

# AEC 6540 - SPRING 2018

## Communication Theories and Strategies for Agriculture and Natural Resources

### **INSTRUCTOR:**

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### **COURSE MEETING TIME:**

Spring 2018  
Fridays  
8:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
306 Rolfs Hall

### **OFFICE HOURS:**

I am happy to meet with you so please reach out and schedule an appointment when you'd like to meet.

### **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 TEXT:**

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

## ASSIGNMENTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

### Theory Matrix

You will create a matrix in a format of your choosing that includes the following components: (a) theory, (b) key players, (c) fundamental elements, (d) research application, and (e) professional application. You will need to add to this matrix each week as we explore new theories. Some weeks you will add to a previous week's entry. You will submit your theory matrix twice: **March 2 and April 13**

### Theoretical Application Discussion Boards

You will be responsible for writing weekly discussion posts wherein you apply a communication theory to an issue in agricultural or natural resources. You will also be responsible for commenting on other students' discussion posts.

### Participation

**Article Presentation and Discussion:** Each student is required to lead one class presentation and discussion on assigned readings (I will let you know which articles or chapters). Most articles will encompass original research applying the week's relevant theories. The student should begin with a 20-minute presentation of the substantive arguments and methods of the articles, not merely summarizing, but providing an overview of the method and explaining/critiquing how the author used evidence to support his/her arguments. Each participation will be graded on the following criteria:

- correct identification of concepts and/or 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
- lead class discussion of study implications for agricultural communications professionals
- lead class discussion of future relevant research

**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 as either an outstanding (A=100); satisfactory (B=90), or unsatisfactory (C=80) level of engagement.

### Research Paper OR Final Examination

You have two options for your final and major assessment in this course. I encourage you to visit with your faculty advisor regarding this decision. Choose the best fit for your program and your educational goals. **You must let me know which of these options you will pursue by Friday, February 2.**

**Option 1:** An original research paper of twenty to twenty-five pages (double-spaced and not including citations and appendices). The research paper grade will consist of two 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 study. You will turn this in on **Friday, February 2** if you choose this option. The second part is the final paper itself. If you plan to collect original, primary research for this paper, you should get started on this as soon as possible to allow time for IRB approval, data collection and analysis. You can also write a paper for data already collected. Please visit with me about this if you're interested. I can help you discern if the data available is appropriate for the topic and parameters of this project.

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.

**Option 2:** A comprehensive final examination. This final examination will be given on Friday, April 20. No notes will be allowed. There will be a combination of short-answer and essay questions (formatted in a similar manner to qualifying examination questions).

### EVALUATION OF GRADES

Assignment	Percent of Grade
Theory Matrix	20%
Theoretical Application Discussion Board Posts	20%
Article Presentation/Discussion Leader	20%
In-Class Contribution	10%
Research Paper OR Final Examination	30%

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>

#### 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/](http://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](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu) or 352-392-1575

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

## Course Schedule

*See Canvas or course website for links to readings*

January 12	Course Overview and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss agricultural communications as a profession and discipline.</li><li>• The nature and value of theory.</li><li>• The development and application of theories of communication to agricultural communications.</li><li>• Major communication models.</li></ul>
January 19	No in-person class this week – materials online to work through Attitudes and Persuasion Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to Persuasion (<i>read Perloff, Chapters 1-2</i>)</li><li>• The Nature of Attitudes (<i>Perloff, Chs. 3-6</i>)</li><li>• Cognitive Dissonance Theory (<i>Perloff, Ch. 11</i>)</li><li>• Elaboration Likelihood Model</li></ul>
January 26	Attitudes and Persuasion Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Cognition</li><li>• Theory of Planned Behavior</li><li>• Social Judgment Theory</li></ul>
February 2	Attitudes and Persuasion Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Credibility and Trust</li><li>• Changing Attitudes and Behavior</li><li>• Source and Message Factors (<i>Perloff, Chs. 8-9</i>)</li><li>• Emotional Appeals (<i>Perloff, Ch. 10</i>)</li></ul>
February 9	Interpersonal communication theories and small group communication
February 16	Diffusion of Innovations
February 23	Media Effects and the News <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two-step flow</li><li>• Opinion Leadership</li><li>• Digital Divide</li><li>• Knowledge Gap</li></ul>
March 2	Media Effects and the News <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spiral of Silence</li><li>• Gatekeeping</li><li>• Public Opinion and Third Person Effect</li></ul> <p><b><i>First submission of Theory Matrix due</i></b></p>
March 9	<i>No Class – Spring Break</i>
March 16	Media Effects and the News <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agenda Setting</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing</li> <li>• Priming</li> </ul>
March 23	<p>Audience Selection and Use of Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses and Gratifications</li> <li>• Prospect Theory</li> <li>• Echo Chambers</li> </ul>
March 30	<p>Public Relations Theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ROPES Process Model</li> <li>• Relationship Theory</li> <li>• Excellence Theory</li> <li>• Contingency Theory of Accommodation</li> <li>• Situational Theory of Publics</li> <li>• Social Capital Theory</li> </ul>
April 6	<p>Risk and Crisis Communication Theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Image Repair Discourse</li> <li>• Situational Crisis Communication Theory</li> <li>• Issues Management and Crisis Management</li> <li>• Media Framing of Crisis</li> <li>• The Role of Apology</li> <li>• Cultural Issues in Crisis and Risk</li> <li>• Corporate Social Responsibility</li> </ul>
April 13	<p>Digital Media Theory</p> <p><b><i>Second submission of Theory Matrix due</i></b></p>
April 20	<p><i>Final Examination</i></p>