Approaches to the Study of Communication: Issues and Concepts

JMC 6700

Class meets: Monday 5-7:30 p.m., E250 AJB

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course overview

This course serves as an introduction to research and graduate study in journalism and mass communication; it is an entry point for the M.A. thesis and Ph.D. students’ degree work. More broadly, the course will provide an overview of various approaches to the study of the media, introducing students to the range of theoretical and methodological currents in our discipline as well as to the culture of academe. Naturally, more focused and specific coursework will be necessary for any student to complete her/his graduate degree and thesis.

Goals for the course include:
- helping students to understand the connections between the ideas covered in the class, graduate coursework, and careers
- developing a set of common experiences for a diverse group of incoming students
- familiarizing students with scholarly journals, organizations, opportunities to participate professionally, norms, habits, & ethics of the profession
- introducing some major theories and ideas in the field and discussing their interrelationships
- “meeting” important thinkers and doers in the field
- grappling with some social and ethical issues
- becoming colleagues
- preparing students to conduct original research
- understanding the conventions and techniques of scholarly writing
- preparing students for success in graduate school and an academic career

books/readings

- The following required is available at the Iowa Hawk Shop book store (as well as online):
  The following books are highly recommended and can be ordered online:
- Other readings can be found under “Modules” on the course ICON website.
- Any one of the following style manuals is highly recommended, although not required:
class policies

You are expected to turn in all assignments on time; **late work is not accepted.** Missed assignments can only be made up in case of illness or emergency, and documentation (doctor’s letter, obituary notice, etc.) **must** be provided in such contingencies. Any other occasion for absence from class or lateness with assignments—visiting family, travel plans, social obligations—are not considered sufficient reason for make-up work.

In addition, **final grades of “incomplete” will not be given in this class** except in dire circumstances as specified in the CLAS handbooks (i.e. for documented medical or serious family reasons). The end of the semester is “crunch time” for everyone, so you are expected to manage your schedule so that you can fulfill your TA and/or other class responsibilities along with this one. Time pressures are **not** considered sufficient justification for awarding an “incomplete.”

accommodations for disabilities

The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which include but are not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor’s office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See [http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/)

I can only make accommodations for students who have been evaluated by SDS, following that office’s specific recommendations.

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 correspondences. *(Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11.)*

course web site

The class has an ICON site that students can access using their Hawk IDs. **First and second drafts of all stories must be uploaded to this site on or before the deadlines in the syllabus.**

The site is password protected. Each student has access to his/her grades on this site, as well as all the course information that is online (syllabus, course calendar, etc.)

To access the ICON site, go to:

icon.uiowa.edu  (please note that there is no “www” at the beginning of this URL)

log on to ICON using your Hawk ID and password  
[Note: The login ID for each new account will be your HawkID. If you don’t know your HawkID, you can find out what it is by calling the Customer Information Desk (384-0800), looking it up in WebISIS (http://isis.uiowa.edu/) or calling the ITS Help Desk (384-4357)].

Select the appropriate semester.  
Click on the course name/number.  
Most course readings will be under the “Modules” link the navigation bar on the left.
To upload your files once you are in the course web site:
Click on “Modules” in the navigation bar at the left.
Click on the appropriate date/assignment.
The system will allow you to upload a file.

FYI--The topic will be locked after the deadline on the syllabus! Also, all uploaded stories are time and date-stamped by the computer, which is another way I can keep track of deadlines.

If you have any difficulties with ICON, please call ICON help at 335-5194. But technical problems are not an acceptable reason for late work! Please plan on uploading your final paper at least an hour before the deadline so that there are no hiccups!

general expectations
General expectations for all students include consistent class attendance, adequate preparation for in-class and out-of-class assignments, constructive participation (especially during article workshops), and completion of all reading and writing assignments on deadline. For purposes of class communication and fulfillment of assignments, you'll need an email account and regular access to a computer and printer.

**Important note:** Deadlines are absolutely sacred in this class (as they are in the “real world” of professional media)! Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per hour. No make-up work will be allowed, except in the case of an excused absence (see the policy on absences, below). In addition, final grades of “Incomplete” will not be given unless in exceptional and dire circumstances.

**Other important notes:** Remember that printers break, computers crash, and dogs eat homework, so plan ahead. This is both professional and courteous, and it will also save you a lot of trouble.

Be sure to back up your work, for the same reasons. Many students have lost their only copies of final projects at the very last minute, so be smart and back up.

And, finally, cell phones and other communication devices must be turned off during class.

academic honesty
Follow basic academic and journalistic ethics. Be original, be creative, and be true to your values: show me that you are a person of integrity and principle. Your writing will reflect who you are as a person. Remember that we will form lasting impressions of each other this semester.

The only real crime in this class would be cheating. It is expected that all work submitted for a grade in this course reflects the original work of the student submitting it. Keep in mind that if you borrow an idea from someone else, you must cite the source, even if it is based on a conversation or correspondence. Also, inventing sources/quotes constitutes plagiarism.

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who deals with academic fraud according to these guidelines:
[www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml](http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml)

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's **Code of Academic Honesty**: “I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the **IOWA Challenge**. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty.” Any student committing academic
misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Any student who does not fully understand the standards of academic honesty should speak to me in advance of submitting coursework.

clas final examination policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar’s web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student’s responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

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 Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

making a suggestion or complaint

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

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 web site.

student classroom behavior

The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the Code of Student Life. When disruptive activity occurs, a university instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit the classroom, laboratory, or other area used for instruction immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to appropriate departmental, collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students).

The guidelines for civility extend to written work, as well. Please avoid gratuitous obscenity and racist, sexist, and other discriminatory language in your writing, unless there are exceptional circumstances where such content is essential to the story. Communicate clearly with your instructor about such circumstances.
course requirements

The format of the course will involve readings, discussion, presentations, and a series of written assignments. These will break down as follows:

Responses to readings: 20 percent
Every week, each student will come to class with a written comment sheet on each assigned reading. These will be “prompts” for class discussion; they will also be turned in for a grade. The comment sheets will provide responses to the following questions for every assigned reading:
- The author's main thesis points were:
- The idea I most agreed/disagreed with was:
- The aspect of the reading I found most compelling was:
- This aspect of the reading struck me as important because:
- Other thoughts:

The responses should be concise and focused, not exceeding two printed, double-spaced pages. The responses should be posted to the course web site by noon of the day they are due; hard copies should be submitted in class.

Leadership of class discussion: 20 percent
Students will be assigned to lead the class discussion about selected topics throughout the semester. This will call for careful reading of the assigned material, research into supplementary scholarship, and classroom management skills in terms of fostering productive classroom discussion leading to understanding and insight about the topic.

Article analyses: 30 percent (15 percent each)
Each student will analyze selected articles conforming to different paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological approaches. These written assignments will be due at different points during the semester, and should be predicated on the terminology and concepts discussed in class. Handouts will be provided to guide you with these analyses.

Final paper: 25 percent
The final paper in this class will be a 15-page draft of a thesis or dissertation proposal. This is almost certain to change as you progress in your program; it is intended as an exercise that will help you to begin thinking in a focused way about your degree program and its outcome.

Attendance and class participation: 5 percent
Participation in the class discussion is of crucial importance in a class like this, where a central goal is collegiality and initiation into “the academic tribe.” Please come to class prepared to talk about the readings and to respond to the ideas generated by your classmates, guest speakers, and the professor. In addition—please keep an open mind! A diversity of opinions and the free flow of ideas are the basis for a rich scholarly environment.
**course calendar**

*All readings marked with an asterisk are on the ICON website; others are from the text. Responses are due every week unless otherwise specified in the syllabus. Please post your reading responses online by noon every Monday; also bring a hard copy of your responses to class to hand in.

**week one**

Tuesday, August 23—Introductions, syllabus, course overview, etc.

Readings for next week (August 30); responses due on ICON:

**week two**

Tuesday, August 30—Joining a scholarly community. Responses to readings due in class; discussion.

Readings for next week:

**week three**

Tuesday, Sept. 6—Responses to readings due in class. The broad view: approaches to mass communication/media research. Discussion of McQuail's taxonomy.

Readings for next week:
week four
Tuesday, Sept. 13—Responses to readings due. The shift toward critical/cultural studies. Overview of social inquiry and communication research.
Good critical/cultural studies articles using appropriate theory, e.g.

week five
Tuesday, Sept. 20—
Tom Oates on the *Journal of Communication Inquiry.*
Research design in critical/cultural approaches to media analysis (Frank Durham)

Article analysis #1: Follow the footnotes

Readings for next week:
Readings for Judy Polumbaum presentation: Bad Writing winners; Mills; Pinker; Sokal; Tiger Woods; Writing S & W; Writing Advice

week six
Tuesday, Sept. 27—“Follow the footnotes” assignment due in class; discussion of positioning research in relation to the field.

Readings for next week:

Chapter 1: Human inquiry and science
Chapter 2: Paradigms, theory, and social research
Chapter 3: The idea of causation in social research.
Chapter 4: Research design

week seven
Tuesday, October 4
Judy Polumbaum on academic writing.
Setting up a media research study. Models for studying communication: interpretive versus social scientific. Epistemology and methodology

Readings for next week:
week eight
Tuesday, October 11—Responses to reading due; discussion of article structure, method, and analysis.
Article analysis #2 assignment handed out

Readings for next week:
Booth, Part III, Prologue and Chapters 7-10 (pp. 85-148)

week nine
Tuesday, October 18— Citations and abstracts of articles for Analysis #2 due in class (hard copy); one-paragraph summaries of why you chose the article and what its significant features are.

week ten
Tuesday, October 25— Article analysis #2 due in class (hard copy + online)
Writing a thesis or dissertation proposal (D. Berkowitz, K. Hedding, D. TePoel)

Readings for next week:

week eleven
Tuesday, November 1—Responses to readings due. Beginning your own research; how to use theory. Melissa Tully on developing a research project.
Reading for next week:
Booth, Chapters 11, 13 and 15 (no responses due)

week twelve
Tuesday, November 8— Research questions & proposal outlines due in class (in writing)

week thirteen
Tuesday, November 15 — Draft proposals due at the start of class; workshop and peer review session

week fourteen
Tuesday, November 22 —
**Thanksgiving Break! Happy tofu/turkey day!**

week fifteen
Tuesday, Nov. 29 — Feedback on draft proposals; second round of workshopping

week sixteen
Tuesday, Dec. 6 — Final proposals due; presentations and party to celebrate the end of the semester!

**Best of luck on the road to your M.A. or Ph.D.!!**