

COMS 607
Communication and Health: Troubling Promotion
Winter 2012
Jan. 2-6, 9 – 4
Social Sciences 202

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Communication and Health examines the concept of health as a socio-cultural phenomena, and interrogates and the ways that “health” issues are communicated, defined, represented, framed, subjected to PR spin, and act as a form of governmentality. The sub-theme, *Troubling Promotion*, aims to provide a critical space in which to explore the concept of health through the lens of communication. It embraces cultural and media representations of health (and health issues), along with questions of health and identity, health promotion and advocacy, health and risk, policy and regulation, governance, and social movements.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

The course objectives are to:

- 1) familiarize students with some of the main theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches relevant to understanding communication and health
- 2) critically examine how issues of health are communicated, defined, framed represented and act as a form of governmentality
- 3) assess the strengths and weakness of the various approaches (outlined in objective 1)
- 4) interrogate the particular questions arising from a *communications*-oriented perspective of health/health issues/health problems

READINGS

All readings, including book chapters, are available online through the UofC library databases.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

This course has five evaluative components: a critical analysis/presentation of a Communication and Health issue (20%); a re-assessment of that analysis (10%); participation and submitted questions based on the readings (10%); a research paper (40%); and a take home exam (20%).

1. Critical analysis of a ‘Communication and Health’ issue

Due Jan 2 (20%)

This assignment must be prepared in advance of the course, and will be presented by all class members on the first (and depending on numbers, also the second) day of class. Students are required to select a specific issue they are interested in pertaining to Communication and Health, and to analyze the media representation of that issue. The topic possibilities are vast (i.e., Communication and Health-related issues pertain to health, health risks, public health crises, ‘risky’ behaviours, mental health, illness, etc.). Potential topics could range from obesity or the risks associated with smoking, to HIV/AIDS, breast cancer and the H1N1 ‘pandemic’.

Students will analyze the media coverage of the issue—it can include newspapers, televised news, blog sites, twitter feeds, etc. The time frame for the analysis (and the media) can be selected by the student, depending on the issue (it

can be historical or present). However, the monitoring of the ‘issue’ must be carefully worked out (i.e., “X number of newspapers over Y period”, so that the analysis is rigorous). The point of the critical analysis is to assess, drawing from the coverage, how the selected “issue” is framed, represented, and communicated to the public. Students should consider:

- 1) what are the ‘common ingredients’ comprising the stories? (What is the ‘story’ being told to the public about this issue?)
- 2) Who are the principal actors in story? (Who are the spokespeople? Who is silent? What assumptions, if any, are made about the actors? Who are the villains? The heroes?)
- 3) What is the dominant/preferred reading of the story? (How does the coverage lead readers to interpret the meaning of the issue in a particular way? Whose agenda does the coverage suggest the issue is about?)
- 4) What is emphasized in your issue (and what is rendered invisible)?
- 5) How are uncertainties/anxieties around risk dealt with?
- 6) What is the ‘solution’?
- 7) Did your analysis of the coverage in light of these questions draw attention to issues that you had not previously considered? If so, what were they?

Students will have **10-12 minutes** to present their “issue” to the class. The objective of this assignment is to introduce your own interest areas your colleagues and to showcase the myriad issues pertaining to communication and health. They will also submit a 5-page paper (double spaced, Times New Roman font) detailing this analysis.

The preparatory work you do on this issue will be central to the course, as you will be asked to consider (over the course of the week) how the various communications approaches covered inform, and perhaps alter, your understanding of the issue you selected.

Over the week, students will be given time to integrate the concepts they encounter into their ‘analysis’. On the last day of classes, students will have an opportunity to revisit their original presentation in light of the materials we have covered.

2. Critical analysis ‘redux’ – Presented in class

Jan 6 (10%)

The final presentation is an opportunity to revisit your selected “issue” in light of the materials we have covered. The goal is to broaden your analysis, to integrate the relevant conceptual/theoretical materials and to illustrate how the materials covered in class may add insight to the assessment or take it in entirely new directions. Given the condensed time frame of this course, you will be provided time to work on this, in class. It is understood that this presentation will be more informal than the first one. You may choose to collaborate (and co-present) with another student working on a similar issue.

3. Participation and Key Points, Key Queries (KPKQ)

Jan 2-6 (10%)

Students are expected to attend **all** classes, respect the start/finish times of the class, read the required readings and discussion pieces, and be prepared to identify and discuss issues emerging from these in a thoughtful and informed manner during the class. Students are encouraged to ask questions, probe issues, challenge assumptions and bring their experiences to the materials being engaged with.

Key Points, Key Queries (KPKQ)

Every student will be responsible for submitting three KPKQ during the week. *Key Points, Key Queries* is an assessment of the assigned readings. Select an assigned reading, identify three key points from that reading – what you believe are the key take-away points – and one or two thoughtful and analytical queries arising from the reading. (Students might productively approach the queries in terms of first asking themselves, “What is working in the analysis?” {i.e., identifying strengths} and “What is missing?” {i.e., identifying oversights}). The KPKQ must be typed, and submitted at the beginning of the class (two copies should be brought: one for yourself and one for submission).

Note that: 1) the KPKQ must be submitted the **day** the reading is being covered in class; and
2) not more than one submission can be made each day. The KPKQ may be used as the basis of class discussion.

Note also that this can be accomplished easily if you write up your questions as you do the reading!

4. Take home exam

Distributed Jan 23; Due Jan 30 (20%)

The take home exam will evaluate students' analytic comprehension of the course materials (lectures and readings). No outside research is required, and students will have one week to complete the take home exam. To provide students with the opportunity to think about the concepts covered, the exam will be distributed on January 23; it will be due in by no later than 4:00 p.m. the following week – Jan 30.

As this is a final exam, the deadline for submission is firm. No late assignments will be accepted.

*Students may not collaborate on this assignment

5. Research Paper (15-20 pages)

March 1 (40%)

Identify a question of interest to you in area of communication and health. Review relevant literature on this question, and identify a theoretical perspective that lets you conceptualize, research, and respond to this question. Please use the style guidelines found in the Canadian Journal of Communication (papers that fail to do so will be penalized one half letter grade). Make sure your paper is double-spaced, using 12 point Times New Roman font.

Quality of writing (e.g. organization of ideas, sentence structure, grammar etc.) will factor strongly in the marking of assignments.

The scope of this research paper is open; use this as an opportunity to examine an aspect of communication and health that is intriguing to you. Please be sure to see me, at least three weeks prior to the deadline, to briefly discuss your proposed paper topic.

Late Policy

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Writing Skills Statement Faculty policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/info. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: www.efwr.ucalgary.ca

Grading System

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent – superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
		Note: The grade point value (3.0) associated with this grade is the minimum acceptable average that a graduate student must maintain throughout the program as computed at the end of each registration anniversary year of the program.
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
		Note: A student who receives a B- or lower in two or more courses will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average unless the program recommends otherwise. Individual programs may require a higher minimum passing grade.
C+	2.3	
C	2.0	All grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements. A student who receives a grade of F will normally be required to withdraw unless the program recommends otherwise.
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1.0	
F	0.0	

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (SS 106, efwr.ucalgary.ca) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts, see www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su

Graduate Students' Association

For details on the Graduate Students' Association, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/services/ombudsperson.html>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly Points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (ie. Surveys, interviews, observation) as a part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb>

Schedule of Classes and Readings

January 2: Theorizing health: The body and (social/moral) regulation

January 3: Marketing and representing health: The case of children

January 4: Framing public health and managing risk

January 5: Advocacy and Health

January 6: Representations of health and illness: health promotion and social movements