Mass Communication Seminar -- Media and Health
019:279:001 (JMC:6800:0001)
School of Journalism and Mass Communication / The University of Iowa
Fall 2013
Thursday 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.
W340 AJB (Adler Journalism Building)

Instructor: Julie Andsager
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Description of Course

The media are the public’s primary source of health information. News media warn of potential epidemics, provide news about recent medical developments, and inform us about celebrities diagnosed with disease. Entertainment media construct illness and treatment, while perhaps shaping our expectations about physicians and healthcare workers. Social media have the capacity to influence health knowledge and decisions in a myriad ways.

This seminar will examine how and why media construct health and medicine in the ways that they do and how audiences process those messages. We will explore mediated health from theoretical perspectives such as cultivation, social comparison, agenda setting, priming, social cognitive theory, and more.

Course Objectives

- To understand how news media, entertainment media, and social media contribute to public knowledge and attitudes regarding health and medical issues.
- To understand the constraints under which various media operate in reporting and explaining health issues.
- To understand how entertainment media shape perceptions about health and medical issues.
- To understand the theoretical explanations for how audiences use and process mediated health messages.

Texts

Required readings for the course are located on its ICON site. (See complete list of references at the end of this syllabus.)
Course Policies

Course attendance: As graduate students, you are expected to be here for every class meeting. Each class meeting constitutes one week of the course. Much of the learning in this course will occur through class discussion. You should prepare for class by reading the assignments and thinking of questions or comments about them. I don't expect that you will completely understand the readings prior to discussion, but I will expect that you have read them. If you can’t make it to class for some very good reason, please contact me.

Participation in class: There is no “participation grade,” but our class will be too small for you to be able to avoid participating in discussion. Read the week’s assignments before class. We will base much of our discussion each week on the readings.

Timely completion of assignments: Assignments are to be turned in on time. “On time” means 2 p.m. on the class period the assignment is due. One third of a letter grade will be deducted for each day an assignment is late, including weekends. “Late” begins at 2:15 p.m. on the day the assignment is due. Assignments will be submitted via the class’s ICON drop box, and the drop box will be closed at 2:15 p.m.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondence (Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor, and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.
Reacting Safely to Severe Weather
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Public Safety website.

Resources for Students
Writing Center: http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/
Speaking Center: http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/for-students/speaking-center

Assignments and Grading

Grading System and the Use of +/-: This course uses the +/- system.

Assignments and Percentage of Final Grade

- 25% Reflections on week’s readings
- 10% Leading class discussion
- 20% Media research proposal
- 35% Media research paper
- 10% Paper presentation

For all papers: Use 1.25-inch margins; 11- or 12-point type; preferably Arial or Times New Roman font (or something similar); double-space. Put your name and the date at the top of the Word file (not just as the file name). No title pages (put title on media research proposal and paper at the beginning of the paper under name and date). Save as .doc or .docx files; no .pdf or .txt files.

Grades for all papers are primarily based on the criteria listed below and, to a small extent, on grammar, spelling, and punctuation; errors in these reduce the ability to communicate
Reflections on week’s readings: For each of the 12 weeks with a set of required readings, you will write a short (1.5- to 2-page) summary of the assignment. Address the following questions – What are the most important points (1-3) that the authors are trying to make? Why do you say that? What are the commonalities and distinctions among the readings? What questions or critiques are you left with? Due at 2:30 Thursdays.

- Grades are based on thoughtfulness of response; clarity of writing; evidence that the student read and understood the readings. For these reflections, direct quotation from the readings is limited to one sentence from each reading only. More than one direct quote or too much close paraphrasing suggests that the readings were not well understood and that the response is not necessarily thoughtful.

Leading class discussion: Each student will take a turn in leading the class discussion for the first part (about 45 minutes) of class each week. Use your reflection essay from the week as the starting point to discuss the readings. (A recent example in the media that illustrates the topic may be helpful, but limit video or audio footage to about 10 minutes. PowerPoint is discouraged.)

- Grades are based on ability to accurately summarize the readings or their main point; stimulation of discussion; and to ask and answer questions.

Media research proposal: Prior to conducting research for the media research paper and presentation, you will write a brief proposal of your research. (I strongly encourage the research questions to be based on studies of media content, as it will be difficult to obtain IRB approval for any study using human subjects.) In the proposal, you will identify the topic and explain why it’s important; briefly explain the purpose of your study; give an overview of the theoretical perspective that will guide the study; provide a brief literature review (2-3 pages); and pose 2 or 3 hypotheses or research questions. Then give a description of proposed methods to test/answer Hs and RQs, including: Method (why that method?); medium (e.g., TV news? Tweets?); and a list of 8-10 variables you would need to address the study’s purpose. Due Friday, Oct. 11, 4 p.m.

- Grades are based on originality of purpose; accurate use of theory; appropriateness of literature review; whether hypotheses and research questions derive logically from theory and literature review; appropriateness of method, medium, and variables.

Media research paper: This is a revised and expanded version of the proposal, with data obtained and analyzed to test/answer the hypotheses/research questions. In addition to a more
substantial literature review and theoretical overview, the methods must be clearly detailed. Appropriate analytical techniques for data must be applied. The results must be discussed thoroughly and tied back to previous literature and theory. Limitations and suggestions for future research should be included. The goal for this paper is to provide you with a paper suitable for submission to a conference (and, eventually, perhaps, publication). Please note that, depending on your purpose and methods, you may have to collect additional data after the semester is over to strengthen the project. *Due when our final would be held; date TBA.*

- Grades are based on the same criteria as on the proposal, with the addition of thoroughness of method section and report of results. Discussion of the findings (see above) will comprise about one-third of the grade, as the previous sections will have been revised from the proposal.

**Paper presentation:** Each student will present his/her research paper in a conference-style presentation at the end of the semester. Presentations will be 10 to 12 minutes long and may employ PowerPoint. We will discuss presentations in more detail in class.

- Grades are based on clarity and organization of presentation, plus the ability to answer questions about the paper. A key point: Will someone who hasn’t read your paper be able to understand it from the presentation alone?

**Tentative schedule**

Aug. 29  
*introduction – context: media coverage of health and audience consumption of it*

Sept. 5  
*Theoretical approaches to studying media and health*  
Walsh-Childers & Brown; Finnegan & Viswanath; Potter

Sept. 12  
News media / agenda setting  
Shoemaker & Vos; McCombs; Kendrowski & Sarow 3; research article TBA

Sept. 19  
*Analyzing media content – textual analysis* (guest: Rachel Young, MPH, PhD);  
*Journalism and medicine*  
Seale; textual analysis reading TBA

Sept. 26  
*Analyzing media content – content analysis*  
Krippendorff; Riffe et al. 4, 5; research article TBA

Oct. 3  
*Constructing “disease” / framing*  
Kedrowski & Sarow 7; Tewksbury & Scheufele; research article TBA

Oct. 10  
*Social media*  
Len-Rios; Wright et al.; research article TBA

**Media research proposal due Friday, Oct. 11 – 4 p.m.**
Oct. 17  Medical dramas / cultivation
Turow 14, 15; Morgan et al.; research article TBA

Oct. 24  Entertainment education / social cognitive theory
Bandura; McAlister et al.; research article TBA

Oct. 31  Health and media literacy
Zarcadoolas et al. 3, 5, 6; research article TBA

Nov. 7   Information seeking / uses & gratifications
Rubin; Johnson & Case; research article TBA

Nov. 14  Media advocacy
Wallack et al.; Kedrowski & Sarow 5

Nov. 21  Chronic issues vs. epidemics / schema
Briggs; Wicks; research article TBA

Dec. 5   presentations

Dec. 12  presentations

Media research paper due when our final would take place (TBA in week 3).
Reading list references


