, but only from instructors – not from fellow students.
3. We understand when situations or events out of one’s control influence decisions but with double checking, as well as honest and rigorous procedures these should be nonexistent by the end of our study.

**Fair Evaluations:** The following policies help ensure that all coding will consist of fair and legitimate evaluations:

1. We ask that all research assistants provide their full attention to coding and tasks in this investigation. There should be no reading, writing, listening, or discussion of unrelated information while coding. In training no electronic devices will be necessary – cell phones and laptops should be turned completely off and put away for the entire session.
2. To ensure complete independence and accuracy, when applicable do not use or manually turn on subtitles and do not fast-forward content. This does not apply while fixing previously coded content.

**Professional Station Conduct:** The following policies help ensure that all coding will consist of the highest possible quality and accuracy:

1. Cell phone usage (phone calls, text, etc.) is strictly prohibited. If research assistants do receive a call or if they absolutely must text someone, they should sign out and leave the hallway. Do not log time for anything unrelated to the project, such as leaving to get food, making a personal phone call, or waiting for further instructions.
2. No outside interference is allowed. We ask that there be no flagrant socializing at the coding stations. If a friend, professor, visiting relative, etc. visits someone at work, the research assistant is required to sign out and continue the conversation outside.
3. Though we don’t expect such situations to occur, breaks of at least 30 minutes are required every 5 hours of work. These breaks should NOT be done at the coding stations. Lastly, there is no eating at the coding stations for sanitary reasons.

*Academic Integrity:* USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and
COMM 494 SYLLABUS

the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, (http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Students with Disabilities: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.