UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Communication Processes, Sustainability and Innovation

2526-2-F8802N062

Learning objectives

Knowledge and Understanding
The course aims to provide students with the conceptual and methodological tools necessary to critically analyze the communicative strategies employed in political, institutional, and media discourse, particularly in the construction of narratives around environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding
By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate a deep understanding of the theoretical and methodological foundations of discourse analysis in political, institutional, and media contexts, particularly in relation to the concepts of sustainability and innovation. They will be capable of identifying the ideological implications conveyed through discourses on sustainability and innovation across various communicative settings, and of applying advanced models of discourse analysis (e.g., critical discourse analysis, semiotics, frame analysis) to authentic texts and real-world contexts.

Making Judgements
Students will be able to autonomously and critically assess the effectiveness, coherence, and ethical implications of discursive strategies in institutional and media communication. They will also be able to formulate independent and well-argued analyses of complex issues related to public communication, symbolic conflict, and the governance of sustainability.

Communication Skills
The course aims to strengthen students' ability to present and discuss, both in written and oral form, the results of complex discourse analyses with rigor and clarity.

Learning Skills
Students will develop the ability to learn autonomously, including through the use of multidisciplinary academic sources and the analysis of authentic materials.

Contents

The course examines communicative processes within the context of political and institutional discourse, with a particular focus on sustainability. Through the analysis of institutional documents, public statements, and institutional policies, the course will explore how the concepts of sustainability and innovation are integrated and represented in political and institutional communication. It will analyze the effectiveness of communicative strategies in promoting sustainable policies and develop critical skills in deconstructing political and institutional messages.

Detailed program

In the first part of the course, the main theoretical approaches developed within communication research will be presented. The second part of the course will be dedicated to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and to analyzing the most relevant studies published in this field on the topic of sustainability and innovation.

The course will be organized into the following thematic modules:

Module 1: Introduction to Political and Institutional Communication

Definition and characteristics of political and institutional communication
Tools and techniques of communication in the political context
Role of the media in political communication
Module 2: The Concept of Sustainability

Definition of sustainability and sustainable development
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Union
Role of sustainability in public and institutional discourse

Module 3: Discourse Analysis Methods
Methodologies for analyzing political and institutional discourse

Module 4: Political and Institutional Discourse on Sustainability and Innovation
Analysis of political speeches and official documents on sustainability and innovation
Rhetorical strategies used to promote sustainability and innovation
Case studies

Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of the main theoretical and research perspectives in the field of communication and discourse analysis.

Teaching methods

Priority will be given to interactive lessons based on the presentation and discussion of texts, group exercises, as well as the design and implementation of a research project on the course topics.

Lecture-based Teaching (40%): Theoretical introduction to the topics covered.
Interactive Teaching (60%): Analysis and discussion of cases

Assessment methods

The exam consists of two components:

Individual written paper
A critical analysis of a case of political, institutional, or media communication related to the themes of sustainability and innovation (3,000–4,000 words). The paper must demonstrate the student's ability to autonomously and rigorously apply the theoretical and methodological tools covered during the course.

Oral examination
Discussion of the written paper and assessment of the student’s understanding of theoretical content, discourse analysis methodologies, and critical argumentation skills.

Assessed competencies:
Theoretical and methodological understanding of course content (Dublin Descriptor 1)
Critical application to real-world contexts (Dublin Descriptor 2)
Independent judgment (Dublin Descriptor 3)
Written and oral communication skills (Dublin Descriptor 4)
Learning ability and critical reflection (Dublin Descriptor 5)

Assessment criteria:
The final grade (on a scale of 30) will be based on:

Relevance and originality of the paper
Methodological and argumentative accuracy
Clarity of presentation
Critical thinking and independence during the discussion

Consistency with learning objectives:
The exam components are fully aligned with the course objectives, as they assess theoretical knowledge, analytical skills, critical autonomy, and communication abilities developed throughout the course.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

The reference texts will be presented during the first lesson and, where possible, will be made available in PDF format.

During the course, a selection of articles will be presented, analyzed, and discussed, including:

Cornwall, A. (2007). Buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse. Development in practice, 17(4-5), 471-484.
Espiner, S., Orchiston, C., & Higham, J. (2017). Resilience and sustainability: a complementary relationship? Towards a practical conceptual model for the sustainability–resilience nexus in tourism. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 25(10), 1385–1400.
Joseph, J. (2013). Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach. Resilience, 1(1), 38–52.
Machin, D., & Liu, Y. (2024). How tick list sustainability distracts from actual sustainable action: the UN 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development. Critical Discourse Studies, 21(2), 164-181.
Mavelli, L. (2019). Resilience beyond neoliberalism? Mystique of complexity, financial crises, and the reproduction of neoliberal life. Resilience, 7(3), 224–239.
Mediavilla, J., & Garcia-Arias, J. (2019). Philanthrocapitalism as a neoliberal (development agenda) artefact: Philanthropic discourse and hegemony in (financing for) international development. Globalizations, 16(6), 857–875.
Telleria, J., & Garcia-Arias, J. (2022). The fantasmatic narrative of 'sustainable development'. A political analysis of the 2030 global development agenda. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 40(1), 241–259.
Wagner, W., & Anholt, R. (2016). Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's new leitmotif: pragmatic, problematic or promising?. Contemporary security policy, 37(3), 414-430.
Walker, J., & Cooper, M. (2011). Genealogies of resilience: From systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation. Security dialogue, 42(2), 143-160.

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | CLIMATE ACTION