AEE 6905
Communication Theories and Strategies for Agriculture and Natural Resources
Course purpose and objectives

- Where else would you rather be?
- Why is it important to learn about communication theory and strategy?
- How can you apply what you learn to improve agricultural and natural resources outcomes?
Some definitions....

- What is communication?
- What areas does it cover?
- What is theory?
- What’s unique about agriculture and natural resources from a communication perspective?
Some answers

- Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviors.

- Communication involves four areas of study:
  - Interpersonal
  - Group
  - Organizational
  - Mass
What is a theory?

- Explanation of how things happen the way they do
- Research in communication involves discovering testable knowledge based on experience (describe, explore, explain, predict)
- Communication models are graphic representations that can be used to visually depict a concept or theoretical framework
Shannon-Weaver communication transmission model
Course Structure and assignments

- Six weeks, four case study modules using video, text and communication products of the actors involved
- Use of general theory text and more theoretically based readings assignments
- One research paper, three case study write-ups and one team case presentation
- Class web site http://plaza.ufl.edu/declair/ae6905
Decision case method

- Used to initiate thoughtful discussion and application of concepts
- Helps integrate theory and strategy by focusing on actors’ perceptions, motivations and outcomes
- Focuses on identifying problems and suggesting solutions
What makes ag and natural resources unique?

- Less than 2% of U.S. population are farmers
- Popular culture has ingrained stereotypes of the “family farm” and the “family farmer”
- Issues are complex, socially unresolved and hard to communicate via mass media
- Agriculturalists don’t communicate to end users (consumers)
Issues

- International trade and globalization of agriculture.
- Advances in productivity and technology in agriculture.
- Linkages between natural resources, the environment and agriculture.
- Rural-urban interactions, particularly land use issues.
- Agricultural personnel and labor issues.
- Commodity market and agribusiness issues.
Communication theory and research

- Communication is ancient, but theory is a product of the last century
- Human communication processes are based on the concept of *shared meaning* –
  - Subjective responses that individuals learn to make either to things they directly experience in reality or to particular symbols used to label that reality.
  - We want to have similar meanings. If different, communication process has suffered distortion.
  - The point at which frames of reference overlap is where true understanding occurs.
Theories of mass communication

Response to thinking about the impact of mass media on concepts of shared meaning
- How did the introduction of newspapers and mass circulation magazines affect society?
- How did the introduction of broadcast affect society?
- What about the Internet?
Historical perspectives

Theories of direct effect
- Propaganda (Lasswell)
- Silver bullet
- Chicago school
- Neo-Marxism

Academic emergence
- Two step flow/opinion leadership (Lazarsfeld)
- Unified field theory (Shramm)
- Agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw)
- Cognitive dissonance (Festinger)
Models of communication

Models seek to show the main elements of any structure or process and the relationships between and among these elements.

“limited effects” models
- Agenda setting
- Spiral of silence (Noelle-Newman)
- Cultivation (Gerbner)
- Media violence
Agenda setting

- Agenda setting - news media prioritize of setting the agenda of issue concerns for the public
Spiral of silence

- Media's impact on public opinion is influenced by many factors.
- Individual's willingness to speak out on an issue is heavily influenced by perception of the prevailing climate of opinion.
- Minority opinions constitute the “spiral of silence”.
Cultivation

- Heavy TV viewers tend to view the world differently than others
- Their world view consists a “TV reality”—this reality is then transmitted back to viewers who assume the world view is reality
- “The world is a mean, cold place”
The special case of media violence

- Theories suggest the influence of media on violence, particularly in susceptible populations, but hard to empirically demonstrate the effect.
- Does violence in the media have an effect on real-life violence? What factors are related to this?
- Does media change the culture or does the culture reflect the media?
Developing a communication model

- Models are useful in research development; they also suggest how theories work
- Factors important to communication models
  - Selection/content of message
  - Creation of message elements
  - Dissemination of message
  - Reception of message
Developing a communication model of Internet usage

- Develop a model that represents usage of the Internet
- Consider the factors related to communication
- Identify an outcome to work backward from
- Sketch in antecedent, intervening factors
# Communication model criteria

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Human communication models

- Osgood-Schramm interpersonal communication model

Source – Encoder

Signal

Decoder - Receiver
Newcomb’s ABX Model

- Explains how two intervals might communicate about an idea, person or event
- Cognitive consistency, balance, co-orientation theories based on this model
Agricultural communications

- How is agricultural communications different from mass communications?
- How do these differences impact meaning and communication?
- Can we develop a model for agricultural communication? What’s our desired outcome?