

Communication Theories and Strategies for Agriculture and Natural Resources

AEC 6540

Summer B 2015 – Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., 306 Rolfs Hall

<https://aec6540.wordpress.com/>

INSTRUCTOR:

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OFFICE HOURS:

Tuesdays/Thursdays, 2 to 3 p.m. (and by appointment)

COURSE GOAL:

Effective communication is at the heart of successful operation in every enterprise in agricultural and natural resources-based industries. Whether communicating interpersonally, inter-organizationally or through the mass media, it is critically important to understand the communication process in order to achieve effective discourse on the major issues facing agricultural and natural resources industries. This course is specifically designed to teach communication theory and concepts and research processes as they apply to important agricultural/natural resources issues. The major objective of the course is to enhance students' ability to think critically and to develop effective strategies and tactics that draw on the theoretical frameworks and methodologies that are most central to the communication process for agricultural communications professionals.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the history and evolution of agricultural communications as a professional discipline;
- Analyze agricultural communication issues within the context of communication theory and research;
- Develop a strategic approach to communication research that is specifically related to agricultural communications media, audiences and organizational systems.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Perloff, Richard M. (2014). *The Dynamics of Persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century* (fifth edition). New York, New York: Routledge.

ASSIGNMENTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Theoretical Application Blog Posts (5)

You will be responsible for writing weekly blog posts wherein you apply a communication theory to an issue in agricultural or natural resources. We will compile these in a class blog to serve as a resource for future students and communication professionals. You will also be responsible for commenting on other students' blog posts.

Participation

Article Discussion: Each student is required to lead one class discussion on a given research articles (I will let you know which article or chapter). Most articles will encompass original research applying the week's relevant theories. The student should begin with a ten-minute discussion of the substantive arguments and methods of the articles, not merely summarizing, but providing an over view of the method and explaining/critiquing how the author used evidence to support his/her arguments. Each discussion led will be graded on the following criteria:

- correct identification of concepts and statement of research question

- description of theoretical framework and method
- interpretation of results
- detailed critique of the study with specific emphasis on application and extension of theory
- discussion of study implications for agricultural communications professionals

In-Class Contribution: As the course is a seminar, class participation is essential –and a substantial part of student grades. In addition to the assignment to lead discussion, weekly participation will be evaluated with a plus, check, or minus, indicating either an outstanding (A=98); satisfactory (B=88), or unsatisfactory (C=78) level of engagement.

Research Paper Project

Your main assignment for this course will be an original research paper of twenty to twenty-five pages (double-spaced and not including citations and appendices). It will take the place of a final exam. The research paper grade will consist of three parts. The first is a four-page prospectus identifying your research topic, your theoretical framework, the method you will use to investigate that topic, and a description of how you plan to carry out this pilot study. The second part is the final paper itself.

The paper should

- (1) discuss the research problem;
- (2) review the literature to provide a rationale for and pose specific research questions;
- (3) describe the design for the study to answer those questions and a rationale for that design (i.e., method chosen, sampling approach, data analysis strategies);
- (4) report and discuss the findings.

This is a theory class. As such, in evaluating your final paper, I will be particularly concerned with how well you explain your theoretical framework and how well that framework guides your research questions and/or hypotheses. You are encouraged to choose a topic that fits with your research interests. These papers should be prepared as if you were submitting to a conference or, with some more work, a journal. At our last meeting, you will present your research to the class. The presentation should be a short (less than ten minute) overview of your topic, methodology, and main findings. Following the presentations, we will have a question and answer session. On that day, you will also receive two peer reviewers’ comments on your paper. The third part of your research paper grade is a written response to the peer comments you received, as if you were preparing a revision of the paper to re-submit to a journal. (The quality of the comments that *you* offer to your classmates will also be evaluated.)

EVALUATION OF GRADES

| Assignment | Percent of Grade |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Theoretical Application Blog Posts | 30% |
| Participation | 25% |
| Research Paper Project | 45% |

Unless otherwise noted, every component will be evaluated on 100 points. Your final grade for the course will be calculated on the previous percentages, which will then lead to your final letter grade as based on the following scale:

Grading Scale

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| A = 93-100% | B- = 80-82% | D+ = 66-69% |
| A- = 90-92% | C+ = 76-79% | D = 63-65% |
| B+ = 86-89% | C = 73-75% | D- = 60-62% |
| B = 83-85% | C- = 70-72% | E = below 60% |

Note: For information on current UF policies for assigning grade points, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Please note: Under no circumstances will final grades be rounded. Please do not come to me at the end of the semester to negotiate your grade. If you want an A in this course, begin working toward that today.

Grade Discrepancies

If you have a question about a grade you receive on any of the course components, you must discuss the grade with me within one week of getting the assignment back. After that, grades will not be discussed or modified. This discussion must occur in person. I do not discuss grades via email.

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

Class Expectations: Come to each class having read and studied the assigned readings for that week so that you can contribute to our class discussions. You should be able to provide an overview of each reading and explain how the readings relate to one another as a whole. High-quality participation means that you offer a number of informed comments and questions for each class period.

On the whole, student participation will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Meeting deadlines and expectations articulated by the instructor.
- Consistent participation and engagement with the class community.
- Listening and responding fairly to ideas and questions posed by others.
- Reflective and intellectual consideration of how the methods of the course affect their own research interests and fields of study.

Attendance, Make-Up Exams and Assignments

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course is consistent with university policies that can be found at:

Graduate link:

<http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=907#attendance>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center - www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/. The DRC will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodations. Students should contact the DRC and complete this process as early as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

UF Student Honor Code

UF students are bound by the Honor Pledge which states,

“We, the members of the UF community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at UF, the following pledge is either required or implied, “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obliged to report any

condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

Online Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.

Student Assistance and Emergencies

University support services are available to students who are experiencing significant distress and/or personal emergencies. As appropriate please contact:

UF Counseling & Wellness Center: www.counseling.ufl.edu or 352-392-1575

University Police Department: 352-392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:
See Canvas or course website for links to readings

June 30

- Course overview and introductions.
- Discuss agricultural communications as a profession and discipline.
- The nature and value of theory.
- The development and application of theories of communication to agricultural communications.
- Major communication models.

July 2 – Information Processing (how audiences process information)

- Introduction to Persuasion (*read Perloff, Chapters 1-2*)
- Social Cognition
- Elaboration Likelihood Model (*read Perloff, Chapter 7*)
- Credibility and Trust

July 7/9 – Attitudes and Persuasion Theories

- The Nature of Attitudes (*Perloff, Chs. 3-6*)
- Changing Attitudes and Behavior
- Source and Message Factors (*Perloff, Chs. 8-9*)
- Emotional Appeals (*Perloff, Ch. 10*)
- Cognitive Dissonance Theory (*Perloff, Ch. 11*)

July 14/16 – Public Relations Theories

- ROPES Process Model
- Relationship Theory
- Excellence Theory
- Contingency Theory of Accommodation
- Situational Theory of Publics

July 21/23 – News Media Theories

- Agenda Setting
- Issue-Attention Cycle
- Framing
- Gatekeeping
- Spiral of Silence

July 28/30 – Media Use Theories and Risk and Crisis Communication Theories

- Uses and Gratifications
- Knowledge Gap
- Digital Divide
- Prospect Theory

- Image Repair Discourse
- Situational Crisis Communication Theory
- Issues Management and Crisis Management
- Media Framing of Crisis
- The Role of Apology
- Cultural Issues in Crisis and Risk
- Corporate Social Responsibility

August 4 – Getting Agricultural Communication Research Published & Begin Presentations

- Examination of conferences and journals and discussion of recent research in each.
- Understanding and participating in the peer review process

August 6 – Presentations

All students will give a conference-style presentation of their research project.