

**Department of Communication and Culture**  
**Communications Studies (COMS) 717.95**  
**Communication and Health: Troubling Promotion**  
**Fall 2012**  
**W 17:00 - 19:50 SS202**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Communication and Health examines the concept of health as a socio-cultural phenomena, and interrogates 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.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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 and 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 (what does it mean to be a communications scholar studying issues of health?)

### **INTERNET AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICE INFORMATION**

Cell phones must be turned off during the course. Laptops are permitted for note taking only.

### **READINGS**

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

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION**

This course has four evaluative components: (1) a five minute review (5%); (2) participation and KPKQ assignment (25%); (3) critical analysis/presentation of a Communication and Health media issue (media framing analysis) (40%); (4) a take home exam (30%).

#### **1. Five-Minute Review (5%)**

Each class will begin with a five-minute review. These are fun, oral, ‘think’ pieces designed to warm us up, to get us thinking and talking, and to bring current issues pertaining to communication and health into the seminar room. Students will sign up for a date in the first week of class. Presentations should be a maximum of five minutes, examine a current issue related to communication and health and should not involve any other *academic* research. Examine the issue, probe its implications, go on a rant – any approach is acceptable as long as it draws out a current issue relevant to the course and shows us you’re thinking about it in a rigorous way. Your

selected issue does not have to be connected to the material to be covered in that particular class (although it might). Have some fun with these – expose us to some interesting events and issues, and invite us to think and discuss.

## **2. Participation and Key Points, Key Queries (KPKQ) (25%)**

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 signing up for one *Key Points, Key Queries*. KPKQ is an assessment of one of the assigned readings— 20 minutes in length—will be presented to the class.

For the assigned reading in question, 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 assessment will cover the points above (i.e., what is working, what is missing, etc.). But consider the following:

1. The author's theoretical position. (This normally involves looking also at other things the author has written. For example, what do they privilege as their ‘site’ of analysis (e.g. social relations, content, structure, etc.)?)
2. What are the questions the author is asking, either directly or indirectly? (This will likely be covered by the Key Points you identify – although you might want to consider the difference between theoretical and empirical questions).
3. What steps (i.e. methodology) are they taking to answer those questions? Do you think they are sufficient? How might these questions be approached differently? What might the implications be of pursuing these questions from a different methodological perspective?
4. How persuasive is the author's argument and conclusion(s)? If lacking in persuasion, why has the author not convinced you of their case?

## **3. Critical analysis of a ‘Communication and Health’ issue (media framing analysis) (40%)**

### **Oct 31 (presentation). Final paper due Dec 5**

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 the 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 present their "issue" to the class on October 31. This presentation is expected to be polished, but you will not be graded on it. It is the opportunity to get valuable feedback from the class (regarding oversights, implications, theoretical aspects you might consider, etc) that you can take into consideration for the full paper. The full paper will be 15 pages, and submitted the last day of classes.

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.

#### **4. Take home exam**

**Distributed December 5 (30%)**

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. The exam will be distributed on December 5; it will be due in **by no later than noon (12:00)**, Friday, December 14. 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.

**Registrar's- scheduled exam** No

#### **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.

#### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. You will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up any assignments or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.

#### **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ualgary.ca/needtoknow>. 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.ualgary.ca](http://www.efwr.ualgary.ca)

## Grading System - The following grading system is used in the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

| 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 (MacEwan Student Centre 4th floor, [efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://efwr.ucalgary.ca)) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

### Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Graduate Calendar at the following link: <http://grad.ucalgary.ca/files/grad/UC%20Graduate%20Calendar%202010-2011%20July%206-10.pdf>

### 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](http://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 (i.e., 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 Lectures

**September 12: Introduction**

**September 19: Theorizing health: The body and (social/moral) regulation**

**September 26: Law, advocacy and health**

**October 3: Media, advocacy and health**

**October 10: Marketing and representing health: The “failed” body project**

**October 17: Marketing and representing health II: The case of children**

**October 24: Framing public health and managing risk**

**October 31: Media analysis (class presentation)**

**November 7: Mental Health: Methodology, Equity, Advocacy**

**November 14: Representations of health and illness: Corporate philanthropy and breast cancer**

**November 21: Framing public health and managing risk II**

**November 28: PR, “news” and health**

**December 5: Wrap up: Theorizing Communication and Health**