

## COMM 494 SYLLABUS

COMM 494 – Spring 2018 – Units: 2 or 4  
Meeting Times: Mondays, Wednesdays 5 to 6:20pm

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

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#### Course Overview

In this course you will be taking part in a research investigation that primarily examines portrayals of characters in popular media content and the individuals responsible for those films. Specifically, we are quantifying and you will be assisting with data collection on 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 and professional distribution.

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 a written assignment once training is complete. Students who have registered for and completed 2 units of this specific course in a prior term will not be required to participate in training. Rather, they will need to complete laboratory work weekly from the start to the end of the semester.

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 four sections are worth a total of 320 points and will make up 100% of your grade:

- 5%, 16 pts -Attendance and participation during the training process. Students are expected to arrive on time, fully engage in the discussion and learning process, attend all lectures, and refrain from distractions (technology and other material not related to the course). Note: this portion of the grade does not apply to returning 2 unit students.
- 20%, 64 pts -Performance on assigned diagnostics during the training process. During training students will analyze the same material independently. Note: Midterm standing will be based training performance. Students will be evaluated on unitizing, applying the measures, and overall reliability\*\*. After training, various content will be randomly assigned to students. Note: this portion of the grade does not apply to returning 2 unit students.
- 70%, 224 pts -The successful completion of your hours for each week of the semester, coding the provided content from the sample 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. Note: this portion of the grade expands to 95% or 304 points for returning 2 unit students who do not need training. For those registered for 4 units, roughly 5% of this portion will include the written assignment/supplemental work.
- 5%, 16 pts -Lab participation and in the meetings on content throughout the term, as well as discussing data collected, disagreements and correct analysis. This includes correcting all errors and completing any assigned tasks related to the project(s). Further, this comprises the completion of Final Agreement files in assigned groups or pairings.

100%, 320 points

\*\*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

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agreeing with their fellow coders – evaluations will not consider subjective disagreements in judgment. By adhering to the procedures explained in training, in this document, and in the codebook, these issues are expected to be at a minimum. All research assistants are also expected to 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.

*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 instructed to leave the project and withdraw from the course. 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 non-existent 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 or the use of similar communicative technology is strictly prohibited.** If research assistants do receive a call or message, or if they absolutely must message someone, they should sign out and leave the lab. 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 laboratory participation. These breaks should **NOT** be done at the coding stations. Lastly, there is no eating at the coding stations for sanitary reasons.

*Make-Up Policy & Legitimate Excuses:* It is expected that students attend class (training sessions) and their scheduled lab times regularly and punctually. In the event of an emergency (medical, family) students should notify the instructor as soon as possible *prior* to class or their lab time, or be prepared to provide some sort of documentation to support their claim. Occupations, studying, internships, and social gatherings will not count as legitimate excuses for missing class, training, or the incompleteness of weekly laboratory hours and work. If a student misses class, training, or their lab times they are expected to make them up as soon as possible.

*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 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](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](mailto:ability@usc.edu).