COMMUNICATIONS (COMM)

COMM 025 Fellows Proseminar I (SNF Paideia Program Course)
The SNF Paideia Fellows Proseminar I introduces sophomore Fellows to academic research and practice related to the civic engagement mission of the SNF Paideia program. We engage diverse perspectives on the purpose of higher education, the nature of citizenship, the value of civility, and the relationship between individual and community wellness. Students will develop their personal civic identity and wellness goals through intentional course exercises and assignments. The goal of the course is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, experiences, and ethical frameworks for healthy, sustainable and robust civic leadership at Penn and in their local, national, and global communities. This course is open only to SNF Paideia Fellows, who are required to take it during the fall of their sophomore year. Prerequisite: This course is open only to SNF Paideia Fellows, who are required to take it during the fall of their sophomore year.
Taught by: Anderson/Howard
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
0.5 Course Units

COMM 123 Critical Approaches to Popular Culture
Popular culture has been alternately condemned as too trivial to warrant attention and too powerful to resist. Its consumers have been dubbed fashion victims, couch potatoes, and victims of propaganda. This course considers these critiques, as well as those that suggest that popular culture can be emancipatory, allowing for the creation and renegotiation of meaning. Over the course of the semester, we consider the impacts of various forms of popular culture, and discuss their effects on how we see ourselves and others. We explore the ever-shifting distinctions between high, middlebrow, and low culture and analyze how power and resistance structure the production and consumption of popular texts.
Taught by: Lingel/Paxton
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 125 Introduction to Communication Behavior
This course introduces students to social science research regarding the influence of mediated communication on individual and collective attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Throughout the semester we explore the impacts of various types of mediated content (e.g., violence, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, politics and activism, health and wellbeing); genres (e.g., news, entertainment, educational, marketing); and mediums (e.g., television, film, social media) on what we think and how we act. The aim of the course is to provide students with (1) a general understanding of both the positive and negative effects of mediated communication on people's personal, professional, social, and civic lives; and (2) the basic conceptual tools needed to evaluate the assumptions, theories, methods, and empirical evidence supporting these presumed effects. Class meets twice a week (MW) as a lecture and once a week (F) in smaller discussion groups led by graduate teaching fellows. In addition to a midterm exam and occasional short assignments, students have the option of producing a multi-media capstone project or a final term paper on a media-effects topic of their choice. Group projects or final papers are permitted, with approval of the instructor. In addition to fulfilling General Education Curriculum Sector 1 Requirement (Society), this course fulfills one of the two introductory-level courses required of Communication majors or prospective majors.
For BA Students: Society Sector
Taught by: Delli Carpini
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 130 Media Industries and Society
The aim of this course is to prepare you to work in the media business as well as to be an informed citizen by acquainting you with the work and language of media practitioners. The class also investigates the exciting, well as to be an informed citizen by acquainting you with the work and language of media practitioners. The class also investigates the exciting, and (to some employed there) scary changes taking place in the news industry, internet industry, advertising industry, television industry, movie industry, magazine industry, and several other areas of the media system. In doing that, the course ranges over economic, political, legal, historical, and cultural considerations that shape what we see when we go online, use social media, watch TV, read books, play video games, and more. This course fulfills one of the two introductory level courses required of Communication majors or prospective majors.
For BA Students: Society Sector
Taught by: Turow
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 203 Media, Culture & Society in Contemporary China
This course studies contemporary China in the context of globalization. Starting with an analysis of the origins of economic reform and the struggles for political change in the 1970s and 1980s, the course moves on to cover critical issues in the twenty-first century, including migration and work, middle class consumerism, youth, religion, media and communication, environmental degradation, new forms of inequality, civil society and popular protest. Taking a sociological approach, this course introduces methods and theories for analyzing institutions, inequality, and social change.
Taught by: Yang
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SOCI 238
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 210 Quantitative Research Methods in Communication
This course is a general overview of the important components of social research. The goal of the course is to understand the logic behind social science research, be able to view research with a critical eye and to engage in the production of research. It will cover defining research problems, research design, assessing research quality, sampling, measurement, and causal inference. The statistical methods covered will include descriptive and inferential statistics, measures of association for categorical and continuous variables, inferences about means, and the basic language of data analysis. Course activities will include lectures, class exercises, reading published scientific articles, using statistical software, and discussing research featured in the news.
Taught by: Jemmott
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 211 Media Activism Studies
This seminar provides an introduction to the politics and tactics underlying various types of media activism. The class will examine interventions aimed at media representations, labor relations in media production, media policy reform, activists’ strategic communications, and “alternative” media making. The course will draw from an overview of the existing scholarship on media activism, as well as close analyses of actual activist practices within both old and new media at local, national, and global levels. We will study how various political groups, past and present, use media to advance their interests and effect social change. Each member of the class will choose one case study of an activist group or campaign to explore throughout the semester.
Taught by: Pickard/Balaji
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 213 Social Media and Social Life
The irruption of social media as a means of communication has been said to transform many dimensions of social life, from how we interact with significant others to how we engage in public life - but has it, really? Regardless of the specific technology (blogs, micro-blogs, social networking sites, peer-to-peer networks), social media make interdependence more prevalent, and exposure to information more pervasive. But social networks, and the ties that bring us together, have long mediated the way in which we obtain information, engage in public discussion, and are recruited or mobilized for a public cause. So what has social media brought to the table that is new? This course will evaluate the evidence that can help us answer this question, as well as challenge conventional views and discuss questions that remain open. The effects of social media on ideological polarization, social influence and peer pressure, agenda-setting dynamics, and the formation and effects of social capital are examples of the substantive topics and theoretical debates that will be considered.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 214 Media and South Asia
This course examines the historical development of media institutions across the Indian subcontinent, and how media texts have helped to shape post-colonial national/cultural/religious/social identities, nationalism, and geopolitical relations. The course looks at how the post-colonial State in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka) has interacted with media industries, and the implications of this interaction.
Taught by: Balaji
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: SAST 110
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 225 Children and Media
This course examines children’s relationships to media in their historic, economic, political, and social contexts. The class explores the ways in which “childhood” is created and understood as a time of life that is qualitatively unique and socially constructed over time. It continues with a review of various theories of child development as they inform children’s relationships with and understanding of media. It reviews public policies designed to empower parents and limit children’s exposure to potentially problematic media content and simultaneously considers the economic forces that shape what children see and buy. The course also provides a critical examination of research on the impact of media on children’s physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Students in this course produce a proposal for an educational children’s media product as their final project.
Taught by: Woolf
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 226 Introduction to Political Communication
This course is an introduction to the field of political communication and conceptual approaches to analyzing communication in various forms, including advertising, speech making, campaign debates, and candidates’ and office-holders’ uses of social media and efforts to frame news. The focus of this course is on the interplay in the U.S. between media and politics. The course includes a history of campaign practices from the 1952 presidential contest through the election of 2020.
Taught by: Jamieson
Course usually offered in fall term
Also Offered As: PSCI 232
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 230 Advertising and Society
This course explores the historical and contemporary role of the advertising industry in the U.S. media system. The course will cover the social history of advertising; the structure of today’s advertising industry; the workings of advertising in digital media; and critical analyses of advertising’s role in society. In addition to academic writings, the class will read industry reports to understand contemporary strategies and processes.
Taught by: Turow
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 243 Ethnography and Media for Social Justice
How do qualitative social scientists study urban communities? What kinds of powerful tales can be told about urban lifestyles and social issues in places like Philadelphia? This course will allow students to study various ethnographic treatments of urban communities in the United States, using films, articles, TV serials, and books as guides for the framing of their own independent research on the streets of Philadelphia. Students will also form production teams of two or three people, and these production teams will be responsible for (i) identifying and researching an important urban issue in contemporary Philadelphia and (ii) turning that research into a 15-30 minute video documentary or pod cast. Mixing video/audio journalism with ethnographic methods will enhance their skills at archival and social research, from participant observation and interviewing techniques to sound editing and production. This course is intended to be a rigorous and exciting opportunity for students to tell empirically grounded stories using the voices of their participants and the sounds of the city.

Taught by: Lingel
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 248 Digital Dissidence: Networked Movements in the Age of the Internet
This course examines digital dissidence, which takes a wide variety of forms in today's online mediascape. Key issues we will explore include: What is the infrastructure of the global Net and who made it? What is the logic of networked action online and how effective is it? Have the supposedly democratic rules of the internet resulted in positive social transformations? What impact does ever-increasing internet surveillance have on digital dissidence? What can ensure the safety and freedom of online resistance? The sociological concepts and theories covered in this course will help students understand and assess the threats that networked movements face in the political context of contemporary global uprisings.

Taught by: Ustun
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 253 Divine Mediation: Media and the Shaping of Religious Identity and Practice
This course surveys how religious groups interact with media, and how media texts and institutions have played a role in defining religions. The intersections between media and religion are numerous, from the mediated growth of national identities, the rise of online religious extremism, the ingroup/outgroup dynamics within and among religious groups, and the ways in which media is used to legitimize/delegitimize theological positions. We examine how media institutions have played a role in propping up religious norms (both explicitly and implicitly) and the shaping of religious identities. This course looks at media as both enforcer and disruptor, as well as the ways in which religions have been challenged by those with media literacy and access. The evolution of religious practice and social norms can also be linked with technological innovations such as the mass distribution of Bibles in the 15th and 16th century thanks to the printing press, the rise of radio and television messiahs in the 20th century, and the individualization of religious practices through new apps.

Taught by: Balaji
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 270 Global Digital Activism
This seminar examines the forms, causes, and consequences of global digital activism, defined broadly as activism associated with the use of digital media technologies (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, and the Chinese Weibo). The goal is to provide students with a theoretical tool-kit for analyzing digital activism and to develop a critical understanding of the nature of contemporary activism and its implications for global social change. Major cases to be examined include the "Occupy Wall Street" movement in the US, the Arab Spring, the "indignados" protests in Spain, and internet activism in China. Students are required to conduct primary, hands-on research on a contemporary case (or form) of digital activism and produce a final research paper. This research project may be done individually or in small groups.

Taught by: Yang
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 275 Communication and Persuasion
This course examines theory, research, and application in the persuasive effects of communication in social and mass contexts. The primary focus will be on the effects of messages on attitudes, opinions, values, and behaviors. Applications include political, commercial, and public service advertising, propaganda, and communication campaigns (e.g. anti-smoking). Students will develop their own communication campaign over the semester. The campaign will include identifying and analyzing the persuasion problem, the target audience's characteristics and media habits, and then reating a persuasive message consistent with research and practice targeted to the problem and its solution.

Taught by: Cappella
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 282 Sick and Satired: The Insanity of Humor and How it Keeps Us Sane
This course will examine how and why humor, as both an instigator and peacemaker, might be considered one of the most influential and profoundly useful forms of communication devised by human beings. The unique ability of jokes and satire to transcend familiar literary and journalistic forms for the purpose of deepening (or cheapening) socio-philosophical arguments and to inspire (or discourage) debate and participation in public conversations about innumerable political and social issues will be explored. The fearless analytical nature of both high and lowbrow comedy will be examined, as well as its deflective qualities. The course will enable students to consider, through analysis of both contemporary and historical examples, the political and cultural satirist's unique role in society as a witness, a predictor and, in some circumstances, an instigator of public and private debate. We will examine the role of satire in revealing and mediating differences between disparate social groups based not solely on language differences, but also on political affiliation, cultural identity, ethnicity, gender, religious fellowship, sexual orientation, and socio-economic caste.

Taught by: Booth
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 286 Masculinity and the Media
This course examines the construction of masculinity in American and global media, highlighting how masculinity developed in parallel to social, cultural, economic, and political norms. Using case studies and multiple theoretical approaches, we will seek to understand how constructions of masculinity across the world have served to uphold - or challenge - the status quo. Analysis of individual texts across time periods and different cultural contexts will also help us better come to terms with the idea of masculinity - and its proliferation across media platforms.
Taught by: Balaji
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 290 Special Topics in Communication
This is an intermediate level special topics course that covers varying topics in communication. For more information about the course, please see: https://www.asc.upenn.edu/academics/undergraduate-program/curriculum-and-major-requirements
Taught by: Various Instructors
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 292 WARNING! Graphic Content: Political Cartoons, Comix and the Uncensored Artist
This course examines the past, present and future of political cartooning, underground comix, graphic journalism and protest art, exploring the purpose and significance of image-based communication as an unparalleled propagator of both noble and nefarious ideas. The work presented will be chosen for its unique ability to demonstrate the inflammatory effect of weaponized visual jokes, uncensored commentary and critical thinking on a society so often perplexed by artistic free expression and radicalized creative candor.
Taught by: Booth
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 300 Public Space, Public Life
Public space as a mediated system of communication anchored in embodied practice. Historical aspects, public space as a cultural signifier, how the organization and regulation of collective spaces facilitates and enriches or hinders common life, public space as a critical component of democracy.
Taught by: Marvin/Staff
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 301 Introduction to the Political Economy of Media
This course has two aims. First, assuming that communications are central to any society, it situates media systems within larger national and international social relationships and political structures. Second, this course critically examines the structures of the communication systems themselves, including ownership, profit imperatives, support mechanisms such as advertising and public relations, and the ideologies and government policies that sustain these arrangements. Considering case studies ranging from traditional news and entertainment media to new digital and social media, the course provides a comprehensive survey of the major texts in this vibrant sub-field of media studies.
Taught by: Pickard/Various
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 311 Peace Comm: The Use and Abuse of Communications in Intergroup Conflict
Why are conflicts between groups of humans so tragically predictable? What drives us to exclude, demean and fight with members of other groups? And what can we do about it? In this class, we will examine the biological roots of intergroup conflict between religious, ethnic and political groups, and take a critical view of the ways in which psychology and communication have been employed to help foment or transcend conflict. In the first part of the course, we will examine the theoretical work from intergroup psychology. In the second part of the course, we will examine the specific biases that drive conflict (e.g., stereotypes, emotions, prejudice, dehumanization) and how they are measured using both explicit self-report and implicit measures (e.g., physiology, neuroimaging); in the third part, we will explore the interventions that have been demonstrated to work (and fail) to decrease intergroup conflict. No prior experience in psychology or neuroscience is required. The course is lecture-based, but will include class discussions and in-class activities.
Taught by: Bruneau/Moore-Berg
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 313 Computational Text Analysis for Communication Research
In this 'big data' era, presidents and popes tweet daily. Anyone can broadcast their thoughts and experiences through social media. Speeches, debates and events are recorded in online text archives. The resulting explosion of available textual data means that journalists and marketers summarize ideas and events by visualizing the results of textual analysis (the ubiquitous 'word cloud' just scratches the surface of what is possible). Automated text analysis reveals similarities and differences between groups of people and ideological positions. In this hands-on course students will learn how to manage large textual datasets (e.g. Twitter, YouTube, news stories) to investigate research questions. They will work through a series of steps to collect, organize, analyze and present textual data by using automated tools toward a final project of relevant interest. The course will cover linguistic theory and techniques that can be applied to textual data (particularly from the fields of corpus linguistics and natural language processing). No prior programming experience is required. Through this course students will gain skills writing Python programs to handle large amounts of textual data and become familiar with one of the key techniques used by data scientists, which is currently one of the most in-demand jobs.

Taught by: O'Donnell
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 318 Stories From Data: Introduction to Programming for Data Journalism
Today masses of data are available everywhere, capturing information on just about everything and anything. Related but distinct data streams about newsworthy events and issues – including activity from social media and open data sources (e.g., The Open Government Initiative) – have given rise to a new source for and style of reporting sometimes called Data Journalism. Increasingly, news sites and information portals present visually engaging, dynamic, and interactive stories linked to the underlying data (e.g., The Guardian DataBlog). This course offers an introduction to Python programming for data analysis and visualization.

Students will learn how to collect, analyze, and present various forms of data. Because numbers and their visualizations do not speak for themselves but require context, interpretation, and narrative, students will practice making effective stories from data and presenting them in blogs and other formats. No programming experience is required for this class.

Taught by: O'Donnell
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 322 History and Theory of Freedom of Expression
Can legal penalties be assessed against Donald Trump for suggesting his followers might beat up journalists at rallies? Is shouting "Heil Hitler! Heil Trump!" at a performance of Fiddler on the Roof the same as crying fire falsely in a crowded theater? Should racist speech be banned from Penn's campus? If we were to fashion laws about speech all over again for our media-saturated, fake news world, would they be different from the ones we have? Does the First Amendment—invented for a print world in which most citizens weren't literate unlike the ultra-connected world we have today—protect democracy or endanger it? This seminar examines the philosophical foundation of the First Amendment, its interpretation by the Supreme Court over time, and the struggles over its application to current controversies. We also examine the challenges of civil society censorship that gets people banned from social media or fired from their jobs for controversial speech, such as the NFL's threats to fire players for taking a knee. All societies make laws to limit speech. What are these limits in the United States, and are they the ones we want?

Taught by: Marvin
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 323 Contemporary Politics, Policy and Journalism
This course explores modern media and their impact on government and politics. We focus on the post Watergate/Vietnam era and look, in depth, at the challenges faced by journalists in the contemporary political moment. We will examine the presidency of Donald Trump and the ongoing press coverage of the 2020 election cycle. This course also gives students unique opportunities to discuss the nexus of press, politics and public policy with leading practitioners in these fields.

Taught by: Hunt
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 330 The Hidden World of Privacy Policies
The US Federal Trade Commission considers privacy policies essential for internet sites and apps. Lawyers for firms with internet sites and/or apps spend much time writing privacy policies. Yet surveys show that most Americans don't read the policies and in fact cannot understand them because of their legal jargon. Moreover, surveys indicate, most Americans don’t even correctly understand what the label privacy policy means. The aim of this course will be to examine this crucial but misunderstood aspect of modern life. You will learn how to read privacy policies, how to understand their strategic business purposes within the internet industry, and how to think about the implications for society when the key rules of surveillance and privacy are hidden from all but a relative few. You will also work with others in the class to create and carry out a survey of college students' understanding of privacy policies. There will be one exam and a paper related to the survey.

Taught by: Turow
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 332 Survey Research and Design
Survey research is a small but rich academic field and discipline, drawing on theory and practice from many diverse fields including political science, communication, sociology, psychology, and statistics. Surveys are perhaps the most ubiquitous tool of measurement in the social sciences today. Successful practitioners develop expertise in the art and science of survey methodology, including sampling theory and practice, questionnaire instrument development and operationalization, and the analysis and reporting of survey data. Survey researchers are scientists of the method itself testing various practices by which surveys can be improved upon, as well as developing a keen understanding of the nature of error in surveys and how to control it. This course offers an overview of survey research and design. It is highly experiential but also based upon introductory statistical theory and analysis.
Taught by: Dutwin
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: PSCI 332
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 339 Critical Perspectives in Journalism
This course aims to provide students with a critical understanding of journalism. It combines theoretical perspectives on the making of news with primary source material produced by and about journalists. Students will analyze theoretical material on journalism -- about how news is made, shaped, and performed -- alongside articles and broadcasts appearing in the media, interviews with journalists in the trade press, and professional reviews. Topics include models of journalistic practice, journalistic values and norms, gatekeeping and sourcing practices, storytelling formats in news, and ethical problems related to misrepresentation, plagiarism, and celebrity.
Taught by: Zelizer
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 354 Power and Design in Global Communication
In this course, students will critically explore global communication platforms and internet infrastructures with attention to their social and political implications. The goal is to reflect on how the design of communication technologies embeds power relations, and how these impact specific social groups and shape the relations between the global South and the global North. The course will examine topics such as biased algorithms, digital labor, censorship, surveillance, infrastructure standards and protocols, and their public interest dimensions. Cases to be analyzed include gendered and racially biased artificial intelligence tools, the outsourcing of content moderation in social media, and the increased surveillance of neighborhoods affecting LGBTQ+ groups and indigenous communities in the Amazon region. Students will select case studies to research throughout the semester and will examine the relations between technological design, communication, globalization, and transnationalism to imagine new possibilities for the future of global communication.
Taught by: Rosa
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 367 Communication in the Networked Age
Communication technologies, including the internet, social media, and countless online applications create the infrastructure and interface through which many of our interactions take place today. This form of networked communication opens new questions about how we establish relationships, engage in public, build a sense of identity, promote social change, or delimit the private domain. The ubiquitous adoption of new technologies has also produced, as a byproduct, new ways of observing the world: many of our interactions now leave a digital trail that, if followed, can help us unravel the determinants and outcomes of human communication in unprecedented ways. This course will give you the theoretical and analytical tools to critically assess research that uses networked technologies to produce new evidence about communication dynamics, their effects, and how to promote social change.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 373 Black Geographies: Race, Risk, and Visual Culture
What is the relationship between the Flint water crisis, the hyper-policing of racialized people, and the increased surveillance of neighborhoods deemed “poverty-stricken” or “at risk?” How do regimes of security, surveillance, policing, and forms of violence depend upon the concept of “risk” as central to their operation? How is risk informed by systemic racism and forms of anti-Blackness? How does visual culture (e.g., media coverage, documentary photographs, etc.) inform how we come to see and define certain people, communities, and ways of life as “risky”? How have those living in racialized geographies of “risk” found ways to live in, make do, and challenge the faulty narratives of risk? This interdisciplinary course will examine critical debates and key moments—historical (e.g., MOVE bombing in Philadelphia) and contemporary (e.g., Ferguson riots)—that have informed the concept of risk. Over the course of the semester, we will read scholarly texts and engage with objects such as archival documents, photographs, conceptual art, performance art and installations, journalistic texts, and films. This communications course will be approached from a cultural studies perspective, with particular attention to race, gender, and sexuality.
Taught by: Ward
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 377 Philosophical Problems of Journalism
This course explores the relationship between journalism and philosophy by examining particular issues in epistemology, political philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics. Topics will include: the concept of a “fact”, the role of the press in the state; whether journalists (like doctors and lawyers) operate according to specialized “professional” ethics; and the limits of journalism as a literary or visual genre. Course readings will include philosophical texts, breaking print journalism, and blogs that specialize in media issues.
Taught by: Romano
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 388 Ritual Communication
This course explores the significance of rituals as communicative events in contemporary American culture. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which rituals contribute to the making and re-making of social groups, be they ethnic, religious, familial, or institutional. And we will also attend to the obverse: the ways in which rituals create and perpetuate boundaries between “us” and “them” and between “appropriate” and “deviant” social behavior. Issues of race, class, gender, nationality, religion, age and sexuality will be central to our exploration of how rituals function. Over the course of the semester, we will analyze individual rites of passage – from quinceanera to funerals – as well as rituals that mark transitions on a far larger scale such as presidential inaugurations. We will explore rituals that unfold at the local level as well as those that most of us experience only in mediated forms. Students will get hand’s on experience conducting original ethnographic fieldwork and will learn how to develop compelling research proposals.

Taught by: Paxton
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 390 Special Topics in Communication
This is a special topics course that covers varying topics in communication. For more information about the course, please see: https://www.asc.upenn.edu/academics/undergraduate-program/curriculum-and-major-requirements
Taught by: Various Instructors
Course not offered every year
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 393 Political Polling
Political polls are a central feature of elections and are ubiquitously employed to understand and explain voter intentions and public opinion. This course will examine political polling by focusing on four main areas of consideration. First, what is the role of political polls in a functioning democracy? This area will explore the theoretical justifications for polling as a representation of public opinion. Second, the course will explore the business and use of political polling, including media coverage of polls, use by politicians for political strategy and messaging, and the impact polls have on elections specifically and politics more broadly. The third area will focus on the nuts and bolts of election and political polls, specifically with regard to exploring traditional questions and scales used for political measurement; the construction and considerations of likely voter models; measurement of the horserace; and samples and modes used for election polls. The course will additionally cover a fourth area of special topics, which will include exit polling, prediction markets, polling aggregation, and other topics. It is not necessary for students to have any specialized mathematical or statistical background for this course.
Equivalent R based course if prerequisite not met.

Taught by: Dutwin
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: PSCI 333
Prerequisite: PSCI 107
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 395 Communication and the Presidency
This course examines the vital aspect of communication as a tool of the modern Presidency. Reading and class discussions focus on case studies drawn from modern Presidential administrations (beginning with FDR) that demonstrate the elements of successful and unsuccessful Presidential initiatives and the critical factor of communication common to both. This course is also an introduction to primary research methods and to the use of primary research materials in the Presidential Library system.

Taught by: Eisenhower
Two terms. student may enter either term.
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 397 New Media and Politics
This course examines the evolving media landscape and the political process from three perspectives: 1) the voter, 2) political campaigns and candidates, and 3) the news media. The course opens with a broad overview of the main theories of political communication and a historical review of the role played by new media technologies in U.S. political campaigns leading up to 1996, the year the internet debuted in presidential campaigns. The course then follows this evolution from the 1996 presidential campaign through the current 2020 presidential campaign. We will take a deep dive into the landmark changes brought on by new media technologies to mobilize, persuade, inform, and fundraise around modern presidential campaigns. While the course takes a historical perspective it will also focus on what is happening currently in this environment, with special emphasis on President Trump's campaign for re-election, the Democratic primaries and caucuses, sustained attacks on the press, "fake news," bots, and outside interference in elections.

Taught by: Winneg
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 404 Media and Politics
Media and Politics will examine multiple issues specific to the past and present political media environment in the United States. Focus will be primarily, though not exclusively, on the contemporary news media. Topics covered will include political primaries, how elections have been influenced by the rise of partisan media, selective exposure, freedom of political speech as it relates to elections, the theoretical purpose of elections, money and media, political targeting, etc. We will also explore the quantitative and qualitative methods underlying what is and is not known about how elections work. Reading expectations will be relatively heavy, and under the supervision of the professor, students will write an original research paper examining a specific topic in greater depth.

Taught by: Mutz
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: PSCI 404
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 407 Understanding Social Networks
Digital technologies have made communication networks ubiquitous: even when we can’t really notice them, they mediate most aspects of our daily activities. Networks, however, have always been the backbone of social life: long before Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or other similar platforms, communication created channels for information diffusion that linked people in myriad other ways. Through letters, commerce, or simply face to face interactions, people have always been exposed to the behavior of others. These communicative ties embed us into an invisible web of influence that we can make tangible and analyze. This course will teach you how to map those connections in the form of networks, and how to study those networks so that we can improve our understanding of social life. The goal is to help you grasp the consequences of connectivity, and how small changes in the structure of our ties can lead to big differences in how networks behave.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 411 Communication, Activism, and Social Change
This course examines the communication strategies of 20th and 21st-century social movements, both U.S. and global. We analyze the communication social movements create (including rhetorical persuasion, art activism, bodily argumentation, protest music, media campaigns, public protest, and grassroots organizing), and the role of communication in the identity formation, circulation, and efficacy of social movements. We also consider the communication created by forces seeking to undermine social change, define the study of social movements from a communication perspective, identify major historical and contemporary movements, and apply theories of communication and social change to “real world” activism. Students are required to research and design their own social movement campaign.
Taught by: Jackson, S.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 423 Communication and Social Influence Laboratory
Considerable resources are devoted to constructing mass media campaigns that persuade individuals to change their behavior. In addition, individuals powerfully influence one another without even knowing it. Still, our ability to design and select optimal messages and interventions is far from perfect. This course will review investigations in social and cognitive psychology and communication sciences that attempt to circumvent the limits of introspection by using biological and implicit measures, with particular focus on neuroimaging studies of social influence and media effects. In lieu of COMM 275 as a prerequisite, a media effects or persuasion course at ASC, PSYC, or Wharton.
Taught by: Falk
Course not offered every year
Prerequisite: COMM 275
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 414 The Impact of the Internet, Social Media, & Information Technology on Democracy
At the turn of the 21st century, many claimed that the internet would make the world a more democratic place. Have these prophecies borne out? We examine the effects the internet has had on democracy, looking at research that examines whether, for instance, the internet has increased or decreased inequality, polarization, and political participation. In addition to reading and discussing empirical literature, we will also test many of the theories in this course through hands-on workshops in data analysis.
Taught by: Ticona
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 446 Media Industries and Nationalism
Media institutions have long played a central role in constructing national identity, particularly in the era of nation-states. As globalization increases, media industries have also helped countries project their national identities - and nationalism - for both domestic and international audiences. With contemporary nationalist movements in the spotlight, this course examines how media institutions and cultural industries help to shape nationalism while framing in-group/out-group dynamics for audiences. This course examines case studies in mediated nationalism, paying particularly close attention to - but not limited to - countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Hungary, Israel, India, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. Using Benedict Anderson’s idea of imagined communities as a theoretical basis, this course seeks to investigate how media industries affirm - and occasionally challenge - nationalistic sentiment, and how much of a role state intervention has played in the production of media texts. This course provides students with an understanding of the deep connection between media institutions and state-sponsored/populist-nationalist movements, as well as the dynamics that shape nationalism in both wartime and peacetime eras.
Taught by: Balaji
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 459 Social Networks and the Spread of Behavior
This course explores the nature of diffusion through social networks, the ways networks are formed and shaped by social structures, and the role they play in health behavior, public policy, and innovation adoption. Topics include: the theory of social networks; the small world model of network structure; constructing models to represent society; the social bases of the adoption of innovations and the spread of new ideas; the role of social networks in controlling changes in public opinion; the emergence of unexpected fashions, fads, and social movements; and the connection between social network models and the design of public policy interventions. Students will learn how to use the agent-based computational modeling tool “NetLogo”, and they will work directly with the models to understand how to test scientific theories. We will examine the basic theory of social networks in offline, face-to-face, networks, as well as the role of online networks in spreading new ideas and behaviors through social media. Long standing debates on the effects of social networks on changing beliefs and behaviors, their impact on social change, and ethical concerns regarding their potential manipulation will be given careful consideration throughout. Students will be taught new skills that will enable them to use and develop their own agent-based models. Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor
Taught by: Centola
Course not offered every year
Prerequisite: COMM 210 OR COMM 310 OR SOCI 100
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 468 Annenberg Media Lab 2020: It's not Just TV - The HBO Project
"It's not TV. It's HBO." This is one of the marketing slogans Home Box Office started using in the 1990s to articulate its difference from standard network television. Using videotaped interviews already conducted with many of the executives who helped launch HBO in the 1970s, this hands-on course will provide students with a unique opportunity to engage with the methodological and theoretical implications of crafting arguments/stories in images and sound. Students should be prepared to put theory into practice by working on smaller media products linked to these archival materials. Students will study these interviews with HBO execs, watch fictional and non-fictional films/videos of various genres, discuss relevant media/social theory, and acquire training in (and exposure to) the basics of digital media-making. At the end of the course, students should have acquired a more sophisticated aesthetic and analytical approach to media analysis, to media production, and to the inescapable interconnections between the two.
Taught by: Jackson, J.
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 491 Communication Internship
This seminar provides a scholarly counterpart for students’ internships in various communication-related organizations. Through individually-selected readings, class discussion, and individual conferences, students develop their own independent research agendas which investigate aspects of their internship experience or industry. In written field notes and a final paper, students combine communication theory and practice in pursuit of their individual questions. Requires approval of the Communication Undergraduate Office.
Taught by: Haas
Two terms. student may enter either term.
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 493 Independent Study
The independent study offers the self-motivated student an opportunity for a tailored, academically rigorous, semester-long investigation into a topic of the student’s choice with faculty supervision. Students must complete and file a designated form, approved and signed by the supervising faculty member and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies. This form must be received by the Undergraduate Office before the end of the first week of classes in the semester in which the independent study will be conducted.
Taught by: Various
Two terms. student may enter either term.
Activity: Independent Study
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 494 Honors & Capstone Thesis
The senior thesis provides a capstone intellectual experience for Honors students and Communication and Public Service Program (ComPS) participants. Students conduct a primary research study on a communication-related issue over the course of two semesters. Students should consult with and arrange for a faculty supervisor no later than the summer before senior year. Students must also file a designated form and topic statement, approved and signed by the supervising faculty member, no later than the first week of class. Required of all students planning to enroll in COMM 495 or COMM 499 in the Spring. All Honors students must have a 3.5 cumulative GPA at the end of junior year for eligibility. See the Annenberg website for complete eligibility requirements. Taught by: Ben-Porath/Woolf
Two terms. student must enter first term. Activity: Independent Study
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 495 COMPS Capstone Thesis
Second semester of two semester thesis course. Successful completion of COMM 494 is required for enrollment. The capstone thesis is a requirement for all Communication and Public Service Program participants. Students complete the primary research project started during COMM 494. For students graduating with a 3.5 cumulative GPA after completing COMM 495 with a grade of 3.7 or higher, the capstone thesis may be designated as a senior honors thesis in communication and public service. Prerequisite: written proposal approved by both thesis supervisor and major chair. Two terms. student may enter either term. Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 499 Senior Honors Thesis
Second semester of two semester thesis course. Completion of COMM 494 with a grade of 3.3 or higher and a 3.5 cumulative GPA at the end of the Fall semester of senior year are required for enrollment. The Senior Honors Thesis provides a capstone intellectual experience for students who have demonstrated academic achievement of a superior level. Students complete the primary research project started during COMM 494. Two terms. student may enter either term. Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 500 Proseminar
Introduction to the field of communications study and to the graduate program in communications. Required of all degree candidates. Open only to graduate students in communication. Course usually offered in fall term Activity: Lecture
0.0 Course Units

COMM 522 Introduction to Communication Research
The logic of scientific inquiry and the nature of research. Hypothesis development, research design, field and laboratory observation and experimentation, measurement, interviewing and content analysis, sampling, and basic statistical analysis. Required of all degree candidates. Open only to graduate communication students. Taught by: Hornik/Lelkes Course usually offered in fall term Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 523 Qualitative Ways of Knowing
How do social scientists create new knowledge? What are the qualitative processes and philosophies of knowing for communication scholars? This course provides students with a range of theories and frameworks for gathering data and developing claims, as well as understanding the limits of social science inquiry. Key areas of focus are identifying research questions, research ethics, understanding evidence, making causal claims and scholarly writing. COMM 523 is required of all degree candidates and open only to graduate communication students. Taught by: Lingel Course not offered every year Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 525 Introduction to Political Communication
This course is designed as a PH.D.-level introduction to the study of political communication, and is recommended as a foundational course to be taken early in ones course of study for students interested in political communication as a primary or secondary area of research and teaching. As an introduction to the field it is structured to cover a wide-range of topics and approaches, including media institutions and the effects of both mass mediated and deliberative communications. While no single course can provide comprehensive coverage of a subfield with as long and diverse a history as political communication, our hope is that you will leave this course with a strong grasp of the major theories, trends, methods, findings and debates in this area of study, as well as the gaps in our knowledge and promising directions for future research. Taught by: Lelkes Course not offered every year Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 530 Advertising and the Digital Age
It is impossible to understand the development of the contemporary digital era without understanding the role played by the advertising industry, broadly the understood. From the launch of first popular web browsers in the mid-1990s, various forms of marketing communication have shaped the most popular activities—from search to social to apps—and redefined the ways companies think about individuals in society. The aim of this course is to study these developments historically and contemporaneously. First we will range across the history of advertising and its related social force, consumerism, through the late 20th century. We will next investigate the forces that guided the rise of the internet as a commercial medium in the face of an earlier ethic that decreed that very idea. Then we will dive into the ways marketers attempt to guide the internet and other digital media to their benefit by exploring a range of key contemporary activities: the rise of the smartphone as a marketing device, programmatic advertising, personalization strategies, location and cross-platform targeting and attribution, online retailing, the responses of brick and mortar retailers, advertisers’ roles in the cratering of print media, native advertising/branded content, the rise of “influencers,” and the transformation of “television” as a product, an activity, and an industry. We will read industry documents and other materials to assess how all these activities actually “work” and what drives them. Then we will consider their societal implications through a variety of lenses, including surveillance, privacy, pluralism, and democracy. Taught by: Turow Course not offered every year Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 553 Computational Social Science Research Seminar
This is a graduate research seminar in which top researchers in the field of Computational Social Science will present cutting-edge research. Our focus will be on carefully reading the speaker's work, and discussing in detail their theoretical models, empirical methods, and overall scientific contribution. Participants will also present in the seminar, which will help to prepare them for professional presentations of their work at conferences and job talks. This seminar will meet weekly.
Taught by: Centola
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 575 Social Psychology of Communication
Contributions of social psychology to understanding communication behavior: message systems; social cognition; persuasive communications; attitude formation and change; face-to-face interactions and small group situations; strategies of attributional and communicative interpretation; mass communication effects; social influence and networks.
Taught by: Cappella
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 594 Intro To Networks
Much of what we think and do is shaped by social interactions, by the behavior we see in other people, or the information we receive from them: we pay attention to what our friends or we monitor news through the feeds of social media, and we are more likely to use technologies already embraced by other users. Networks are behind those (and, by extension, most) dimensions of social life. They offer the language to capture the invisible structure of interdependence that links us together, and the means to analyze dynamics like diffusion, influence, or the effects of media in an increasingly diverse information environment. The aim of this course is to introduce networks and the relational way of thinking. Students will gain the necessary literacy to read, interpret, and design network-based research; learn how to go from concepts to metrics; and draw and interpret networks through the lens of substantive research questions. We will pay equal attention to the theory and the empirics of network science, and set the foundations for more advanced work on networks.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 615 Experimental Design and Issues in Causality
The main goal of this course is to familiarize students with experiments, quasi-experiments, survey experiments and field experiments as they are widely used in the social sciences. Some introductory level statistics background will be assumed, though this is a research design course, not a statistics course. By the end of the course, students will be expected to develop their own original experimental design that makes some original contribution to knowledge. Throughout the course of the semester, we will also consider how to deal with the issue of causality as it occurs in observational studies, and draw parallels to experimental research.
Taught by: Mutz
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: COMM 498, PSCI 439, PSCI 635
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 623 Health Psychology Seminar
Seminar members shall critically review current applications of psychosocial theory and methodology to health-related issues with the goal of suggesting new directions that research might take. Preventive health behavior, HIV risk-associated behavior, psychosocial factors and physical health, practitioner patient interactions, patterns of utilization of health services, and compliance with medical regimens are among the topics that will be studied.
Taught by: Jemmott
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 630 History of Media Research, 1890-1990
An introduction into the field of mass communication research covering classic studies from the late 19th century through 1970s. Emphasis is on the societal, organizational, political, and other considerations that shaped the field.
Taught by: Turow
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 637 Public Health Communication
Theories of health behavior change and the potential role for public health communication; international experience with programs addressing behaviors related to cancer, AIDS, obesity, cardiovascular disease, child mortality, drug use and other problems, including evidence about their influence on health behavior; the design of public health communication programs; approaches to research and evaluation for these programs.
Taught by: Hornik
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Lecture
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 639 Communication and Cultural Studies
This course tracks the different theoretical appropriations of "culture" and examines how the meanings we attach to it depend on the perspectives through which we define it. The course first addresses perspectives on culture suggested by anthropology, sociology, communication, and aesthetics, and then considers the tensions across academic disciplines that have produced what is commonly known as "cultural studies." The course is predicated on the importance of becoming cultural critics versed in alternative ways of naming cultural problems, issues, and texts. The course aims not to lend closure to competing notions of culture but to illustrate the diversity suggested by different approaches.
Taught by: Zelizer
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 660 Content Analysis
An introduction to content analysis, the analysis of large bodies of textual matter, also called message systems analysis, quantitative semantics, propaganda analysis, and (computer-aided) text analysis. The course inquires into the theories, methods, and empirical problems common to these analytical efforts: sampling, text retrieval, coding, reliability, analytical constructs, computational techniques, and abductive inference. It illustrates these problems by studies of mass media content, interview or panel data, legal research, and efforts to draw inferences from personal documents typical in psychology and literature. Students design a content analysis and do the preparatory work for an academic or practical research project. They may also use the opportunity of forging available theories into a new analytical technique and test it with available texts, or solve a methodological problem in content analysis research.
Taught by: Krippendorff
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 665 Digital Media and Social Theory
This course explores critical issues in contemporary society through the lens of digital media studies and social theory. The goal is to build constructive dialogues between digital media studies and contemporary social theory. Special attention will be given to how social theory may inform the theorizing and empirical analysis of digital culture, politics, and practices. We will read monographs on globalization, power and control, dissent and protest, self and community, and the public sphere as they relate to digital media technologies. They include works by McLuhan, Castells, Turkle, Papacharissi, Lievrouw, Bimber, W. Chun and more. These monographs will be examined alongside the works of Gramsci, Foucault, Williams, Habermas, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Melucci. Students are required to submit weekly reading reports, make oral presentations, and complete a term paper.
Taught by: Yang
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: SOCI 664
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 667 Arts & Propaganda
This course (seminar) deals with examples of controversy or struggles, through public art or exhibition, to define or proclaim, contest or reinforce national identities. Some are internal debates, within national boundaries, some are transnational and exist in a global frame. In most instances, there are sharp disputes- having to do with history and its interpretation and representation, about the role of museum & implications for legitimacy, about the relationship of patronage to power. Some sessions will be rooted in art history and iconography, some in the use of archival material to bring fresh perspectives to bear, some on aspects of law and regulation.
Taught by: Price
Course offered fall; even-numbered years
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 675 Message Effects
Current research, theory and statistical methods for assessing the effects of messages. Specific focus on messages designed to have a persuasive effect on attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or behaviors. Experimental and non-experimental research from mass and interpersonal communication, health, social psychology, advertising, political science and journalism will be considered. Unintended effects - such as the consequences of violent pornography - are not considered.
Taught by: Cappella
Course not offered every year
Prerequisite: COMM 575
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 684 Data Visualization for Research
Empirical research employs data to gain insights and build a theoretical understanding of the world. An appropriate visualization of data is key to illuminating hidden patterns and effectively communicate the main findings of research. This course will discuss the visualization strategies of published research, give recommendations of best practice, and discuss tips and techniques for specific research purposes (i.e. hypothesis testing, group comparison) and data structures, including temporal, geographic, and network data. This course will equip you with tools you can use to learn through visualization and to communicate more effectively your own research.
Taught by: Gonzalez=Bailon
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 697 Popular Culture and Politics
Not surprisingly, most research regarding the media's impact on political attitudes, opinions, knowledge and behaviors focuses on news and public affairs genres, ignoring the vast majority of media content labeled "entertainment." Spurred in part by technological, economic, cultural and political changes that have increasingly blurred the line between news and entertainment, a small but growing body of empirical research is exploring the political influence of popular culture. In this course we will critically review this literature, focusing on issues of theory, methods, findings and implications.
Taught by: Delli Carpini
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 689 Advanced Project in a Medium
Proposal written in specified form and approved by both the student's project supervisor and academic advisor must be submitted with registration. Open only to graduate degree candidates in communication. One-term course offered either term
Activity: Independent Study
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 701 Introduction to the Political Economy of Media
This course has two aims. First, assuming that communications are central to any society, it situates media systems within larger national and international social relationships and political structures. Second, this course critically examines the structures of the communication systems themselves, including ownership, profit imperatives, support mechanisms such as advertising and public relations, and the ideologies and government policies that sustain these arrangements. Considering case studies ranging from traditional news and entertainment media to new digital and social media, the course provides a comprehensive survey of the major texts in this vibrant sub-field of media studies.
Taught by: Pickard
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 703 International Communication: Power and Flow
The tumultuous rise of new media technologies, including the Internet and social media, combine with grinding geopolitical change to create dramatic changes in law and policy regarding speech and society. This course is an examination of current dilemmas in historical context, about strategic communications in contrast or challenge to goals of free expression and to the exercise of power over the flow of information.
Taking relevant contexts, including societies in transition, authoritarian societies, states and societies in conflict, we explore the relationship of the state and other entities to the flow of words and images, and how these messages impact public opinion, stability, and democratic growth. We start with a theoretical orientation focused on two competing paradigms: the paradigm of free expression and the paradigm of national identity, conflict management, and sovereignty. The class will then explore several case studies viewed through the lens of narrative theory. Areas of discussion may include case studies such as Ukraine, Russia, Syria, Iran and, as well, the drama of the development of global internet policy.
Taught by: Price, M.
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: LAW 914
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 706 Analysis of Election Data
This course is intended to serve as a workshop for students interested in the empirical analysis of elections, public opinion and political communication more generally. The centerpiece of the course will be an original research paper produced by each student on a topic of his or her own choosing. The requirements for these papers are fairly open, but demanding: the research papers must a) involve empirical analysis of a major election data set, b) be oriented toward answering an original research question selected with the guidance of the instructor, and c) aim to be of publishable quality. There are no formal prerequisites for the course. However, if you have less than two semesters of statistical training, and/or no formal background in the study of elections, public opinion or political communication, then this is probably not the right course for you. In order to be able to formulate an original research question, you need some background in the literature, which is provided by other courses, but is not a formal part of this course.
Taught by: Mutz
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: PSCI 805
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 712 Race, Media and Politics
"Race" has and continues to play an important role in American politics. In this course we will critically review the relevant Communication and Political Science literature with an eye towards understanding: (1) the role of the mass media in the construction and dissemination of race as a sociopolitical concept; (2) how race affects political attitudes, opinions and behaviors; (3) the unique methodological problems researchers face in studying racial attitudes and opinions; and (4) shortcomings in the existing scholarship on race, media and politics and how these shortcomings might be addressed.
Taught by: Delli Carpini
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 715 Political Communication
This course examines the role of political communication in influencing political attitudes and behaviors. Because of the broad nature of the topic, course readings and lectures will be interdisciplinary, drawing on research in sociology, history, psychology, political science and communication research. There are two primary goals for the course.
One goal is to acquaint graduate students with the wide-ranging literature on political communication. A second major goal is to stimulate ideas for original research in the field of political communication. Toward this end, by the end of the semester students will be expected to be sufficiently familiar with the field to propose original studies on topics of their choosing. The formulation of an original research question and research design will be an important component of the final examination.
Taught by: Mutz
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: PSCI 715
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 722 Theories and Methods in Qualitative Research
The objective of this course is to ensure that students have a grasp of the fundamental theories and methods of qualitative research. After spending time immersing ourselves in the metatheories that shape social science research, we will address ethical issues that emerge in all human subjects research (qualitative and otherwise), focusing primarily on responsible treatment of participants and their data. Then we will work through a series of research techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, ethnography, discourse analysis and participatory mapping. With the goal of providing practical instruction on qualitative methods and a grounding in theoretical issues, this course is meant to prepare students for conducting a broad range of qualitative research projects in communication and media studies.
Taught by: Lingel
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 727 Evaluation of Communication Campaigns
The various roles of research in campaign work: foundational research, formative research, monitoring research, summative evaluation research, policy research. The place for a theory of campaign effects. The ethics of evaluation research. Alternative designs, measurement, statistical and analytic approaches.
Taught by: Hornik
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 741 Media Effects Research Design
This course will include three components. Part one will focus on readings and lectures about media effects research design, with some emphasis on exposure measurement, and on constructing out-of-laboratory designs including natural and quasi experiments, longitudinal and time series designs and designs appropriate for evaluating persuasive campaigns. Part two will be case focused, asking for design critiques of current published research studies. Part three will provide an opportunity for development of designs relevant to students’ own interests.
Taught by: Hornik
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 745 Media Ethnography: Theory and Practice
This course will allow students to conduct 'critical readings' of ethnographic engagements with television, radio and film as cultural phenomena. We will examine how ethnographers use their method and genre to understand the production, reception and circulation of mass media. We will also draw on contemporary social/critical theory to unpack some of the epistemological assumptions organizing and anchoring such qualitative work. (The internet will also be discussed.)
Taught by: Jackson
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 760 Discursive Constructions of Realities
This seminar develops qualitative methods for critical inquiries into what language does. It explores linguistic tropes and social interactions in which realities come to be constructed, contested, and maintained. We critically evaluate the epistemological entailments of several dominant theories of language, and settle on conceptions that enable us to examine the cognitive and social consequences of talk, text, and social interaction. These conceptions provide powerful alternatives to the representational theories that dominate popular discourses. For example, we take language as performative: focusing on how narratives are enacted in the presence of others, ranging from speech acts, instructions, individual stories in therapy to nationalism and war. We develop analytical vocabularies that reveal and try to overcome questionable ontological claims, highlighting actionable possibilities in preference to merely describing facts. We rely on dialogue, socially interactive, and constructive conceptions, ranging from conversations and computer interfaces to discourses, whose artifacts make differences to different communities. The methods that this seminar develops are fundamentally emancipatory and liberating. Realizing that most experiences of power and oppression results from linguistically constructed cognitive or disciplinary traps enables us to explore linguistically informed alternatives. Communication research cannot be undertaken without language but theories have largely failed to reflect on their consequences.
Taught by: Krippendorff
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 783 Describing Your Data
This course is for students who have collected empirical data and will explore ways of describing data for scholarly and translational purposes. For example, students will explore different ways to explore and visualize their data (e.g., a conference abstract vs. a blog post), present their data (e.g., a conference talk vs. a pop talk) and make their findings more reproducible. Students will also read scholarly work (oversampling, though not limited to work on media effects and the science of science communication) and critique their work in relation to what is known about effective communication and reproducibility. Students should come prepared to engage with art, science and computer programming.
Taught by: Falk, O'Donnell
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 788 Studying Social Behavior with Internet Experiments
In the last decade, new studies have used Web-based experimentation to identify previously unobservable features of communication networks - from processes of cumulative advantage, to the spread of innovations, to the emergence of cooperation. This course offers a deep-dive into the design, creation and execution of Web-based experiments. Students will learn the core principles of Web-based experimental design, which will prepare them to design their own Web-based studies. Students will learn the relationship between theory and methods through a careful analysis of the theoretical implications of past Web-based experiments (both in terms of their value for some scientific problems, and their limitations for others). To this end, students will explore Web-based experiments through the lens of the theories that motivate them. Discussions and assignments will focus on eliciting both the strengths and limitations of this approach with specific emphasis on identifying the scientific potential for new studies. Longstanding debates concerning the value of identification and replication in social science, along with the relationship between theoretical models, observational data and experimental data, are given careful consideration throughout. Students will be exposed to new ways of conducting empirical research that will prepare them to design their own Web-based experimental studies.
Taught by: Centola
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 799 Independent Research
Proposal written in specified form and approved by both the student’s project supervisor and academic advisor or another member of the faculty must be submitted with registration.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Independent Study
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 801 Filter Bubbles, Long Tails, & Info Cascades: Methods for a Fragmented Media Env

Scholars and pundits have made many claims in recent years about the impact that digital technologies, and social media in particular, play in shaping access to political information and the formation of beliefs. However, all these claims rely on specific measurement instruments and research designs that are not always appropriately scrutinized or evaluated. This course will discuss the different analytical approaches that can be used to measure media consumption, selective exposure, bias, opinion formation, and the diffusion of information in the online media environment. Our goal is to assess the strength and weaknesses of different research designs with an eye on how to best triangulate available evidence and advance in a cumulative fashion in this important research domain.

Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon and Lelkes
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 815 Labor, Communication and Technology

Debates about the future of work, automation, and the working conditions of on-demand work have opened up new questions rooted in long intellectual lineages. This course introduces students to key theoretical perspectives and concepts in the study of labor, communication, and technology from the 19th and 20th centuries and examines their relevance to 21st century issues. We will examine the meaning of labor from Marxist, post-industrial, cultural, and sociological perspectives as well as the place of labor in communication scholarship. We will also examine the relationship between digital transformations of the workplace and new forms of surveillance, social stratification and inequality.

Taught by: Ticona
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 824 Critical Race Media

This course will attempt to engage students in an interdisciplinary conversation about how "race" and "racism" are theorized, operationalized and debated in both the academy and "the real world." The offering's goal is to articulate one fundamental (though multi-pronged) question: How do disputes about the ontological reality and epistemological utility of race and racism pivot on contestations around various themes/concerns, including (i) essentialism vs. anti-essentialism; (ii) the politics of culture and the semiotics of politics; (iii) globalization and its links to mass-mediation; and (iv) a neoliberalist dispensation’s commodifications of social identities. This course examines the history of race as a socially meaningful category. Where did it come from? Why/how did it develop? What are some of its past and present manifestations? In which ways might it be inextricably linked to other forms of social differentiation (such as class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality)?

Critical Race. Theory. also requests that students think carefully about their own political, intellectual, and emotional investments in race as a social/biological claim. Race is a deceptively complicated construct (considering how much we all think we understand it), one that demands careful attention to culture and biology, mythology and history, science and superstition. This course seeks to unpack race-thinking in everyday life and popular media/culture.

Taught by: Jackson
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 837 The Meaning of Measures: Quantification, Culture & Digital Technologies

It’s been said that what’s counted counts. Numbers and other measurements communicate meaning and create hierarchies of value. As such, measurement is a political act. From prices to ratings, risk scores to the 2020 Census, quantification projects surround our daily lives. This class will ask, how do numbers and other metrics communicate meaning throughout the social world? Specifically, we'll focus on the role of technologies and data in the process of quantification and the construction of cultural meaning and conflict about knowledge and truth. How do our ideas about data shape what we know about ourselves? How do we seek to know others? This course will engage in an interdisciplinary conversation about the past and present of culture and quantification, from the cultural pre-history of "big data" technologies’ appeals to objectivity and efficiency, to current conflicts over privacy and platforms.

Taught by: Ticona
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 839 (De)Sexing the Internet

From the earliest message boards and email chains, the internet has given people a way to connect, not just digitally but sexually. Porn, online dating, sex education: digital technology has made it easier for people to find each other and explore sexuality, but these same tools have also been used in relationships that are exploitative and criminal. In this course, we look at the different connections between sex, gender, queerness and the internet: changing policies regulating sex (like FOSTA and SESTA), the platforms that have created controversies around sex (for example, craigslist, tumblr and Grindr) and shifting norms around how sex and sexuality manifest online. This is an interdisciplinary course that brings together internet studies, queer theory, STS and cultural studies in order to understand the social and historical dimensions of sex, sexuality and digital technologies.

Taught by: Lingel
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 841 The Ethics of Forgetting: Media at Risk of Deletion

Digital information is continually being created and circulated, but it is also forgotten, deleted and otherwise lost. Whether from the perspective of journalists, activists, artists or academics, how do we deal with the deletion or loss of media? Where is information archived and what politics guide its organization, curation and erasure? Where do our media live and die? This course begins with theories of institutional and individual archiving. It then moves to concepts of remediation and machine learning to complicate how information travels, data is stored and archives are ‘retrieved’. Finally, using case studies of arts-based digital archiving projects, the course focuses on the politics of forgetting media.

Taught by: Lingel
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 843 The Meaning of Measures: Quantification, Culture & Digital Technologies

It’s been said that what’s counted counts. Numbers and other measurements communicate meaning and create hierarchies of value. As such, measurement is a political act. From prices to ratings, risk scores to the 2020 Census, quantification projects surround our daily lives. This class will ask, how do numbers and other metrics communicate meaning throughout the social world? Specifically, we'll focus on the role of technologies and data in the process of quantification and the construction of cultural meaning and conflict about knowledge and truth. How do our ideas about data shape what we know about ourselves? How do we seek to know others? This course will engage in an interdisciplinary conversation about the past and present of culture and quantification, from the cultural pre-history of "big data" technologies’ appeals to objectivity and efficiency, to current conflicts over privacy and platforms.

Taught by: Ticona
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 843 It's About Time: Problematizing Time in Social Science Research
Human experience is characterized by a complex interplay of processes that play out across multiple timescales: from second to second, from week to week, and from generation to generation. We will critically examine an expansive literature touching on emotions, personality, media engagement, health communication, and more, all in the service of identifying notions of time that are often implicit in theories of human experience. In doing so, students will become accustomed to applying the following questions to the topics they encounter in their everyday readings and their own research: What timescale(s) are addressed by a theory, either implicitly or explicitly? Is the timing of measurement matched to the timescale(s) over which phenomena are unfolding? Seminars will be accompanied by a data science laboratory in which students will gain hands-on experience in describing, visualizing, and analyzing daily diary data.
Taught by: Lydon-Staley
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 855 Polarization and Partisan Discord
In this course we examine the nature, causes and consequences of polarization and incivility. We pay special attention to the role that the media and information plays in exacerbating these problems, as well as ways in which technology can be redesigned to ameliorate incivility and polarization.
Taught by: Leikes
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 861 Surveillance Capitalism
This course explores the history, technologies, political economy, and regulatory tensions relating to the monitoring of populations and individuals in the contemporary digital media environment.
Taught by: Turow
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 865 Digital Inequalities: Theories & Method
This graduate course will introduce students to key approaches to understanding digital inequalities across communication, media studies, and sociology. From divides in access and skills, to institutional and intersectional approaches, this emerging research area utilizes different types of theories about social inequalities and social scientific methods to understand novel issues arising in an increasingly digitally mediated society. Over the course of the semester, students will develop a research proposal that will prepare them to utilize and contribute to theory and methods discussed in the course.
Taught by: Ticona
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 874 Regulating Imagery
Drawing on law and social science, this seminar explores techniques that governments, institutions and interest groups use to influence, alter, remix, encourage, channel, or ban kinds of images in order to reach certain goals. The syllabus will consider the deployment of law, force, negotiation and subsidy, as aspects of a broader sense of regulation in pursuit of a framework for thinking about the management of imagery (broadly defined). The seminar will deal, among other things, with the regulation of imagery in conflict zones, the construction of narratives of inclusion in museums, attention to shifting degrees of government transparency. It will examine, often in a comparative context, how copyright doctrines and norms of expression are utilized in the regulation of imagery.
Taught by: Price
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 875 Journalism, Truth, and Trust
Taught by: Roudakova
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 876 The Black Public Sphere, from Freedoms Journal to Black Lives Matter
The field of communication projects and encourages particular visions of deliberation and the public that have been critiqued for failing to represent publics that experience identity-based exclusion and misrepresentation. In this course we correct this practice by centering work on the black public sphere, recognizing it as central to political and media theory on publics and counterpublics. We will connected "classical" works on publics (Habermas and Fraser), fields (Bourdieu), and mediascapes (Appadurai) to more contemporary critical, cultural, and institutional analysis (Squires, Gray, Brock, and more) of African American media-making, protest and deliberation.
Taught by: Jackson, S
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 877 Anthromedialities: Experimental Theory and Practice
In recent years much has been made of the "beyond text" turn in anthropology, specifically the need to re-evaluate the singular authority of "writing culture." Several new approaches advocate for non-textual medialities, with representations originating in both sonovisual media and performance. Less, however, has been theorized and advocated about intermediality and the multicompositional practices of transmediality and plurimediality, specifically their more transgressive multisensory epistemology. This course will examine these radical approaches to interacting textual, visual, sonic and performative mediations, theorizing their epistemic and ethical implications, collaborative potentials, affinities in narrative and non-narrative representation, and political and aesthetic investments. Students will both critically engage histories of transmedial anthropology, and produce projects that are multicompositional.
Taught by: Feld
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 576, MUSC 576
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 880 The Social Neuroscience of Communication
This interdisciplinary course focuses on understanding the mechanisms of social thinking, media effects and interpersonal communication across multiple levels of analysis. We use the brain as one powerful window to understand and predict outcomes that are challenging to predict otherwise. The course will cover foundational readings and involve weekly, seminar style discussions of recent papers in social neuroscience, neuroeconomics and communication science.
Taught by: Falk
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 881 The Performance Society: Readings in Social and Media Theories
Social action has a performative character - people act as if on a stage in response to audience expectations, whether offline or online. This seminar traces the history of this line of critical thought from Weber and Bakhtin through Goffman and Victor Turner to contemporary authors such as Judith Butler, Byung-Chul Han, Jon McKenzie, and Charles Tilly. Special attention will be devoted to the relationship between media and performance, examined through recent work by media scholars and sociologists such as Ben Agger, Jeffrey Alexander, Jeffrey Berry, Danah Boyd, Alice Marwick, and Sarah Sobieraj. A central issue concerns the will to perform. Why are individuals in modern society compelled to perform? What are the manifestations and forms of performance in institutional and non-institutional politics (such as revolutions and social movements)? How are performances related to emotion? How do the internet and digital media shape the forms and meanings of performance? What are the consequences of the performance imperative? A term paper is required.
Taught by: Yang G
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SOCI 881
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 885 Summer Culture: Risk and Resistance
What does media at risk look like in the Southern Cone? Summer Culture 2020 will examine risk and resistance in Argentina, situating Argentine media within a global context of media repression and concentration. There are media at risk; there are populations at risk that have to find alternative ways to express themselves. Examining both its past and present, the course will address how populations at risk express themselves when surrounded by the memories and experiences of state dictatorship, censorship, poverty and precarious labor, yet at the same time presenting innovative strategies on the part of active voluntary associations, community media, alternatives to mainstream media and emergent modes of communication. Using the Argentine case as a roadmap for understanding more fully the patterns by which media are put at risk and the societal responses to it, SummerCulture 2020 will be co-taught by Elizabeth Jelin and Barbie Zelizer, with participation by Silvio Waisbord.
Taught by: Zelizer
Activity: Lecture
0.0 Course Units

COMM 889 Cultural Sociology
Studies culture as values, scripts, practice, performance, and style in the contexts of everyday life, social class and status groups, social movements, and status groups, social movements, and changes of communication technologies. Approaches politics, society, institutions, identities, and social change as dynamic processes and complex interactions at both micro/meso and meso/macro levels. Examines the production, reception, circulation, and effects of signs, symbols, and stories. Readings include both classic authors (Elias, Simmel, Bakhtin, Goffman, Foucault, Bourdieu, Raymond Williams, etc) and contemporary works from sociology and communication studies.
Taught by: Yang
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SOCI 561
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 891 Special Topics in Media at Risk
The Center for Media at Risk hosts a visiting scholar each semester who teaches a course related to the risks associated with engagement in journalism, documentary, entertainment or digital spaces, with particular attention paid to practitioners under threat from political intimidation. For more information about the course, please see: https://www.asc.upenn.edu/academics/graduate-program/graduate-course-descriptions
Taught by: Various
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 892 Critical Data Studies
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit