COMM 7841: MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

AU 2015
Class Time: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:55-5:15 p.m.
Location: Derby 3116

Dr. Gerald Kosicki
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Office Hours: noon to 1 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays, and by appointment

Course Description
Our course is a graduate-level seminar dealing with mass communication theory at the macro or sociological level. We will be exploring the relationships among media and social systems, with a focus on understanding the structure of media systems, news production, media content and media linkages to other political, economic and social institutions.

The readings for the class are listed later in this syllabus. We will talk about the priorities and order of importance of the readings each week. I expect that everyone will read these articles and chapters prior to class and be prepared to discuss them. Discussion leaders will be expected to read more deeply in the topic area they are discussing so that they may bring more to the table than the average student.

Class materials
I have ordered one book for the class:

We will have a number of other readings available on Carmen.

Requirements & grading
Evaluations of student performance will be based on several criteria: in-class discussion leader duties, general in-class participation (on non-discussion leader days), the seminar paper. The weighting of these evaluation criteria will be the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion leader duties</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-page papers (4)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Total:</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Exam
The midterm exam will be in a take-home format.
One-page response papers
Each of you will complete four one-page papers over the course of the term. You will pick weeks and do one paper about each week’s readings. Each paper should be one single-spaced page long (500 words) and printable on a single sheet of paper. These papers should discern a main theme across all of the readings and discuss something related to this. The papers should not be a summary of the main points. I am more interested in your reaction to the information. This might involve the usefulness of the information, the level of interest you have in it, anything that you found particularly surprising or disappointing, etc. The best essays of this type will articulate a point of view with respect to the main theme(s) of the materials and then use facts from all the readings to support this argument. You will sign up for due dates for these essays, but in general they will be due Mondays by the start of class of the week that you are writing about. Note that some of you could be asked in class to provide a brief discussion of your essay.

Discussion leading
Beginning the second week, two or three students will be assigned to jointly prepare a series of discussion questions and to lead class discussion on the assigned readings for that day and any appropriate background information that might help put those readings in context. Each set of students should post 7-8 discussion questions that address individual readings/chapters as well as how the readings might relate to each other, or to previous readings.

The discussion questions should be emailed to the group the night before each class by about 8 p.m.

Discussion leaders will be evaluated based on the quality of their questions, depth of understanding of the material, amount of recommended readings they are able to bring into the discussion, and their performance in leading the discussion.

General in-class participation
Students not serving as a discussion leader for a given class will be evaluated on their participation in debate and ability to intelligently discuss the assigned readings. The first, minimum component of this is class attendance. However, ALL students will be expected to participate fully in the seminar by both asking questions and answering them during each and every class period. While a reasonable quantity of verbal participation is a necessary condition for a positive evaluation, it is not sufficient. The quality of questions and answers will be considered when evaluating student participation.

Personal technology
Your laptop computer, iPad or similar devices are welcome in class as long as they are used to enhance your ability to participate in an informed and constructive manner. You should not be using personal technology in the classroom to email, chat, check social media or otherwise distract yourself from the classroom discussion. I reserve the right to ban the use of technology from the room in general, or for specific individuals if these rules are abused.
The final paper will be about a 20-page proposal in which you design an original research study, using any method (e.g., experiment, survey, content analysis, case study, mixed-modes, etc.). The proposal should be inspired by, but not constrained, by the course material. Please prepare your paper using the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA). If students enroll from other disciplines in which other reference systems are customary, they should talk to me about this.

The proposal should include 1) substantive literature review that discusses your theoretical approach and develops your hypotheses (12-15 pages); and 2) a detailed methods section that describes how you would carry out the proposed study and test your hypotheses (e.g., sampling and data collection, questionnaire design, coding sheets, data analysis, etc.). This section might be 3-5 pages.

Alternatively, if you already have access to previously collected data, you might consider preparing a full original research/conference paper that includes a literature review, methods, results and discussion.

Towards the middle of the semester, if not sooner, each of you should schedule an appointment with me to discuss your topic and approach to the final paper. If you wish to share early drafts with me, that can be arranged.

**Some Words about Academic Honesty**

It is your responsibility to complete your own work as best you can in the time provided. Cheating, plagiarism, submission of the same work for two different classes, and falsification of laboratory or other data are serious offenses, and it is my responsibility to make sure they do not occur. Anyone suspected of academic misconduct should expect to have a record of the matter forwarded to the Committee on Academic Misconduct, in accordance with Faculty Rule 3335-23-04. Academic misconduct will be punished to the fullest extent possible. For more information on definitions of plagiarism and academic misconduct more generally, please consult the Code of Student Conduct at [http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/)

**Special Accommodations**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.
**COURSE OUTLINE & READINGS (SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS NEEDED)**

**Week 1, August 26**
Introduction and overview

**Week 2: August 31, September 2**
The macro perspective on communication research


**Week 3, September 7, 9**
Communication, democracy and survey research
Can aggregating individual survey responses create public opinion?


September 7 is Labor Day. No classes. University is closed.
Week 4, September 14, 16
Linking micro and macro


Week 5, September 21, 23
Communication and social movements


**Week 6, September 28, 30**
Moral panics, panics and bubbles


**Week 7, October 5, 7**
News work


Week 8, October 12, 14
Media and community


Week 9, October 19, 21
Defining and framing public issues and bringing them to public attention


Week 10, October 26, 28
Knowledge Gap and related problems


**Week 11, November 2, 4**  
Communication and opinion about the Affordable Care Act


Kaiser Family Foundation (2012). *Data note on Affordable Care Act.*

Midterm Exam distributed November 4. Exam is due November 9 at noon.

**Week 12, November 9, 11**  
Distortion, misunderstandings, and lies in public discourse and their effects


November 11 is Veterans Day. No classes. University is closed.
Week 13, November 16, 18
Evolving information systems: Technology, democracy, and governance
McGinnis, pp. 1-93.

Week 14, November 23
Evolving information systems: Technology, democracy, and governance
McGinnis, pp. 94-160.

Week 15, November 30, December 2
Censorship and surveillance


Week 16, Dec. 7, 9
Newer forms of data and analysis: Computational social science and spatial data


Last class day is December 9.

Week 17, December 17
Final paper due no later than Dec. 17, 4 p.m.