Course Description

The seminar provides an in-depth introduction to theories and research on the diffusion of innovations, an approach that seeks to explain the process by which new ideas or products spread over time via communication channels among members of a social system. Diffusion theory can be applied in many settings such as health communication, marketing, news diffusion, policy diffusion, and the adoption of new technologies.

Readings

- Reading Packet.

Requirements/Assignments

The final grade for the course will be based on the following requirements:

- 3 x Reaction Paper 15% (5% each)
- 2 x Discussion Leader 40% (20% each)
- 1 x Research Paper 30%
- Participation 15%

*Reaction Papers*

Students are expected to write 3 short reaction papers of approx. 3 pages during the semester, in weeks of their choice (but excluding weeks with a discussion leader assignment). The papers
should offer a short, critical evaluation of (some of) the readings of a given week. They are due at noon each Monday and may be submitted as hardcopy or as email attachment.

Discussion Leader
Each student will choose two of the topics on the course schedule and, in consultation with the instructor, present and discuss recent research and/or the current status of the theory on that topic to the class. The presentation should include a brief outline of the key findings, methods, implications, and limitations of the research topic. The discussion leaders are expected to make their presentation and lead the seminar discussion for one-third to one-half of a class period. Discussion leaders are expected to hand out an outline to the entire class detailing what they cover in their presentation as well as a brief annotated bibliography of the articles reviewed for the presentation. Please note that the bibliography is to supplement the readings already on the syllabus for a particular topic. More specifically:

- The topics will be assigned on the first day of class but not later than the second week.
- One week before the assigned discussion leadership, you must provide your classmates and the instructor with a copy of one article or study that you feel best demonstrates how the topic we are covering can be used to understand diffusion theories. Keep in mind that your discussion should relate the readings you found to the assigned readings for the week.
- One week before the assigned discussion leadership, you should provide the instructor with a preliminary copy of the outline of your presentation, discussion questions, and the annotated bibliography.
- On the day of your presentation, you will distribute copies of your outline and the annotated bibliography.

Research Paper
Each student is required to write a 20 to 30 page research paper related to the course material (and ideally the student’s research interests). This will usually be a summary and critical review of a particular concept, theory, or hypothesis as well as the research or studies pertaining to it. It could also be a (proposal for a) research project analyzing a diffusion process, or an empirical study such as the secondary analysis of existing data. The precise topic is to be determined between the student and the professor as early as possible during the semester. The goal is to write a paper of high quality (substantively and formally) that might be submitted to a conference or even a journal. A short, written proposal is due – at the latest – April 2. The completed paper will be presented and submitted on May 14. Students are encouraged but not required to submit a final draft of their paper some time before May 14 for comments and suggestions.

Participation
The seminar requires active participation of the students in class discussions. Students are expected to read the assigned readings before each session.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
The University of Maryland is committed to making appropriate accommodations to individuals with disabilities that have been documented by the Disability Support Services (0126 Shoemaker Hall). If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this class, please contact the instructor as soon as possible, and no later than the third week of the semester.
Course Schedule

1/29  Introduction

2/5  Origin, History, and Definition of Diffusion Research

- Rogers, ch. 1-3 (pp. 1-130).

2/12  Scientific Methods: Mass Media Effects & Social Network Analysis

- Weimann, ch. 3 (pp. 29-51).

2/19  Generation of Innovations, Communication Channels, and the Innovation-Decision Process

- Rogers, ch. 4-5 (pp. 131-203).
2/26  Innovations and their Adoption

- Rogers, ch. 6-7 (pp. 204-280).

3/5  Opinion Leaders

- Rogers, ch. 8-9 (pp. 281-370).
- Weimann, ch. 1-6 (pp. 3-105) & ch. 14-16 (pp. 239-286).

3/12  Networks


3/19  Spring Break (no class)

3/26  Organizations

- Rogers, ch. 10 (pp. 371-404).
Health Communication

- Weimann, ch. 10 (pp. 183-193) & 13 (pp. 219-236).

Culture & Marketing

- Weimann, ch. 7 & 8 (pp.109-157).
4/16  News Diffusion


4/23  Politics & Policy Diffusion

- Weimann, ch. 9 (pp.159-182).
New Technologies & Participation


Campaigns & Consequences of Innovations & Miscellaneous Topics

- Weimann, ch. 11 (pp. 195-205).

Presentation of Papers