

**COMM 750, Special Topics:  
Media, Technology and Cultural Change**

Department of Communication, North Dakota State University  
Spring 2014  
3 graduate-level credits

**Instructor:** Ross F. Collins, Ph.D., professor of communication, 338 Minard Hall, ross.collins@ndsu.edu, 231-7295, www.rossfcollins.com.

**Office hours:** 9:30-11 Tuesdays and Thursdays, or by appointment.

Class meets 5-7:30 p.m. Mondays.

Class communication: This class will be administered through the university's course management (Blackboard) website; the instructor will post announcements there at least weekly, usually on Mondays.

**Required text:** There is no specific text for this class, although students may wish to buy a copy of books on which extensive readings will rely. These readings will be available on reserve at the library or department office, depending on class needs.

**About this class.**

Students in this graduate-level *seminar* (see below) will investigate topics related to the influence of technological evolution driving the development of communication and media, and their contribution to cultural change in the United States and abroad. Topics to be investigated will include general themes as indicated below. Other themes may be considered as class interests and time dictate; as this is an advanced seminar, the class is structured loosely to allow students to investigate topics in greater detail and to develop possible topic ideas not directly indicated in the syllabus.

**Objectives.**

- Gain basic knowledge regarding the most significant technological revolutions in communication from ancient times to the present.
- Gain insights into how technological change drives communication change (or does it?).
- Explore the relationship between technology, media, and culture.
- Gain basic understanding of historical research methods in communication.

**Participation.**

As this is an graduate-level seminar, attendance is essential. Students need to come prepared to ask questions and discuss assigned material, as informed discussion is vital to the vibrant experience of a seminar.

The instructor realizes students sometimes face unforeseen emergencies that may require them to miss a class. Course policy is to allow one "free skip" for any reason; this absence will not affect a student's participation grade. Beyond this students must realize that their

missing a discussion will result in a deduction of class participation points. Note students who merely show up but do not participate in class discussions also may lose participation points, as success of a graduate-level seminar requires students who are prepared and ready to discuss, as noted below.

### *What is a seminar?*

Students who enroll in a class may expect to receive a detailed syllabus specifically describing the material to be covered, how it will be covered, and activities throughout the semester. The class instructor will take primary responsibility for preparing and relaying this information to students, through lectures as well as films, trips and other activities, and specific assignments. Examinations will usually be administered to evaluate student progress and establish a final grade.

A seminar, on the other hand, shares the educational experience among students and instructor. A professor facilitates discussion based on his or her own knowledge and study of a topic, but seldom offers long lectures or other formally structured lesson plans and assignments. Learning is instead based on participation of each student. Students will be expected to do their own research on topic ideas to be covered at class meetings, offer essays or other written work in support of those ideas, and lead or facilitate group discussions of those topics. In addition to facilitating class discussions, instructors may provide tutorials and evaluation of written work. But the knowledge and insight taken from a seminar relies on preparation and enthusiasm of everyone who takes part.

Because the seminar approach asks students to pursue research, writing and discussion of topics through their own initiative, enrollment is usually limited to motivated and mature participants. Ancient universities such as Cambridge (the instructor's alma mater!) and Oxford, as well as American "Ivy League" universities, favor the seminar as a pinnacle of higher education. Truly it is the bright and fortunate graduate student at NDSU who experiences the challenge—and fun!—of seminar-style learning.

### **Class projects.**

*Presentations:* Topics described below will generally be considered for about two weeks of class. In addition to the required readings during the initial week of study **one student** will undertake a more in-depth examination of each topic, based on **at least two scholarly sources** beyond the assigned material. (Non-academic articles or online encyclopedias may be used for background, but will not count as scholarly sources.) The student will present the topic to the class based on the assigned readings and supplemental material found and chosen by the student using library databases or other resources. During the second week of each topic's study all students will search online databases for scholarly research on a particular facet of the topic presented the first week, based on personal interest. Each student during the second week will present his or her findings based on this search. PowerPoints or other visual aids are not required, but may be used if appropriate.

Students *need not prepare* a formal research paper based on these presentations. They will be expected to submit a **written outline and bibliography** based on the presentation. Grades will be based on bibliographical sources consulted, knowledge of the subject as

indicated in the presentation, organization of the presentation, and facilitation of class discussion following the presentation.

*Research paper prospectus:* During the concluding two or so weeks of the seminar, students will establish a topic idea of their own interest for possible future research. While students will probably not have time to actually produce a completed research paper during the semester, they will be expected to compile a bibliography, a reasonable literature review, and a research plan based on standard techniques of historical research as indicated in readings on reserve. This material usually runs about 10-12 pages (12 pt. type, double-spaced).

### **Grading.**

Presentations: 50 pts. each; students will be expected to prepare about three presentations during the semester, although this may change depending on final enrollment number.

Research paper prospectus: 100 pts.

Weekly participation: 40 pts.

Tentative total: 290 pts.

Curve: 90-100%=A; 80-89.9%=B; 70-79.9%=C; 60-69.9%=D; below 60%=F.

### **Formatting style.**

Students are encouraged to use Chicago style, as this is standard for historical research, but may use APA style, if more convenient. Students will need to deviate from APA style, however, in that page numbers must be included for all references, even if not part of material directly quoted.

## **Tentative Schedule.**

### **Week one.**

Introduction; methods of historical inquiry. Revolutions in human communication.

Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 1.

William David Sloan and Michael Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, Ch. 1.

Ross F. Collins, "What Is Plagiarism?"

[www.rossfcollins.com/436history/plagiarism.html](http://www.rossfcollins.com/436history/plagiarism.html).

### **Weeks two and three.**

Invention of human speech and language.

Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 2.

David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History*, Part One.

### **Weeks four and five.**

Invention of writing.

Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 1.

Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 3.

David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History*, Part Two.

### **Weeks six and seven.**

Invention of printing.

Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 2.  
Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 4.  
David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History*, Part Three.

**Weeks eight and nine.**

Invention of mass media.  
Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 3.  
David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts*, Introduction and Ch. 1.  
Michael and Edwin Emery, *The Press in America*, Ch. 9.

**Weeks ten and eleven.**

Invention of image-making, cinema and media entertainment.  
Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 5.  
Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 4.  
Ross F. Collins, "A Brief History of Photography and Photojournalism,"  
[www.rossfcollins.com/242photojournalism/historyofphotography.html](http://www.rossfcollins.com/242photojournalism/historyofphotography.html).

**Weeks twelve and thirteen.**

Invention of telegraphy and broadcast.  
Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 5.  
Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 6.  
Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, Chs. 3-4.  
Wm. David Sloan and Michael Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, Chs. 3-4.

**Weeks fourteen and fifteen.**

Invention of the internet; conclusions.  
Irving Fang, *A History of Mass Communication*, Ch. 6.  
Terence P. Moran, *Introduction to the History of Communication*, Ch. 7-8.

**University official notice on academic honesty.**

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335, Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct, applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at [www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty](http://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty).

*Note: If you need special accommodations for learning, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.*