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 dialogue across difference. The course also explores the relationship between robust, civil dialogue and citizenship, wellness, and service. We engage diverse perspectives on the purpose of higher education, the role of dialogue in learning and communities, the nature of citizenship, the value of civility, and the relationship between individual and community wellness. To help cultivate a sense of belonging and connection to Penn, the course invites several guest lecturers from entities at Penn to share how they foster citizenship, service, wellness or dialogue into our community. Students will identify the ways in which their academic, professional and personal interests in these themes could align and then develop a strategy to cultivate and apply these interests during their time at Penn and to the benefit of the Penn community. 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.

Taught by: Anderson/Howard
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
0.5 Course Units

COMM 026 Fellows Proseminar II (SNF Paideia Program Course)
In the SNF Paideia Fellows Proseminar II, Fellows engage in deeper exploration of the themes of dialogue, citizenship, wellness, and service, especially considering potential connections with their chosen major. In this course, junior Fellows investigate engaged scholarship in their home discipline and reflect on the ways their designated SNF Paideia courses influence their research, career, and service trajectories. Building on the course materials from Proseminar I, fellows will delve deeper into the scholarship that evaluates dialogue strategies for the ways they contribute to service, citizenship and wellness. Moving beyond Penn, the course invites several researchers or practitioners at the national or international level to share how they put theory into direct practice addressing real world problems. The culminating assignment is to develop a draft proposal for a capstone project that in some way incorporates SNF Paideia themes. Fellows in this course also develop their leadership skills by mentoring students in the sophomore Fellows course. 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 junior year.

Taught by: Anderson/Howard
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
0.5 Course Units

COMM 113 Data Science for Beginners
This course serves as an entrance to the world of data science and is aimed at students who have little to no background in data science, statistics, or programming. The core content of the course focuses on data acquisition and wrangling, exploratory data analysis, data visualization, inference, modelling, and effective communication of results. This course, which will rely on R, the statistical programming language, will prepare students for more advanced data science and computational social science courses.

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

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
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: Lelkes
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, 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 science 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/ O’Donnell
One-term course offered either 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
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
Course not offered every year
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 class 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 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 244 Civil Dialogue Seminar: Civic Engagement In A Divided Nation
The goal of this course is to help students develop concepts, tools, dispositions, and skills that will help them engage productively in the ongoing experiment of American democracy. This nation's founders created a governmental structure that sets up an ongoing and expansive conversation about how to manage the tensions and tradeoffs between competing values and notions of the public good. These tensions can never be fully resolved or eliminated; they are intrinsic to the American experiment. Every generation must struggle to find its own balance, in no small part because in every era people who previously had been unjustly excluded from the conversation find a way to be heard. That inevitably introduces new values and changes how enduring ones get interpreted. The challenge of each generation is to develop that capacity to its fullest. The goal of this course is to equip you to engage fully in your generation's renewal of the conversation. Class sessions will use a variety of modalities: lecture, discussion, case studies, opportunities to experiment with the tools and techniques of civil dialogue and writing.
Each session will include some theory or historical context, a case study, exploration of a key concept of civic dialogue with a related tool or technique, and an interactive exercise. This course is part of a larger effort by the university (called the Paideia program) to help Penn students build these skills.
Taught by: Harris Sokoloff
One-term course offered either term
Also Offered As: EDUC 244, URBS 245
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 249 Film Festival History and Practice
Film festivals as we know them emerged as nationalist spectacles and have since become important sites of cultural exchange at global and regional levels. Constantly shifting due to geopolitics and technology, festivals are crucial components in the larger film industry and help to shape film culture, greatly impacting the trajectories of both the life of a film and its makers. Festivals offer a vehicle with which to explore the intersection of art, communications, economics, and politics. Festivals have previously constituted an alternative distribution mechanism for independent and so-called 'international' films that may never get a theatrical release and thus offer opportunities for regional audiences to find them. They have also been especially important for nonfiction films. In this course, we will examine the histories of the larger international festivals in North America and Western Europe (i.e. Berlin, Cannes, Toronto, Sundance) and also look into smaller festivals that have formed around thematic, regional or cultural parameters. Additional topics include: independent film distribution and exhibition, criticism, funding, film programming theory and practice, differences in regional and niche festivals, tourism, marketing, and social media. Particular attention will be paid to for-profit versus not-for-profit models and explore the relationship of festivals to museums, universities and non-profit arts structures widely. The course will consist of readings, screenings, and guest presentations from festival programmers.
Taught by: Holmes
Course not offered every year
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 263 Modern Social Movements
This course examines the main sociological theories and concepts in the analysis of revolutions, popular protest, and social movements. Special attention will be given to three theoretical traditions: resource mobilization, political process, and cultural analysis. We will study narratives, symbols, performances, and old and new media forms in the construction of identities and solidarities and the mobilization of publics. Historical and contemporary cases from the U.S. and around the world will be examined. Students will work in small teams on a term project - an analysis of a social movement or protest event of their choice.
Taught by: Yang
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: SOCI 143
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 is on the effects of messages on attitudes, opinions, values, and behaviors. Applications include political, commercial, health and public service advertising, propaganda, and communication campaigns. 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 creating a persuasive message consistent with research and practice targeted to the problem and its solution.
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) sociopolitical 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/undergraduate/courses
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 299 We are the 99%: Media and Memory of the Occupy Movement
2011 was a watershed year for social movements, from the Arab Spring to Los Indignados, to Occupy Wall Street. This seminar focuses on the Occupy movement, placing it in a global climate of activism, and focusing on the movement's use of media and technology. In the midst of an activist movement, it's impossible to know what practices, technologies and ideas have staying power and which ones will fade away. The ten-year anniversary of these activist uprisings provides an opportunity to reflect and ask: what are the legacies of these movements for today's activist efforts? How did the Occupy movement reshape digital activist practices? Where did the movement fail and what were its successes? In this discussion-based seminar, students will learn fundamentals of social movements theory, analyze the particular efforts and ideas of the Occupy movement, and develop a richer understanding of activist media.
Taught by: Lingel
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 301 Understanding 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 310 The Communication Research Experience
In this hands-on course students will work with active researchers in the Communication Neuroscience lab at Penn to gain experience in how research works. Students will have the opportunity to interact closely with a mentor and will gain experience conceptualizing research questions, designing experiments, and collecting and analyzing data. In fall 2019, the course "field experiment" will examine how to increase voter turn-out among Penn students, but the specific research approaches taken to this topic will be driven by students' interests (e.g. in persuasion, marketing, network science, etc). Prerequisite: COMM 210, an equivalent research methods class, or permission of the instructor.
Taught by: Falk
Course not offered every year
Prerequisite: COMM 210
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: 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 (particular 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

If we were to fashion new laws for speech from scratch in our media-saturated, fake news world, would they be different laws from those we have? The rootedness of free speech in our civic DNA springs from enduring philosophical arguments over what truth and knowledge are, what human nature is like, and what we think society owes to and requires from its members. We explore foundational debates at the core of the First Amendment, the evolving interpretation of the amendment by the Supreme Court, its determined historical challengers, and struggles over its applicability to contemporary controversies. We address strong claims that unfettered speech is central to democratic societies and strong claims that society can be made more democratic by removing discriminatory speech from social media and public discourse more generally. Every society limits speech in significant ways. What are these limits in the United States, why are these the limits, and are they the ones we want? This is a reading and discussion seminar. It meets three times a week for lively but informed dialogue and debate.

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

COMM 323 Contemporary Politics, Policy and Journalism

This course focuses on how modern media intersect with politics and government in the 21st century. Case studies will include examining media coverage of the Gore v. Bush 2000 presidential election recount, 9/11, Barack Obama's election and presidency, the Trump administration, and the 2020 election. The course will include several guest speakers, all of them prominent press/political figures. In addition, students will participate in a DC fieldtrip (live or virtual, TBA) where they will get to hear from, and interact with, Washington leaders in the fields of politics, policy and journalism. Course materials, in addition to number of books, will include the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, left- and right-wing social media sites, cable broadcasts, and network news shows. There will be three written assignments: an analysis of the first two weeks of the next Administration; a column or op-ed; and a final research paper. In this discussion-based seminar there will be a premium on class participation.

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

COMM 328 Drawing the Blue Line: Police and Power in American Popular Culture

The police are one of the most heavily imagined institutions in American popular culture. From Cagney and Lacey to Colors, Law & Order, The Wire and The Watchmen, evolving depictions of law enforcement help us to understand larger socio-cultural shifts that have occurred from the post-1968 riots to the dawn of the Black Lives Matter movement in the mid-2010s. Using case study and textual analysis approaches, students will examine how specific police procedurals, movies, and other cultural texts showcase police authority in relation to certain communities, and consider how these texts reflect, uphold and/or challenge prevailing views on law and order and criminal justice. Our explorations of how media and cultural industries have framed policing will pay particular attention to questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and geography.

Taught by: Balaji
Course not offered every year
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 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 342 Global Rhetorics of Borders, Walls, and Sovereignty
Borders shape the conditions of our lives in both spectacular and invisible ways by controlling international movement, determining national belonging and access to resources, and demonstrating political power or sovereignty. What messages do we receive from popular culture, media, governments, policy makers, and activists about borders and the walls (literal and metaphorical) that often come with them? How do these messages communicate broader formations of political power that value people’s lives differently based on notions of national belonging? To answer these questions, this course examines popular media and political communication around borders, walls, and sovereignty with a particular focus on the way that increases in the global movement of capital have been accompanied by rhetorical efforts to contain or condemn the global movement of people. Over the course of the semester, students will learn to critically analyze written and multimedia texts that communicate and contest the relationships between borders, racism, colonialism, migration, displacement, imperialism, and climate crisis. Turning to transnational case studies ranging from the Americas to the Middle East, course material will emphasize decolonial, queer, and feminist theories and methodologies.
Taught by: Masri
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 345 Adolescence and Media
How are adolescents represented in media and what effects do these portrayals have on developing teens? What makes adolescents a “jackpot market” to be targeted by advertising and how can they be swayed by mediated public health efforts to encourage health-promoting behaviors? Finally, what does the increasingly mediated nature of everyday life mean for adolescents, their friends, and their families during their journey into adulthood? We will explore these questions by reading key empirical studies and by critically analyzing film, music, and public service announcements portraying and/or targeting adolescents from the 1950s to the present day.
Taught by: Lydon-Staley
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 that links the United States to the Philippines, connectivity shutdowns from the United Kingdom to India, as well the politics of the domain name system 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 356 Youth, Digital Culture and Online Harassment: A Participatory Research Workshop
From trolling to cyber-bullying, online harassment has increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic and it disproportionately impacts school-age youth. This ABCS course provides a hands-on opportunity for students to conduct community service and fieldwork investigating digital culture and online harassment. Over the course of the semester, students will review scholarship in Feminist Media Studies and Digital Inequalities, while undertaking participatory focus groups in partnership with students in a West Philadelphia school. In this course, students will merge theory with action through weekly seminars and fieldwork sessions. Together, our community of researchers will produce a collaborative report sharing original findings and evidence-based recommendations on how to prevent and address online harassment. This dynamic, hands-on course is perfect for students who want to tackle real-world communication issues, develop their research skills, and learn more about feminist Communication scholarship.
Taught by: Maddocks
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 359 Journalism in an Age of Information Disorder
As audiences navigate the polluted information environment, they increasingly look to journalists to help them understand what is true or false. As a result, newsrooms now publish regular debunks, journalists verify eyewitness footage posted to Twitter in real-time, and a new ‘disinfo’ beat has emerged with reporters investigating conspiracy theories being peddled on 4Chan, Discord or Reddit. At the same time, some members of the public see journalists as being part of the problem itself and Trump famously labeled them as the ‘enemy of the people’. This course will examine the major shifts that have happened in the information ecosystem since 2005 and will explore how they have impacted journalism. Each week, we will consider a current challenge US newsrooms are facing, for example: the rise of social networks and the resulting collapse of the local newspaper industry, the media manipulation campaigns aimed at hoaxing and tricking newsrooms into amplifying false or divisive content, and the new pressures on ‘objectivity’ as journalists report on stories related to the current political and social climate. This course will focus on the practical strategies journalists and newsrooms are adopting including hearing from reporters and platform representatives who now work on this new ‘disinfo beat’.
Taught by: Wardle
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 365 Media, the Apocalypse, and the Undead
Global media industries have long been fascinated with the idea of the apocalypse, particularly humanity’s attempts at survival against (seemingly) mindless hordes. Whether in the form of zombies or infected masses, cultural industries’ preoccupation with humankind’s collapse - and potential resilience - has led to lucrative film, comic and television franchise universes. Using texts from around the world, including - but not limited to - The Night of the Living Dead, The Walking Dead, Black Mirror, Reality Z, Dead Set, KL Zombie, The Road, Ravenous, Bird Box, Train to Busan, Kingdom, Adventure Time, and The Girl with all the Gifts, this course invites students to explore the ways in which media and cultural industries seek to define human existence through the Otherness of the undead/infected. Central to the course will be an examination of the ways in which post-apocalyptic portrayals of human survival amidst rampaging hordes include important commentaries and subtexts about race, gender, power, and class, as well as the connections to a political moment or era.
Taught by: Balaji
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 371 Youth Driven Health Campaigns
Through this academic based community engagement course, you will mentor and collaborate with a team of high school students to develop a media campaign. This is an opportunity to apply communication research to addressing a real-world community-identified problem. The course will cover health communication theories and campaign development with a special focus on youth participatory action research. Together with high school students, you will gain hands-on research experience with problem identification, formative data collection and analysis, message design, and evaluation. Course work will include weekly readings and assignments relevant to each phase, periodic reflections, and a final group presentation related to your team’s campaign. Engagement work will include approximately 2 hours in the late afternoon/early evening (outside of class time and based on availability) facilitating campaign development with one of the Netter Center’s high school programs.
Taught by: Kikut
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 373 Black Geographies: Race 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 378 Journalism & Public Service
In this course we examine links between journalism and public service by scrutinizing core concepts involved, practices that sometimes put journalism and public service in conflict (e.g., investigative reporting, coverage of war), and how journalism stacks up against other forms of public service from NGO work to government employment. Beginning with a reading of Robert Coles’s classic The Call of Service, we dissect the notion of the “public,” assess so-called public-service journalism by reading Pulitzer- Prize-winning examples, and reflect on the news media as a political institution. Individual weeks focus on such topics as the conflict that arises when a journalist’s obligation to a confidential source clashes with a duty to the judicial system, whether the business of journalism is business, how journalism and NGO work compares as public service, and whether journalism by committed political activists (such as I. F. Stone) surpasses mainstream “neutral” journalism as a form of public service.
Taught by: Romano
Course usually offered in spring term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 379 Black Visual Culture and Its Archives
This undergraduate seminar examines the intersections of visual culture and race in the United States. It aims to provide a historical, cultural, and visual foundation for understanding the representation of and by Black people from the 19th to the 21st centuries, including texts such as, but not limited to, photography, film, television, conceptual art, and performance. Students will be introduced to critical concepts in the field of visual studies, black studies, communication, cultural studies, and rhetorical studies. The course will pay special attention to concepts such as Blackness, visibility, visibility and invisibility, surveillance, photographic theory, the gaze, and spectatorship. We will consider questions such as: What is “black visual culture”? What are its archives? How is Blackness produced, represented, and negotiated through visual modes? In what ways does Blackness and Black people challenge, refract, and rewrite the visual have been, and continue to be, entangled.
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/undergraduate/courses
Taught by: Various Instructors
Course not offered every year
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: Lecture
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: Winneb
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. Networks have always been the backbone of social life: communication creates channels for information diffusion that connect us and expose us to the behavior of others. Social media have made those networks more prevalent and central to everything that we see and do. This course will teach you how to map networks and analyze their structure through hands-on lab sessions. We will study the building blocks that make networks operate as they do, and uncover why small changes in the structure of ties can lead to big differences in how networks behave. The goal of this course is to give you the tools to understand why networks are so consequential in this digital age.
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 431 Is Public Opinion the Voice of the People?
Democracy relies on mechanism in which the public communicates with policy makers. This course examines the extent to which public opinion effectively represents this mechanism. We begin with historical conceptions of public opinion tracing back to ancient Athens and 18th century enlightenment thinking. We then consider the extent to which public opinion can be captured by modern day polling, or whether it only emerges after considered deliberation and discussion. We then discuss the ways in which elite rhetoric and the media move public opinion, including through the use of public opinion polls. Finally, we ask whether policymakers are actually sensitive to the voice of the people or only the voice of some of the people.
Taught by: Lelkes
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 432 Digital Inequalities
Digital information and communication technologies are intertwined with our everyday lives, from banking, to working, and dating. They’re also increasingly crucial parts of our most powerful institutions, from policing, to the welfare state, and education. This course examines the ways that these technologies combine with traditional axes of inequality like race, gender, and class in ways that may deepen social inequality. We'll consider major approaches to understanding digital inequalities and apply them to case studies of both problems and solutions. Students will learn to critically analyze policies and programs from a variety of perspectives, and to evaluate the promise of digital technologies against their potential perils.
Taught by: Ticona
Course usually offered in fall term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 436 Data Literacy in the Algorithmic Society
Algorithms regulate many areas of social life: they shape the information you see online, how resources are allocated, or how hiring and matching happen in private and public settings. In these and many other examples, algorithms rely on data informing the automated decisions they encode. Our ability to think critically about that data is, thus, paramount to understanding how the algorithms operate. In this course, we will discuss how data is transformed into information and actionable knowledge. You will learn how to question data to ensure its validity, reliability, and representativeness. Understanding how data are collected, analyzed, and used is key to being able to demand transparency in automated decision-making, and to exercising our democratic role of demanding accountability when decisions are made based on questionable data.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 441 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: Leikes
Course not offered every year
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 463 Surveillance Capitalism
Surveillance capitalism is a term academics and policymakers increasingly use to describe the world in which we live: where businesses track and classify individuals in order to decide how to sell to them, or whether to sell to them at all. Companies that millions of people turn to every hour such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Target, Walmart, and Pandora use the technologies of surveillance capitalism to drive their revenues. Critics point out that these activities are intimately bound with issues of discrimination and reputation. The "big data" analyses (often powered by artificial intelligence) may affect the ads people see, the discounts they receive, the jobs they may get offered, and far more. This course surveys the history of surveillance capitalism, how it works, and the key issues swirling around it. Students will write short (350 word) essays about each reading that will be key contributors toward their grades. Students will also conduct research and write a paper that explores a contemporary or historical topic related to surveillance capitalism.
Taught by: Turow
Course not offered every year
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: Seminar
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: Independent Study
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: Independent Study
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 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 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 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 and Policy
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 576 Communication & Public Opinion
An exploration of enduring research questions concerning mass communication and American public opinion. The course introduces students to the literature on public opinion, with a focus on the role of communication in public opinion formation and change. Important normative, conceptual and theoretical issues are identified and examined by reviewing some early writings (ca. 1890-1930) in social philosophy and social science. These issues are then investigated further through a review and discussion of relevant research in sociology, political science, social psychology and mass communication.
Taught by: Delli Carpini
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 577 Attitudes and Attitude Theory
This course surveys classic and contemporary theory and research in the area of attitude formation and change and examines the principles of social information processing that underlie attitudes. We cover some of the basic concepts of the psychology of attitudes, including attitude structure and measurement at both conscious and unconscious levels. After this introduction, we will review persuasion approaches, the role of affect and fear in communication, influences of past behavior, to finally turn to models that explain behavioral change and allow researchers and practitioners to design ways of modifying recipients’ actions.
Taught by: Jemmott
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 1990s. 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 inductive 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 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 699 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 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 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 studies 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 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 dialogical, 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 765 Digital Inequalities
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 our 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
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 808 The Portrait as/in Ethnography
When cameras are ubiquitous and millions of people post pictures of themselves online, what counts as a portrait today? In an age of selfies, surveillance, biometric “smart” identity cards, and movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and indigenous decolonization, can the portrait do a different kind of representational work? How do visual portraits (whether photographic, painted, drawn, or sculpted) operate differently from textual portraits (such as biographies, life histories, or profiles)?
This seminar aims to resituate and rethink the portrait in ethnography, and by extension, the practice of portraiture as an ethnographic method, by exploring portraiture as a culturally conditioned, socially resonant form of knowledge production. All portraits, even self-portraits, rely upon a relationship: between the portrayed and the portrayer, the sitter and the artist, the interlocutor and the ethnographer. We will interrogate how portraits have shaped identity politics, and how portraiture, as a scholarly and artistic act, can radically re-theorize forms of social engagement. Drawing on multimodal and decolonial turns in anthropology, seminar participants will produce portraits of their own, using whatever medium/media might be best suited for their interpretive work.
Taught by: Chio
Course not offered every year
Also Offered As: ANTH 674, CIMS 674, FNAR 608
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 814 Doing Internet Studies
This is a project-based seminar with two key objectives: introducing students to core theories and methods in internet studies and completing a research project that uses digital media, broadly construed. Comprising many methods and research approaches, Internet studies is inherently interdisciplinary, and this course is designed to provide a practical set of guidelines for doing work in this diverse and growing field. Students will have a lot of independence in developing a final research project for the course they may work individually, in pairs or in small groups, and the final project can take the form of a research paper, an art project or a piece of long-form journalism, as long as these projects use both digital media and critical theory from internet studies.
Taught by: Lingel
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 semiology of politics; (iii) globalization and its links to mass-mediawmd; 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 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
Notes: Fulfills ASC Influence Requirement

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 policies 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 849 Labor in the Digital Economy
Long before the rise of platforms, scholars connected the role of media and communication technologies in the re-organization of labor. This course introduces students to key concepts and theories 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 ways that technological transformations have prompted scholars to reconsider the meaning and value of work; from Marxist, cultural, and feminist perspectives, as well as the place of labor in communication scholarship. Key areas of focus will include the relationship between digital transformations of the workplace and precarity, control, resistance, and inequality.
Taught by: Ticona
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 851 Social Media and Political Information
Is social media good or bad for democracy? This seminar will unpack this question through the lens of empirical research casting light on how different actors create and consume content on social media - and the broader consequences of that content for political behavior. The discussion will center on current controversies, including the political impact of bots, the role of algorithms in radicalization dynamics, the susceptibility of different groups to misinformation, the consequences of incivility and hate speech, or the predominance of clickbait over factual news.
Taught by: Gonzalez-Bailon
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 852 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, political 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 identifying and evaluating notions of change, accumulation, speed, timing, tempo, sequences, and 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 intensive longitudinal data, data consisting of 5 or more repeated measures over relatively short (seconds, minutes, hours, days) timescales. Intensive longitudinal data are increasingly feasible to collect due to the widespread availability of smartphones and come with both data wrangling and analytic challenges as well as opportunities to operationalize complex, time-related concepts. Some familiarity with linear regression is recommended but not required.
Taught by: Lydon-Staley
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 853 Gender, Media and Culture
This course focuses on contemporary feminist theory as a site for the restructuring of knowledge, exploring the theoretical, methodological, and intersectional questions that arise when gender and race are placed at the center of study. This course is designed to historicize and conceptualize past and current developments, as well as recurrent themes and movements, in feminist methodology and theory, as well as to gain insight into the ways in which gender, and its intersections with race, ethnicity and class, is enacted, represented and mediated, and has an impact on cultural formations and communication. The course material provides an overview of feminist theories as they have developed in the West, especially the United States, with a particular emphasis on the period since the 1960s. It also suggests that we must consider feminism beyond the West in terms of global and transnational perspectives. It places works and scholars in conversation with others, both contemporaries who act and speak from other standpoints and predecessors who belong to the same tradition or trajectory.
Taught by: Banet-Weiser
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 854 A Sociopolitical and Intellectual History of the Communication Field
This course combines close readings of canonized works as well as lesser-known scholarship with a critical sociology of knowledge. A key theme of the course is that to understand how our field evolved, we must understand the historical context and the power relationships that shaped its intellectual and ideological contours. Although we will include some contemporary criticism of the field's historical lacunae--especially along racial, gender, sexuality, and class lines--much of the course's emphasis will be placed on the field's development during the twentieth century. As a class, we will consider the relevance of research paradigms that emerged during the print and broadcast eras for today's digital age.
Taught by: Pickard/Turow
Course not offered every year
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 858 CHANGE: Networks and Policy
This course explores the policy applications of current network theories of social influence and behavior propagation. The course is developed around the book CHANGE focusing on the specific shortcomings of existing policies and the development of new policy strategies for collective behavior change. Students will engage with current thinking on topics including: influencers, virality, stickiness, social norms, motivated reasoning, organizational change, partisan bias, group problem-solving, and political change. This course focuses on implementation and evaluation strategies for applying the theory of network diffusion to current policy problem such as: COVID-19 vaccination, sustainable technology adoption, political campaign mobilization, justice system reform, implicit bias in medicine, the spread of political and health-related misinformation, #MeToo and changing gender norms in organizations, and other important topics. Students will engage in "translational social science" by developing theoretically motivated solutions to concrete policy problems.
Taught by: Centola, D
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 859 Diversity and the End of Average
There are persistent inequities in academic experiences and careers between individuals from different demographic backgrounds. There are also differences in the extent to which certain groups of people are represented in our scholarship, preventing these groups from experiencing the benefits of our research innovations and, in turn, perpetuating inequity. The aim of this class is twofold. Seminar readings will provide insight into the long history of inequity, discrimination against, and lack of representation of groups marginalized because of their sex, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, intersectional identities, and more, that persists in our communities and our scholarship. A data science laboratory run in parallel with the seminar will introduce students to person-specific approaches to data collection, analysis, and intervention to provide students with a toolkit that allows them to circumvent approaches that rely on the presumption that empirical studies recruiting diverse samples produce an average result that is appropriately reflective of the individuals themselves.
Taught by: Lydon-Staley
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 862 Gendered Media Economies
This seminar introduces and traces feminist media studies over the past several decades, with a particular emphasis on media and cultural economies, which includes financial economies but also expands it to the production and circulation of reproducing inequalities, constituting norms, regulating and disciplining individuals and populations, commodifying difference and critique, and (potentially) enabling resistance, oppositional practices and cultural activism. Through this frame, we approach the power dynamics of gender alongside the power dynamics of race, class, sexuality, geopolitics and other social experiences. Along the way, we will examine a variety of gendered media economies from feminist media production to reality television to social media influencers and more. This course is being offered at both the University of Southern California and the University of Pennsylvania.
Taught by: Banet-Weiser, S
Course not offered every year
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

COMM 863 Utilizing Mixed Methods in Health Communication Research
This course will introduce concepts and frameworks including the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis, Structural Influence Model, digital divide, and the Health Equity Promotion Model, that are relevant to understanding health communication inequalities and the implications on improving health equity in the digital age. Through this course, students will 1) gain familiarity with communication inequalities in the form of information exposure, knowledge, health information seeking, message processing, and ability to take action among vulnerable and traditionally marginalized communities, with a specific emphasis on digital health communication, 2) learn how various methods and study designs are used to examine the impacts of communication inequalities on population health and health disparities, 3) learn about recent innovations in digital health communication interventions to address communication inequalities and effectiveness of these interventions in improving health equity, and 4) develop a proposal to design a digital communication intervention to improve health outcomes among health disparity populations. Throughout the course, we will draw upon examples pertaining to communication inequalities and digital interventions addressing the needs of a wide range of populations (in relation to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, sexual orientation and gender identity, those who experience language barriers, immigrant populations, physical disabilities, and mental illness), across the life course, and in diverse health conditions including tobacco and other substance use, infectious diseases, cancer care, and other health issues. We will discuss challenges of operationalizing and measuring communication inequalities, considerations when designing and implementing equitable digital interventions, and potential unintended impacts on population health.
Taught by: Tan
Course not offered every year
Activity: Seminar
1.0 Course Unit
COMM 864 The Racist in the Machine: Conspiracy Theories, Cultural Criticism, and Contemporary Mass Mediation
Philosopher Gilbert Ryle used imagery of a "ghost in the machine" to characterize that fundamental Cartesian separation between mind and body. Ryle also provided interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz his oft-cited distinction between thin and thick descriptions of social life. For scholars of communication, examining how debates about race are organized and framed can be a valuable way to reimagine what interventions the field might make into ongoing scholarly and popular disputes on the matter. With such a goal in mind, this course will ask students to consider (i) what kinds of dualisms organize racialist logics, (ii) whether conspiracy theories might be said to pivot on racialized understandings of difference and power, (iii) how people ground assertions of racial authority/authenticity, and (iv) the ways in which these inter-related themes are impacted by our decidedly new/social media moment.
Taught by: Jackson
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 of difference and power. With such a goal in mind, this course will ask students to 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 870 Advanced Qualitative Research
An important milestone in every doctoral program is the successful defense of a dissertation proposal. But what does a good dissertation proposal look like? How can students craft a proposal that sets them up for success as they advance towards writing a dissertation? This course has one objective: to provide students with the tools they need to write a convincing, well-written and well-reasoned dissertation proposal. This means having a clear problem statement, a convincing answer to the "So what?" question, and a coherent plan for moving forward with writing a dissertation. Structured more as a workshop rather than a seminar, students will receive feedback on each other’s work throughout the semester, collectively addressing common issues around writing, argumentation, reviewing literature, research ethics and outlining chapters. Because qualitative interpretive work comes with specific expectations and challenges, this course is geared towards students who draw from these research techniques; students who are conducting mixed-methods dissertations may also be allowed to join.
Taught by: Lingel
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 groups whose citizenship and inclusion in democratic processes is not assured. In this course we correct this practice by centering scholarship on the Black public sphere, recognizing it as central to political and media theory on publics and counterpublics. We will connected "classical" theoretical works and epistemological schools to contemporary critical, cultural, and institutional analysis of Black media-making, geographies, innovation, 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 mediations, with representations originating in both sonovisual media and performance. Less, however, has been theorized and advocated about intermediality and the multicompositional practices of transmediation 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, affordances 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 898 Explaining Explanation
In the social sciences we often use the word "explanation" as if (a) we know what we mean by it, and (b) we mean the same thing that other people do. In this course we will critically examine these assumptions and their consequences for scientific progress. In part 1 of the course we will examine how, in practice, researchers invoke at least three logically and conceptually distinct meanings of "explanation:" identification of causal mechanisms; ability to predict (account for variance in) some outcome; and ability to make subjective sense of something. In part 2 we will examine how and when these different meanings are invoked across a variety of domains, focusing on social science, history, business, and machine learning, and will explore how conflation of these distinct concepts may have created confusion about the goals of science and how we evaluate its progress. Finally, in part 3 we will discuss some related topics such as null hypothesis testing and the replication crisis. We will also discuss specific practices that could help researchers clarify exactly what they mean when they claim to have "explained" something, and how adoption of such practices may help social science be more useful and relevant to society.
Taught by: Duncan Watts
Also Offered As: CIS 798, OIDD 953
Activity: Lecture
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