

Evaluating Information and Analyzing Media II Communication Studies 122

Josh Pasek, Ph.D. and Aswin Punathambekar, Ph.D.
Winter 2014

Class

The course meets 11:30am-1:00pm on Mondays and Wednesdays in Angell Hall Aud. B. Sections meet in 1245 North Quad at your designated section times.

Office Hours

Professor Pasek: Mon 4:15-5:15pm at 5413 North Quad or by appt. jpasek@umich.edu
Professor Punathambekar: Wed 10:00-11:00am at 5427 North Quad or by appt. aswinp@umich.edu

Graduate Student Instructors

Name	Sections	Office Hours	Office	Email
Amanda Cote	002	TBA	5341 NQ	accote@umich.edu
Ozan Kuru	004, 005	TBA	5341 NQ	okuru@umich.edu
Isaac Epstein	006, 007	TBA	5332 NQ	epsteini@umich.edu
Steve Nelson	008, 011	TBA	5332 NQ	stevenel@umich.edu
Jessica Lehrich	003, 010	TBA	5332 NQ	jlehric@umich.edu

Mentoring Office Hours: Mon 1:10-3pm, Tues 2-4pm with Amanda Cote in 5341 NQ

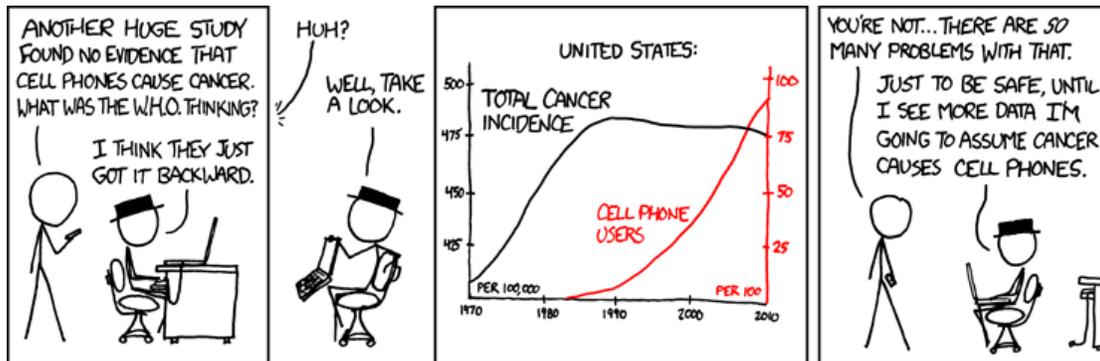
Is Your Mobile Phone Giving You Cancer?

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 research.



As the second evaluative reasoning course in the Communication Studies curriculum, COMM 122 focuses on the core skills necessary to think through and critically assess scientific and analytic arguments and evidence. The course 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 differentiate between casual opinion and carefully argued 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, J. S., Thomas-Maddox, C., Richmond, V. P. and McCroskey, J. C. (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 (Mar 12)	20%
Research Critique Paper (Feb 10)	20%
Analytic Proposal (Feb 26)	10%
Capstone Project (Apr 22)	30%
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 11:30am to 1:00pm in Angell Hall, Auditorium B. 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 Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays (at varying times depending on the section) in 1245 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).

This class will use Piazza as a way to facilitate student questions during lectures. Please create an account in the first week of class. Piazza is also valuable for answering troublesome or confusing points outside of class. This forum will predominantly be “crowdsourced” information source, but the teaching team will monitor it and use this communication channel as a way to gauge topics needing greater review.

Papers

Course papers require you to write clearly about communication research. You will be graded on your writing 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 research critique paper requires that you critique the way a journalist reported on a particular piece of research. The Analytic Proposal requires you to propose a study using analytic methods. This paper will be resubmitted as a component of the Capstone Project, which will require you to write up the results of your own analysis of some survey data. 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.

Exam

The exam requires 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 in this course.

Some Recommendations and Resources

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.

Course Policies

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. The Assistant Dean’s executive secretary is Debbie Walls;

you can email her at dwalls@umich.edu. When you return to campus, bring documentation in support of your absence.

Grades

When any major assignment (paper or exam) is returned to you, course policy dictates that you wait at least 24 hours before contacting your GSI with any questions you have. This ensures that you have time to read over the feedback given you and understand the issues your assignment faced. We have found that students who take the time to wait then approach their GSIs with more useful questions and receive more helpful answers. We also recommend you bring questions to your GSI first, as they are more directly involved in the grading process and are permitted to resolve any grading errors. If your GSI is not able to answer your questions or if you still believe your grade deserves to be changed, you should then contact the professors.

Assignments can only proceed to re-grading after you have spoken to your GSI and tried to understand the grade you received and the reasons behind it. If that proves insufficient, you should write an email, including your GSI and both course professors, requesting an assignment re-grade. Re-grade requests must be accompanied by a short paragraph – approximately ½ to 1 page in length – detailing the specific parts of the assignment that you believe were unfairly marked. Be sure that these points are substantive and reference the original assignment and rubric, making clear why you believe you completed the requested work in a way that was not reflected in your grade. Also include an unmarked copy of the assignment you originally turned in. (For an exam, please ask your GSI photocopy your exam for this process). Re-grades will be completed independently by a different individual on the teaching team. *The re-graded version of any assignment will replace the original grade regardless of whether the new grade is higher or lower than the original.*

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 dishonesty 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.

Winter 2014 –Schedule of Topics

Part 1- Evaluating Research and Media Coverage

Week of January 6th, 2014 (Week 1) - Introduction

This week will serve to preview our expectations for the class and to review some key concepts from the social science and analytic traditions. Labs will then take place in the library, where you will be introduced to some of the best resources you can use for communication work.

January 6th – NO CLASS

1- January 8th – Course Introduction Review / The Analytic and Scientific Traditions
– A Repose [SS + AT]

January 8-10th – Workshop 1: Library Tools

Week of January 13th, 2014 (Week 2) – Research and Preparing to Collect Data

Monday's lecture this week will build off the library session, going over methods for finding and evaluating the quality of research in both the social science and analytic traditions. Wednesday's lecture will then review the processes of conceptualization and operationalization. Workshop will aim to improve your reading skills, allowing you to practice finding the information you need in an academic piece without having to read the entire paper in depth.

2- January 13th – Reading and Finding Research [SS + AT]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 4 "Searching for Previous Research and APA Style"

3- January 15th – Conceptualization and Operationalization, A Review [SS]

Review: Wrench et al. Ch. 8 "Measurement"

January 15-17th – Workshop 2: Parsing Papers and Sources

Week of January 20th, 2014 (Week 3) – Academic Research and the Media

After the holiday this week, we will review measurement quality. We also will discuss how research is communicated and the important role that has. We will be working through the ways scholars communicate their findings and the challenge of translating technical language and concepts into news stories.

January 20th – NO CLASS (MLK HOLIDAY)

4- January 22nd – Measurement Quality, and Combined Measures Review / Academic Research and The Media [SS + AT]

Reading: Offit, Paul A. (2008). "Science and the Media." In *Autism's False Prophets: Bad Science, Risky Medicine and the Search for a Cure* (pp. 156-175). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

January 22-24th – Workshop 3: Evaluating Media Coverage of Academic Work

Week of January 27th, 2014 (Week 4) – A Basis for Experimentation

This week will focus on two main topics. The first is ethics, or the moral guidelines researchers follow in order to ensure their participants do not come to harm because of their work. We will talk through both the obvious things researchers need to be aware of and some of the more subtle areas where people are most likely to experience problems. Wednesday will then introduce the idea of causality, or the criteria needed to show that variables are related in a cause/effect fashion, as well as true experimental design, one of the best ways for establishing causality. We will also go over third variables, additional measures that often act as part of social science hypotheses.

5- January 27th – Ethics [SS + AT]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 3 "Ethics"

6- January 29th – Hypotheses, Causality, and Experimentation [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 12 "Experimental Design" pp. 289-302.

January 29-31st – Workshop 4: Third Variables

Part 2 - Ways of Collecting Data About People

Week of February 3rd, 2014 (Week 5) – Experiments

This week we will delve further into the world of experimentation. Specifically, we will focus on some of the practical limits on experimental designs, looking closely at the assumptions of experimentation and conditions under which experiments can mislead on Monday. For Wednesday, we will look at how using the experimental method allows us to make claims toward causality or generalizability.

7- February 3rd – The Virtues and Limits of Experimentation [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 12 "Experimental Design" pp. 302-312.

8- February 5th – Causality vs. Generalizability in Experimentation [SS]

Reading: Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2002). *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston, MA. Ch. 1 "Experiments and Generalized Causal Inference" pp. 1-22.

February 5-7th – Workshop 5: Experiments

Week of February 10th, 2014 (Week 6) – Interviews

Another method for gathering data about people is interviewing them. This week will focus on how in-depth interviews are used in the analytic tradition, what kinds of questions interviewers can ask and how to go about creating an interview guide. The lectures will focus on two main areas—interviewing audiences to understand their perspective as media consumers and interviewing industry members to understand their role as media creators.

9- February 10th – Interviewing Audiences [AT]

Reading: Punathambekar, A. (2010). "From Bihar to Manhattan: Bollywood and the Transnational Indian Family," in Michael Curtin and Hemant Shah eds. *Reorienting Global Communications* (pp. 41-59). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

10- February 12th – Interviewing Industry Workers [AT]

Reading: Grindstaff, L. (2009). "Self-Serve Celebrity: The Production of Ordinariness and the Ordinariness of Production in Reality Television," in Vicki Mayer and Miranda Banks eds. *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (pp. 72-86). London/New York: Routledge.

February 12-14th – Workshop 6: Interviews

Week of February 17th, 2014 (Week 7) – Broadening the Focus

Splitting this week between the analytic tradition and the social science tradition, we will cover focus groups and review sampling. Although we will talk primarily about the use of focus groups in research, this method may be particularly interesting to those of you who desire a career in marketing or advertising, where it is very commonly used. For sampling, we will review its use in social science and also explore some of the ways in which sampling can be used in studying people from an analytic perspective.

11- February 17th – Focus Groups [AT]

Reading: Lowe, M. (2003). "Colliding Feminisms: Britney Spears, "Tweens," and the Politics of Reception," *Popular Music and Society*, 26:2, 123-140.

12- February 19th – Sampling Review [SS]

Review: Wrench et al. Ch. 13 "Sampling Method and Replication"

February 19-21st – Workshop 7: Analytic proposals for audience research

Week of February 24th, 2014 (Week 8) – Surveys

Surveys, like any method, require careful thought and planning in order to collect useful data. This week will explain the different types of surveys that can be conducted and their various uses on Monday. Wednesday will focus on survey questions and how researchers can ensure that their questions are worded in such a way as to be useful. This information will be very important to your final project; we recommend you take careful notes!

13- February 24th – Types of Survey Research [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 10 “Survey Research”

14- February 26th – Asking Survey Questions [SS]

Reading: Pasek, J. & Krosnick, J. A. (2010). “Optimizing Survey Questionnaire Design in Political Science: Insights from Psychology”. In Leighley, J. E. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. pp. 27-51.

February 26-28th – Workshop 8: Asking Survey Questions

[ENJOY SPRING BREAK]

Week of March 10th, 2014 (Week 9) – Mixing Methods

Although we’ve spoken about these various methods of collecting data as if they are independent of one another, there are many ways in which researchers combine them to produce nuanced results. Monday’s lecture will explore some of these approaches, while Wednesday will be the midterm exam.

15- March 10th – Combining Quantitative Methods [SS]

Reading: Sniderman, P. M. (2011). “The logic and design of the survey experiment: an autobiography of a methodological innovation.” In Druckman, J. N., Green D. P., Kuklinski J. H., and Lupia A. *Cambridge handbook of experimental political science* (pp. 102-114). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

March 12th – MIDTERM EXAM

March 12-14th – Workshop 9: Bring filled-out surveys and enter data in SPSS

Week of March 17th, 2014 (Week 10) – Naturalistic Observation

Sometimes the information analytic researchers need can’t be found in the answers to questions; people often forget to talk about daily habits, for instance, despite the fact that these impact their relation to media. In these cases, researchers rely on observation, viewing audience member or industry workers in their daily environment in order to understand it in depth. Monday’s lecture will introduce this method and how it is used to study audiences, while Wednesday’s lecture will extend this to work on industries.

16- March 17th – Observing Audiences [AT]

Reading: Excerpts from Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas*. New York: Routledge.

17- March 19th – Observing Industry Workers [AT]

Reading: Caldwell, J. (2009). “Cultures of Production,” in Alisa Perren and Jennifer Hold eds. *Media Industry Studies* (pp. 199-212). New York: Routledge.

March 19-21st – Workshop 10: In groups to design an observation based study

Week of March 24th, 2014 (Week 11) – Coding Observations

Observation is also useful in the social science tradition, when researchers have preexisting data from other studies or are trying to draw conclusions about an easily visible trait (for instance, geographic location). Monday's lecture will focus on social science methods for observing behavior and patterns, while Wednesday will explore the use of social and economic factors in research.

18- March 24th – Behavioral Observation and Epidemiological Studies [SS]

Reading: Bakeman, R. (2000). "Behavioral Observation and Coding" in Reese, H. T. and Judd, C. M. eds. *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 138-151). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

19- March 26th – Social and Economic Indicators [SS]

Reading: Selections from Noll, H. (2002). "Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research"

March 26-28th – Workshop 11: Cleaning and re-coding data

Part 3 – Data Analysis

Week of March 31st, 2014 (Week 12) – From Data to Conclusions

Hypotheses require that we know more than just how the variable are distributed; we need to know how they compare to one another. This week we focus on the relations between variables, the ways in which they map onto our hypotheses and how to tell if a result is "statistically significant".

20- March 31st – Testing Hypotheses with Data [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 14 "Hypothesis Testing"

21- April 2nd – Relations Between Variables [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 15 "Chi-Square (χ^2) Test of Independence" and Wrench et al. Ch. 18 "Correlation"

April 2-4th – Workshop 12: Correlations and cross-tabs

Week of April 7th, 2014 (Week 13) – Complex Hypotheses

At times, correlations and cross-tabs are not sufficient to test hypotheses, as they are best for comparing only a few variables. Monday's lecture will therefore focus on methods for testing more complex hypotheses and demonstrate what the results of these should look like. Wednesday will attempt to bridge the gap between social science and analytic work by showing how one can act as a springboard for research in the other, prompting researchers who notice something interesting about a specific group to look for how it might affect broader trends, or vice versa.

22- April 7th – Testing Complex Hypotheses [SS]

Reading: Wrench et al. Ch. 19 “Regression”

23- April 9th – Crossing Between Traditions [SS + A]

Reading: King G., Keohane R. O., and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. Ch. 1 “The *Science* in Social Science”

April 9-11th – Workshop 13: Open Lab

Week of April 14th, 2014 (Week 14) – From Research to Conclusions

Both analytic and social science work aim to draw conclusions, although of different types. Monday’s lecture will focus on how analytic researchers develop theories about people, particularly media audiences and industry workers. Wednesday will parallel that with the process of making generalizable statements about a group of people after a hypothesis has been tested.

24- April 14th – Reaching Conclusions in the Analytic Tradition [AT]

25- April 16th – From Data Analysis to Conclusions [SS]

April 16-18th – Workshop 14: Open Lab

Week of April 21st, 2014 (Week 15) – Concluding Remarks

The final lecture of the semester will pull together the material you have learned and connect it to the main goal of the course—teaching you to be critical of the information around you, regardless of whether that source is academic or popular. This will help you as you proceed in your future COMM classes, but will also serve as a useful skill when you enter the job market in the future.

26- April 21st – How to Be a Critical Evaluator of Knowledge [SS + AT]

April 23rd – NO CLASS (Study Days)