Communication Scholarship and Public Life
Communication 502, Spring 2003
EE 026, M/W 10:30-12:20

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Course Objectives and Description
Communication theory and research can make valuable contributions to public life, and interaction with communities beyond academia can spark new ideas and lines of research. This course helps students understand the potential connections between communication scholarship and the general public, as well as government, markets, civil society, and the media.

This course will introduce and explore the idea of public scholarship, as well as many specific instances of communication scholars whose work has influenced the larger culture and economic, political, and social institutions. Students will have the opportunity to learn about major instances of public scholarship in communication and related disciplines, and to discuss the issues raised by public scholars and their critics.

Assignments and Evaluation
Student grades will be based on eight short response papers (30%), participation in class discussion and performance as discussant (20%), and a final paper (50%). Grades will be calculated as percentages of total possible points (0-100%). Using the UW’s official grade conversion system, 97-100% = 4.0, 94-96% = 3.9, 93% = 3.8, 92% = 3.7 and so on, with each percentage point decrease corresponding to a 0.1 decrease in one’s final grade.

Reaction Papers
On the nine dates noted with an asterisk, you are required to submit a two-page double-spaced paper responding to the readings due for that day. Each paper should discuss at least two of the assigned readings (for those days when more than one reading is assigned) and offer reactions and reflections, rather than merely summaries. These reaction papers give you the chance to reflect and comment on the readings, find connections across different readings, and potentially explore new ideas that you might eventually incorporate into your final paper.

Reaction papers will be graded based on the depth of insights and the ability to understand, analyze, and connect the readings assigned. Each paper will be graded using a 5-point scale. Your top eight reaction papers will count toward your final grade.

Discussion and Participation
Each Wednesday during Weeks 2-9, two to three students will act as discussants whose responsibility is to develop a set of questions or identify points of controversy designed to spark discussion of the readings done that week. Discussants will meet as a team outside of class and email their one-page discussion guide (with all students’ names on it) to the instructors by noon the previous Tuesday. Discussants are not expected to make elaborate presentations; rather, they should develop discussion ideas and play an active role in those discussions. Discussants may structure their presentations and the class discussion however they wish, within reason, and the discussion that ensues may last anywhere from 20-40 minutes. Discussant presentations will be graded on the same five-point scale used for response papers, and grades will be based on the quality of the questions/issues raised.

General class participation will be assessed based on the level of participation and engagement in class activities.
Final Paper
Your work in this course will culminate in a full-length (20-25 pp.) paper that: (a) describes an existing communication theory or research program and suggests how it could connect to communities outside academia; (b) develops a plan for how to make your own emerging line of research an instance of public scholarship; or (c) discusses one of the challenges of public scholarship in relation to three communication theories or research programs. In developing your final paper, you will conduct literature reviews, develop original ideas and insights, and, when appropriate, examine media representations and accounts of scholars’ public activities and interview the scholars who are the subjects of the students’ papers.

Your final paper can be written individually or in groups as large as three students (with each co-author receiving the same grade on the paper). Final papers will be graded based on the quality of the writing and organization of the paper, the effective use of the literature from the course, the depth of understanding of key concepts and theories, and the originality and potential value of the proposed activities, if any. Papers should be written in APA or MLA format, strictly following the appropriate format and style conventions. Final papers are due at noon, Monday, 9 June, in either instructor’s mailbox in 102 CMU.

Outside Lectures
While enrolled in COM 502, students are encouraged to attend lectures and other public events on campus and in the greater Seattle area that pertain to communication, as well as other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Though there are no graded assignments pertaining to these events and they may not always enter class discussion, these events will provide students with useful ideas for their papers and highlight ways in which their own scholarship might interface with larger issues and diverse communities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Background
This first week introduces the notion of public scholarship in relation to the history of the discipline of communication.

March 31: History of the Field
A brief overview of the history of the communication discipline makes clear the relationship between historical events and the development of new theories and programs of research. The discipline has always had a direct connection to public activities and current issues, and it is easier to understand how the field has changed over the years when juxtaposed with the events of the larger world.

Required Readings (read lightly)

Additional Readings
April 2: The Contested Idea of Public Scholarship
This introduction to the concept of public scholarship highlights contemporary debates about the meaning, purpose, and value of “public scholars” or “public intellectuals.” Key questions to consider include: What does it mean to describe someone as a public scholar or intellectual? What is the history of public scholarship, as a vocation? What is the basis for the praise and criticism heaped on public intellectuals?

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 2: Public Scholarship and the American University
This week introduces students to recent writings on public scholarship, engaged scholarship, public intellectuals, and related ideas. The emphasis is on the common themes among these different views of public scholars, as well as the criticisms of these perspectives.

* April 7: The Broader Academic Context
In reading these chapters, consider the evidence, experience, and phenomena Bloom brings to bear upon the arguments raised in his chapter on students and music. To what extent do you find validity in Posner’s criticisms of public intellectuals as they apply to Bloom? How do academics and public intellectuals overlap and differ in their ideas and actions? What should public intellectuals who are academics be doing?

Required Readings
Additional Readings

April 9: The Communication Discipline
What should be the research goals of a communication scholar? This set of readings considers the possibility that the discipline of communication should have research commitments that transcend the particular interests of individual scholars and reach outside of the academy. Is there a cost associated with making such a commitment? Can one carry out reliable and valid research while adhering to a larger agenda?

Required Readings

Week 3: Applied Research and Organizational Consulting
This section examines how scholars play the role of consultant in organizations, as well as the less direct impacts academic research has on the economy. Discussion will focus on the nature of action research, the professional and ethical responsibilities of consultants, and the difficulties of carrying out field experiments and other forms of applied research.

* April 14: Applied Experimentation and Innovation
The term “applied research” is often used derisively. To help establish the legitimacy of applied research, a journal was launched to showcase the best applied studies and explain the rationale behind that approach. The first reading makes a case for applied scholarship, and the second reading provides a more recent illustration. What is the relationship between applied research and theory? What does the researcher gain or lose by extending a research question to an applied setting?

Required Readings

Additional Readings

April 16: The Role of the Consultant
Sometimes communication researchers move even further into the field and begin to play the role of consultant. This can mean setting aside the role of researcher and simply helping an organization achieve its goals, or it can fuse the role of consultant and investigator. What are the advantages of playing the consultant role? Can one balance research with consulting roles, or should they be kept separate?
Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 4: Public Journalism and Media Literacy
This section explores how communication scholarship interacts with media institutions and the public’s relationship to the media. The readings this week emphasize how scholars’ ideas shape and reflect media practices, and how these practices are viewed by other sectors.

* April 21: Public Journalism

The four readings below focus on a somewhat controversial journalism movement that emerged from concerns that the citizens were disengaged from public life. Consider the viability of public journalism from each author’s perspective. How would journalists, elected officials, ‘average’ citizens, and academics react to public journalism?

Required Readings

Additional Readings

April 23: Producing and Consuming Media Content

Communication research often focuses on media effects, but we know that effects are contingent on a number of factors. While much effort is put into producing messages that are hopefully effective, others channel their energy into ensuring that media messages have little, if any, deleterious effects. The two readings for today offer very different perspectives of how media messages are produced and reacted to by the public.
**Required Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**Weeks 5-6: Public Opinion, Policy Expertise, and Government**

The content for this section of the course deals with how scholars, laypersons, and practitioners view public opinion. More importantly, the readings underscore the process by which academic research and “real-life” concerns can influence how we think and measure public opinion (and ultimately, public policy).

* April 28: The Public and Its Opinions

Democratic theory affords public opinion a key role in political decision-making. To what extent can public opinion – as expressed either today or a century ago – accurately reflect citizens’ interests? To what extent would your response to this question depend on whether you were an elected official, a citizen, a journalist, or a public opinion pollster?

**Required Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**April 30: Case Study of Children and Television Violence**

Children’s reactions to frightful media content have generated a considerable amount of academic research, raised concerns among parents, and provided the impetus for years of lobbying and policy-making. In reading both pieces, consider how Cantor adapts her ideas and language to two very different audiences.

**Required Readings**


**May 5: Interacting with the Media and the Public**

Joanne Cantor will join our class today to discuss her experiences communicating research to the media and the larger public through the book, *Mommy, I'm Scared*. The only required reading is an example of a UW graduate student’s efforts to influence public awareness and opinion.
Required Reading

* May 7: Tenuous Connections between Government and the Academy
Academics sometimes attempt to influence public policy or the larger culture through their relationship with government. This can entail seeking government grants, working for public agencies, or simply playing the role of public servant through service at a public university. The readings for this week are wide-ranging, exploring many facets of the academic's relationship with government. What role would you seek to have with the government and its agencies? Do you imagine a different relationship with local or state government, versus the federal government? What are your obligations to the public and the government by virtue of teaching and doing research at a public institution, like the University of Washington?

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 7: Elections and Elected Officials
This section of the course explores the complex relationship between academics and government. Discussion topics will include the role of think tanks, land-grant universities, government granting institutions, and public debates over the role of the humanities and social sciences in public life. An in-depth case study will look at the role of intellectuals in the Clinton administration, as seen through the eyes of Benjamin Barber, one of President Clinton’s many academic advisors.

* May 12: Speaking into the Ear of the President
This week we will vicariously experience the thrill and frustration of being an academic advisor to President Clinton through the reflections of Benjamin Barber. Being asked to advise the President gave Barber the chance to reflect on the power (and powerlessness) of both elected officials and their academic counselors. What would you say to the President of the United States if s/he asked for your counsel? To what extent were Barber’s experiences shaped by the particular situation facing Clinton, or were his experiences probably like those of other academics advising other presidents?

Required Reading

Additional Reading
May 14: Campaigns and Elections
Barber’s journey through the Clinton years continues with more tales of woe.

Required Reading

Additional Reading

Weeks 8-9: Civil Society and Cultural Change
Academia has innumerable connections with local and global organizations outside of government. These nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civic groups, nonprofit foundations, and other entities often collaborate on research projects to better meet their own goals for civic reform and social change. This week reviews a variety of partnerships and focuses on the efforts of Robert Putnam to reassess the vitality of American culture.

* May 19: Working with Civic and Nonprofit Organizations
The two research projects below can be viewed as interventions or social-marketing research aimed at tailoring future interventions. They are instances of applied research, though the emphasis here is not so much on improving organizations as on working with organizations to change the behaviors and attitudes of larger social groups. What are the challenges facing a researcher who undertakes projects such as these? What obligations do scholars have to the people they study and the organizations they work with?

Required Readings


Additional Readings


May 21: The Impact of Robert Putnam’s “Bowling Alone”
This series of writings by Robert Putnam illustrates his effort to communicate the same ideas about the decline of social capital to different audiences. Consider how he changes the tone, style, and content of his writing as he writes for an international audience of government officials and civic reformers (Journal of Democracy), social scientists (PS), and the general public (the book).

Required Readings


Additional Readings


May 26: Memorial Day (No class)

* May 28: Case Study of Gender and Language

This day explores an instance of academia intersecting with the general public through the publication of a “crossover” or “trade” book. The case study is one of Deborah Tannen’s bestsellers on language and gender.


*Note that on April 8, Dr. Cameron is giving a talk on culture/language in Kane Hall at 7pm.

Week 10: Higher Education

This final week looks at the role of the public scholar within the classroom and considers the potential value of service learning. Readings also prompt consideration of the lifestyle and ambitions of a public scholar, taking into account the variety of ideas and approaches discussed throughout the quarter.

* June 2: Drawing Students outside the Classroom

Service learning is a widely popular notion in academia, though it is easier to conceptualize than practice in many instances. Typical links are those forged between the classroom and a nonprofit service provider or those between a research project and a community organization. What are ways you might imagine incorporating service learning into your own teaching? Is there a larger political significance to teaching communication courses? What is the point of teaching communication theories, research methods, and skills?

Required readings


Additional readings


June 4: The Academic Career and Lifestyle of the Public Intellectual

These final readings are reflections on what it means to live out one’s life as a public scholar. What is the life of such a person like? What are the habits, attitudes, and goals of a public intellectual?


The required readings for this course include two books, both available at the University Bookstore (4326 University Way NE; open M-F, 9 am to 9 pm, Sat 9 am to 6 pm, Sun 12-5 pm; 634.3400):


There are also two readings packets (one for Weeks 1-5, the other for Weeks 6-10). These are available at Ram’s Copy Center at 4144 University Way NE (open M-F, 8 am to 11 pm, weekends 10 am to 7 pm; 632.6630).