

Courses taught

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Graduate Courses:

Social Constructions of Reality. An inquiry into the principles and processes by which realities come to be socially constructed, linguistically institutionalized, and discursively maintained. This seminar serves as an introduction to the emerging epistemology of communication and provides students with dialogical and discursive tools to inquire into the histories and cultural differences of various social phenomena. It favors a reflexive/ethnographic approach that involves entering one's cognition into the sociology one comes to construct in the cause of observation and action. It explores the artifacts that discourses create, including scientific discourses. In such explorations, students learn to boldly challenge all kinds of taken-for-granted realities, asking why some of them tend to hide their constructedness, and if experienced as burdensome, probing into possibilities of liberation from them. The seminar is committed to critical scholarship and emancipatory pursuits, which are allied with feminist writing, cultural studies, and reflexive sociology.

Cybernetics, Systems and Media, formerly Models of Communication. An introduction to cybernetics and systems theory, whose concepts are fuelling the current information-technological revolution. Students become acquainted with the formal building blocks for constructing models of communication and complex systems, whether these concern causal, cognitive, or social phenomena; with various theories of human interfaces with technology: cyborg, information, autopoietic, and coordination theories; and with second-order cybernetics, which offers a reflexive approach to understanding. The interdisciplinary scope of the course enables students to draw on knowledge from a diversity of empirical domains.

Cybernetics and Society. Models of communication and control are applied to various social phenomena and contrasted with other conceptual frameworks in the social sciences. Among the conceptions that are developed are those of information networks; recursions a system as contrasted with the exertion of influence; feedback (recursion and teleology); autopoiesis, self-organization, self-observing systems and other forms of recursive networks of interaction; natural, social, and artificial intelligence; different manifestations of natural selection/ultra-stability in perception, cognition, self-repair, and immune systems; chaos theory.

Information in Qualitative Data. The course develops multi-variate methods for exploring a variety of qualitative data and simultaneously broadens concepts of information and communication in a variety of social settings. While qualitative data are common in social research, their systematic analysis has been largely neglected. Recent developments have facilitated the use of qualitative data as a source of insights. The use of information theory as a vehicle for exploration is particularly appealing to communication researchers in search of new theoretical perspectives.

Semantics of Communication later called **Introduction to Qualitative Textual Research.** Most social inquiries rely on linguistic data: written documents, letters, interview transcripts, field notes or published reports. The sole reason for their being is the meanings they have for particular readers. This course considers various theories of meanings, how texts are used, by whom, and in which institutional settings; and it explores the methods of analysis that these theories inform. It introduces several qualitative research traditions, presents case studies, and reviews the concepts, logic, and analytical models needed for independent qualitative research. The course is ethnographic in its approach to data collection (interviews, observational accounts, written matter); analytical in the way it probes its data (with models drawn largely from cultural anthropology); qualitative in the empirical methods it encourages (metaphor, conversation, and discourse analysis); dialogic in its respect for multiple voices (as opposed to the more familiar monologue); and critical or emancipatory in the consequences it aspires to.

Content Analysis. An introduction to the analysis of large bodies of textual matter: content analysis, also called message systems analysis, quantitative semantics, propaganda analysis, text analysis, or an approach to big communication data. The course inquires into the methods, empirical problems, and theories underlying these analytical efforts: sampling, text retrieval, coding, reliability, analytical constructs, computational techniques, and

inferences. It demonstrates these with studies of mass media content, interview or panel data, and systematic efforts to provide legal evidence or draw valid inferences from personal documents or electronic exchanges. Students learn to design a content analysis and do the preliminary work on it. They may also perform a content analysis on already available data, develop a new analytical technique from available theories and test it, or they may explore relevant literature to solve a methodological problem in content analysis.

Seminar in Message Analysis. Advanced topics in the analysis of verbal and non-verbal message content will be considered and methodological or practical problems arising out of research projects will be solved in a seminar format. Among the topics that might be considered are: experiments with recording qualitative data, expansion of the system of agreement analysis, further formalization of data languages, attempts at validation, development of new analytical techniques and computer aided text analysis procedures, analytical use of available theories of cognition and symbolic behavior, exploration of systems that could integrate the results of different kinds of empirical research techniques with content analysis findings.

Undergraduate Courses:

Language in the Social Construction of Realities. Departing from traditional notions of language as a medium, this course sheds light on the discursive practices that constitute the realities we come to live in and observe. Readings and lectures develop the concepts needed to understand how realities are socially constructed or 'language'd into being. Seminar-like discussions and individual students' contributions offer opportunities to critically examine a variety of constructions of reality from this perspective: facts, emotions, social problems, race, gender, hegemony, family, science, technology, and more. Students learn to appreciate how their own identity and their own world is shaped by the language they use. They take with them analytical skills and practical abilities to alter if not the way social reality is constructed so at least their own participation in it.

Social Cybernetics. Basic ideas about communication in society are explored from a cybernetic and systems theoretical perspective. The course acknowledges the traditional assumptions of linearity (communication as an intentional and one-way process), but builds on the recognition that most social processes are circular, emerging, self-sustaining, and controlling their own destiny. It starts with simple circularities, such as feedback, moves through the biological idea of autopoiesis (the ability of living systems to create and maintain their own boundary while organizing themselves within it) to self-organizing social systems. Principles of information generation, processing, storing, and communication are discussed. Evolutionary aspects of cultural artifacts, such as rituals, and of technological systems are explored. The lives of large communication networks are examined, and paradigms of self-observing systems are developed.

Human-centered Design. The word "design" derives from "de + signare," to "mark," "to make things into signs" or to make them meaningful to their users. Starting with the axiom that humans do not respond to the physics of things but to what they mean to them, the course explores how artifacts, especially language-like or intelligent ones, constitute themselves in various social practices and in their users' understanding. Key to this approach is the recognition that artifacts are understandable only through their interfaces and that human-centered design, as opposed to engineering or the design of functions has to address these.

- The course distinguishes four contexts in which artifacts must survive: use, language, ontogenesis, and the ecology or other artifacts.
- It develops a vocabulary, a language, to empirically study and describe a variety of meanings – a semantics – for each context in which artifacts must survive in interaction with different stakeholders, including among designers who too have a stake in the viability of their designs.
- It develops methods for designing artifacts that are culture-sensitive and respect what users or more generally stakeholders can make sense of and learn in their respective domains of experiences.
- And it develops empirical tests to validate the semantic claims that designers need to make to those who could bring their design to fruition.