Seminar in Qualitative Content Analysis

Course Description

This is a hands-on course in qualitative content analysis. It will cover a range of ways to analyze the content of qualitative data, both by hand and with the aid of computer software. Content analysis stands at the intersection of qualitative and quantitative methods in sociology. It begins with qualitative data, but often transforms the data into coded form for quantitative analysis. We will cover a range of approaches, with emphasis on making use of readily available general purpose software and free or readily available specialized software applications.

Students should come to the course with a qualitative content analysis project in mind, preferably one for which an appropriate and available data source has already been identified. The data source might be any kind of “text” (including visual images or other multimedia forms), in any language you can read, which you can treat as a body of data for systematic sociological analysis. You will work with your data throughout the course and produce a seminar paper in two drafts. If your data are from a larger project, you may need to work with a small subset in order to complete the seminar paper for the course. There will also be required class exercises so that you can try out various approaches that may not be appropriate for your particular data.

Because you will need to work on your project during the class, you should plan to bring a laptop to the class each week (with a USB key for backup). We will be using MS Word, Excel, and Access. If you do not have that software on your computer, you will need to get it. (The Bookstore offers a great deal on the full MS Office Pro 2007 package for $89.)

Course Goals

You will learn the following in this course:

1. the basic principles and procedures of qualitative content analysis in sociology, including the need for appropriate sampling and systematic data analysis in order to produce results that meet accepted sociological standards of reliability and validity;
2. how to devise a sampling strategy that will maximize the potential of your data analysis while remaining feasible in terms of time and effort;
3. the difference between tables in a text program, spreadsheets, statistical analysis programs using flatfile formats, relational database programs, and dedicated CAQDAS programs, and which is most appropriate for particular tasks;
4. how to do both deductive and inductive coding of qualitative data systematically and flexibly, using appropriate tools;
5. how to use general purpose text (MSWord), database (MSAccess), and image organizing (Picasa) software as tools for various aspects of data processing, coding, and analysis;
6. how to compare these general purpose tools to expensive dedicated CAQDAS packages and make informed decisions about which to use;
7. how to use other readily available software to extend the analysis, such as mapping concepts and relationships, and analyzing sequential or spatial patterns;
8. how to move coded data between programs easily in order to do more elaborate charting or quantitative analysis in Excel, SPSS, network analysis software, or GIS software;
9. how to plan and carry out a qualitative content analysis research project using appropriate software tools;
10. how to write an article-length sociological research paper based on qualitative content analysis of a particular body of data.
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Texts
There will be a coursepack available at Professional Image on King St.
You may also want to purchase a manual for MS Access, but wait to do so until the first class.

Preliminary Weekly Schedule (readings will be added later)

January 12  Introduction and Initial Class Exercise on Range of Uses of Content Analysis

January 26  Different Approaches to Content Analysis

Assignment DUE: Select project and complete first assignment worksheet to turn in. Go as far as you can on the worksheet.

For class discussion:
Forms of data and what you can do with them.
When and how to sample.
Units of Analysis for content analysis projects.

February 2  Uses of Computers for Qualitative Content Analysis

Assignment Due for Class: Develop a basic data plan for your project and do a brief write-up of the data source, data parameters, sampling procedure if needed, and identify the basic unit(s) of analysis. Fill in the relevant parts of your worksheet and be prepared to report in class as well as hand in the latest version of your worksheet.

February 9  Conceptual Aspects of Coding Qualitative Data

Assignment Due for Class: Bring in 3 or more examples of your data source in their naturally occurring form. If they need to be transformed to be usable, try out the possible transformations and bring these examples to class along with the originals. Note how much time it takes you to do the transformation. If the data are already in computerized form, bring both the files and a printout. Get familiar with your examples so you can see what sorts of information they contain.

February 23  Developing a Coding and Recording System

Assignment Due for Class: Preliminary Coding. Use your sample cases to do preliminary coding and try different methods following instructions in the assignment handout. Bring your coding examples to class and be prepared to analyze and discuss the process you used and the kinds of coding you did.

March 2   Now What? Starting to Analyze Content Data

Assignment Due for Class: Bring in the initial stages of your Access database on your laptop, following the instructions in the assignment sheet and handout. We will work on your database in class and develop forms for data entry. Bring in some of your data so you can get started on real coding.

March 9  More on Analyzing Content Data

Assignment Due for Class: Bring in your database and any problems you are having with it.
March 16  Writing a Content Analysis Paper

March 23-27  Spring Recess

March 30  Special Methods: Event Sequence Analysis and Narrative Analysis methods

April 6  First Draft of Research Paper Due
   Special Methods: Event Analysis and Even History Analysis of Newspaper data

April 13  Special Methods: Network Relations and Network Analysis Methods

April 20  Special Methods: Conceptual and Spatial Mapping Methods

April 27  Student presentations in class

May 4  Student presentations in class, Final Draft of Research Paper Due