

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of
Communication Studies

COMM 4608
Strategic Communication Capstone
Fall 2016

9:50 am - 11:30 am | Hastings Suite 119 | Tuesday & Friday

Office Hours | By Appt | 225 Holmes Hall

Matthew C. Nisbet
Associate Professor
m.nisbet@northeastern.edu

In this capstone seminar, you will complete an intensive research and writing project focused on a topic related to the field of strategic communication. Possible research topics can span business, politics, advocacy, entertainment, public health, the environment, popular culture, and other societal sectors (see list of examples at end of syllabus). Building on previous course work, you will gain a deeper scholarly and professional understanding of the field of communication, forge professional and academic contacts, and demonstrate a mastery of relevant theoretical concepts, professional principles, research methods, and writing approaches.

With guidance from me, you will conduct a review of the relevant scholarly and professional literature, carry out research on the topic using selected methodological approaches, and write a substantial research paper that articulates and supports a thesis. It is a unique chance for you to become an expert in a specialized topic, deepening your understanding of an area that you are passionate about and that aligns with their career goals. The majority of the work for this class will be conducted independently by you and in regular consultation with me. The course is also designed as a research seminar that enables you to develop your ideas through active engagement with your classmates and via peer feedback.

CLASS FORMAT

The course is structured as a mix of collaborative class sessions and individual meetings with the instructor.

Collaborative Classes

Class sessions are organized as a research workshop. In these classes, the following activities will take place:

- The instructor will cover the fundamentals of research design and project conceptualization and execution, discussing key challenges, strategies, and milestones and providing individual and general feedback to students
- Students present portions of their work to the entire class for feedback
- The classes are also a time and place for students to receive detailed peer critiques of work from classmates who are pursuing similar avenues of research.

Individual Meetings

The instructor will also meet individually with students at scheduled class times. These meetings will focus on and be tailored to a specific research or writing stage relative to the student's capstone.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- choose an independent research topic;
- evaluate published research in the area of their chosen topic;
- design a research project;
- apply concepts, theories, ideas and frameworks to the design of their research projects;
- apply appropriately one or more quantitative or qualitative approaches, or mixed methods approaches, in conducting their research;
- undertake original data collection using a selected research method or methods;
- produce a substantial, independent academic research paper;
- criticize constructively peer work.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation, Presentations, & Peer Feedback (20%)

You are expected to attend every class and to take advantage of class sessions that involve individual consultation. During class, you are expected to volunteer and provide feedback, critiques, and ideas in reaction to other students' discussion of their research projects. You will also be giving a PowerPoint presentation to the class based on your literature review and research design, eliciting feedback and input.

Annotated Bibliography (20%)

Your annotated bibliography will include at least 15 high quality scholarly books, book chapters, journal articles, and reports that are relevant to your topic. Your sources should be weighted toward works that have appeared within the last 5-10 years. Each citation to one of your sources will be formatted in APA style – usually around 300

words — and will be followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph called “the annotation.” See more below.

Primer on Getting Started with Finding Your Research

Example of a Professional Annotated Bibliography

Primer on Using APA Style in Your Writing

Literature Review and Research Design (30%)*

Your literature review introduces the topic, issue, or problem to the reader and tells an integrated, evidence-based story about how to understand different dimensions of the topic, drawing on scholarly works reviewed in your annotated bibliography and journalistic sources that you have also identified. Think of your literature review as the first half of your paper.

The literature review ends with a “summing up” of how past research, contemporary debate or professional practices add up to a set of questions or expectations that you want to explore in conducting your own research. These questions or expectations are followed by a research design that clearly explains how you carried out your research. Your literature review and research design will be between 10-15 pages double spaced plus a reference section.

Research Results & Conclusion (30%)*:

This the second half of your final paper. In this section, you carefully describe and contextualize the findings or results of your research and analysis and then end with a conclusion which discusses the implications of your findings. Your conclusion should link your findings back to the literature review, identifying where your findings are consistent with past work or may diverge. You should also offer an outlook on your topic which includes suggestions on where future research needs to go, how your findings relate to professional best practices, and/or how your findings might lead to judgments or critiques of institutions, organizations, trends etc. This section is likely to be 10-15 pages double spaced.

FORMATTING AND REVISING YOUR ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be turned in as electronic MS WORD files and emailed to me by the assigned due date. All papers should be double spaced, in 12 pt New York Times font. Unless you have spoken with me about factors delaying your assignment, any papers that are late will receive a quarter grade penalty for each day that it is overdue. Each of your assignments should be labeled as follows:

LastName_Assignment_Draft [or Final]

Nisbet_PaperTopic_Draft
 Nisbet_PaperTopic_Final
 Nisbet_AnnotatedBiblio_Final
 Nisbet_LiteratureReview_Draft
 Nisbet_LiteratureReview_Final
 Nisbet_ResultsConclusion_Draft
 Nisbet_ResultsConclusion_Final

For the drafts of your literature review/research design and results/conclusion, I will be editing each in MS WORD using the track changes function. Adopt all specific edits you think are useful creating an updated “clean version” of the paper. Then as you add new content to this clean version, include the new content in track changes format so that I can identify the new content that has been added.

SCHEDULE AND TENTATIVE DEADLINES

Jan 10-27 — Students learn about defining an original research question, and conducting a search of the literature. In consultation with the instructor, they define a preliminary research topic, set of related questions and expectations, and a strategy to guide their literature search.

- Sun Jan 22-Draft paper topic due by 8pm EST
- Sun Jan 29-Final paper topic due by 8pm EST

Jan 31-Feb 17—Students in consultation with the instructor identify 15 or more peer-reviewed and scholarly sources specific to their topic and compile/write an annotated bibliography.

- Sun Feb 12 – Annotated bibliography due by 8pm EST.
- Friday Feb 17 – No class.

Feb 21-March 17— Based on their annotated bibliography, students write a detailed outline for their literature review and research design, gain instructor and peer feedback, and complete a draft of their literature review and research designs. Students also present to the class for feedback.

- Feb 21, 24, & 28, March 14 & 17 – Class presentations.
- Friday March 3 – No class.
- Friday March 3 – Draft literature review due by 8pm EST.
- Sunday March 19 – Final literature review by 8pm EST.

March 21—April 18 — Students conduct research and analysis, preparing a draft of the findings and conclusion section of their capstone for comment by the instructor. Meet individually to discuss progress on research and writing.

- Sun. April 9 – Draft results and conclusion due by 8pm EST.

Wed. April 26 -- Final version of capstone project completed and turned in.

Topics Studied by Previous Students Taking a Similar Course

- Analysis of right wing populism and the Trump campaign.
- The rise of mindfulness and meditation and integration into school curriculum.
- The portrayal of female athletes in TV coverage of the Olympics.
- The use of big data analytics to predict movie box office success.
- The branding and promotion of luxury cars to Millennials.
- Effective crisis communication in response to hurricane threats.
- Strategic communication about renewable energy in Massachusetts.
- Social and psychological factors influence Supreme Court decisions.
- The rise of Tinder and the impact on dating and sexual relations.
- Effective ways to promote and frame the home birthing movement.
- Debates over work-life balance and effective policy responses.
- The marketing of E-cigarettes and the need for regulation.
- New media portrayals of the Israeli-Palestine Conflict
- Reality TV portrayals of Romantic Relationships
- Sports Marketing Strategies of Bruins and Red Sox
- Masculinity, Culture, and Stress Coping Mechanisms
- Advertising, Gender Portrayals, and Body Image
- Media Violence and Its Effects
- Online Video and Social Engagement.
- Defining Radical: Analysis of Activist Groups and Tactics.
- Framing Sexual Violence in the Media.
- Comparative Look at American & French Coverage of Protest.
- Communicating about Gender Bias and Female Stereotypes.
- The Virginia Tech Massacre: Framing and Crisis Communication.
- Communicating about Parental Involvement in Public Schools.
- California Proposition Campaigns: A Framing Analysis.
- Opinion Leaders and Social Impact of Documentaries.
- Framing and Priming in Canadian Parliamentary Debates.
- Opinion Leaders and Fashion Marketing.
- Analysis of News Aggregator and Social Media Habits.
- New Technology and the Agenda-Building Process.
- Communicating about New Energy Technologies.
- Framing Education Policy: The Case of Delaware.
- Analysis of George Lakoff in the Context of the 2008 Election.

- Higher Education Branding and University Athletics.
- Examining Dominant Political Narratives in U.S History.
- Analysis of the “Vote or Die” Campaign.
- Analysis of Barack Obama Campaign Speeches.
- Corporate Social Responsibility and the Red Campaign.
- Place-based Branding: The Case of Ithaca, NY.
- Emotional Branding: Three Case Studies.
- Communication Campaigns about Animal Welfare.
- Political Communication and Young Voter Engagement.
- Visual Persuasion in Campaign Advertising.
- Microtargeting in Political Campaigns.
- Analysis of Destination Branding Campaigns.
- The Truth Campaign and Social Marketing Research.
- Corporate Social Responsibility: Priming and Framing.
- Entertainment Communication and the Environment.
- Apple Inc and Research on Branding Campaigns.
- Crisis Management and the Future of Consumerism.
- Higher Education and Student Marketing.
- The Truth about Entertainment Communication.
- Taking Control of Science Communication.
- Coverage of Latin America in the U.S. press.
- Mass Media, Society, and Celebrity Journalism.
- Communication Strategies and Mental Health Stigma.
- Worse Case Scenarios: When Scandals Come to Light.
- Media and Social Norms on Campuses.
- Framing Art: Artists, Non-Profits, and Social Change.
- Naming Rights Campaigns in Sports marketing.
- Why do People Play the Lottery?
- Branded Entertainment: The Case of Bud TV.
- Gay Advertising Messages and Straight consumers.
- Nation Branding and the News Media.
- Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility Campaigns.
- Evaluating Opinion Leader and Market Maven Theories.

###