

SOCIOLOGY 156 – Sociology of Communication Spring 2016

Instructor: Ian Sheinheit

Lecture: Tuesday and Thursday 12:45-2:10 – (Brower 101)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of sociological research on communication. In this course we will assess a variety of topics and theoretical orientations that examine the social processes of communication. First, we will map out some of the most important theoretical orientations in the study of communication. Second, we will turn our analytical gaze toward civil society, its public sphere and the institution, which helps maintain and establish it: the media. This institution often provides the frameworks, narratives and spaces for our public sphere communication. Next we will begin to think through applying these theoretical lenses to study and research a phenomenon of our own interest. The back end of this course is concerned with specific issues related to the contemporary field of communication. It is here that we will access and discuss: discourses and representations of race and gender, celebrity and authenticity, political communication and the future of the media system. The inextricable link between communication and power is the common thread throughout this course with which we need to continuously engage.

OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:30, Davison 202M. If you should need to make an appointment to see me at another time, you may do so after class. You can also reach me via email (the best way to contact me) at: ian.j.sheinheit@hofstra.edu.

TEXTS

There is no textbook for this course. In an effort to get you to think more critically (and save you money), we will be reading original journal articles and a number of chapters from books. All journal articles and book chapters will be made available electronically via Blackboard.

COURSE GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS

10%	In-Class Assignments and Participation
10%	Critical Reading Response
20%	Take-Home Assignments (four)
20%	Midterm Exam (In-Class)
20%	Final Exam (Take-Home)
20%	Research Paper

- **In-Class Assignments and Participation (10%):** The content of this class will require each student to be actively engaged in the material and be ready to discuss the class topics and relate them to each week's readings. Each class session will induce classroom engagement in different ways. Sometimes you will be broken up into small groups, other times we will discuss as a class, and other times you will be asked to write up questions or answer

questions about that session's readings and material. These assignments may just get a ✓ for completion. Or they may be graded with one, two, or three ✓s (for OK, very good, and outstanding). **You can drop one in-class assignment without penalty.**

- **Critical Reading Response (10%):** Students will be required to write a **reading response** worth 10 points towards your final grade. By the end of the first week you will choose the readings to which you would like to respond (all of which are from the second half of the course). This response offers you the opportunity to express an understanding of the reading and to draw comparisons between readings and class discussion. Further it allows you to ask pertinent questions about the material. Students should closely read the required reading for the week and in two to three pages (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, one-inch margins) write an assessment that discusses the following:
 - Explain the main idea or concept offered in all of the readings for the week.
 - Critically assess the readings under examination. That is, what did you learn? What surprised you about the reading?
 - What are the arguments proffered by the authors? What is convincing about the arguments presented? What is not as convincing?
 - Synthesize, connect and compare all the readings assigned. Do they proffer similar or dissimilar arguments?
 - Think of a current event and find a corresponding outside article and connect it to the main concepts from the readings.
 - Lastly, ask at least four pertinent questions about the readings. For your questions you should:
 - Ask for further clarity in reference to the main concepts.
 - Think about potential flaws or inadequacies of the author's ideas.
 - Ask whether the author's ideas might be used in explaining a different and/or original example.
 - Investigate the logic of the author's thinking and attempt to follow it to its logical conclusion.
- **Take-Home Written Assignments (20%):** Students will be required to complete four **assignments** each worth five points. To receive full credit you will need to do the following:
 - Complete the assignment fully.
 - Perform all tasks accurately and answer all questions asked on the assignment.
 - Demonstrate to me that you have done the readings and understand the related content.
 - You should be able to establish that you understand how the assignment is asking you to apply the concepts we are learning in this course.
- **Research Paper (20%):** **Students will be required to write a five to seven page** (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, one-inch margins) **paper on the sociology of communication topic of your choosing.** Students must submit a one to two paragraph paper proposal to me in class by 4/5. We will spend the class sessions titled "Research, Methodology and the Sociological Analysis of Communication (3/22, 3/24)" going over this assignment in detail. During these class sessions you will think through a research topic and

question with which to focus your paper (note: you can use a topic discussed in this class but only one source). Then you will write up a one to two paragraph proposal. Once this proposal is accepted you will begin the process of your literature review. This research paper will require you to do a literature review by collecting and analyzing at least four academic sources. You will need to assess, analyze and synthesize these academic articles. Further, you will come up with a research plan. For a number of reasons, the methodology this course will be utilizing is media content analysis (note: this might impact your research topic/question). You will then collect a small sample of data and begin your initial analysis. In the end, you will have a cohesive research paper that discusses: the way in which a particular communicative phenomenon was studied (your four sources), how you would study said phenomenon, how you conducted your preliminary study and what were your tentative results. The overarching goals of this assignment are as follows:

- Become more knowledgeable about finding and using **varied research sources**.
 - Further develop your **critical thinking skills** and **support your arguments with evidence**.
 - Become more adept at **synthesizing information** and **developing informed views**.
 - Discipline yourself to **follow a scholarly research format, documenting in-text sources** and creating a **reference page (bibliography)**.
 - Compose a **well-organized, clear, concise research paper** to expand your knowledge on a subject related to the sociology of communication.
- **Midterm Exam (20%)**: This exam will consist of multiple choice and short essay sections that will cover all of the material covered in the first half of the class.
 - **Final exam (20%)**: This exam will consist of an essay portion that will cover material from the entirety of the class. This exam will be take-home and you will have ten days to complete it.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attendance and Assignments: There is a strong correlation between performance (i.e. grades) and both attendance and participation. Thus, it is crucial for you to complete your assignments and attend class.

Attendance and Leaving Early: Class sessions last one hour and twenty-five minutes. We all have this information before the semester begins. As stated above, attendance and participation is strongly correlated with performance. This means you are expected to attend every lecture. If you are going to miss a class it is your responsibility to obtain the class notes from a classmate and to come to speak with me to find out what you have missed. Further, getting up and leaving early is a major distraction for me and our classmates. That being said, I understand that people will have to leave early on occasion. In these circumstances speak to me at the beginning of the class to let me know that you will be leaving early. An imperative prerequisite for this class is that students attend, listen and take notes for the full time period of the class.

Emails: Face to face social interaction, for the most part, is preferred to contact through email. If you need to contact me for any important reason, please try to come to office hours or see me

before or after class (if necessary we can set up a Skype meeting as well). If you do email me, I will do my best to respond in a timely manner. Further, please use full sentences and appropriate grammar and spelling in your e-mails. That is, proofread them before sending. **Also, be sure to put 'Soc 156' in the subject line of your message to ensure that I will respond.**

Papers, Reading Responses, Assignments, and Exams: You will be expected to write clearly, concisely, and in your own words, as though you were writing to an intelligent person without a background in sociology. Use examples and direct quotations strategically, and explain or paraphrase them where necessary to make your purpose clear. Cite your sources. I am less concerned with a bibliography than I am with citing sources directly in the text. That is, if a website link is available, link to it; if you are citing one of the course readings, or another academic paper, provide the author and year at the end of the sentence (e.g. Luker 2008). If you are paraphrasing from the PowerPoint slides you need to cite those as well (for example, Notes 4/21). Editing is very important here, both in terms of grammar and content. You cannot demonstrate to me that you understand the course material if I cannot understand your writing.

Late Assignments: All assignments must be turned in on time and in the manner specified by the instructions. Late assignments will only be accepted for full credit if the student has a legitimate reason for not being able to turn the assignment in on time, such as an illness or family emergency, and the student notifies and receives permission from the instructor before the assignment is due. Absence is not a legitimate excuse for late work. Assignments turned in late without the instructors' permission will be marked down accordingly.

Cell phones and Texting: The use of cell phones and other media devices are not permitted during class for any reason, and should be turned OFF at the beginning of class. Students using laptops during class are expected to be taking notes, NOT surfing the web, chatting online with friends or working on assignments. The use of all media devices during tests is forbidden, and may lead to disciplinary action if cheating or other misuse is suspected.

Note Taking: Students are expected to take notes actively during class. Not all concepts covered in class will appear in your assigned readings or PowerPoint presentations. Any and all topics covered in class may appear on exams. If you are unsure how to take effective notes, ask me for additional help.

Tough Semester: If you are struggling for personal or academic reasons, please talk to me sooner rather than later! While everyone has to complete the work to pass the class, I am not totally inflexible with students who are communicating with me and making a serious effort. But I can't do much if you come to talk to me during finals week about the reason you missed half the assignments.

Disagreeing with Course Concepts: Students are required to learn and discuss sociological concepts and theories, but not to agree with them. You may encounter ideas in this course that strongly conflict with your personal beliefs. This is fine, and will never be held against you. All that is required for this class is that you understand the concepts well enough to be able to say or write something like this: "I have my own ideas about the topic, but sociologist 'X' argues 'Y.'"

Extra Credit: There will be **no** extra credit possibilities for this course. The tasks of this course are described in this syllabus. Do well on these tasks and you will earn a ‘good’ grade for this course. Alternatively, if you do not do these tasks or do them poorly you will earn a ‘poor’ grade for this course. That is it. Do **not** email me at the end of the semester pleading for extra credit. As is stated here, there will be **no** such option.

Students with Disabilities: If you qualify for extra accommodations because of a diagnosed disability submit a letter to the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) by the end of the first week of class so that arrangements can be made as needed. Services for Students with Disabilities is located in Memorial Hall 040 (516-463-7075):
<http://www.hofstra.edu/studentaffairs/stddis/>.

GRADING POLICY

The courses utilizes the standard A – F grading scale

A = 100-94	B = 86-83	C = 76-73	D = 66-63
A- = 93-90	B- = 82-80	C- = 72-70	D- = 62-60
B+ = 89-87	C+ = 79-77	D+ = 69-67	F = <59

Grading Rubric

Plus (+) and minus (-) grades indicate student’s standing within the aforementioned grades.

A= Excellent

Work is comprehensive, detailed, and successfully integrates themes and concepts from course material. Arguments and summaries are well organized, clearly explained, include rich examples, and provide a sophisticated level of analysis. Student is clearly prepared for class, regularly participates, and helps the class explore course material at a deeper level and in a more insightful manner.

B=Good

Work is complete and demonstrates a reasonable level of understanding. Arguments and summaries are clearly expressed and include appropriate examples, but tend toward a broad or general level of analysis. Student regularly participates in class activities in a thoughtful manner.

C=Average

Work demonstrates an adequate understanding of course material, but remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Course material and other sources may be used inadequately or inappropriately. Arguments lack detail or specific examples and illustrations. Classroom participation is inconsistent and often shallow.

D= Unsatisfactory

Work is incomplete and demonstrates an extremely weak understanding of course material. The work lacks attention to detail, misunderstands course material, and overlooks significant aspects or themes. Classroom participation is rare and superficial.

F=Failed

Work did not satisfy any of the assigned parameters or completely failed to express the most basic aspects of the course. Student did not even attempt to participate in any classroom activities in a meaningful way.

Academic Misconduct: This course follows the academic policies established by the University. As defined by the University, academic misconduct includes but is not limited to such behaviors as plagiarism, cheating, forgery, sabotage, unauthorized fabrication, falsification and bribery. Attempts to commit such acts fall under the term academic dishonesty and are subject to penalty. It is every student's responsibility to become familiar with the standards of academic integrity at the University. Claims of ignorance, of unintentional error or of academic or personal pressures are not sufficient reasons for violations of academic integrity. It is highly recommended that each student familiarize themselves with the University's Standards of Academic Integrity, which can be found here <http://bulletin.hofstra.edu/content.php?catoid=65&navoid=4910>. Any student who engages in academic misconduct will receive a failing grade on the exam or assignment for the first offense. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty a second time will receive a failure for this course and be referred to the University Judicial System.

The instructor reserves the right to alter this syllabus with sufficient notice to students.

Course Schedule

Week 1 Course Overview and Introductions (1/26)

No required readings.

Week 1 Taking Communication Seriously (1/28)

Williams – (1976) “Communication, Media and Mediation” in *Keywords*

Thompson – (1995) “Communication and Social Context” pp. 10-37

Geertz – (1973) “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” pp. 1-22

Week 2 Ideology, Text and Communicative Power (2/2, 2/4)

Barthes – (1972) “The World of Wrestling” pp. 15-25

Storey – (2009) “Roland Barthes: Mythologies” pp. 118-125

Hall – (1980) “Encoding/Decoding” pp. 63-74

Week 3 Communicating Boundaries (2/9, 2/11)

Bourdieu (1984) “The Aesthetic Sense” pp. 205-210

Watching the movie *Banksy Does New York*

Assignment #1 Due 2/11

Week 4 *Class Canceled (2/16, 2/18)*

Week 5 **Communicative Institutions: The Culture Industries (2/23, 2/25)**

Adorno and Horkheimer – (1969) “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” pp. 94-136

Adorno – (1991) “Culture Industry Reconsidered” pp. 12-19

Benjamin – “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” pp. 217-251

Ross - (2014) – “[The Naysayers](#)”

Week 6 **Communicative Institutions: The Public Sphere (3/1, 3/3)**

Habermas – (1989) “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article” pp. 73-78 and (1994) “Civil Society and The Political Public Sphere” in *Between Facts and Norms* pp. 358-376

Senft – (2013) “[Hating Habermas](#)”

Davenport – (2002) “Anonymity on the Internet: Why the Price may be Too High” pp. 33-35

Assignment #2 Due 3/3

Week 7 **Beyond Rational Critical Discourse (3/8, 3/10)**

Alexander and Smith – (2003) “The Discourse of American Civil Society” pp. 121-154

Jacobs and Townsley – (2011) “Media and Opinion Formation: Toward a New Theory of Deliberative Politics” pp. 54-75

Beck - (2015) “[Life’s Stories](#)”

Assignment #3 Due 3/10

Week 8 **Review and Midterm Exam (3/15, 3/17)**

- Week 9 **Research, Methodology and the Sociological Analysis of Communication**
(3/22, 3/24)
- Luker - (2008) *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences* excerpts pp. 1-21,
76-113, and 187-189
- Assignment #4 Due 3/24**
- Week 10 *Class Canceled – Spring Break (3/29, 3/31)*
- Week 11 **Representations of Race and Gender (4/5, 4/7)**
- Doane - (2006) “What is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics”
pp. 255-274 in *Critical Sociology*
- Parisi (1998) “The New York Times looks at one block in Harlem:
Narratives of race in journalism” pp. 236-254
- Sonnnett et al. (2015) “Priming Implicit Racism in Television News: Visual
and Verbal Limitations on Diversity” pp. 328-347
- Lorie (2011) “Forbidden Fruit or Conventional Apple Pie” pp. 35-51
- Mears (2010) “Size zero high-end ethnic: Cultural production and the
reproduction of culture in fashion modeling” pp. 21-46
- Paper Proposal Due 4/5***
- Week 12 **Performing Authenticity and Celebrity (4/12, 4/14)**
- Goffman – (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* “Conclusion”
pp. 1-10, (1956) and “Embarrassment and Social Organization” pp. 1-9
- Grindstaff and Murray – (2015) “Reality Celebrity: Branded Affect and
the Emotion Economy” pp. 109-135
- Marwick – (2015) “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy”
pp. 137-160
- Davis – (2015) “[The Hyperauthenticity of Political Campaigns](#)”
- Lena – (2012) “[Why Hipsters Hate on Lana Del Rey](#)”
- Week 13 **Political Communication I: The March to the War in Iraq (4/19, 4/21)**

Bennett et al. "The Case of the Iraq War" in *When the Press Fails* pp. pp. 1-9, 13-45

Hayes and Guardino (2010) "Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq" pp. 59-87

Baum and Groeling (2010) "Tidings of Battle: Polarizing Media and Public Support for the Iraq War" pp. 149-183

Cole (2005) "The Political Rhetoric of Sacrifice and Heroism and U.S. Military Intervention" pp.139-154

Week 14 **Political Communication II: Polarization, Outrage, and Satire (4/26, 4/28)**

Baum and Groeling (2008) "New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse." Pp. 345-365

Sobieraj and Berry (2011) "From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News" pp. 19-41

Jacobs (2011) "Entertainment Media and The Aesthetic Public Sphere" pp. 318-340

Week 15 **The Future of Media: Hope or Despair? (5/3)**

Pickard – (2014) "Withering Journalism" pp. 1-7 and (2015) "Conclusion: Confronting Market Failure" in *America's Battle for Media Democracy* pp. 212-231

Week 16 **Take Home Final Exam and Final Papers Due on Blackboard by 5/13**