COURSE DESCRIPTION

Goals

This course is designed to introduce students to theories, concepts, strategies and processes of persuasion and social influence. The concepts and theories addressed in the course will be applied to both interpersonal persuasion and communication campaigns. The course focuses on competing theoretical accounts of the processes underlying persuasion (the evidence concerning them, the problems they have encountered, etc.) and on research evidence concerning the effects of various factors on persuasive effectiveness.

Through participation in this course, student should (1) understand a range of theoretical and empirical issues in the study and practice of persuasion and (2) be able to critically evaluate persuasion and social influence scholarship in the discipline.

Course format

The course will be conducted in a seminar format where students are expected to discuss issues raised in the readings. Therefore, it is imperative that students complete assigned readings prior to each class meeting. The instructor may provide a basic lecture when appropriate.

In addition, each student will be assigned to a theory to be covered in the course, and will function as a guest speaker for that theory. To prepare for this role, students are expected to find one article that describes a study which empirically tests the theory in an applied context. Then, students will do a 15 minute presentation that includes a brief overview of the theory and the chosen study along with their critique of the study. These presentations will lead into the discussion of the applicability of the theory to “real world” problems. The presentation constitutes 25% of your grade.

Required Text & Assigned Readings

Students are required to buy one textbook:


There are many additional reading materials for the course. Each student is responsible for obtaining these readings by the date assigned.
Grades

Final grades will be determined based on a class presentation (25%), a theory paper (60%), and overall participation in classroom discussions (15%). Those who wish to appeal their grades should do so by submitting an appeal letter to the course instructor within 72 hours from the time of grade distribution. The letter should describe the nature of the dispute, justification for the dispute and proposed actions. Instructor will review individual appeals carefully and respond in writing. However, students should be aware of the fact that a review can results in lowering of the grade as well as improving it.

Paper

Each student will select a theory/theoretical area and develop a paper which discusses the current state of the theory. The student is expected to review all relevant literature on the theory. The paper will contain (a) a review of the theoretical terms, assumptions, and propositions, (b) the historical background of the theory, (c) a discussion of the validity of the theory based on empirical evidence, and (d) identification of areas needing future research. This paper is due May 10 and constitutes 60% of your grade. To prevent last minute scrambling at the end of the semester and to allow students to get instructor feedback prior to turning in the graded paper, students will be asked to submit this project in a number of phases. Only the final phase of the project (i.e. the paper) will be given a course grade. Thus, students are not required to submit any phase listed blow except the final paper. Instructor feedback on each of the phases will only be provided if a student completes the phase on or prior to the date assigned. The phases are described below.

a. Reference paper: The paper will provide a list of all relevant articles with a one to three sentence summary following each citation. Due: February 24

b. Outline 1: Students will provide a detailed outline of the first part of their paper (review of the theoretical terms, assumptions, and propositions, and the historical background of the theory). The outline must contain complete sentences and have citations where appropriate. The historical background of the theory may be a separate section or discussed when laying out the theory. Make your organizational choice based on the criteria of conciseness and clarity. Due: March 17

c. Outline 2: The second outline will include appropriate revisions made to outline 1 and will detail the last half of the paper. Due: April 7

d. Final paper: The final paper should demonstrate expertise in your theoretical area and should be free of typographical and grammatical errors. Paper is due on May 5, and must not exceed 20 pages. Papers must follow APA guidelines specified in the following manual. This book provides the writing style for most of the social science journals you will consult as majors. While it is not a required text for the class, it would be a good investment for those who major in Speech or other social sciences areas.

Assignments

Assignments are due on or before the regularly scheduled class time on the date due. All assignments should be typed and double spaced. ABSOLUTELY NO late assignments will be accepted.

A word about honesty

It is students’ responsibility to complete their own work as best as they can in the time provided. Cheating, plagiarism and falsification of data are serious offenses. Anyone found guilty of academic misconduct should expect to fail the entire course and have a record of the matter forwarded to the Dean of Students.

A word about cellular phones

Students are expected to observe basic courtesy out of respect for fellow students and the professor. Cellular phones are very disruptive for class. Remember to turn off your cellular phones before coming into the classroom.
COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Introduction: Persuasion and the concept of attitude -- January 16 & 23


2. The attitude-behavior relationship – January 30


3. Source factors affecting persuasion – February 6

O’Keefe, chapter 8


4. Message factors affecting persuasion – February 13

O’Keefe, Chapter 9.


5. Receiver factors affecting persuasion -- February 20

O’Keefe, Chapter 10.


6. Consistency theories – February 27

O’Keefe, Chapter 4.


7. Learning theories — March 6


8. Theory of Reasoned Action/Planned Behavior — March 13

O’Keefe, Chapter 5.


10. Elaboration Likelihood Model — April 3

O’Keefe, Chapter 6.


11. Persuasion in political context – April 10


12. Persuasion in health context – April 17 & 24


13. Conclusion – May 1

PAPER DUE ON May 5