

COMM 494 SYLLABUS

COMM 494x Research Practicum – Fall 2020 – Units: 2 or 4

Class Days & Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays 5 to 6:20pm

Content Analytic Research On Screen & Behind the Camera in Entertainment

Marc Choueiti, Project Director

Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, ASCJ 223

choueiti@usc.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment, Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

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 that content. Specifically, you will be assisting with data collection and quantifying 1) speaking characters and their various demographic and contextual data, and 2) individuals working behind the camera in the contemporary entertainment industry.

This course is designed to provide firsthand 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 any assigned readings/materials before attending class meetings. It is your responsibility to save course materials, bring them to class and to your research when you conduct your data collection. 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 research each week; 4 units will be required to complete 10 hours of research. Those hours will be comprised of a mixture of independent data collection and small team discussions reviewing and finalizing data collection. 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 research weekly from the start to the end of the semester for 8 hours each week.

The **reading material** will be an ever-evolving content analysis codebook that will serve as the instruction manual for research conducted as part of this course. The codebook is a very detailed, applied manual consisting of procedures for quantifying and analyzing media content. The length (approximately 40 to 60 pages) and contents fluctuate depending on what research projects are conducted this term. Each class meeting during the training portion of the course, students will be guided through one to two sections of the codebook (roughly 5 pages or so) in detail via

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lecture and discussion. The codebook will be provided to students in stages throughout the weeks of training as specific sections are discussed and assigned in the training sessions.

It is possible that sections will be discussed/assigned in a different order than what is specified in the syllabus schedule. This is to allow for variability in the understanding and application (low, high) of materials in a given term and flexibility in which research topics interests and priorities. For example, it is possible that a new research endeavor is launched this term - together we will embark on learning and testing this research methodology in training and application (and where students' contributions are key).

You are required to read, absorb and apply all of the information throughout the project. The lab assignments throughout training will test and evaluate students' understanding and application of the methodology outlined in the codebook and in lecture. Lab assignments (diagnostics) are to be completed independently. Please refer to the manual during the class and at all times while analyzing content. Supplemental reading materials for research may be assigned throughout the term to facilitate understanding and application.

We will be using the Google suite of online applications (sheets and documents) provided by the University to collect and store data and assignments. Training diagnostics (lab assignments) will be completed using Google sheets in a form supplied to each student and collected when designated as 'finished'. One collected, students' work will be evaluated according to the standards delineated in class.

Learning remotely: To provide for more impactful online class sessions, lectures may be provided asynchronously and assigned ahead of class. Doing so will 1) help class meetings focus on practical application of the material, 2) allow students to consider the material and formulate pointed questions ahead of class, and 3) introduce research topics earlier thereby including them in initial diagnostics, which will allow for additional opportunities to practice research.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course students will be able to a) meaningfully discuss and evaluate the breadth of diversity and inclusion in media, b) demonstrate the steps needed to conduct a quantitative content analysis, c) construct and apply diversity measures to content by way of classifying information on screen and behind the camera, d) know how to design a unitizing approach to content research and e) evaluate equivalent research by making use of their experience with content discussion.

Course Policies

Grading: Your grade will reflect the quality of assignments you complete as well as each aspect of the course listed below. For those enrolled in two units and that are not returning, the following four sections are worth a total of 320 points and will make up 100% of your grade. Student enrolled in four units have a fifth section covering the written assignment that is worth 17 points and 5% of the overall grade (337 points), changing some of the proportions below.

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- 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 (see lab assignments above). 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 contribution to 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.
- Depending upon how much training is required this term (meaning, the amount and type of data being collected by the research team) there may be 4 to 6 diagnostics. The total number of points of all diagnostics will add to the total of this section. However, diagnostics will not be equal in weight. The first will be worth the fewest amount of points and the second will increase in value and so on, with the last being worth the greatest amount of points.
- 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. Time will be logged through online forms.
- 5%, 16 pts -Research 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.

Assessment & Submission. Across assignments students begin with full points. Points are lost from the total possible based on a variety of objective factors: misapplication of the material,

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lack of understanding of subject matter, lack of participation or engagement, and other criteria relating to the specific assignment or grade component (fewer than exactly 8 hours per week for 2 units; fewer than exactly 10 hours per week for 4 units).

Grading Scale. The following scale will be used in this course to assign letter grades:

92.5% - 100%: A	80% - 82.49%: B-	67.5% - 69.9%: D+
90% - 92.49%: A-	77.5% - 79.9%: C+	62.5% - 67.49%: D
87.5% - 89.9%: B+	72.5% - 77.49%: C	60% - 62.49%: D-
82.5% - 87.49%: B	70% - 72.49%: C-	0% - 59.9%: F

Grading Standards/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 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 – 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.

Letter Grade Standards. The highest letter grade (A) will reflect comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter and correct application of the materials, as well as consistent and meaningful contribution to research for the full amount of time expected according to registered units 2 or 4. The 'B' letter grade will reflect good/moderate knowledge and less than the exact amount of time expected post training but not considerably so (8 hours per week for 2 units, 10 hours per week for 4 units). Contributing a considerable amount of time less than expected (missing one to two weeks of research) but maintaining a satisfactory/fair understanding of the course material is consistent with a 'C' letter grade. Marginal understanding as well as even less contribution to research would approximate a 'D' letter grade. Failing the course (F) would reflect minimal knowledge and understanding and lack of contribution to data collection by way of incomplete time spent on research.

Grading Timeframe and Evaluations. Students will receive timely feedback on assignments and progress. Every attempt will be made to grade assignments and post grades within two weeks of the assignment due date. Scores for all assignments are regularly updated on Blackboard. You are responsible for notifying the Instructor within one (1) week of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. Moreover, you only have this period of time to contest a score on an assignment. If you fail to inquire or notify of any discrepancy, missing score, or fail to contest a score within one week of the date the score is posted, no further changes will be made.

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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 the instructor or designated supervisors – not from fellow students.

Fair Evaluations: The following policies help ensure that all coding will consist of fair and legitimate evaluations (see *Academic Integrity* below for more information):

1. We ask that all research assistants provide their full attention to coding and tasks in this investigation. If for some reason students are not in the right frame of mind to provide full attention, they should notify the instructor immediately. There should be no reading, writing, listening, or discussion of unrelated information while coding. In training and during data collection, other devices should be silent and put away to reduce distraction.
2. To ensure complete independence and accuracy, when applicable do not use or manually turn on subtitles and do not skip content. This does not apply while fixing previously coded content.

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

1. Any activities unrelated to research will not count towards time spent on data collection. If research assistants are interrupted or distracted, they should sign out. 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. It is also the student's responsibility to ask for and prepare for additional research and tasks.
2. No outside interference is allowed. We ask that there be no flagrant socializing while conducting research. If another individual interrupts the research process, the research assistant is required to sign out and discontinue logging time.
3. Though we don't expect such situations to occur, breaks of at least 30 minutes are required every 5 hours of continuous data collection. This is to ensure that students can provide their full attention and reduce fatigue.

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Communication. Students are encouraged to email the instructor if they have questions outside of class. If email cannot facilitate learning, prepare for direct meetings to discuss material, questions, evaluations, and content. Emails will be responded to within 48 hours.

Make-Up Policy & Excuses: It is expected that students attend training sessions and 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 supporting documentation. Occupations, classes, and socializing will not count as excuses for missing class, training, or the incompleteness of weekly research hours. If a student misses class, training, or their lab times they are expected to make them up as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity: The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. 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. In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor.

Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles.

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 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.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis. In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness](#).

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Tentative Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

Week/Topic		Class Discussion & Assignments
8/18	Unit of Analysis, Demographics	Read: Syllabus Policies; <i>Character Unitizing, Demographics</i>
8/20	Content Analysis	<i>Single vs Group Unitizing and Variables</i> Lab #1 Assigned
8/25	Using Credits & Domesticity Measures	<i>Credits, Domesticity</i>
8/27	Lab 1 Discussion, Transformations & Unitizing	<i>Type; Unitizing & Transformations</i> Lab Assignment #1 Due by 12pm; #2 Assigned
9/1	Frames of Reference, Physical Attributes Labor Day 8/31	<i>Physical Attributes</i>
9/3	Lab 2 Discussion, Physical Attributes & Sexualization	<i>Sexualization; Program Level Measurement</i> Lab Assignment #2 Due by 12pm; #3 Assigned
9/8	Attraction & Role	<i>Physical Beauty; Role</i>
9/10	Lab 3 Discussion, Measuring Sexuality	<i>Apparent Sexuality</i> Lab Assignment #3 Due by 12pm; #4 Assigned
9/15	Additional Sexuality Measures	<i>Sexuality & Gender</i> 4 Unit Coders: Term Paper Assigned
9/17	Lab 4 Discussion, Disability	<i>Disability</i> Lab Assignment #4 Due by 12pm; #5 Assigned
9/22	Disability Continued	Disability Related Measures; 4 Unit Coders: Term Paper Topic Due by end of Class
9/24	Lab 5 Discussion	<i>Fall Lab Procedures and Projects</i> Lab Assignment #5 Due by 12pm
Week 7	September 28 to October 2	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production
Week 8	October 5 to 9	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production

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Tentative Course Schedule (cont'd) (Subject to Change)

Week/Topic	Class Discussion & Assignments
Week 9 October 12 to 16	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production 4 Unit Coders: Term Paper Draft Due Thurs 10/15/20 5pm
Week 10 October 19 to 23	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production
Week 11 October 26 to 30	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production
Week 12 November 2 to 6	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production
Week 13 November 9 to 13	Lab 8 or 10 hours; Data Collection On Screen, Production 4 Unit Coders: Term Paper Due Tues 11/17/20 5pm

Support Systems to be aware of:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 / Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplcity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

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dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.