
Syllabus Traditions of Communication Sciences

Fall 2023

Course director: Prof. Katharina Lobinger

Course Calendar

October 2, 2023: 14:00-15:30: Preparatory meeting (MS Teams) – 1.5 hours

- Assignment of presentation topics
- Reading list
- **Attention:** a preliminary statement (300 words) must be submitted one week before the preparatory meeting (and thus on **September 25, 2023**)

October 26, 2023: 9:00-17:00: Session 1, lunch break from 12:30-14:30 – 6 hours

- Introduction
- Basic terms of communication sciences

October 27, 2023: 9:00-17:00: Session 2, lunch break from 12:30-14:30 – 6 hours

- Mapping the field
- Locating one own's research

Aims

The term “communication sciences” (mind the plural!) highlights the fact that communication is studied and theorized from various disciplinary angles, including very different approaches and theoretical lenses that stem from e.g., sociology, psychology, semiotics, linguistics, informatics, and many more. This leads to the question whether communication is actually a discipline, a transdisciplinary field, or an area of contact (and thus also of friction) where different disciplines meet and overlap? Another related question is when communication sciences were actually born or established? With the advent of technically mediated communication and mass communication, as many social scientific approaches argue, or with the use of symbolic exchange, as often argued in approaches stemming from the humanities?

This high interdisciplinarity of communication sciences can be considered the beauty and the beast at the same time. The beauty because it gives researchers great flexibility in thinking about social, cultural, and technical aspects of communication and focus on these aspects from different perspectives. This certainly allows for more complete views on complex issues. The beast because transdisciplinarity complicates situating and locating one's own

research without getting lost in interdisciplinarity. It is thus important for Ph.D. students to know the different traditions, be able to locate their own approach, identify the field of reference and its relevant publication outlets, associations, and experts. From their “home” paradigm and position they can then comfortably enjoy the flexibility the transdisciplinarity that communication sciences allow for.

This course will tackle these questions and has two main aims:

- to foster the creation of common ground among Ph.D. students in communication and
- to help students locate their own work.

Topics

The course is divided into two main themes: 1) *Basic terms of communication sciences* and 2) *Mapping the field and locating the own research* within the resulting overview. One day-long session will be devoted to each theme. In the preparatory meeting before these two sessions, mandatory readings will be assigned to students based on their disciplinary background (for individual or group presentation).

1. Basic terms of communication sciences

After a general introduction into the course contents, the main concepts of communication sciences will be discussed and deconstructed. Among other questions, we will focus on the concept of communication itself. We will elaborate what communication is – and what communication is not. This is important to limit and narrow the field of inquiry. We will also discuss the key notion “medium”. What is a medium? What are different definitions of media? Are communication sciences necessarily concerned with mediated communication? This session will be based on selected readings that are announced in the preparatory meeting session on *October 2, 2023*. Students will prepare short oral presentations that summarize these texts. Moreover, students will be asked to discuss how they use these basic concepts in their own research.

2. Mapping the field and locating the own project

In the second session, we will look at some of the involved disciplines, various “founding texts” or “founding approaches” and selected core theories of communication sciences and put them in relation to each other. This mapping exercise shall help create an overview of communication sciences. We will particularly focus on research that is located at the intersections of the involved disciplines. Students will again present the mandatory readings in oral presentations and locate their own approach within the conceptual map. It will be of particular interest which interrelations do exist between the involved interdisciplinary traditions, how concepts migrate between disciplines and what the involved disciplinary approaches can learn from one another.

At the end of the session, Ph.D. students will position their own research in the map. They will be asked to discuss which other approaches are related to or could be helpful for their project(s). After the second session they will write a short comment (max. 500 words) that sums up these reflections.

Pedagogical approach

After an introduction by Professor Katharina Lobinger, Ph.D. students will present the mandatory readings that serve as the basis on which the further work and discussions in class are grounded. Besides these short presentations, the sessions will be organized in discussion groups and workshops. At the end of each session, students are given time to

prepare their written statements. Additional space will be dedicated to bottom-up requests stemming from discussions in class.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the course will be based on the following items:

1. A **preliminary 300 words statement** containing the following information: 1) topic of the Ph.D. research, 2) indication of the tradition of communication science the participant is most familiar with and 3) a list of three publications that are most relevant for the Ph.D. research. (If possible, please include the PDF files.) The statement must be submitted one week before the preparatory meeting (and thus on *September 25, 2023*) on iCorsi. Please kindly also indicate in which of the following languages you feel comfortable reading scientific texts (English, German, Italian, French).
2. **In class-resentations** (max. 10 minutes, around 5-8 slides per assigned text). The presentations should summarize the main concepts of the assigned readings (see the file "Reading List & Preparation" that will be handed out during the preparatory meeting).
3. **Discussion in class** and contributions to **the course Wiki** (see iCorsi for further information).
4. A **short comment (max 500 words)**, to be submitted after the second session.

Readings

Mandatory readings:

All participants are requested to read the following articles before session 1. Related task: Also search for information regarding who the authors of the text are and what tradition of communication sciences they represent.

Donsbach, W. (2006). The identity of communication research. *Journal of Communication*, 56(3), 437-448. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00294.x

Craig, R. T. (2016). Traditions of communication theory. In K. Bruhn Jensen, R. T. Craig, J. D. Pooley, & E. W. Rothenbuhler (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (pp. 1-10): John Wiley & Sons.

Further reading will be assigned during the preparatory session on *October 2, 2023*.