Evaluating Information and Analyzing Media I
Communication Studies 121
Josh Pasek, Ph.D. and Amanda Lotz, Ph.D.
Fall 2013

Class
The course meets 10:00-11:30AM on Mondays and Wednesdays in 1400 Chemistry
Sections meet in 1245 North Quad or 1110 North Quad at your designated section times.

Office Hours
Professor Pasek: Weds 2:45-3:45 PM at 5413 North Quad or by appt. jpasek@umich.edu
Professor Lotz: Mon 9-10; 11:45-12:45 AM at 5445 North Quad or by appt. lotz@umich.edu

Graduate Student Instructors

| Name	Sections	Times	Location	Email
Amanda Cote	002, 011	Th 8-10, 2-4	1245 NQ	accote@umich.edu
Stephanie Filipp	003, 005	Th 6-8, F 11-1	1245 NQ	s.l.filipp@gmail.com
Ozan Kuru	004, 010	F 9-11, Th 12-2	1245 NQ	okuru@umich.edu
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Isaac Epstein	008, 009	F 9-11, 11-1	1110 NQ	epsteini@umich.edu

Is Your Mobile Phone Giving You Cancer?

Readers of the *New York Times* could point to seven headlines published during 2011 reporting, "Cellphone Use Tied to Brain Changes" (Feb 22), "No Cellphone-Cancer Link in Large Study" (Oct 20), and, "Cellphone Radiation May Cause Cancer" (May 31) among other related claims.

Does this seem somewhat contradictory? It should. Depending on whom you ask and when, the answer to the cellphone-cancer link might be existent, nonexistent, or a subject for continuing research.

In life, we are constantly exposed to claims about what is true and how the world works. Some of these claims come from trusted acquaintances, others stem from news reports, and additional assertions reach us through Facebook, casual conversations, and email listservs. We find ourselves in this constant stimulation environment without a single easy way to determine which of the things we hear are actually true, which may be misleading, and which are completely false.

Clearly, cellphone use cannot simultaneously cause cancer, not cause cancer, and possibly cause cancer. But how should we evaluate which of the studies reported by the *New York*

Times was actually accurate? Sadly, most of the time we simply aren't given enough information to weigh the evidence without looking at the studies themselves. Problematically, many people lack the training to read and understand original scientific research.
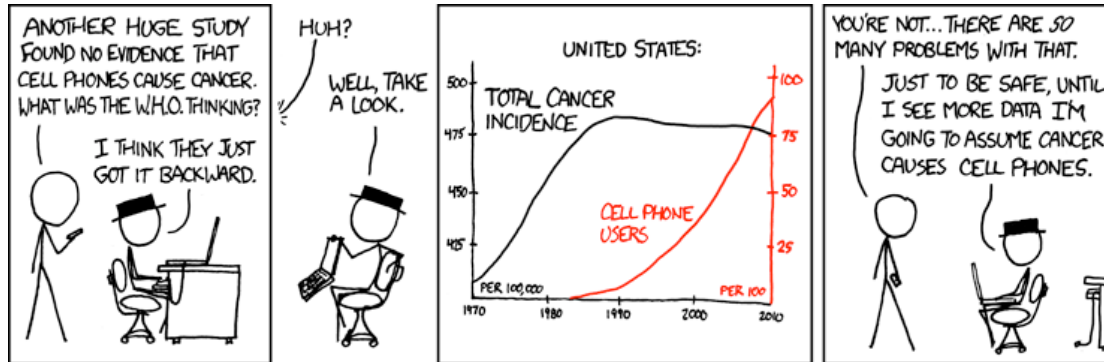
As the first research methods course in the Communication Studies curriculum, this course focuses on the core skills necessary to think through and critically evaluate scientific and analytic arguments and evidence. It offers tools for understanding results from the scientific study of human behavior as well as the norms of humanistic media analysis. By the end of the semester, you will have the tools to read and understand social science as it appears in the news and in scientific journals and to differentiate between casual opinion and carefully argued, analytical criticism.

Over two sequential semesters, Evaluating Information and Analyzing Media explores first the basic fundamentals of the development of knowledge, theories and evidence and the collection of data in both social science and analytic media research. The first half of the course culminates in units exploring the tools offered by both traditions for studying media messages and texts. The second half of the course then begins with explanations of how to conceptualize research that studies people's use of media through methods including experiments, surveys, naturalistic observation, and interviews.

In this course, you will be expected to understand some of the basic principles of scientific research. You will learn some of the different ways that scientific studies can be designed, that data can be collected, and that data can be analyzed when studying a phenomenon like mass communication. For each of these areas, we will explore a variety of techniques and will assess the assumptions that researchers make in using each of those techniques. From this, you will be able to recognize what we can and cannot conclude in our examinations. These skills will also help you when you encounter scientific information in real world settings.

Course Materials
Required Texts:

> Wrench, Jason S, Candice Thomas-Maddox, Virginia Peck Richmond and James C. McCroskey. (2012). *Quantitative Research Methods for Communication: A Hands-On Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

> Additional readings will be posted on the course CTools account.

Requirements

Grading

Exam 1 (Oct 7)	10%
Exam 2 (Nov 11)	10%
Final Exam	20%
Semiotic Analysis Paper (Nov 25)	20%
Content Analysis Paper (Dec 9)	20%
Participation and Section	20%

Participation and section grades are composed of the following parts:

Lecture Participation (Clicker)	5%
Section Participation	5%
Section Homework	5%
Section Quizzes	5%

Class and Workshop Meetings

The class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00AM to 11:30AM in Chemistry, room 1400. Students are expected to attend all classes and to have the reading assignments and paper assignments completed in advance of the assigned class. Students are also expected to participate in class and use clickers at designated times during lectures. Because laptops can be distracting, some areas of the classroom may be designated as laptop-free zones.

Workshops for this class meet on Thursdays and Fridays (at varying times depending on the section) in 1245 North Quad (section 010 will meet in 1110 North Quad). Workshops are led by Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) and meet every week of the semester. Students are expected to complete workshop homework in advance of the assigned week's workshop.

Lecture Participation

Each lecture contains clicker questions. The professor will present the question, you will submit answers with your clicker, and then the correct answers will be revealed and discussed. The reason we use clickers is to give you more examples and applications of the concepts we are learning about, engage you right away in using what you've learned, and provide you with feedback about how well you understand the course material. Please note: most students find exams are harder than the clicker questions, so be sure to use the practice exams even if you're getting all the clicker questions correct.

If you answer 75% of the clicker questions in a given day (correctly or incorrectly), you will earn credit for participating in lecture that day. Failure to answer 75% of the questions for any reason—absence, forgotten clicker, *et cetera*—will be excused three times. After the third time, failure to participate in lecture will adversely affect your grade.

In previous semesters, most students earned 100% in this category and those with higher lecture participation scores were far more likely to do well on exams and papers than those with lower participation scores (i.e., attending and participating in lecture are powerful learning tools).

Papers

Course papers require you to analyze and write clearly about analyses you have conducted. You will be graded on your writing, your use of the specified analytic technique, as well as the extent to which you identify important class ideas. All papers for this class should use APA style (American Psychological Association, 2009) and you will need to be familiar with the rules for writing and citation in this style (a good overview is available at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/).

The Semiotic Analysis paper requires that you closely read an assigned piece of media. The Content Analysis paper requires you to complete a content analysis and compute reliability data on your results. Both papers will be approximately 5 pages in length. All papers need to be turned in on CTools in advance of the class for which they are due. Late papers will be docked 3% for each day they are late and will NOT be accepted more than one week late.

Exams

The exams require you to apply the concepts you have learned in class. Exams from past courses will be posted on CTools. Exams will ONLY be offered on the designated day and time, there will be no alternate times for exams or makeup exams in this course.

<div align="center">**Some Recommendations and Resources**</div>

How to Succeed

In this class, we provide a number of tools to help you learn how to understand, evaluate, and produce good social science. We will test you on your ability to do just that. Your success in the class will be highly dependent on how well you utilize the tools we offer. It is hypothetically possible to pass the class without attending all the lectures, but attendance in lecture has proven an incredibly accurate indicator of overall class performance. Similarly, because we test how well you can apply the concepts in the readings and in class, you will not need to memorize any of the specific examples used in the textbook. Nonetheless, if you understand how concepts are applied in those examples, you will be much more likely to be able to apply them in the papers and during the exams.

<div align="center">**Course Policies**</div>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let the professor or your GSI know as soon as is feasible. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way we teach can be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make us aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; http://www.umich.edu/sswd) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. The teaching team will treat any information you provide as private and confidential. Please note that we will not make any retroactive accommodations.

Absences

Sickness. If you are sick, please go to http://lsa.umich.edu/students/. Click on the button that reads "What to do if You're Sick" and complete the subsequent form. This will report your illness to all of your instructors. You must complete LSA's form if you want to have an illness-related absence excused.

If you are sick for an extended period of time, your absences will only be excused if you provide a doctor's note in addition to filling out the LSA form.

Religious holidays. Within the first two weeks of the semester, please notify your GSIs of any religious holidays for which you will be absent. If a holiday is sufficiently important that you will miss class, you should know the dates in advance.

Athletic and other university-related absences. If you are travelling to represent the University of Michigan, someone on your team will provide you with the appropriate paperwork to distribute to your instructors.

Other excusable absences. For family emergencies, funerals, and other such absences, you will need to notify the office of the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, who will be able to inform all of your instructors. In Fall 2013, the assistant to Assistant Dean is Debbie Walls; you can email her at dwalls@umich.edu. When you return to campus, bring documentation in support of your absence.

Academic Honesty

A good student-teacher relationship operates on the basis of trust. From that basis, your professors and GSIs trust that you will do your utmost to complete coursework and to be honest with us if for any reason you are unable to fully meet a commitment to the class. We also trust your judgment that any advice you solicit from or offer to your peers will stay well outside the bounds of the University of Michigan's policies on plagiarism and cheating (see examples at http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/). That said, if any of us encounters evidence that you have in any way, shape, or form copied material without attribution or collaborated to the point that the work you present is not entirely your own, we will immediately refer the incident to Esrold Nurse, the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education. Because plagiarism and academic dishonestly hurt *everyone* in the class, we have no compunction about failing students who are found to have been dishonest. Put simply, this class has a zero-tolerance policy. There will be no second chances for cheating.

Course Outline:

PART 1 – Knowledge, Theories, and Evidence

Week of September 2nd, 2013 (Week 1)
Introduction to Evaluating Information and Analyzing Media

This week we will briefly discuss the purpose of the course, the syllabus, and the expectations for the class. In the GSI-led workshops, we will be previewing our main topic for next Monday's lecture, and explore some of the ways in which we know things (or think we know things).

> September 2nd – NO CLASS
> 1- September 4th – Course Introduction
>
> September 5th/6th – LAB 1: Workshop: Introduction to Workshops and the Lab

Week of September 9th, 2013 (Week 2)
Ways of Knowing and Intro to Social Science
How do we know things? Can we be sure something is true? What role does the media play in our knowledge of the world? These core questions are the focus on Monday's lecture. On Wednesday, we begin our exploration of social science, one of the two main methodologies through which we can explore media.

> 2- September 9th – Ways of Knowing
>> Reading: Smith, Greg. (2001). "It's Just a Movie": A Teaching Essay for Introductory Media Classes. *Cinema Journal* 41(1)*.* 127-134. http://www2.gsu.edu/~jougms/Justamovie.htm
>>
>> Bruner, Jerome. (1986). Two Modes of Thought. In Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (11-17). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
>
> 3- September 11th – Putting the Science in Social Science: Why Social Studies is More Than History
>> Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 2 "Empirical Research"
>
> September 12th/13th – LAB 2: Workshop: Scientific Evidence

Week of September 16th, 2013 (Week 3)
Intro to the Analytic Tradition
In contrast to the social science approach, we have the analytic tradition, which focuses on deep, critical explorations of media. Both lectures this week will help introduce this perspective and some of its major components, such as the socially constructed world and analytic research processes.

4- September 16th – Learning in the Analytic Tradition
5- September 18th – Research Questions in the Analytic Tradition
    Reading: Becker, Ron. (1998) Prime-Time TV in the Gay '90s: Network TV, Quality
    Audiences, and Gay Audiences. *Velvet Light Trap* 42. 36-47.

September 19th/20th – LAB 3: Workshop: Where Ideas Come From

Week of September 23rd, 2013 (Week 4)
Dealing with Data and Theories
On Monday, we think about data as important waypoints in moving from theory to
evidence. What is data? How should we understand it? And how do data relate to what we
want to study? Wednesday's class then explores the some of the major theories analytic
researchers apply to their study of media and discusses the importance of using these
theories as a critical lens. Workshop this week will introduce SPSS, a relatively simple
program used to analyze quantitative data.

6- September 23rd – Turning Social and Media Processes into Quantitative Data
    Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 6 "Variables"
7- September 25th – Theories, Methods and "Data" in the Analytic Tradition
    Reading: Tyson, Lois. (2006). Everything You Wanted to Know about Critical Theory But
    Were Afraid to Ask. In <u>Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide</u> (1-10). New York:
    Routledge.

September 26th/27th – LAB 4: Workshop: Data—Working with SPSS

Week of September 30th, 2013 (Week 5)
Ideas to Concepts to Questions
If we want to test a scientific theory, we first have to figure out what that theory implies
and how to address it specifically in our research. This week, we focus on
conceptualization, where an idea or theory is translated into clear enough language that we
can directly test it, and operationalization, the process of turning a concept into a variable
that can be measured.

8- September 30th – Conceptualization
    Reading: Phinney, Jean S. and Anthony D. Ong. (2007).Conceptualization and Measurement
    of Ethnic Identity: Current Status and Future Directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 54
    (3), 271-281.
9- October 2nd – Operationalization
    Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 8 "Measurement" pp. 189-193; 197-203; 206-208

October 3rd/4th – LAB 5: Workshop: Conceptualization

Week of October 7th, 2013 (Week 6)
Seeking Good Measures
Now that we are familiar with the process of operationalization, we can explore it a bit more specifically. Not all operationalizations are good at addressing the variables we really want to measure. Therefore, we examine the specific ways questions can be asked and reveal how misleading questions can lead to confusing answers.

October 7th – FIRST EXAM
[Note: some sections will not meet in regular lecture room]

10- October 9th – From Hypotheses to Measures
Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 8 "Measurement" pp. 193-197; 203-210

October 10th/11th – LAB 6: Workshop: Operationalization and Measures

PART 2 – Preparing to Collect Data

Week of October 14th, 2013 (Week 7)
Finding a Better Ruler
Measurement, especially in the social sciences, is frequently imperfect. This is true in part because of challenges in the question-and-answer process, but also because the questions we ask rarely map perfectly onto the concepts we wish to study. When we want to understand how well our measures relate to the concepts of interest, we focus on two overarching dimensions of survey measurement: reliability and validity. This week, we explore these tools, what they tell us about our data, and work toward understanding them.

October 14th – NO CLASS (Fall Study Break)
11- October 16th –Measurement Quality – Reliability and Validity
Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 9 "Reliability and Validity" pp. 213-219; 228-241

October 17th/18th – LAB 7: Workshop: Reliability

Week of October 21st, 2013 (Week 8)
Overcoming Imperfections Through Combined Measures and Quality Samples
Now that we accept the imperfections inherent in our measurements and know how to quantify those problems, we employ a new way of getting past them—measuring the same thing in multiple different ways and combining them for greater reliability/validity. Then on Wednesday, we introduce a key component in the design of any quantitative study—choosing a sample from which to collect data. Samples allow us to collect the data we need without having to talk to every single person or look at every single media source, saving both money and time while collecting data of equal quality. How is this possible? You'll find out this week!

12- October 21st – Combining Measures – Indexes and Typologies
>Reading: Babbie, E. (2010) Indexes, Scales and Typologies. *The Basics of Social Research.* 5th ed. Wadsworth: USA. 167-169; 171-189; 196-198
>**Note: Babbie defines "scales" much more specifically than the majority of researchers. Should you run into a section where he is discussing them, ignore it**

13- October 23rd – The Notion of Sampling
>Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 13 "Sampling Methods and Replication" (pp. 313-316, scan 316-327)

October 24th/25th – LAB 8: Workshop: Reliability, Validity, and Indexes

Week of October 28th, 2013 (Week 9)
Types of Samples
Figuring out what to study is one of the central challenges researchers encounter. This week we are going to discuss different ways of finding cases to study and explore the pros and cons of each approach. On Monday, we will be discussing probability samples, or samples based on randomness. On Wednesday, we will go over the non-probability samples, which are not random or generalizable, and discuss the kinds of conclusions you can draw from each type of sample and the errors you might expect to run into.

14- October 28th – Probability Samples
>Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 13 "Sampling Methods and Replication" (pp. 316-320)

15- October 30th – Non-Probability Samples
>Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 13 "Sampling Methods and Replication" (pp. 320-327)

October 31st/November 1st – LAB 9 Workshop: Sampling

Week of November 4th, 2013 (Week 10)
The Analytical Approach to Texts
This week we introduce semiotics, or the study of signs and their meanings, and discuss their importance to the deep critical exploration of a text. We will also see the return of the critical theories we discussed early in the term and explore how these affect interpretations of signs and meanings, talking through concepts of ideology and power.

November 4th – SECOND EXAM
[Note: some sections will not meet in regular lecture room]

16- November 6th –Textual Analysis: Introducing Critical Theory and Semiotics

November 7th/8th – LAB 10: Workshop: Meaning is Constitutive and Critical Theory in Practice

PART 3 – An Application to Media Messages

Week of November 11th, 2013 (Week 11)
A Detailed Look at Analytical Tools
This Monday, we explore the tools of semiotics more deeply, through the use of an online resource that breaks down the construction of meaning in mediated images. On Wednesday, we then look at some more approaches to analysis, formal and narrative analysis. Formal analysis looks at the influence of power on stories and representations through various critical lenses, while narrative analysis examines a text's entire story to get at its broader meaning.

17- November 11th – Textual Analysis: Semiotics and Ideology
Recommended Reading: http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/;
http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/ideology_intro.html
18- November 13th – Other Critical Tools: Formal and Narrative Analysis
Reading: Barker, David. (1985). Television Production Techniques as Communication. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2. 234-246.

November 14th/15th – LAB 11: Workshop: Doing Critical Analysis

Week of November 18th, 2013 (Week 12)
Looking at Texts from Different Perspectives
This week sums up the previous lectures on analytic methods by applying them to a text in a deep critical analysis during Monday's lecture. Wednesday then moves back to the social science perspective, introducing the process of content analysis, the systematic study of texts in a quantitative fashion.

19- November 18th – Critical Analysis
Reading: Ciasullo, Ann M. (2001). Making her (In)visible. *Feminist Media Studies* 27 (3). 577-608.
20- November 20th – Content Analysis
Wrench et al. Ch, 11 "Content Analysis"

November 21st/22nd – LAB 12: Workshop: Content Analysis/SPSS

Week of November 25th, 2013 (Week 13)
Content Analysis Continued
Following up on last Wednesday's lecture, this week explores the specifics of content analysis. Before content analysis can occur, research teams need to develop a detailed schematic for their coders to follow when analyzing the media itself. This coding scheme consists of a codebook and a coding form, both of which will be explained and investigated in detail this week.

21- November 25th – LAB 13: Putting Together a Coding Scheme
> Wrench et al. Ch, 11 "Content Analysis" (especially pp. 279-285)

*Critical Analysis Paper Due

November 27th – Group Work Day (Attendance Optional)

November 28th/29th – NO WORKSHOPS (Thanksgiving)

Week of December 2nd, 2013 (Week 14)

Assessing and Analyzing Collected Data

As with all forms of quantitative research, content analyses likely contain some imperfections; therefore, Monday's lectures addresses the specific ways to measure and address these imperfections in order to ensure data quality. Wednesday then discusses how this collected, evaluated data can actually be explored and described by the researcher, as a necessary step towards drawing conclusions."

22- December 2nd – Assessing Reliability and Validity of Coded Data
> Wrench et al. Ch, 11 "Content Analysis (pp. 282-284, 286), Review Ch. 9

23- December 4th – Describing Quantitative Data
> Wrench et al. Ch, 7 "Descriptive Statistics" (pp. 159-166; 173-174; 177-181)

December 5th/6th – LAB 14: Workshop: Open Lab for Content Analysis

Week of December 9, 2013 (Week 15)

Wrapping Up

In this final week of class, we explore the limitations of our different analyses and discuss situations where these methods may not work effectively. We also set the stage for COMM 122, the follow-up course in which you move from the study of texts to the study of people and media, an essential component in Communications research.

24- December 9th – What Our Data Can (and Cannot) Tell Us – A Discussion ***Content Analysis Due**

25- December 11th – Foreshadowing, Review, and Course Evaluations

December 17 Final Exam Date

[Note: some sections will not meet in regular lecture room]