

“He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast.”
-Leonardo da Vinci

“It is the theory that decides what can be observed.”
-Albert Einstein

“It doesn't matter how beautiful your theory is, it doesn't matter how smart you are. If it doesn't agree with experiment, it's wrong.”
-Richard Feynman

“Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve.”
-Karl Popper

COMM 7927: Theory Construction

Fall, 2025

Mon Wed 2:20-3:40

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Office Hours 3:40 to 4:10pm day of class: I hold the half hour after class free for office hours (via Zoom if a Zoom class day), so let me know if you'd like to meet with me after class (send me an email before class to arrange). If I haven't heard from you (a request right before or even during class, eg via chat, is fine) I won't wait around, so let me know if you'd like to meet.

I can also set a time to talk if that is better for you. The best way to reach me is by email, I usually respond quickly, and if need be can set an appointment via Zoom within a day or so.

Course Overview and Objectives:

This course in theory construction is intended to further your development as a social scientist and as a prospective university faculty member. As conceptualized by the Graduate Studies Committee and interpreted by me as the instructor, this course explores the combination of intellectual rigor and creativity in theory development that is the hallmark of good social science.

The first few weeks will be spent laying a conceptual foundation regarding social science theory and theory development. Subsequent weeks will combine discussion of readings with brief updates by students about their progress in their efforts at original theory development, as I believe you will learn a great deal by seeing how others evolve their ideas as well as by going through your own process. Lecture will be kept to a minimum, as I believe one learns to think about theory by actively thinking about and discussing theory and theory-building. Therefore, this class will have a strong “workshop” element, with students developing their ideas in an

intellectual community with feedback from fellow students as well as from their mentors and from me.

The focus of this class is on causal process theory, the theory type that predominates in the social sciences. You will develop a theoretical model that advances existing theory. This will be one that can be represented in visual form as a “box and arrow” process or causal model, or as a flow chart that similarly lends itself to empirical test; this will be developed incrementally, with several rounds of feedback from me and the class. This will be written up with developing the theoretical justification and rationale for your novel claims, and providing a brief outline of several studies which together will make significant progress in testing your model. You are encouraged to include studies which you have already completed or have under way as part of this description of programmatic plans, but you are also expected to outline at least two additional studies to assess other aspects of your theoretical model.

The purpose is to help you conceptualize your work programmatically, as a series of related studies building on one another. You will in all likelihood use your work in this class to help structure and organize your 2nd year talk and to begin the kind of thinking that will help you structure a job talk, and hopefully you will in time conduct some version of at least some of the studies you outline and propose. Therefore, you should be talking about your ideas and directions with your advisor. However, please do not ask your advisor to review your written assignments for this class until after you’ve handed them in and gotten my comments.

Specific objectives:

- To review foundational readings on theory construction in social science in general and communication research in particular
- To be able to identify various approaches through which one can make an original contribution to communication theory
- To be better able to assess the theoretical contribution of research articles in the literature, and to critique and improve research ideas of others and one’s own
- To practice the collaborative, brainstorming environment in which much social science theory development is evolved
- To develop a theoretical process or causal model that has the potential to advance communication theory in your area of interest, explain how your existing work has begun to examine aspects of the model (if that is the case already), and outline a series of studies that would permit you to systematically examine your model
- To improve skills at presenting theoretical ideas and proposed research in written and oral form
- To help prepare you for developing your second year research talk and later your “job talk” in which you present your research efforts and program to potential employers
- In so doing, to advance your development and maturity as an analytical thinker, researcher and scholar.

Summary of Course Requirements (each component described in further detail below):

- Short papers 1-10, see also class schedule (5% each, 50% of class grade total)
- Final paper: updated version of your box and arrow model short paper with initial research plans (20% of grade)

- Presentation of your causal model and related research plans (15% of grade)
- Class attendance and participation including discussion questions from readings (15% of grade)

Short papers:

These papers should be at least one page but no more than two or two and a half pages double-spaced, APA style, not including references. All papers should include citations where appropriate. I may on occasion share some of this work with the class, if it helps clarify issues under discussion. You will draw on many of these papers in writing your final project paper and presentation, so you are in fact working on these final assignments throughout the semester.

I am “front-loading” these assignments, so most come in the first half of the course, to plunge you into thinking about your research program systematically. You will then have breathing time to pull all these ideas together for your presentation, and have most of the groundwork laid for your final short paper and presentation based on these earlier short papers. This should balance workloads in other classes which tend to be heaviest late in the semester, but it may seem sometimes a bit hectic early in the semester.

Often, these papers will be discussed in small groups with fellow students, to help in brainstorming and idea development in a workshop environment. The paper assignments are described in the class schedule below.

Final paper:

The heart of this paper will be an updated version of the box-and-arrow process model you handed in earlier that is intended to advance theory in your domain of interest. The paper will begin with a paragraph or two that explains the theoretical significance and context of the model you will propose. This section will describe the underlying research question or questions, and identify relevant theory on which you are drawing. It will conclude with a sentence or two in which you describe the intended contribution(s) to theory of your model. You can draw as needed from your short papers. However, rewrite for clarity, flow, and based on the thinking and feedback you have received in the meantime. This section should be ½-1 page, and will take a few drafts at least to do well.

You will then provide the box-and-arrow causal process model, including examples of mediation and moderation as relevant, updated and refined based on your further thinking and feedback you’ve received since you handed in your earlier draft. You don’t have to walk me through all the paths and relationships in the accompanying text. Describe the theoretical justification and rationale for your *novel* claims, and explain why these claims, if supported, will advance theory. The model will require a page, and the text to accompany it will typically be about a page. Provide brief definitions of variables that are not otherwise obvious.

Please also include at minimum a short paragraph about boundary conditions or other ways in which issues of race, gender, or sociocultural/economic advantage or disadvantage may bear on

your model, developing the points you have made about this in short paper #10. Development at greater length where appropriate is welcome. If there is no particular way that this is an issue, or it is not yet a focus of your model, just say so.

The final section should be a couple of paragraphs (less than a page in any case). It is quite unlikely that the relationships in your model can be fully examined in a single study. Tell me what aspects of the model you would like to look at first empirically, with very general information about what that study might look like (a survey or experiment, what would be manipulated in an experiment, etc). You can mention more than one planned study if you like.

Have a concluding paragraph that summarizes the impact you hope to have, theoretically and substantively, by conducting this research program.

If you run a bit long, it is fine *IF* the extra length is needed to help you articulate ideas you want to work through. If the problem involves difficulties in expressing yourself clearly and concisely, the extra length may work against you. Please spend some time polishing this paper so it is the best expression of your ideas you are capable of at present--you've drafted a lot of this already, so you should be able to provide a reasonably polished product here.

This paper and your presentation is an initial effort to outline where your research program may be going and some larger research ideas you hope to pursue over the course of your graduate career. *I therefore expect that you discuss your ideas and plans with your advisor.* In other words, make sure to “bounce” your ideas off your advisor and to have his/her support regarding your research ideas and directions for a research program. If you are working with another faculty mentor on this idea also, that’s ok too.

Yes, this is early in the program for many of you, and yes, you can expect your plans and ideas to evolve and change. The purpose of this class is to help you start to think systematically and programmatically about your research and what you are trying to contribute as a scholar. For some of you, the ideas articulated in this class may frame much of your early career. For others, it will be practice, and you will apply these approaches to theory construction and development to different theories and questions as your interests and research foci change. Either outcome is fine. You may not know for some years how this will unfold for you.

Presentation of your theoretical model and research program plans:

You will have 20 minutes to present your larger theoretical causal process model and research plans on PowerPoint, for class discussion and critique. This is in effect an outline for your final paper, and gives you another opportunity to get feedback from me and from the class. This will be followed by 10-15 minutes for Q&A. If you run over 20 minutes by more than five minutes and I may have to cut you off. Arrange to have someone help you by giving you a 5 minute, 2 minute, times-up, and 1-minute-over warning (this is what you will typically experience presenting at conferences, by the way).

You should be able to adapt much of this presentation to your second-year talk next semester or your job talk when you hit the job market. More details on the presentation are in the class schedule.

Class attendance, participation, brief presentations, and posted discussion board questions:

Participation in class is expected. I want to hear your ideas, questions, possible confusions, and your constructive comments and suggestions when fellow students present their ideas. To support such participation, I will expect the following.

Discussion questions regarding readings: I will provide you a list of discussion questions on the topic of the days reading that we will discuss in class, on the days when you don't have short papers due.

You can do the readings with those questions in mind; I ask that you jot down some ideas about your thoughts regarding those questions, further questions you have, etc, to facilitate an active and useful discussion. If it seems necessary to encourage greater preparation for the class, I may require you to post these thoughts on a discussion board the evening before class, but I'll skip this in the interest of reducing deadline activities if possible.

Class attendance is required; absences must be excused in advance (e.g., illness, family emergency, conference travel). *However, if you are sick and potentially contagious and an in-person class is scheduled, just email me to let me know in advance, and do yourself and us the favor of staying home. Excused absences are not penalized.* If you have a sniffle and decide to come to class, please wear a mask to help protect your classmates (even if you think it is just an allergy—hard to know for sure). If I am unwell and potentially contagious but well enough to hold class, if there is a bug going around and several people would otherwise miss class, or other situation arises making class attendance in person problematic we will meet via Zoom; I will announce this via email, so do check each day. We will also meet via Zoom if required by a guest speaker who cannot attend personally. For any classes held in person (unless we meet out of doors), I will be masked and encourage you to be masked too if masking is optional; if it is required, of course, we will all be masked. If the class is agreeable and weather cooperates, we will hold many of our in-person sessions outdoors—it proved conducive to relaxed and productive discussion in previous semesters. Up to 75% of classes may be held via Zoom given this is a hybrid class.

Policies and Procedures:

- Any late assignment will have half a grade deducted *each day* it is late if I have not cleared a changed deadline in advance. An assignment is considered late when it is submitted after the stated deadline (if no time is stated for the deadline, the deadline is before midnight the day the paper is due), and deductions will be taken beginning with the missed deadline. Exceptions may be made for emergencies or other well-documented issues (family situations, conflicting deadlines in other classes). I am usually flexible if the situation is discussed with me by email in advance, but I do not tend to respond positively to retrospective excuses. If you are under a lot of time pressure the day short

papers are due, you can email me a request for extension before it is due and as long as I get the email by 10pm, you have an extension until 8AM the morning of class. I will need all the assignments by then to prepare for class.

- All written assignments must be typed and conform to guidelines established in the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Publication Manual.

Academic integrity policies specifically for this course

- **Written assignments:** All written assignments, communications, and posts should be your own original work. In formal assignments, you should follow **APA** style to cite the ideas and words of your research sources. You are encouraged to ask a trusted person to proofread your assignments before you turn them in, and you are welcome to speak to your advisor for input and comments – but no one else should revise or rewrite your work.
- **Use of AI:** Any use of generative AI (ChatGPT, Bard, etc) must be disclosed and explained, with a copy of the content generated by the AI program and the prompt used, to demonstrate that it was used to facilitate information-search and was not incorporated directly into your written work. It is best to email me, explaining how and why you plan to use generative AI, and get written approval via email from me beforehand as well.
- **Reusing past work:** In general, you are prohibited in university courses from turning in work from a past class to your current class. If you want to build on past research or revisit a topic you've explored in previous courses, that is normally fine and often desirable for this class but please discuss the situation with me.
- **Falsifying research or results:** All research you will conduct in this course is intended to be a learning experience; you should never feel tempted to make your results or your library research look more successful than it was.

School diversity statement

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual perspectives of those who comprise diverse cultures.

Additional notes: Respect for all students and their personal and intellectual perspectives are basic values that will be reflected in classroom discussion and exchanges, as in my experience they always have been in this course.

Grades

This is a graduate course, which means we expect most students to be in the A to B+ range. I grade using the GPA scale as noted below. A B+ converts to 3.3 in the GPA, so it's about the lowest grade you should be making in a grad class. If you are concerned that you may be making below a 3.3 in the class, please come see me as soon as you can so that we can see what sort of problem we're dealing with and how to resolve it.

Your grade at least:	But less than	= Letter Grade
3.85	n/a	A
3.50	3.85	A-
3.15	3.50	B+
2.85	3.15	B
2.50	2.85	B-
2.15	2.50	C+
1.85	2.15	C
etc., as needed		

University Policies

Student Academic Services

Arts and Sciences Advising and Academic Services' website provides support for student academic success. Information on advising issues such as tutoring, transfer credits, academic standing, and contact information for Arts and Sciences advisors can be obtained through this website. The site is: <http://advising.osu.edu>.

Student Services

The Student Service Center assists with financial aid matters, tuition and fee payments. Please see their site at: <https://contactbuckeyelink.osu.edu/>

Copyright

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

Counseling and Consultation Services / Mental Health Statement

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may

lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766 and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 by dialing 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee ([Faculty Rule 3335-5-48.7 \(B\)](#)). For additional information, see the [Code of Student Conduct](#).

Disability accommodations

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion.

If you are ill and need to miss class, including if you are staying home and away from others while experiencing symptoms of a viral infection or fever, please let me know immediately. In cases where illness interacts with an underlying medical condition, please consult with Student Life Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. You can connect with them at slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; or slds.osu.edu.

Religious accommodations

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn shall not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodations confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities. Examples of religious accommodations can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the [Civil Rights Compliance Office](#). (Policy: [Religious Holidays, Holy Days and Observances](#))

Open inquiry

Ohio State is committed to fostering a culture of open inquiry and intellectual diversity within the classroom. This course will cover a range of information and may include discussions or debates about controversial issues, beliefs, or policies. Any such discussions and debates are intended to support understanding of the approved curriculum and relevant course objectives rather than promote any specific point of view. Students will be assessed on principles applicable to the field of study and the content covered in the course. Preparing students for citizenship includes helping them develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to reach their own conclusions regarding complex or controversial matters.

A discrimination and harassment-free environment

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a community to reflect diversity and to improve opportunities for all. All Buckeyes have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom), race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment. Members of the university community also have the right to be free from all forms of sexual misconduct: sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

To report harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation and/or seek confidential and non-confidential resources and supportive measures, contact the Civil Rights Compliance Office:

Online reporting form at <http://civilrights.osu.edu/>,

Call 614-247-5838 or TTY 614-688-8605,

Or Email civilrights@osu.edu

The university is committed to stopping sexual misconduct, preventing its recurrence, eliminating any hostile environment, and remedying its discriminatory effects. All university employees have reporting responsibilities to the Civil Rights Compliance Office to ensure the university can take appropriate action:

- All university employees, except those exempted by legal privilege of confidentiality or expressly identified as a confidential reporter, have an obligation to report incidents of sexual assault immediately.

The following employees have an obligation to report all other forms of sexual misconduct as soon as practicable but at most within five workdays of becoming aware of such information: 1. Any human resource professional (HRP); 2. Anyone who supervises faculty, staff, students, or volunteers; 3. Chair/director; and 4. Faculty member.

Writing Assignments:

Turnitin.com Students agree that in taking this course, all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Any submitted papers may be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Terms and Conditions of Use posted on the Turnitin.com site.

READINGS

Required texts:

Jaccard, J. & Jacoby, J. (2020). *Theory construction and model-building skills*. NY: Guilford. (2nd Edition). This one is worth having and keeping. If your book arrives late, the 1st edition is available through the library.

Shoemaker, P.J., Tankard, J.W., & Lasorsa, D.L. (2004). *How to build social science theories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. If need be and money is tight, perhaps you can share with a classmate. Or you can access online through the library:

<https://methods-sagepub-com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/book/how-to-build-social-science-theories>

Other readings available through CARMEN.

Recommended:

Reynolds, P.D. (1971/2007). *A Primer in Theory Construction*. NY: Pearson. (An “Allyn & Bacon Classic”; i.e., a reprint of the ’71 book). Worth a look, don’t buy unless you are a real fan.

Full citations for the various articles and readings assigned are included with the readings, either in the schedule or in the list of references at the end of the syllabus.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: full references for readings are listed at end of syllabus (to reduce clutter reading the weekly assignments and plans)

8/27 Review syllabus, readings, assignments.

Looking ahead: Soon (see below) a description of the general areas and research questions you are interested in is due. *Speak to your advisor about the idea or ideas you want to explore in this class for your class project before you hand in your ideas to me.* I'll also be available after class for office hours, and will be available in my office by appointment, or by email anytime. It is easier to reach me by email than by phone.

Due before midnight, Saturday 9/13: Short paper 1: What is the general topic and domain of the research you are interested in pursuing? What are the two or three theories that are most influential on your thinking? What is it you hope to contribute through your research? If you have a specific idea you want to pursue and discuss, make sure to provide this larger context concerning your interests and how what you want to look at fits in. Also tell me the name of your advisor and/or other faculty members you are working with regarding these ideas. You are welcome to chat with me after class or via a Zoom appointment about possibilities.

Remember to talk with your advisor about ideas you are developing this semester! Please submit this and other short papers via Carmen. This assignment will be graded based on the clarity with which you've thought about and clearly expressed your ideas and their context, not on some judgment of mine about the quality of the ideas—those will be evolving throughout the semester, anyway!

And yes, I know paper 2 is due before paper 1. It is just one of those mysteries of life...

9/1 Labor Day

9/3 Early positivism and critiques (In the next few classes, we will briefly review movement in thinking about social science from logical positivism to post-positivism and quasi- or model dependent realism—or—can you defend what it is you are doing, and recognize both its limits and the significance and contribution of empirical social science research?)

Comte *Positive Philosophy* Chapter 1 (skim, this is a fairly loose translation cf 1853)

Pavitt Chapter 5 Perspectivists (focus on section on Kuhn, quickly skim the rest)

Essays on Kuhn (Note: I encourage you to read Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific*

Revolutions; given the time constraints of this course, I am only assigning some brief essays providing intelligent critical summaries; you need provide only one question on Kuhn across the Pavitt chapter and the essays on Kuhn, not one for each—ie, three questions today, on Comte, on Kuhn, on constructivism).

Schwandt “Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1994. (can skim)

Readings on posted on Carmen. I will email you some discussion questions to focus on as you do these readings.

I'll provide you with discussion questions to help guide/inform your reading for this and for other classes unless a short paper is due that day. I ask that you jot down thoughts and responses regarding these questions, so you can participate more readily in the class discussion. If necessary to encourage greater preparation, I may require that these be posted the night before class on a discussion board, but let's try doing this without discussion board postings first, in the interest of reducing the number of deadline activities you have for this class.

9/8 Scientific realism, quasi-realism, and model-dependent realism

In these readings, we cover perspectives that many contemporary social scientists find better characterize their understanding of what we do. Read these, and raise questions, with an eye towards the task in the short paper today, regarding how various perspectives here do and do not reflect your understanding of what social science is.

Popper chapter 1

Pavitt chapter 6 (read section on Suppe, quickly skim the rest)

Hawking and Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, Chapter 3.

“typical scientist” web excerpt is fyi, no need for question on discussion board.

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

9/10 Some more background readings on theory in social science ... what is empirical social science theory, anyway, and why bother?

Readings:

J&J, Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Shoemaker, Chapter 1.

Reynolds, Chapter 1 (recommended, not required).

Short paper 2: How would you articulate your own position and understanding with respect to issues such as positivism, constructivism, realism, objectivity, and the purpose of empirical theory and research?

What I'm looking for is an effort to articulate your own stance, as of now, regarding these issues and what you understand is a rationale to defend the practice of empirical theory and research (that is, if you are inclined to defend it).

Draw on and cite as appropriate readings from the last two classes as well as today's readings. I may ask you to expand on your thinking and comments in class today, and perhaps explore these issues in small group discussion.

Due 10pm via Carmen Assignments upload on the night before class.

9/15 Concepts, variables, explication

Readings:

J&J Chapter 5

Shoemaker, Chapter 2

Chaffee, (review Concept Explication: An overview from your first theory class)

Reynolds, Chapter 2 (recommended)

Short paper 3, due 10pm the night before class in lieu of questions on readings: Identify one to three concepts that appear at present most central to your evolving research direction or program. Provide a brief concept explication of one concept that you regard as the most important or central to your work, with citations. This can be an update of work you have done previously in other classes or research projects, but should reflect your best current thinking. Where your concept explication is still a work in progress and needs development, that's fine, you can say so. If you can at this point, highlight conceptual problems or issues in the existing literature that you hope to address in your research, and how you hope to address it (through new measures or manipulations, redefining or reconceptualizing the concept, etc). Please use examples as appropriate to help clarify your thinking about the concept for the reader (me).

Be prepared to briefly (2-4 minutes) describe your key concepts to the class, and how they relate to your evolving research program (we will afterwards divide into interest-based small groups on this).

9/17 Epistemic relations (possible slippage between concept and operationalization)

Readings: As needed to support doing short paper #4.

Short paper #4: In your area of interest, describe at least one study in which you have concerns about the epistemic relationship—where you aren't sure if the measure or manipulation really captures the concept in the way the authors claim. What are the implications of this epistemic problem for their theoretical claims? Alternatively, you can identify a concept that has been operationalized with different measures or manipulations that seem to produce inconsistent results. Describe these different approaches, and what you think these different approaches and findings mean. If you can't identify any of these, describe some measures or manipulations of key concepts in your research area that you think are ok but can be improved (with cites), and the theoretical implications of improving these operations.

We will break up into shared-interest small groups to discuss the problems and issues identified for at least part of class. See if you can come up in discussion with ideas on how to address some of the problems you've found that your group can report back to the class as a whole. 10pm day before class is due date.

- 9/22 The process of generating new theory-development ideas. Class discussion of readings.

Readings:

J&J, chapter 4

Shoemaker, chapter 8

Reynolds, chapter 7 (recommended)

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

Note: Look ahead to future short papers and start doing thinking and reading needed to prepare them (list of variables relevant to your research direction, and possible mediators and moderators).

- 9/24 The process of generating new theory-development ideas part II. Presentations from faculty. Scheduled are: Osei Appiah, Emily Moyer-Guse, Hillary Shulman. (Subject to change if their availability changes).

Readings:

To be assigned from presenters

Come with questions to ask about how theoretical ideas were conceived and developed. Are you curious about how specific elements of these ideas arose?

- 9/29 Types of theory and the importance of causal process models in communication research

Readings:

Reynolds, Chapter 5

Powerpoint slides with theory examples from Prof. Eveland

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings

- 10/1 Review of basic hypothesis construction, predictive relationships

Readings:

J&J, Chapter 6 to page 135.

Shoemaker, Chapters 3 and 4.

Reynolds, Chapters 3 and 4 (recommended).

If time permits we will discuss hypotheses we are working on in small groups.

Short paper 5 to hand in by 10pm night before class: What are the relevant independent variables in your research program (predictors, possible mediators, moderators, and key control variables) that you have identified so far? What are key or typical dependent variables? Why, in a sentence or two, is each relevant to your research direction? What is at least one hypothesis you are planning or would like to test?

10/6 Intro to constructing causal process (aka box and arrow) models

Readings:

J&J chapter 7 (this is long and worth your attention)

Shoemaker, Chapters 5 and 6

In both J&J and Shoemaker, note carefully their use of box-and-arrow models showing the relationships between variables in a causal model. Start sketching out your own. If you are working with an advisor/mentor, you may want to get input on this. You are also welcome to meet with me.

We will discuss in class when such models are fine-grained extensions or syntheses of theory and when they are more fundamental theoretical contributions.

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

10/8 Causal process models II...Thinking about mediating processes and mechanisms

Reading: same as for prior class.

Hayes 2009

Slater & Rasinski 2005 (Media use as mediating variable, controls as exogenous). Skim.

We will discuss some key issues as a class then break up into shared-interest groups to discuss your specific mediation ideas: do they make sense? Alternative explanations or processes? Are relations correlated or causal? How much do these proposed relations contribute to theory and/or substantive understanding?

For 10pm night before class, submit to Carmen short paper 6: Describe a key bivariate relationship involving two of these variables that is established either in the literature or by your research to date, and explain why it is a theoretically and important relationship. Propose a mediating variable that might help explain that relationship that hasn't to your knowledge been previously proposed or tested as a mediator, and explain why testing this mediation would help increase theoretical understanding of the relationship. Include a formal statement of your hypothesized mediating relationship (with the IV, mediator, and DV); look at journal articles for models of how to articulate such a hypothesis.

10/13 Moderation and moderated mediation in building theory about process, causal modeling part III

Readings:

J&J review chapter 7 on moderation
 Holbert et al (2023)
 Bucy & Tao (2007)--skim

For 10pm the night before class, submit to Carmen short paper 7: Do the same as in the prior paper, but this time propose a novel moderator variable, either for the same bivariate relationship or for a different one among the variables you've mentioned relevant to your evolving research program. Again, explain why examining this moderator relationship is theoretically and substantively valuable. Please include a graph of your proposed interaction. Moderated mediation also ok...graph both the proposed interaction (see p. 79 in Shoemaker et al.; <https://statisticsbyjim.com/regression/interaction-effects/> has some nice examples), and a box and arrow illustration of the moderated mediation relationship.

You will discuss these in small groups in the latter part of class.

- 10/15 Anticipating and considering alternative explanations and causal orders for proposed theoretical relations, and brief introductory discussion of SEM

Readings:

Holbert & Stephenson (2008) chapter on uses and misuses of SEM for theory testing in communication research
 Eveland et al. (2005) (skim)
 Slater, Hayes, & Ford (2007) (skim)

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

- 10/20 Theory comparisons, typology as theory

Readings (skim):

Cooper & Richardson (1986)
 Doty & Glick (1994)
 Slater, 2013

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

- 10/22 Importing/adapting theory from other disciplines; frameworks and meta-analyses

Readings (skim):

Witte (1994)
 Anderson & Bushman meta-analysis, *Psychological Science*
 Shoemaker chapter 7

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

- 10/27 Class and group discussion of students' proposed initial models.

Short paper 8. Draft an initial box-and-arrow causal process model illustrating the process you propose may represent the phenomena you are interested in studying, highlighting in accompanying text the main relationships proposed in this model that aren't already established in the literature, and also note the relationships you are still thinking about. This should involve all the variables you mentioned in paper #5. Also: Look ahead to find paper to comment on for short paper 9.

10/29 Reading theoretical contributions part I

Readings:

Shoemaker chapter 9 on evaluating theories

Kaplan (recommended, but optional, if you want more philosophic depth on this topic)

J&J chapter 15

I suggest you do an initial skim of the readings for next class as well.

Don't forget to review the discussion questions I send before doing the readings.

11/3 Reading theory Part II: Typology of approaches to theory-building in communication research

Readings:

Slater & Gleason

DeAndrea & Holbert

Levine & Markowitz (skim) on Carmen

Short paper #9: Find an empirical article of interest relevant to the model you have been developing in this class, preferably in JOC, Comm Research, or HCR, or a quality subdiscipline journal, and based on the Slater and Gleason article, and if you wish using additional ideas from DeAndrea and Holbert, tell me what kind of theoretical contribution(s) were being made in the article (i.e., what contribution was envisioned, how it was tested, what the results showed). If you see additional potential theory-building directions based on this article not proposed by the authors, or have critiques of their theoretical claims, please mention those. If boundary conditions associated with race/gender/ethnicity/sexuality are likely to be relevant, note whether or not they have been appropriately addressed. Due 10 PM day before class, to Carmen.

These will be discussed in in class and in interest-based small groups.

11/5 Qualitative research/grounded theory, mathematical modeling, simulations/ABM. Prof. Wang will be in to talk about theory through mathematical modeling. We also hopefully should have a special guest, Dr. Frantisek Kalvas of U. West Bohemia, Czech Republic, to talk about ABM; if so, we'll meet by Zoom to accommodate Prof. Kalvas.

Readings:

J&J, chapters 8, 9, 10, 11. A lot to cover so just skim for what is of interest/relevance to you and so you know what's here if you want to look into it more later.

Come prepared with questions for guest speaker(s)

- 11/10 Proposal presentations and instructor-facilitated class discussion of student theoretical ideas – grad students Julia Wilson and Lucy Brown sharing their 7927 presentations and discussion

Remember...our purpose is:

- a) to learn about the process of theory development by watching and participating in the process for each other as well for your own project...your project is just one example of this process...you learn far more by being attentive to issues arising in the development of theoretical ideas of others as well...and you've had a chance to observe the development of these ideas for your classmates.
- b) To experience the collaborative nature of idea development in social science theorizing...the value of feedback and input in helping you refine your ideas.
- c) To improve the final product—your programmatic research ideas and model—through this collaborative process.

Therefore, I do expect students in this class not only to attend these presentations, but to actively participate via their questions, suggestions (eg for useful literature, clarifying definitions, possible relationships/mechanisms about which to hypothesize and operationalizations), and comments. This input is part of your participation grade.

Also, you will find that a brief, tight oral presentation can serve to clarify your thinking considerably. That is another benefit of these presentations. Therefore, as noted above, I expect carefully prepared, powerpoint presentations, that you've rehearsed and polished; the quality of the presentation is part of your class grade. You will probably do presentations much like these for your masters and PhD defenses, and if you go into academia, your "job talk" is critical—so practice in doing these is most valuable. You hopefully will be able to use this presentation as the foundation for your second year talk next semester, or your job talk if you are further along. Look at guidelines in J&J for such powerpoint presentations.

Highlight graphically the part of your theoretical model being addressed by each of the studies you summarize, or otherwise find a graphic means to illustrate how your studies are linked programmatically.

Plan and rehearse a 12-13 minute presentation, 15 is the absolute max. We'll have 10 minutes for discussion after each presentation. We will have 3 presentations per class. Discussion will include feedback about the presentation itself as well as substantive comments concerning the ideas presented.

Check out the presentations and ask questions!

11/12 Evaluating your own planned theoretical contributions

Slater & Gleason, 2012

DeAndrea & Holbert, 2017

Short paper #10: Per the Slater and Gleason as well as if you wish the DeAndrea and Holbert article, explain the kind of contribution(s) to theory-building that you are planning to do in your work in the coming year or so (e.g., elaborating or proposing alternative mechanisms: testing moderators/contingent conditions and/or mediators; extending boundary conditions; testing premises or challenging assumptions/conceptualizations; elaborating/clarifying concepts and demonstrating empirical importance of new conceptual distinctions; replicating using different methods/populations; comparing alternative theories in a given context; importing theory from other disciplines and adapting/testing in communication, etc). Be as specific as you can regarding how you plan to go about this. Make it clear why these proposed contributions actually matter, theoretically or substantively.

Also, make sure you discuss whether boundary conditions associated with psychology/ideology/race/gender/ethnicity/sexuality/economic disadvantage, or other theoretical concerns associated with these or other relevant individual difference factors, are likely to impact your model—if so, why, if not, why not. Due 10 PM day before class.

We will discuss these in class and small groups.

11/17 Student final project presentations and roundtable discussion of theoretical model and proposed studies

11/19 Some students may be gone for NCA...if several may not hold class; otherwise, final project presentations

11/24 Student final project presentations and roundtable discussion of theoretical model and proposed studies

11/26 Thanksgiving break

12/1 Finish any remaining presentations or final project one-on-ones.

Please send me the most recent version of your model with definitions of each variable in the model, and an explanation/graph for any interactions, at least 24 hours before we meet!

12/3 Final project one-on ones.

12/8 Final project one-on-ones.

12/10 Final project one-on-ones.

Final papers are due Dec 13 by midnight, see syllabus text for detailed description of this paper. If you have finals or other due dates conflicting with that day or causing excessive stress/pressure, you may request an extension until Sunday noon; please make that request by Dec 10. Requests made by Dec. 10 will be granted.

References

Note: not all used every year. See above for required/recommended textbooks for course. A few miscellaneous, non-academic readings are not listed here.

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