



Northeastern

**Department of
Communication Studies**

**COMM 3201
Health Communication
Spring 2016 Semester**

1:35 pm - 3:15pm | YMCA 100 | Tuesday & Friday

Office Hours | By Appt | 225 Holmes Hall

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, you learn about the relevant scientific, social, and ethical dimensions of major public health debates and problems; the generalizable theories, frameworks, and methods that scholars use to analyze them; and the implications for effective public communication and personal decision-making. Assignments include facilitating class discussion, class presentations, short analysis papers, multiple-choice exams, an annotated bibliography, and a research paper. By the end of the course, you will have gained an integrated understanding of the different roles that you can play in public health debates as professionals, advocates, and consumers. In doing so, you will have improved your ability to find, discuss, evaluate, and use expert sources of information; assess competing media claims and narratives; write persuasive essays, analyses, and commentaries; and author evidence-based research papers.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- **Discussion Leadership (10%):** For each class topic, 2 students will be designated discussion leaders and will provide 1-2 page summaries of each reading. Students should compile their reading summaries into a single PDF document and email the document to Prof. Nisbet by the Monday evening before the class sessions. These summaries will then be posted on the course page in advance of class. In consultation with the instructor, students will choose a complex topic

covered in the readings and deliver a 15-minute presentation on that topic. This may include doing additional background reading on the topic.

- **Weekly Reading Quizzes (15%):** To begin each Tuesday class, students will complete a short quiz comprised of 10 multiple choice questions testing their basic knowledge of the assigned readings and of major stories appearing at the NY Times' Health section over the past week.
- **Three Analysis Papers (45%):** Students will be completing three 1000 word analysis papers specific to case studies and topics covered. These papers will assess and integrate the assigned readings and other sources; and be written in a broadly accessible, persuasive, and engaging style. Students will be expected to revise papers after initial grade and review by instructor.
- **Annotated Bibliography and Research Paper (30%):** Students begin by compiling an annotated bibliography of approximately 15 quality academic or research sources on a topic relevant to the course and of personal interest. Based on the bibliography, students will prepare a detailed outline for their final paper subject to feedback and discussion. Drawing on their annotated bibliography and other sources, students will author a 4,000 word paper synthesizing and applying research to their topic, written in a style that is broadly accessible and engaging.

Compiling an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to scholarly books, book chapters, journal articles, and reports. Each citation – usually around 300 words — is followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph called “the annotation.” For your annotated bibliography, you should be able to find and describe in your own words relevant journal articles, book chapters, and books on your topic. The journals, edited volumes, authors, and fields referenced in this course are good places to start to search for relevant sources.

[Primer on Getting Started with Your Research](#)

[Primer on Using APA Style in Your Writing](#)

REQUIRED BOOKS

[Caulfield, T. \(2012\). *The Cure For Everything: Untangling Twisted Messages About Health, Fitness and Happiness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.](#)

[Gallagher, W. \(2009\). *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*. New York: Penguin.](#)

NEW YORK TIMES HEALTH

Each week you are expected to read and follow closely the news articles at the [Health section and Wellness blog of The New York Times](#). We will discuss the relevance of weekly news items and blog posts during class and the major stories appearing each week will be asked about in the regular reading quizzes.

CLASS SCHEDULE / READING

Jan 12 & 15 — Course overview and getting started on research

Jan 19 & 22 — The Central Role of Attention to Health and Well-Being

Readings:

- Gallagher, W. (2009). *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*. New York: Penguin, pgs 1-28; 99-132.
- Kahneman, D., & Deaton, A. (2010). High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 107(38), 16489-16493 [[HTML](#)]
- Short, K. (2014, July 7). Here is the Income Level at Which Money Won't Make You Happier in Each State. *The Huffington Post*. [[HTML](#)]
- Quenqua, D. (2015, May 12). Lower paid lawyers are happier. *The New York Times*. [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- TED Talk Daniel Kahneman: The riddle of experience vs. memory [[video](#)]
- TEXx Talk Judson Brewer: The Science of Flow [[video](#)]

Jan 26, Jan 29, & Feb 2 — Attention and Distraction in the Digital Age

- Gallagher, W. (2009). *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*. New York: Penguin, pgs 145-162.
- Wilson, T. D. et al. (2014). Just think: the challenges of the disengaged mind. *Science*, 345(6192), 75-77. [[HTML](#)]
- Carr, N. (2008). Is Google Making Us Stupid? *The Atlantic* [[PDF](#)]
- Read the full *New York Times* series "Your Brain on Computers" [[HTML](#)]
- Ragan, S.R., Massey, J.D., Jennings S.R. (2014), Unregulated use of laptops over time in large lecture classes. *Computers & Education*. [[Library Gateway](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- PBS Frontline "Digital Nation" [[Video](#)]

Feb 5, Feb 9, & Feb 12 — Technology and the Mindfulness Movement

- Ricard, M., Lutz, A., & Davidson, R. J. (2014). Mind of the Meditator. *Scientific American*, 311(5), 38-45. [[Library Gateway](#)]
- Widdicombe, L. (2015). The Higher Life: Mindfulness Guru for the Tech Set. *The New Yorker*. [[HTML](#)]
- Delahunty, H. (2015, Feb). Let the Game Come to You. *Mindfulness magazine*. [Distributed to Class]
- Horgan, J. (2015, July). Meta-Meditation: A Skeptic Meditates on Meditation. *Scientific American.com*. [[HTML](#)]
- Broad, W. (2012, Jan 5). How Yoga can wreck your body. *The NY Times Magazine*. [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- CBS 60 Minutes “Mindfulness” [[Video](#)]
- Jon Kabat-Zinn “Be Here Now” [[Video](#)]
- NPR Fresh Air: The Risks and Rewards of Yoga [[Podcast](#)]

Feb 16 & 19 — The Obesity Epidemic?

Readings:

- Barry, CL, Brescoll VL, Brownell KD, Schlesinger M (2009). Obesity metaphors: How beliefs about the causes of obesity affect support for public policy. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 87: 7-47. [[PDF](#)]
- Harris, J.L., Pomeranz, J.L., Lobstein, T., & Brownell, K.D. (2009). A crisis in the marketplace: How food marketing contributes to obesity and what can be done. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 30, 211-25. [[PDF](#)]
- Sanger-Katz, M. (July 24, 2015). Americans Are Finally Eating Less. *The New York Times*. [[HTML](#)]
- Sanger-Katz, M. (July 28, 2015). How Changing Attitudes Went Along With a Drop in Calories. *The New York Times*. [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Excerpts from Videos:

- HBO Films’ *The Weight of the Nation*, Part 4: Challenges, Chapters 1 – 5. [[Video](#)]
- Documentary “Fed Up” [[Video](#)]

Feb 23, Feb 26 & March 1 — Twisted Messages about Diet and Exercise

Readings:

- Caulfield, T. (2012). *The Cure For Everything: Untangling Twisted Messages About Health, Fitness and Happiness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press (pp. 1 – 98).
- Taubes, G. (2011, April 13). Is Sugar Toxic? *New York Times Magazine* [[HTML](#)]
- Taubes, G. (2007, Sept. 24). The Scientist and the Stairmaster. *New York magazine* [[HTML](#)]
- O'Connor, A. (2016, Jan. 7). New Dietary Guidelines Urge Less Sugar for All and Less Protein for Boys and Men. *New York Times* [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- TEDx: Robert Lustig “Sugar: The Elephant in the Kitchen” [[Video](#)]

March 4 — Discuss Bibliographies and Research Papers

March 8 & March 11 — SPRING BREAK

March 15 & March 18 — The Food Movement and Genetically Modified Food

Readings:

- Pollan, M. (2010, May 20). The Food Movement Rising. *The New York Review of Books*. [[HTML](#)]
- Fox, N., & Ward, K. (2008). Health, ethics and environment: a qualitative study of vegetarian motivations. *Appetite*, 50(2), 422-429. [[Library Gateway](#)]
- Brody, H. (2015, June 8). Fears, Not Facts Support GMO Labeled Food. *The New York Times*. [[HTML](#)]
- Strom, S. (2015, Jan. 7). Campbell Labels Will Disclose GMO Ingredients. *The New York Times* [[HTML](#)]
- Nisbet, M.C. (2016, May/June). The Franken Public: Have Americans Turned against Genetically Modified Food? *Skeptical Inquirer*. [Distributed to Class]
- Spector, M. (2014, Aug 25). Vandava Shiva’s Crusade Against Genetically Modified Crops. *The New Yorker* [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- Food Inc [[Video](#)]
- PBS Frontline “Harvest of Fear” [[Video](#)]

March 22, March 25 & March 29 — Media Violence, Video Games, and Public Health

- Stossel, S. (1997). Man Who Counts the Killings: George Gerbner... Is So Alarmed about the Baneful Effects of TV That He Describes Them in Terms of" Fascism. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 279. [[HTML](#)]
- Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2001). Media violence and the American public: Scientific facts versus media misinformation. *American Psychologist*, 56(6-7), 477. [[PDF](#)]
- Bushman, B. J., Jamieson, P. E., Weitz, I., & Romer, D. (2013). Gun violence trends in movies. *Pediatrics*, 132(6), 1014-1018. [[PDF](#)]
- Strasburger, V. C., Donnerstein, E., & Bushman, B. J. (2014). Why is it so hard to believe that media influence children and adolescents?. *Pediatrics*, 133(4), 571-573. [[HTML](#)]
- Markey, P. M., French, J. E., & Markey, C. N. (2015). Violent movies and severe acts of violence: Sensationalism versus science. *Human Communication Research*, 41(2), 155-173. [[HTML](#)]

Discuss Videos:

- MEF: George Gerbner on the Mean World Syndrome and Desensitization.
- PBS What Next: Media Violence [[video](#)]

April 1 to April 19 — Catch Up, New Topics, Class Presentations

— Final research paper due during exam week —

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