COMM 125 - Introduction to Communication Behavior

Summer I Session 2019 (May 28-July 3)

Instructors:
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Class meetings: Tues, Thurs, 9:00am-12:50pm, Annenberg School for Communication

Course overview:
This course introduces students to exploring communication and behavior, with a focus on mass and social media processes and effects. Topics include: the influence of social media on social relationships; the effects of biased media representations of social groups; the emotional experiences underlying the consumption of media, including for mood management; the political economy of the media industries; the political role and impact of the news media; the social and political impact of social media use; and other current topics. The aim of the course is to provide students with (1) a general understanding of research design and methods for the study of communication, and (2) the basic conceptual tools needed to critically evaluate the findings, assumptions, theories, and methods examining communication behavior and media effects. The class will survey social scientific, critical, and cultural studies approaches to understanding communication and media processes, and their broader social implications. Students who take this course will acquire the tools to better understand and conceptualize issues and problems related to communication, and mass and social media prevalent today.

Grading/Assessment:
Attendance and participation: 10%
In-class activities: 20%
Group presentations: 20%
Quizzes: 15%
Take-home short essay exam: 35%

Class Attendance: We expect you to be a full participant in class discussions and activities. Attendance in class is required.

In-Class Activities: Students will engage in activities related to designing research and examining current media-related issues in class, including media representation of marginalized groups, social media behavior and habits, and effects of media on society.

Group Presentation: Each student will participate in a group presentation related to a particular topic covered in the course.

Quizzes: There will be two short quizzes early in the course testing students’ knowledge of the subject’s foundations.

Take-home short essay exam: A short essay, take-home exam will be given to the class near the end of the course, testing knowledge of the key topics the class covers.
Course readings. Students should complete listed readings prior to the class in which they are discussed and be prepared to participate in discussion. Required readings will be available through links on the syllabus and on Canvas.

Note: Comm 125 fulfills the “Society” sector requirement (Sector 1). The society sector focuses on the structure and norms of contemporary human society, including their psychological and cultural dimensions.

Courses in this sector use many analytical techniques that have been developed to study contemporary society, with its complex relations between individuals and larger forms of mass participation. Some Society courses are largely devoted to the analysis of aggregate forms of human behavior (encounters, markets, civil society, nations, supranational organizations, and so on), while others may focus on the relations between individuals and their various societies. While historical materials may be studied, the primary objective of Society courses is to enable students to develop concepts and principles, test theories, and perfect tools that can be used to interpret, explain and evaluate the behavior of human beings in contemporary societies. This objective will be realized through the specific content of the various courses, but the emphasis in each course should be on developing in students a general capacity for social analysis and understanding.

COMM 125 Syllabus

1. INTRODUCTION

Week 1
May 28th (Tuesday)

Topic: Introduction to Comm. 125 (Why Communication Matters) - Communication in the Digital Age - Basic Concepts

In-class activity:

- Syllabus review and preliminary communications exercise

Readings:


2. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

May 30th (Thursday)

Topic: Studying Communication - Communication Theories

In-class activity:

- Viewing: Sana Amanat’s Ted Talk: The importance of diversity in the comic book university
- Dylan Marron Tumblr “Every Single Word”
- Puzzle Exercise

Readings:

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Week 2

June 4th (Tuesday)

Topic: The Study of Media Effects as a Communication Behavior - Basic Concepts in Quantitative Research Design

In-class activity:
- Formulating research questions and hypotheses, and designing a media effects research study

Reading:

June 6th (Thursday):

Topic: Basic Concepts in Qualitative Research Design

In-class Activity:
- Studying media behavior through ethnographic observation and interviews

Reading:

3. THEORETICAL STREAMS

Week 3

June 11th (Tuesday)

Topic: Major Critical Theoretical Frameworks - Cultural Studies - Political Economy of Communication

Quiz 1: Short quiz on research design and methodologies from week 2

In-class activity:
- Examining media remaking through a cultural studies lens (memes, hashtags, fan work)
- Mapping the political economy of popular TV shows and social media apps

Readings:

June 13th (Thursday)

Topic: Media Effects Theories - Main Concepts and Theories

In-class activity:
- Media propaganda exercise

Readings:
4. MEDIA EFFECTS CASES

Week 4

June 18th (Tuesday)
Topic: Media and Politics - Political Knowledge, Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, “Fake News”

Quiz 2: Short quiz on theoretical streams from week 3

In-class activity:
- Mapping our political news consumptions habits

Readings:

June 20th (Thursday)

Topic: Media and Fear - Media and Mood Management

Group presentation #1

In-Class Activity:
- Favorite media genres mapping

Readings:

Week 5

June 25th (Tuesday)

Topic: Social Media Impact on Social Relationships

Group presentation #2

In-class Activity:
- “When old technologies were new”: analyzing social reactions to older technologies
- Debate exercise - social costs and benefits of using social media
- Viewing: #TenemosQueVernosMas (“We need to see more of each other”) campaign

Readings:

June 27th (Thursday)

Topic: Representations of Gender, Race and Ethnicity in Mainstream Media - Body Image and Eating Disorders

Take-home short essay exam handed out and explained

In-Class Activity:
- Content analysis exercise and Bechdel test

Readings:
- "Gender Bias Without Borders" Report

**Week 6**  
**July 2nd (Tuesday)**

Topic: Review and Concluding Group Activity

In-class activity:
- Media game
- Short feedback survey