

Communicating Sustainability

ADV 324/PR 324

Unique Course Number: 05873 and 06377

Fall 2017

BMC 2.106

MW 2:00 – 3:30

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Office Hours: Monday 9:30 – 11:30 and by appointment

READINGS:

Readings will be drawn from books and journals. All readings are posted on Canvas. There is no textbook or reading packet to buy.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:

From organic chocolate and fair-trade coffee to alternative energy and socially responsible investing: for today's American consumers, daily life offers countless opportunities to be more environmentally friendly, more socially responsible, more ethically minded. In short: more ways to be more sustainable. It is not surprising, then, that an increasing proportion of Americans report being concerned about the environment and claim a willingness to change their behaviors to more sustainable ways. And yet, despite these environmentally friendly attitudes, there remains a profound attitude---behavior gap, often called the green gap, between what Americans say they value and how they actually behave. Mass communication, both informative and persuasive, can play a vital role in closing this gap.

The class will look closely at the ways mass media can foster, challenge and change attitudes and behaviors as they relate to sustainability. The class will focus on the potential challenges and pitfalls we face in trying to communicate with audiences about issues of sustainability. The focus will be on sustainable consumption, which I define broadly to encompass not only the purchase, use and disposal of sustainable products and services, but also the adoption of lifestyle choices and value orientations that help further sustainable goals. This broad definition encompasses quotidian behaviors, like buying a cup of coffee, but also deeper, ideological issues, like the decision to support green political candidates.

A central premise of this course is that without effective communication campaigns, even the most promising sustainable initiatives will not succeed. In the course of the semester, students will gain the theoretical and practical foundation necessary to understand, evaluate and craft successful media messages to communicate issues of sustainability.

COURSE THEMES

The course is structured around the following themes:

1. What is sustainability?

This segment focuses on the social construction of issues of sustainability and the role played by mass media (both news and advertising/marketing). Students will learn about issue attention cycles, constructionist perspectives and environmental sociology, with a goal of understanding how mass media and communication play an integral role in the formation, definition and significance of sustainability as a social issue.

2. What does the public think about sustainability?

In this segment, we will focus on public opinion about issues of sustainability and the environment. How do we develop opinions about issues of sustainability? What role do mass media play in shaping, challenging and reinforcing different stakeholders' views of sustainability? We will cover important theoretical perspectives as they apply to communication, looking in particular at theories of agenda setting, framing, priming, cultivation theory, and third-person effects.

3. How do we change public opinion about sustainability?

Having explored the foundations of public opinion as it relates to issues of sustainability, we will then focus on ways in which public opinion might be changed. We will pay close attention to theories of persuasion, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model, social judgment theory and consistency theories (cognitive dissonance and balance theory).

4. How do we get the public to act sustainably?

As countless public opinion and consumer polls demonstrate, even those individuals who claim to hold environmental values and favor living more sustainably often fail to follow through on these attitudes. In this segment, students will focus on ways in which mass media can help translate pro-sustainable attitudes into pro-sustainable behaviors. Drawing on theories of behavior change, including the theory of planned behavior, social cognitive theory and social norms theory, students will gain solid grounding in how mass communication might effectively encourage more sustainable lifestyle choices.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Monday	Date	Wednesday
1	8/27		8/29	Introductions
2	9/3	LABOR DAY (NO CLASS)	9/5	What is Sustainability?
3	9/10	Who are Sustainable Consumers?	9/12	What is the "Environment"?
4	9/17	Depictions of the environment	9/19	Group Project Work Day
5	9/24	<i>Merchants of Doubt</i> (Part 1)	9/26	<i>Merchants of Doubt</i> (Part 2)
6	10/1	Ethics	10/3	Agenda Setting
7	10/8	Framing	10/10	Cultivation Theory
8	10/15	Spiral of Silence/Third person	10/17	Group Project Work Day
9	10/22	<i>Day After Tomorrow</i> (Part 1)	10/24	<i>Day After Tomorrow</i> (Part 2)
10	10/29	Emotions	10/31	Attitude change
11	11/5	Elaboration Likelihood Model	11/7	Social Judgment theory
12	11/12	Theories of Behavior Change	11/14	Group Project Work Day
13	11/19	Independent work day (no class)	11/21	THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)
14	11/26	PRESENTATIONS	11/28	PRESENTATIONS
15	12/3	PRESENTATIONS	12/5	NO CLASS
16	12/10	PRESENTATIONS	12/12	

COURSE FLAGS

This class carries two flags: Independent Inquiry Flag and the Ethics and Leadership Flag.

Ethics and Leadership Flag

This course carries the Ethics and Leadership flag. Ethics and Leadership courses are designed to equip you with skills that are necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments involving ethical issues and the process of applying ethical reasoning to real-life situations.

Independent Inquiry Flag

This course carries the Independent Inquiry flag. Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the independent investigation and presentation of your own work.

EVALUATION AND EXPECTATIONS

This class is a combination of lectures and discussion. I expect you to come to class prepared to talk about the readings and your on-going group project. If you are not prepared for a particular day's discussion, please let me know before class starts. Do not miss class because you feel you are unprepared or haven't had time to read all the assigned articles or chapters. You will still gain invaluable insights about the material, in general, and the research project, in particular, by attending the class.

Your grade in the class will be based on the following:

1. Participation/attendance	= 10 points	(10%)
2. Self-change project	= 10 points	(10%)
3. Debate	= 20 points	(20%)
4. Ad portfolio	= 20 points	(20%)
5. Group project report	= 30 points	(25%)
6. <u>Group project pitch</u>	= 10 points	(10%)
TOTAL	= 100 points	(100%)

1. Attendance and participation (10 points)

It is assumed that students will attend every class, and I will take regular attendance using Arkaive to track this. However being present in the room is not sufficient; you must also be engaged and involved scholars. Class format will include lectures, small group activities, work sessions, guest speakers, etc. Participation – not just attendance – is integral to a successful, enjoyable class and to you earning a high grade. Active participation means contributing to the discussion, listening to what your colleagues have to say and engaging with the readings and in-class activities. It means showing up on time, not checking Facebook or email on your computer, not texting on your phone. If you do not participate in class discussions, you will not earn full points for attendance even if you come to every class.

NOTE: We are in a very large classroom but I expect you to sit in the front half of the room. If you sit in the back you will be counted as absent.

2. Self-change Project (10 points):

Persuasive communication, like advertising, is about changing or reinforcing behaviors. It's easy to underestimate how hard this can be. This exercise will help you understand the challenges that go into changing behaviors, beliefs, attitudes etc. This project will entail you adopting an

environmentally friendly behavior and tracking the challenges you faced. Deliverables include weekly posts to a class Facebook group and a reflection paper posted to a microsite (use Wix, Wordpress, etc. to create it). A handout with more details will be distributed in Week 2.

3. Debate Series (20 points)

When it comes to issues of sustainability, climate change, and the environment, people have very strong opinions either way. Your task, as a persuasive communicator, is to try and convince your audience about the merits of your argument. This assignment asks you to sharpen your persuasive communication skills by arguing for one side or the other of a sustainability-related issue. This debate is an opportunity to strengthen your skills in the areas of leadership, interpersonal influence, teambuilding, group problem solving, and oral presentation. This is a team assignment. You will be randomly assigned to a group of students (size of groups will be determined by final enrollment numbers). You will also be randomly assigned to a topic and to either the pro or con side. Your task involves presenting compelling arguments via a debate format in support of your side of the issue and writing a 3-5 page, single-spaced debate summary. Working individually, you will also evaluate two other debates using a pre-determined evaluation sheet. A handout with more details will be distributed in class.

4. Ad Portfolio (20 points)

Persuasive campaigns focusing on green and sustainable claims are often criticized for being deceptive or misleading. The Federal Trade Commission recently revised its Green Guides, which are designed to help marketers ensure their claims are truthful and non-deceptive. Still, many persuasive messages promoting sustainability skirt the issue and misleading, sometimes false claims are commonplace in persuasive green campaigns. Each of you will be responsible for identifying and analyzing examples of green advertisements. A handout with more details will be distributed in class.

5. Final project (40 points total including proposal, report and pitch)

The bulk of your grade is based on your final project. Working in small groups, you will identify a sustainability-focused group and develop a consumer typology about them. Possible groups include vegans/vegetarians, backyard chicken farmers, bicyclists, community gardeners, electric-car owners, locavores, etc. You will conduct extensive primary and secondary research to learn more about your chosen group. You will then use the data to develop marketing and advertising insights. You will turn in a written document outlining your typology and pitch your ideas to the class in a 10-minute presentation. A handout with more details will be distributed in class.

GRADING SYSTEM:

This class will be graded using the plus/minus grading system, as outlined by the university's provost office (<http://www.utexas.edu/provost/planning/plus-minus/>) and described below:

To earn an:	You must earn:	This is the percent equivalent of:	And the GPA equivalent of:
A	94.00 — 100 points	94-100	4.00
A-	90.00 — 93.99 points	90-93.99	3.67
B+	87.00 — 89.99 points	87-89.99	3.33
B	84.00 — 86.99 points	84-86.99	3.00
B-	80.00 — 83.99 points	80-83.99	2.67
C+	77.00 — 79.99 points	77-79.99	2.33
C	74.00 — 76.99 points	74-76.99	2.00
C-	70.00 — 73.99 points	70-73.99	1.67
D+	67.00 — 69.99 points	67-69.99	1.33
D	64.00 — 66.99 points	64-66.99	1.00
D-	60.00 — 63.99 points	60-63.99	0.67
F	0 — 59.99 points	0-59.99	0.00

What the letter grades mean:

- A, A–** Earned by work of excellent quality indicating full mastery of the subject; in the case of an A, it indicates extraordinary distinction.
- B+, B, B–** Earned by work that indicates commendable comprehension of the course material and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities.
- C+, C, C–** Earned by work that indicates average and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.
- D+, D, D–** Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
- F** Earned by work that is unsatisfactory and indicates a failure to do minimal passing work

Some Words on Grading:

- I will NOT be rounding up percentage grades or points. So if you earn an 89.6% that translates into a B+ and will not be rounded up to 90% (an A-).
- Any questions or concerns about a grade must be presented in writing within seven (7) days after the grade is announced or posted. I will not discuss grades after this seven-day period.
- When we grade your work, you start with zero points. You earn points based on the quality of the work and the accuracy, appropriateness and detail of your answers. You do not start with 100 percent and then points based on mistakes you might make. Your final points represent the total points earned for that assignment, not the number of points “taken away” for errors or omissions.

MOODY COLLEGE WRITING SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Moody College Writing Support Program, located in BMC 3.322, <https://moody.utexas.edu/students/moodywriting> offers one-on-one assistance without charge to students seeking to improve their professional writing in all fields of communication. We have specialists in Journalism, RTF, CSD, CMS, and PR and Advertising. In addition, we offer workshops to strengthen core writing skills in each field and to inspire students to strive for excellence. Students may book half-hour appointments on our website or drop in for assistance during all stages of the writing process.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

OTHER UNIVERSITY NOTICES AND POLICIES:

1. Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students

All students should become familiar with the university's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the university informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with university-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

2. Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

- Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
- Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information: http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php

3. Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

4. Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

5. Q drop Policy

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

“Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.”

6. Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office gives you instructions to do so.

7. Counseling and Mental Health Services

Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

- Visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor | [512-471-3515](tel:5124713515) | cmhc.utexas.edu
- CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512.471.2255](tel:5124712255) | cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html
- **CARE Counselor** in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW|CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](tel:5124717642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)
- **FREE Services** at CMHC:
 - Brief assessments and referral services
 - Mental health & wellness articles - cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html
 - MindBody Lab - cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html
 - Classes, workshops, & groups - cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html