

COMM 502: Theoretical Approaches to Multidisciplinary Design Projects

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Office: ASC 321-J

Time: Thursday, 3:30 – 6:20pm

Location: ASC 328

I. Course description

The purpose of this course is to examine and apply theories and present research in Communication and the Social Sciences to individuals interested in bridging disciplines in order to produce a proposal, business plan, publication, or a research project. Particular emphasis is placed on applying theory to understand human communication and behavior, both in face-to-face and digital contexts. Students are introduced to individual, group, and network level theoretical frameworks. See the Daily Schedule below for more specific details.

II. Learning Objectives

Expected learning outcomes for students are listed below.

- *Knowledge and Application of Theory*
 - Accurately explain theories of communication and how these theories impact communication outcomes.
 - Use communication theory to analyze case studies for a new perspective on problem solving.
- *Analytical Thinking:*
 - Develop theoretically-grounded improvements to existing communication processes, products, platforms or campaigns.
 - Conduct a literature review that synthesizes research from a variety of sources.
 - Apply communication theories to design a feasible and executable cross-disciplinary research project or business proposal of the student's choosing
- *Information Literacy:*
 - Conduct academic research using a variety of library resources.
 - Develop the ability to communicate effectively across disciplines in order to achieve team goals and deadlines.

III. Assignments & Assessment

Application Assignments (15%)

Throughout the semester you will complete a total of two application assignments. For these assignments you must pick an example from the popular press that pertains to the readings and topics for the current week. This assignment is about **application**, and it is not a summary. At most, you should spend a paragraph to summarizing ideas. The bulk of your assignment should be devoted to analysis of the example and application of course concepts. Your assignment should demonstrate that you are critically engaging with the material and providing your own take on it. Length should not exceed 500 words. You must also include two discussion questions for the class. References and discussion questions are not included in the word count.

A limited number of people can select each week. You can sign up here: [LINK TO GOOGLE DOC](#)

You will post your assignment to the course blog. Keep in mind that while this is a “blog post”, it is not a rambling personal reflection. You should still have a logical structure to your post. This is a graduate program and you should be honing your writing skills. Grammatical and spelling errors are distracting. Look out for them. Your posts should include citations to course readings and, where appropriate, external resources.

As preparation for each week’s class you are expected to have read all of the application assignments for that week.

Case Study (10%):

For this assignment you will conduct a case study analysis of a product, service, or campaign of your choosing. For example, you may choose to analyze the success or failure of a new product or service, platform, or marketing campaign. The goal of this assignment is to help you gain experience applying class theories and concepts to the evaluation of real-world scenarios. This is a “write, revise, resubmit” assignment. I will provide feedback on your first submission, you will revise according to my comments, and then you will resubmit. The grade for this assignment will come from your revised submission. If you do not revise and resubmit *you will not receive credit for this assignment*. Refer to the Case Study Assignment Guidelines for a more detailed description of the expectations for this assignment.

Midterm Literature Review & Presentation (25%)

For the Midterm Literature Review you will review relevant academic literature on a topic of your choosing. This will be the first step towards developing your final deliverable for this class, which is a proposal for business or research project. Refer

to the Midterm Literature Review Guidelines for a more detailed description of the expectations for this assignment.

Final Project & Presentation (35%)

The final project for this course consists of developing a proposal for a new business or product, or for a broader research project. The final deliverable consists of a written report along with a presentation in the final class period. Refer to the Final Project & Presentation Guidelines for a more detailed description of the expectations for this assignment.

Class Participation (15%)

This is a seminar-style class. I will be lecturing each week, but there will also be a large discussion component of each class meeting. Therefore, class participation is essential. We will spend time discussing the readings and working through case studies that relate to the theory and concepts we are covering each week. You will be expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings, with questions/comments prepared on those readings, and with case questions or application examples when requested. If you want to be sure you will receive a high participation grade, you should volunteer your thoughts, ideas and responses verbally in class each week. This demonstrates both your engagement and your preparation. (It also makes class more interesting for everyone!)

IV. Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Applicant Assignments	15
Case Study Evaluation	10
Midterm Literature Review	25
Final Project & Presentation	35
Class Participation	15
TOTAL	100

VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Deci, E. (1996). *Why we do what we do: Understanding self motivation*. New York, NY: Penguin Books

Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York, NY: Free Press

Sloman, S., & Fernback, P. (2017). *The knowledge illusion: Why we never think alone*. Riverhead Books: New York, NY.

Each week you will be reading some combination of book chapters, journal articles, case studies, and popular press articles. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

VII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change – and probably will change – based on the progress of the class and/or guest speaker availability.

	Topics	Readings	Deliverables
Module 1: The Individual			
Week 1 8/24/17	Course Introduction	See Blackboard each week for assigned readings	
Week 2 8/31/17	Cognition		
Week 3 9/7/17	Motivation		
Week 4 9/14/17	Emotion		Midterm Lit Review Topic Selection
Week 5 9/21/17	Identity and Reputation		
Module 2: Interpersonal & Group Dynamics			
Week 6 9/28/17	Group Cognition		
Week 7 10/5/17	Group Emotion & Midterm Presentations		Midterm Literature Review & Presentation
Week 8 10/12/17	Group Identity & Online Collaboration		
Week 9 10/19/17	Culture		
Module 3: Dynamics of Networks and Collectives			
Week 10 10/26/17	Theories of Social Networks: Part I		Case Study Assignment
Week 11 11/2/17	Theories of Social Networks: Part II		
Week 12 11/9/17	Diffusion & Virality		

Week 13 11/16/17	Ethics in the Age of Big Data		
Week 14 11/23/17	Finals Workshop Week		
Week 15 11/30/17	Final Presentations		Final Presentation
Final Exams			Final Project

VIII. Policies and Procedures

A. Plagiarism

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Please see the *SCampus* (<http://scampus.usc.edu/1300-academic-integrity-review/>) for the university's Student Conduct Code.

USC School of Communication Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Communication's policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

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All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as Communication school administrators.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

B. Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX)
ability@usc.edu.

C. Stress Management

Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

D. Sexual Assault Resource Center

The Center for Women & Men and the Sexual Assault Resource Center are one and the same. Student Counseling Services is a separate place that also offers confidential counseling and support groups on a variety of other topics. To schedule an appointment with Student Counseling Services, call (213) 740-7711 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or visit the Engemann Student Health Center on the University Park Campus.

E. Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.