

JOUR 4501
Communication, Public Opinion, and Social Media
(3 credits)

HUBBARD
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
& MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Course Description

Sharpen your understanding of public opinion and its role in political and civic life: What does it mean? Where does it come from? How is it measured? What impact does it have? How are the public's preferences shaped by the larger communications environment and the strategic messages of politicians, interest groups, and other actors in society? What are polls really measuring, and why do they seem so unreliable sometimes? How are social media technologies giving voice to new segments and dimensions of public opinion? But how are they vulnerable to manipulation from bots and other efforts designed to alter perceptions of collective opinions? Examine the theories of communication, psychology, political science, and sociology that underlie these dynamic questions. We'll consider cutting edge approaches used by market researchers, political analysts, and data scientists to harness new forms of data about what the public thinks. We investigate theories that explain how people form their opinions, deliberate with others, change their minds, and reveal their preferences, and we apply these frameworks to understand contemporary public opinion issues and campaigns.

Course Learning Objectives

Course learning objectives define the specific competencies students should acquire from the course through the cumulative assignments, discussions, lectures and other activities of the course. All Course Learning Objectives are tied to the application of one or more overall Program Learning Outcomes described below this list. Here are the learning objectives for this course:

1. Identify and describe different psychological, sociological, media, and interpersonal communication theories that underlie the public opinion process as well as understand and reflect on meanings of the terms "public" and "opinion" and varying contexts in which these different meanings apply
2. Develop a deeper understanding of how the affordances of differing social media platforms shape perceptions around public opinion
3. Develop an awareness around the methods used in different approaches to public opinion and social media research and be able to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses
4. Apply this understanding to be able to analyze public opinion around a specific issue and describe the ways in which public opinion may or may not be influenced by communication processes

Core values and competencies taught in this course

The Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication adopts the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications' Core Values and Competencies as its 10 Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for all students. These PLOs govern student learning throughout the curriculum and are applied through all course learning outcomes (see above). This course teaches the following PLOs and the following levels:

ACEJMC Values and Competencies	Awareness	Understanding	Application
Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located	X		
Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications		X	
Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts		X	
Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies			X
Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve			X
Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity		X	
Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work			X

Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts			X
Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness			X
Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work			X

Typical Assignments and Activities

- Weekly reflection or application exercises
- Short papers
- Exams

Writing Expectations

Writing is an essential skill in the fields of journalism, public relations, and strategic communication. The ability to tell stories effectively for the audience and channel is a central tenet in HSJMC. The school's commitment to student writing is reflected in its participation in the University's "Writing-enriched Curriculum" program.

Through discussion boards, academic papers, and skills assignments, you will consistently improve your writing as you progress through the curriculum. Writing should be clear and concise, using active voice. Papers should be well organized, with an effective introduction, valid arguments supported by evidence, clear analysis and an effective conclusion. You should display the ability to integrate information from trustworthy sources into assignments. Writing in the discipline calls for sensitivity to channel and to audience, reflecting energy, engagement, and creativity. Proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, style and construction are among the most basic expected competencies.

Writing assignments are used to teach and evaluate students' ability to conduct research and demonstrate understanding of various concepts, principles, and information related to the course material. Writing outcomes for HSJMC courses include:

1. Write concisely and clearly, using precise language.
2. Emphasize active construction.
3. Organize writing effectively (introduction, evidence, analysis, conclusion.)
4. Write with the expected elements, language and tone for a particular assignment (ie: an explanatory paper, an analysis, a review, etc.)
5. Articulate valid arguments based on evidence or express an informed opinion leading to a clear point or conclusion.
6. Find, evaluate and properly attribute appropriate and credible sources of information to use in the assignment.

7. Demonstrate an understanding that the writing process involves ongoing editing and revision.

In context courses, writing assignments are used to teach and evaluate students' ability to conduct research and demonstrate understanding of various concepts, principles, and information related to the course material.