Mass Communication
Theory and Practice

Definitions

- Mass Communication
  - The process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences.
- Interpersonal Communication
  - Communication between two or a few people

Review – Interpersonal Communication Model
1948, Harold Lasswell

A source sends a message through a medium to a receiver producing an effect.
Osgood and Schramm’s Model (1954)

Terminology
- Encoded: transformed into an understandable sign and symbol system
- Interpreter: all participants working to create meaning
- Decoded: the interpretation of signs and symbols
- Noise: anything that interferes with successful communication

Schramm’s model of Mass Communication
- Many identical messages
- The mass audience
- Many receivers, each decoding, interpreting, encoding
- Each connected with a group in which the message is reinterpreted and often acted upon.
- Input from news sources, art sources, etc.
Inferential Feedback
- Indirect rather than direct
  - Ratings from new programs
  - Text messaging to vote
  - Criticism by television/movie critic
- Source must infer the meaning
- Too late to change the message
- Doesn’t suggest improvement

Constraints of Mass Communication
- Constrained by virtually every aspect of the communication situation
- A level of communication most likely to meet the greatest number of viewers’ needs
- A belief that experimentation is dangerous
- A belief that to challenge the audience is to risk failure

Mass Comm. and Culture
- Arguing the importance and power of the media industries and mass communication
- Micro vs Macro-level effects
  - Micro: personal
  - Macro: cultural
    - Does television cause violence?
    - Do beer ads cause increased alcohol consumption?
Turn to a partner

☐ Identify something in the mass media that has had a micro influence.

☐ Now identify something that can have a macro influence.

Mass Comm. and Culture

☐ Administrative vs Critical Research
  ■ Administrative: immediate, observable influence
    ○ Does a commercial campaign sell more lawn mowers
    ○ Did Mortal Kombat inspire the Columbine High School killings?
  ■ Critical: asking questions about the kind of nation we are building, what kind of people we are becoming.

Turn to a partner

☐ Identify an example of administrative research question.

☐ What would be a critical research question?
Mass Comm. and Culture

- Transmissional vs. Ritual perspective
  - Transmissional: media as senders of information for the purpose of control
  - Ritual: media as central to the maintenance of society in time – the representation of shared beliefs

Turn to a Partner

- Develop an example of media as transmissional perspective.

- Now, develop an example of media as a ritual perspective.

Mass Media as Cultural Storytellers

- A culture’s values and beliefs reside in the stories it tells
  - Media has a responsibility to do so professionally and ethically
  - The audience has the responsibility to question to stories and the tellers, to interpret the stories in a way consistent with the larger cultural values and truths, to reflect on the stories’ meanings
In the last six months, how has the media served as a cultural storyteller?

Mass Media as Cultural Forum
- A giant courtroom where we discuss and debate our culture – what it is and what we want it to be.
- Mass communication has become the primary forum for this debate
- The most powerful voices have the most power to shape definitions and understandings.

In the last six months, how has the media served as place of cultural debate?
Thursday

Media Literacy