WRTG 3020: Language, Power and Perception  
Spring, 2007

Instructor: Angela Buchanan  
Office: ENVD 1B27C  
Office Hours: M & W, 1-2, or by appointment  
Office Phone: 735-4776  
email: angela.buchanan@colorado.edu

Textbooks:  
*The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Power in a More-than-Human World,* by David Abram  
*Thinking in Pictures, and Other Reports from My Life with Autism,* by Temple Grandin  
*The Everyday Writer,* by Andrea Lunsford, or a similar, approved writing handbook

Course Goals and Objectives: In this course we will examine theories of language and cognition based on how humans interact with and perceive the world around them. We will discuss different philosophies of communication and how they correspond with, or conflict with, different lived experiences. The primary goal is to develop a better understanding of how language shapes our communicative abilities and understanding, and to apply that knowledge to rhetorical situations ranging from the personal, to the academic, to the civic. A key objective of the course is to encourage a greater awareness of the underlying philosophical assumptions of language, particularly language that is meant to be persuasive or prescriptive in nature.

This course will be conducted in seminar style, meaning that students will be expected to contribute extensively to the course content through discussion, research, and readings. Ideally this will be a fun and productive course, with everyone bringing something interesting to our “table.”

Major Projects:  
-Reading Journal (20 percent)  
-Grandin Book Response (10 percent)  
-Abram Book Analysis/Response (20 percent)  
-Research Report on an Alternative Theory of Language/Cognition (15 percent)  
-Oral Report or Interactive Class Activity (15 percent)  
-Participation (20 percent)

*All assigned work must be completed to pass the course, including drafts.*
With regard to independent variables, scales are created for trust in societal institutions, perceived role of the scientist, biotechnology awareness/interest, attention to government news on television, attention to science on television, attention to entertainment television, attention to government news in newspapers, and attention to science in newspapers. Means, standard deviations, and a further description of the variables within each scale are provided in the appendix. The appendix also includes descriptive statistics for the single-variable demographic measures used (age, gender, income, education, ideology), exposure to television (reported in total minutes per day), and exposure to newspapers (reported in days per week). The awareness variable is included partially to compensate for lack of a direct test of knowledge about biotechnology, a minor limitation of the present study.

We use both media attention variables and exposure variables here in accordance with Chaffee and Schleuder’s (1986) injunction to draw on attention to media measures rather than just exposure measures.

Method

Based on a scatterplot of each independent variable, all of the measures show linear relationships with the dependent variable, except for the trust variable, which appears to have a curvilinear relationship with biotech support. As trust increased, overall support reached a plateau. A squared version of this variable was, therefore, included in the model, but additional research seems necessary to fully understand and replicate this curvilinear relationship.

Given the linearity of the relationships involved, this study uses hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression using the four-measure biotechnology support variable as our dependent variable. Hierarchical OLS allows the researcher to enter variables in a series of steps, with the results at each step providing an indication of the relative relationship of the variables to biotechnology support while controlling for the variables entered in the previous steps (Cohen et al. 2002). Pearson correlation coefficients (called zero-order coefficients in the results tables) and on-entry beta are also reported.

For our model (see Figure 1), we enter the five demographic variables in the first block (age, education, income, gender, and ideology). A second block includes the basic newspaper and television exposure variables. The third block includes the five core media attention variables. The fourth block includes the trust variables, the role of the scientist variable, and biotechnology awareness variable. As previously noted, the ordering of these variables is consistent with the O-S-O-R approach to political communication that
**Attendance:** You may miss five classes with no direct harm to your grade. Illness does **not** constitute an excused absence, excluding examples detailed below. Six or more absences will result in a failing grade for the participation aspect of the course. Nine or more absences will result in failure of the course. Excessive tardiness and/or leaving early will result in a failing participation grade. If you need to leave early or show up late two or three times during the semester, notify me in advance and it will not harm your grade or your credibility.

Note that exceptional circumstances such as hospitalization, death in the family, or physical or mental trauma should be discussed with me as soon as possible, and documentation should be provided (contact the Dean in circumstances resulting in extended absence—the Dean will then contact all of your professors). Absences due to religious observances are excused with two weeks advance notice of the specific date(s), and verified military or athletic obligations must also be cleared in advance and accompanied with a note from the coach or military officer. **Important:** Any absence, for any reason, requires that you contact me and make arrangements for all missed work to be made up in a timely fashion. Email is the most efficient way to contact me.

**Grading:** I use the standard numerical scale (3.0 = B, 3.3 = B+, etc.) to calculate final grades. All written work (excluding the Reading Journal) may be revised one time for an improved grade. First drafts will be assigned a regular grade if they are fully drafted, or a benchmark grade if they are works-in-progress. The first draft, with my comments, must be turned in with a revision. Revisions may be completed during the course of the class, or you may submit them at the end of the course in your final portfolio of work. Save all drafts and revisions!

The difference between an “A” and a “B” paper is usually a matter of depth of research, quality of analysis, and stylistic choices. “A” work is genuinely excellent in all areas, while “B” work reflects a good effort on all counts. “C” work reflects less investment, lower quality of thought, content, and/or style; “D” or “F” work reflects minimal investment of time and thought and/or failure to meet the demands of the assignment.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have physical, emotional, and/or learning disabilities requiring special accommodations, please notify me during the first two weeks of the course and, if appropriate, contact the Disability Services Office in Willard 322, phone number (303) 492-8671. If your disability is undocumented please discuss it with me anyway, and I will accommodate you to the best of my abilities.

Note that Disability letters from the university indicate legally mandated reasonable accommodations, while other letters/requests from agencies such as health providers or therapists are recommendations, rather than legal mandates. Please discuss any extenuating circumstances with me so I can let you know if accommodations are possible. If you have a disability that will prevent you from meeting the requirements of the attendance policy, I cannot accommodate you in this course. Equivalent online courses are available if you have disabilities that inhibit regular and punctual attendance.
Once in the model, the variables in the first block, as shown in Table 1, have results consistent with previous research, explaining about 11 percent of the total variance. Older people tend to have more positive feelings about biotechnology. Being male, additional years of education, and conservatism are also associated with greater biotechnology support. The first component of H1 is, therefore, supported.

For the second block, the first one containing communication measures, only the television exposure variable emerged to have any predictive role. Even this small relationship, however, disappears with the inclusion of the five media attention variables. This block explains very little additional variance. The third block brings the total explained variance up to 19 percent. It is interesting to note that only the television variables maintain significance after controls. Furthermore, while the television news attendance variable starts out insignificant at the zero-order level, it emerges as a small negative predictor of biotechnology support in the final model. Attention to
Participation: This aspect of your grade reflects your mental attendance. In other words, those who simply show up will not do well; those who are actively engaged in the course will succeed in this area. This is not a “lecture” course in nature or content, and you learn rhetorical skills primarily through guided, deliberate practice and participation. Participation includes a variety of things, including but not limited to providing quality written and oral feedback during peer reviews and workshops; asking intelligent and relevant questions during discussions and following presentations; acting professionally and in the manner of a colleague (meaning participating in a reflective and critical way, but in a manner that shows respect for others); and participating fully in all in-class exercises. Note that one of the primary goals for this course is to teach you about audience awareness and appropriate modes of discourse. Your primary audiences for this class are your peers and the teacher (me). Demonstrating rhetorical awareness and savvy in relation to these audiences is essential to your success.

General CU guidelines regarding expectations of classroom behavior are available online at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/index.html. Students and faculty are expected to conduct themselves with professionalism and respect for others at all times. Rude or disruptive behavior may result in disciplinary action.

Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. I will report all incidents of academic misconduct to the Honor Code Council. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Additional information may be found at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

Instances of unintentional plagiarism will be handled through in-depth discussion of citation expectations. Intentional plagiarism, such as turning in work that is not your own, will result in failure.
entertainment television and attention to science television have significant positive relationships to biotechnology support. The failure of the newspaper variables to reach significance contradicts H1 while the answer to RQ1 seems to depend on which specific television attention variable is under consideration. This interesting result will be further addressed in the discussion section below.

The fourth block of variables brings the total variance explained up to about 28 percent. The significance of the squared term suggests that increased generalized trust goes only so far in predicting biotechnology support. The failure of the measure assessing awareness and interest to show significance once its companions enter the model requires some additional consideration. It may be that biotechnology is an issue with both strong proponents and opponents who may have equally high levels of awareness/interest, potentially canceling out any directional relationship with biotechnology support. The questions tapping belief in the idea that scientists should be able to pursue their chosen research path ("role of the scientist") is one of the strongest in the model, highlighting the importance of specific attitudes about scientific research in predicting biotechnology support.

In sum, age, education, gender, and conservatism, as well as trust in institutions and faith in scientists all, as predicted, have positive relationships with support for agricultural biotechnology. Based on the relative equivalence of before-entry and final betas, the demographic variables seem to have relatively direct relationships with biotechnology support. The television attention variables are somewhat diminished in size by variables entered into the model before them. General trust also seems to decline in strength between its individual relationship with agricultural biotechnology perceptions and its final relationship. The variable assessing perceived role of the scientist declines in strength by about a third while the awareness variable drops into nonsignificance after the initial blocks of controls. If it is assumed that these variables are entered in the appropriate causal order, then these declining levels of significance suggest that media attention is mediating the relationship between demographic variables and the fourth block of trust and science-support variables.

**Discussion and Next Steps**

The results from the first and the fourth blocks of the model presented above largely confirm previous research. However, the performance of the communication variables provides new insights that hint at a number of paths for further research.