

Descriptif d'enseignement / *Course descriptions*

cycle master 1 / 4th year
Semestre 2

Titre du cours - *Course title*

Humanitarian communication: contexts and challenges

Langue du cours/Language of instruction : English

Enseignant(s) – *Professor(s)*

Valérie Gorin

Lecturer and researcher, University of Geneva

Contact : valerie.gorin@unige.ch

Résumé du cours – Objectifs - *Course description – Targets*

The course seeks to explore and analyse the use of different types of communication by several stakeholders involved in humanitarian crises and programmes. If communication has been at the core of humanitarian organisations' public image and operational activities since the rise of modern humanitarianism at the end of the 19th century, these organisations have adapted their communication strategies to the competition of the international relief ecosystem, the complexity of humanitarian crises and the vulnerabilities of affected populations.

The main goals of this course will be:

- a) to understand the multiple challenges of modern humanitarian communication, and the relations between the different actors of communication in particular;
- b) to reflect on the typologies of communication involved, with a focus on life-saving communication (prevention, crisis and peace contexts), crisis reporting (relations with the media), public communication (PR, branding) and political communication (advocacy, negotiation);
- c) to assess the use of new technologies and new media regarding the rise of digital humanitarianism;
- d) to analyse the multi-faceted representations of humanitarian action and the economies of visualization of distant suffering.

Evaluation - *Assessment*

- Class participation is encouraged, as it is an interactive class in which students should engage in discussion and debate about the different perspectives.
- A written essay, to develop a personal, in-depth research question related to one of the topics seen during the course.

Plan – Séances - *Course outline*

The course is organised in six thematic sessions:

1. The challenges and objectives of humanitarian communication

Introduction of the course, understanding of the main concepts linked to humanitarian communication and its different levels (public, internal, operational)

2. The media and humanitarian organisations: moving beyond a relation at stake

Exploring the ambivalent relation between media and humanitarian organisations, and the new stakeholders (media development agencies, the diaspora, the military, local media, etc.)

3. The contexts, cycles and needs of humanitarian communication

The adaptation of humanitarian communication to affected populations, in pre-, during or post-crisis contexts

4. Challenging humanitarian representations: a path into alternative models?

Economies of visualization, "selling" distant suffering, humanitarian ethics, new representational models

5. The case of political communication: advocacy and negotiation

The dilemmas of speaking out, from the use of testimonies to advocacy campaigns and negotiation with armed groups

6. Digital humanitarianism: a new utopia?

The impact of new technologies in humanitarian responses, the Digital Humanitarian Network and the use of volunteer and technical communities

Bibliographie - Bibliography :

Recommended readings for session 1:

- Brauman, Rony. (1993). "When suffering makes a good story." In *Life, Death and Aid. The Médecins sans frontières Report on World Crisis Intervention*. Jean, François (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 149-158.
- Cottle, Simon, and David Nolan. (2007). "Global humanitarianism and the changing aid-media field. 'Everyone was dying for footage'." *Journalism Studies* 8 (6): 862-878.
- Dijkzeul, Denis, and Markus Moke. (2005). "Public communication strategies of international humanitarian organizations." *International Review of the Red Cross* 87 (860): 673-691.
- Rye Olsen, Gorm, Nils Carstensen, and Kristian Hoyen. (2003). "Humanitarian crises: what determines the level of emergency assistance? Media coverage, donor interests and the aid business." *Disasters* 27 (2): 109-126.

Recommended readings for session 2:

- Adams, Gordon. (2003). "The media and complex humanitarian emergencies." *Humanitarian Practice Network* (13): 5-7.
- Ignatieff, Michael. (1998). "The stories we tell: Television and humanitarian aid." In *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*. Jonathan Moore (ed.), Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 287-302.
- Robinson, Piers. (2000). "The policy-media interaction model: measuring media power during humanitarian crises." *Journal of Peace Research* 37 (5): 613-633.
- Ross, Steven. (2004). "Toward new understandings: Journalists and humanitarian relief coverage." San Francisco: Fritz Institute.

Recommended readings for session 3:

- BBC World Service Trust. (2008). "Left in the dark. The unmet need for information in humanitarian responses". Policy Briefing #2.
- BBC Media Action. (2012). "Still left in the dark? How people in emergencies use communication to survive - and how humanitarian agencies can help". Policy Briefing #6.
- Chapelier, Carole, and Anita Shah. (2013). "Improving communication between humanitarian aid agencies and crisis-affected people". HPN Network Paper (74).
- Hieber, Loretta. (2001). *Lifeline Media: Reaching populations in crisis*. Media Action International. Extracts from pp. 15-45 + pp. 73-82

Recommended readings for session 4:

- Chouliaraki, Lillie. (2013). "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2): 107-126.
- DOCHAS. (2014). "The illustrative guide to the Dochas code of conduct on images and messages." Dublin.
- Kennedy, Denis. (2009). "Selling the distant other: Humanitarianism and imagery - ethical dilemmas of humanitarian action." *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*. <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/411>
- da Silva Gama, Carlo, et alii. (2013). "Empty portraits - Humanitarian aid campaigns and the politics of silencing." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3 (19): 39-50.

Recommended readings for session 5:

- Bridges, KM. (2010). "Between aid and politics: diagnosing the challenge of humanitarian advocacy in politically complex environments – the case of Darfur, Sudan." *Third World Quarterly* 31 (8): 1251-1269.
- Fassin, Didier. (2008). "The humanitarian politics of testimony: subjectification through trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (3): 531-558.
- Jackson, Ashley. (2014). "Humanitarian negotiations with armed non-state actors: key lessons from Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia." HPG Policy Brief #55.
- Slim, Hugo, and Andrew Bonwick. (2005). "Humanitarian advocacy." In: *Protection. An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies*. London: ODI, 79-102.

Recommended readings for session 6:

- Garman, Stuart. (2015). "New communications technologies in emergencies." In *The Routledge Companion to Humanitarian Action*. Mc Ginty et alii (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 440-452.
- Madianou, Mirca. (2013). "Humanitarian campaigns in social media. Network architectures and polymedia events." *Journalism Studies* 14 (2): 249-266.
- OCHA. (2012). *Humanitarianism in the network age*. New York: UN OCHA.