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Communication Education: Responding To Media Needs -
UPM's Contributions

By

Raja Ahmad Tajudin Shah
&
Musa Abu Hassan
Communication Education: Responding to Media Needs-

UPM's Contributions

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Communication Education: Responding to Media Needs—UPM's Contributions

By

Raja Ahmad Tajudin Shah
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to share the experience of Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Agriculture University Malaysia, UPM) in conducting courses in communication. Both academic and non academic courses will be described. Specifically, the paper will elaborate more on the academic courses that deal with communication media and the in-service training courses that are offered to the staff of development agencies.

To help readers comprehend our discussion better, we have arranged the paper in five sections. The first section gives an institution overview. Here, the paper traces the establishment of the Department of Development Communication within the Centre for Extension and Continuing Education, UPM. Then the current programmes of the department will be described. This section presents a discussion on specific courses that deal with media production. The discussion deals with both the academic and the non formal programmes. As reflected in the department’s name, we conduct in-service training in the areas of communication to better equip the staff of development agencies with media production knowledge, skills and capabilities. Section four outlines the department’s
plans and hopes for the future. In the final section the paper presents certain issues that hopefully will provide food for thought in the seminar discussions.

**History of Communication Education in UPM**

The history of UPM began in 1973 with the merger of the College of Agriculture Malaya and the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Malaysia. However, intake of students for the academic programmes started in July 1973 by three faculties. The three founding faculties were the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Animal Science, and the Faculty of Forestry. There was also a Basic Science Division.

Today, the university has 10 faculties, 3 centres and a Farm Division. The number of students enrolled for the July 1994/95 semester stands at 11,368. They are registered in 28 Bachelor Programmes, 3 Matriculation Programmes, and Masters and Doctoral Programmes in various disciplines.

The Department of Development Communication was established in May 1979, as an academic department of the Centre for Extension and Continuing Education (CECE). Nevertheless, communication as an academic course was already offered in the early 70s.

At this juncture it is important to note that the establishment of CECE in January 1976 was to coordinate the extension programmes of the university. Before 1976 extension programmes were conducted by the extension unit that was part of the Faculty of Agriculture. The extension unit also offered courses in extension and communication.
One of the main activities of the extension programme is continuing education, whereby the staff of the centre are involved in conducting in-service training for personnel of development agencies. Other extension activities include publication and distribution of Extension Magazine, Farmers’ newsletter and Extension Publications. Also, there are staff who participate in disseminating agricultural knowledge and technologies through the mass media.

Besides the above activities the centre offers elective courses in communication and extension to the students of UPM. The centre also has a graduate programme with specialisation in communication and extension education at the Masters and Ph.D. levels. These graduate programmes have attracted students from all over the world. Currently the academic staff of the department consists of one professor, 28 lecturers, and two tutors. Please refer to Appendix II for details on the academic staff.

After the background of the institution and the department have been described, let's move on to the focus of this paper—the current programmes of the Department of Development Communication.

**Current Programmes**

**Academic Programmes**

In this section, the discussion is tailored to the academic programmes of the department of development education. The list of courses that is directly related to the media will be described in detail.
Presently, the department offers 10 elective courses to the undergraduate students of UPM. At the graduate level, the department offers 20 courses besides independent studies and special topics. These courses and their respective synopsis are listed in Appendix 1.

It has been the policy of the university and the department to provide adequate training for students who taking our courses. As such, the department is equipped with up to date facilities in our six communication laboratories. These laboratories are Media Laboratory, Publication Laboratory, Graphic and Design Laboratory, Broadcasting Laboratory, Photography Laboratory and Oral Communication Laboratory.

With regard to communication media, it is important to note that the department adheres to the wider perspective of media utilisation. This means that the academic and non academic courses offered by the department is not limited to the mass media for general public. They also cater for the various kinds of media for specialized audiences such as those in the agriculture, health and community development sectors.

Besides this, the courses offered are not confined to media production process and critics but they include strategies for employing communication media in different kinds of working conditions. This aspect of media education offered by the department needs to be stressed because we are serving the students who later will become personnel in development agencies and other organizations. These students need to be exposed to both aspects of media production and media utilization. In this manner, it is envisioned that they will be capable of handling media in their work place, even though they may not be directly involved in media production.
Courses at the undergraduate level that are considered to be directly contributing to media production are Basic Photography, Basic Video Production, Preparation and Utilization of Communication Media, Principles and Practices of Development Communication, and Introduction to Advertising. All these courses, except for Introduction to Advertising, have a practical component. These courses provide students with first hand experience in producing media.

Specifically, for the Basic Photography course, students are required to develop visual awareness and develop photographs with specific message. Certainly the technical aspects of photography are also emphasized beside the communication contents. The students carry out their practicals in the darkroom and in a photographic studio. Normally about 50 students enrolled in this course annually. Similarly, Basic Video Production course requires students to produce a short documentary of their interest by the end of the semester. As such they will undergo the various stages of video production such as, script writing, story boarding, directing as well as the processes involved such as shooting, editing and inserting graphics. The students do their practicals in a studio that is located in between the camera control room and the audio room. Video editing facilities are located in a nearby room. About 40 students enrolled in this course annually.

The course Preparation and Utilization of Communication Media deals with several media, especially ‘small’ media for development works. In this course the students are required to produce posters, flip charts, slides-tape series, audio cassette programme, and a short video programme. Once the media are completed, the students are required to use the media they produced in a presentation for that particular media purpose. In some
cases the media produced in this course are utilized in actual field work conducted by our extension agents. Students conduct their practicals in the media laboratory that is equipped with computers for graphics, lettering machines, slides and transparencies projection systems and a small audio recording studio. Annually, about 35 students register for this course.

Unlike the above three courses which are offered as free electives to students of UPM, the course Principles and Practices of Development Communication is a required elective to a number of programmes in the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Human Ecology. As the graduates of these faculties are mostly involved in community work, they need to be trained in media production and utilization. The skills they acquire from the course are essential when interacting with members of the society.

The course content of Principles and Practices of Development Communication is wider than the Preparation and Utilization of Communication Media course, as it includes oral communication, planning communication campaigns and use of audio-visual aids. As for the practical part of the course, students have to produce group projects that will be utilized in a communication campaign or in an instructional situation. Course projects produced by the students include slide-tape series, flip charts, posters, photo novels, overhead transparencies, booklets, brochures and audio cassette programmes. More than 200 students enrolled in this course annually.

We consider Introduction to Advertising as a course that deals with media because advertisement itself is a form of a medium. Furthermore, advertisements contain messages and utilize various communication elements such as persuasive techniques, design and
visuals. In this course there is no practical, however the students need to conduct a study on advertisements from various media.

From the above explanation, we can safely say that those courses provide practical experiences to the students in meeting the needs of the media. These needs can be viewed in terms of production skills, media utilization strategies as well as media critics.

At the graduate level, courses related to communication media are Development Broadcasting, Agricultural Journalism, Writing and Editing Agricultural Publications, Magazine Design and Production, Mass Media in Developing Countries, and Communication Technology for Development. Courses that have elements of media are Principles of Advertising, Strategies of Communication, and Advanced Communication and Development.

Most of these courses are theoretical and philosophical in nature, in line with the norms of graduate learning. Students who enrolled in these courses are not involved in media production activities, but they conduct studies as part of the courses’ requirements. As such, they should be more critical about the communication media with respect to media contents, media utilization strategies and media management.

Non-Academic Programmes

In addition to teaching and research, UPM carries out extension and public service activities. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of the Centre for Extension and Continuing Education serves to facilitate the extension function of UPM. The non academic programme at the centre forms part of the extension and public services of
UPM. The programme includes in-service training, short courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, publications, and audio visual productions. Both the Department of Development Communication and the Department of Extension Education participate in all of these activities. However, the management of extension publications and audio video productions is entrusted to the Department of Development Communication.

The centre developed the short courses on its own or jointly with the participation development agencies. The nature of the in-service programmes varies according to the needs of the particular agencies but most of the programmes has aspects of communication theories and skills incorporated into them. For instance, the series of training in Extension Programme Development for Personnel of Lembaga Tembakau Negara (National Tobacco Board) in the past two years included, among others, lectures and workshops in communications.

In the past as well as at present, the media related communication areas included in the in-service training and courses offered by the department are photography, video productions, technical writing, publishing of developmental information, and production of audio-visual aids. The clientele agencies include MARDI, MADA, KADA, RISDA, FAMA, IPTAR, just to name a few.

These courses were relevant and appropriate to the agencies since the department was able to provide the expertise, equipment and facilities available at the Centre. This set up allows the personnel from the development agencies to try out certain equipment before actually purchasing them. Related to this, the department also provided advice and
input for agencies to establish their own communication units, especially with regard to media production facilities.

The department normally conducts short courses in extension and development within the context of certain technical areas. These courses usually deal with communication knowledge, skills, and strategy related to the dissemination and adoption of certain technical information or innovation. To help the participants in the technical areas, faculty members from the related technical areas take part as facilitators cum resource person in these courses.

The workshops, seminars, and conferences conducted at the centre are for practitioners and academics in both extension and development communication. These activities provide opportunities for academicians and practitioners to keep abreast of the latest research and development as well as other issues related to extension and development communication.

The Department of Development Communication is responsible for the publication of Extension Magazines, Extension or Technical Bulletin, Farmers’ Newsletters, and Farm Pamphlets. Contributors for these publications come from all the faculties at UPM with the majority coming from the CECE. The audience for these publications are agencies and individuals involved in development work. These include researchers, extension workers and farmer-entrepreneurs. These publications form part of the vital linkages for the research-extension-clientele system necessary to ensure the knowledge creation-diffusion-utilisation process. In short all the above activities provide academicians at UPM access to issues, concerns and problems of the "real world." This, we would like to believe, will
bring us down from the ivory tower in which we were often accused of isolating ourselves.

**Plans for the Future**

Academics need to maintain strong linkages with non academic organisations in order to be sensitive to the changes taking place in the "real" world. These linkages are especially important in planning for the future. Without going into the intricacies of strategic planning, this paper will cite examples of the approach taken by the Department for on-going developments and its plans for the future.

The origins of the Department of Development Communication, UPM was strongly linked to developmental status of the nation at that time and to the role UPM has set for itself then. The strong tie to agriculture and developmental agencies was apparent due to the extension function of UPM. With this context, the Department set out to provide communication education to the students at the various faculties who were potential developmental workers. UPM did not set out to produce graduates in communication at the beginning and UPM at present still does not offer any undergraduate programmes in communication.

In 1985 the centre forwarded a proposal for two undergraduate programmes. The programmes were BS in Developmental Studies and BS in Development Communication.
A study carried out at that time indicated that there was a need for those programmes. However, the proposed programmes did not get the green light from the Ministry.

Between 1985 and the present, the development pace in Malaysia has increased. We feel that there is a real need for UPM to offer an undergraduate program in Communication now. In line with the current development and aspirations of the nation, the department is planning to again forward a proposal for a BS programme in communication. This programme will offer four specialization areas: mass communication, corporate communication, human communication, and media and visual communication.

As part of the curriculum development process, the department will conduct dialogues and discussions with groups from various organisations to get feedback on the nature of the graduate that we must develop. In this matter, media related organisations would be the department's staple diet as feedback sources.

Earlier discussions noted the linkages between UPM and development agencies and their roles in providing a window to "real" life problems and issues for faculty and students of UPM. If the proposed programme in communication were to be approved, there will be a tremendous potential for collaboration between media-related organisations and UPM. For example, as part of the requirements for completing the programme students would be required to complete, in lieu of the traditional thesis research project, an internship programme with a media organization. Yet another option is for the student to submit a completed medium in place of the thesis.

Collaboration between UPM and other organizations, both public and corporate, in research and development in media technology and processes should also be pursued.
UPM may have its roots in agriculture and agricultural development, but UPM today deals with other areas and disciplines too. Likewise, the Department of Development Communication needs to break out from its agrarian confines and venture into other areas.

The department as part of the university is subjected to opportunities and problems that come with certain characteristics that differentiate universities from other organisations. This forms the framework of the next and final section of this paper.

**Food for Thought**

Baldridge et al. (1986), in their article “Alternative Models of Governance in Higher Education” paints a picture of the unique characteristics of academic organisations. We believe these characteristics are universal and the issues remain valid today. The characteristics are goal ambiguity, client service, problematic technology, professionalism, and environmental vulnerability. In this section we will briefly discuss each of the five characteristics.

**Goal Ambiguity**

Baldridge et al. say that the goals of a university, unlike that of most organisations, are vague and ambiguous. They add that the question “what is the goal of a university?” is difficult to answer because the list of possible answers is long. Among possible answers
are teaching, research, service to the community, solutions to social problems, academic freedom. Most universities include teaching, research and public service as their goals but few actually specify the weightage that a lecturer must give to each of the goals.

What is effective teaching? How do you assess effective teaching? What constitute scholarly work? These questions have not been answered at the operational level. Baldridge et al. observe that conflicts usually erupts as soon as the ambiguous goals are concretely specified and put into operation.

Client Service

Universities are "people-processing" organisations where students are "processed" in the various academic programmes. The clientele includes the students and other interested parties such as parents and potential employers. The clients have differing demands. Whose agenda should get the attention of the university?

Problematic Technology

The technology needed to "process" people, say Baldridge et al., is difficult to construct because the entire person must be considered. Furthermore, it is difficult to evaluate effectiveness of educational technology on a short term basis.

Professionalism

Universities have a large number of professional staff who are experts in various fields. Professionals demand autonomy; have divided loyalties; and demand peer
evaluation. Furthermore, professional values and bureaucratic expectations are at odds with each other.

Environmental Vulnerability

Universities, like other organisations, interact with their social environment. The degree of control outside forces have on the organisation will affect the autonomy of the academic professionals. The university will have less control on curriculum development and other matters as a result of external pressure.

Concluding Remarks

The five characteristics may be used as a framework to view the university as an organisation that is different from most other organisations. For example, a university's ability or inability to respond to the needs of its clients may be analysed from the five characteristics.
References

APPENDIX 1

SYNOPSIS OF COURSES
(Diploma and Undergraduate)

PP 205  Public Speaking  2 credits
Introduction to oral communications theories, principles of voice development, discussion on the various types of speeches; collecting, arranging and developing materials for speech; principles of delivering the speech; technique in delivering several types of speeches; factors associated with an effective speech - semantics, attractive, clarity, and persuasion; listening technique; humour in speech; speech salutation.

PP 206  Basic Photography  2 credits
Basic techniques in the usage of camera and dark room; photography for newspapers and magazines; the principles of developing pictures; the needs for communication purposes or values, aesthetic and technical; editing and photo-exhibitions.

PP 215  Principles and Practice of Development Communication  3 credits
This course will provide an introduction to the theory and process of communication, overview of the adoption process and program planning, and also the planning, implementation and evaluation processes in a communication campaign. Skills in writing articles for publication and technical reports; planning, designing and using audio visual aids; and principles and practices in oral communication, are included too.

PP 295  Basic Video Production  3 credits
The course emphasises on the principles and practices of video production. Practical skills of familiarisation and handling of equipment, script preparation, shooting and editing will be provided. Lighting and visual techniques will be exposed to the students so that they will be able to produce a video documentary.

PP 314  Public Relations  2 credits
A brief survey of public relations history; the scope and functions of public relations; the public relations process; the audience of public relations. Communication techniques; working with the media; the ethics of public relations; the practice of public relations in Malaysia.

PP 315  Introduction to Advertising  2 credits
Introduction to advertising; its development in the world and in Malaysia, uses of advertising and its importance. Theories and models in advertising; types of advertising; advertising media; activities of advertising agencies and methods of producing advertisements. The advantages and disadvantages of advertising to the consumers; advertising education in the world and in Malaysia.

PP 341  Preparation and Utilization of Communication Media  3 credits
This course emphasizes the principles and practices in the preparation, production and utilization of slides, OHP, transparencies, video, poster, flash card, photographs, audio cassette and other small media. Exposure to development and management of media unit will be provided. Practical skills in choosing the right media for different situations will also be provided.

PP 343  Interpersonal Communication  3 credits
The items that will be covered in the course are: factors related to interpersonal communication; the dynamic of diadic and triadic interpersonal communication, practical considerations for effective interpersonal communication; the barriers in interpersonal communication; interpersonal conflict and principles of resolving conflicts; interview-types and their
significance, role and responsibilities of the interacting parties; types of questions; counselling; the dynamics of listening in interpersonal communication -- the importance of listening types of listeners, good listening technique, and the relationship between reasoning and listening. Students will also be given practical training in several aspects of interpersonal communication such as the techniques of interpersonal interactions in formal and nonformal settings, communicating and listening techniques in interviews, the technique of conducting meetings, communication methods in counselling, and the like.

PP 347 Written Communication for Organizations 3 credits
This course will provide the students with an understanding of concepts and principles of organizational writings as well as skills in writing for organizations, namely in the writing of minutes of meetings, proposals, working papers, reports and speeches.

PP 399 Organizational Communication Skills 3 credits
Theories and models of communication and organizational development; basic problems and strategies in organizational communication; supervision of activities in organizations; co-ordination and co-operation among development agencies.

SYNOPSIS OF COURSES
(Graduate)

PP 507 Development Broadcasting 3 credits
The importance and advantages of broadcasting media. The philosophy and principles of broadcasting for development. Approaches in broadcasting for development in developed and developing countries. Development problems in Malaysia and the role of broadcasting media to alleviate the problems.

PP 509 Agricultural Journalism 3 credits
Principles and functions of written communication; history and progress of agricultural journalism; ethics of agricultural journalism; readability of agricultural publications; writing styles for agricultural publications; analysis of agricultural publication; future of agricultural journalism.

PP 511 Principles of Advertising 3 credits
Definition of advertising and its usage and importance; the history and development of advertising; theory and models in advertising; types of advertisements and activities in advertising; effects for advertising on consumers and advertising education in the world and in Malaysia.

PP 513 Statistics for Communication Research 3 credits
This course will include discussions of a variety of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to prepare students for performing statistical analysis. Special emphasis will be given to the analysis of data obtained from communication research, experimental research such as content analysis, readability test, survey research, experimental research and the like. This course focuses on the applied rather than the theoretical aspect of statistics.

PP 515 Organizational Communication 3 credits
Topics that will be discussed include the dynamics for intra- and inter- organizational communication; the mode and the problems encountered in organization; -- written communication, communication via listening, and communication via interviews, communication and organizational structure, factors influencing inter agency relationship -- centrality, domain concensus, density, multiplexity, stability, intensity, symmetry (reciprocity) and power differential; the role of "boundary spanning individuals"; bridging the gap between the organizations; and issues related to intra- and inter- organizational conflicts.
Writing and Editing Agricultural Publications

Editor's job; copy editor's job; planning and scheduling agricultural publications; steps in editing manuscripts; editing symbols; writing style (scientific, technical, and popular); elements in writing style; principle of good writing, readability and legibility; usage of language, writing topics, subtopics, caption, blurbs; editors editing policy and copyright; editing newspaper; presentation of tables, charts, graphs; printing process; publication evaluation - readership, form and format of publication (mailed questionnaire, interview etc.)

Magazine Design and Production

Introduction to style and format of publication; elements of layout and design; visual and verbal contents; selection and usage of typography; copy arrangement; photography and layout; illustration and graphic art; printing process of full-colour photography; printing paper; budgeting and contents; arrangements and preparation of dummy; printing schedules; usage of advertisements in publications; format and layout of newspapers; preparation of brochures; newsletters; annual report; departmental news and other publications.

Communication Theory

Analysis of contemporary theories of human communication emphasizing the similarities and differences of human communication processes in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and mass communication systems.

The Practice of Public Relations

Specific practices and techniques employed in public relations; administration in the production of information materials, activities and events, including content formulation, message production and media selection.

Managerial Communication

This course discusses the communication role of managers in organizations. This include the role of managers as leader, motivator, interviewer, decision maker, problem solver, conflict resolver and change agent. The communication skills that managers should develop to perform these roles as well as the principles and theories related to managerial communication will also be discussed.

Communication Research Methods

Development of research in communication; the role of theory in research; the research process; developing a research problem, defining concepts, formulating objectives, testing hypothesis, concepts of causality, logic of measurement, reliability and validity; survey research - sampling, questionnaire and interview schedule construction, interviewing and fieldwork; experimental design - problem of design, internal and external validity; coding and content analysis, using archived data and statistical records; data reduction and statistical analysis; report writing.

Strategies of Communication

The process of developing communication strategies with emphasis on problem definition, behavioural specification of objectives, situation analysis, strategy formulation and justification through application of communication theories and research results.

Advanced Communication and Development

This course critically discusses the basic models and approaches of development communication, namely the social interaction model; research, development and diffusion model; the packaged program approaches; and the problemsolving or integrated approach to rural development. This course will also discuss the communication approach of involving women in development.

Mass Media in Developing Countries

Survey of the role and functions of mass communication in developing nations. Major issues in mass communication in developing nations with particular reference to Asean countries, Afrika, Muslim countries in West Asia and Latin America.
PP 551 Communication Technology for Development 3 credits

This course focuses on the use of communication technology for national development in developing countries. Theories of technological development and effect of new communication technology on society will be presented and discussed. Students are expected to evaluate the suitability of a communication technology to be used for development and to analyse factors which encourage the development and spread of communication technology in developing countries.

PP 553 Advanced Statistics for Communication Research 3 credits

This course focuses on multivariate statistics -- multiple regression, multiple correlation, canonical correlation, discriminant analysis and factor analysis. Special emphasis will be given to the analysis of data from confirmatory or explanatory research using survey and experimental research methods. Students will also be introduced to data analysis technique using the SPSS computer program.

PP 555 Psychology of Communication 3 credits

This course is designed to provide an understanding of the relationship between the theories and principles of psychology and social psychology and communication process. Elements of psychology that are related to communication that will be discussed include persuasion, prejudice, self-justification, interpersonal attraction, psychological factors in group communication, psychology of group discussion, psychology of public address, and psychology of mass communication. Some of the social psychological theories that will be discussed include perceptual selectivity, mum effect, foot-in-the-door, cognitive scheme, attribution theory, and implicit personality theories.

PP 565 Advanced Public Relations 3 credits

Exposure to the concepts, theories and principles of public relations. Survey of current practices and problems in the field of public relations, with emphasis on various public relations function, communication and publicity techniques, and analysis of relationship with various groups such as press representatives, employees, stockholders and consumers.

PP 571 Communication Research Design 3 credits

The course is designed to help advanced graduate students develop the capacity to plan independent research. It will emphasize on the practical aspect of research process. Through their assignments, students will be required to exhibit their understanding of the various stages in research, which include: statement of area of research interest, concept explication and development of theory, operationalization of variables and analysis plan. Students will also be required to develop a complete research proposal and present critique of other participants' research proposals.

PP 573 Advanced Communication Theory 3 credits

The course discusses the recent developments in communication theory and critically and thoroughly examines and discusses selected theories that will form the basis of students' research.

PP 575 Communication and Decision Making 3 credits

This course is designed to provide an understanding of the role of information in decision making; the decision making process and strategies; communication environment and decisional interlude; information seeking, and decision making at the individual, family, village, organizational and national level. Techniques of lateral thinking will also be discussed.

PP 594 Independent Study 3 credits

Individualised reading on extension, communication and other related materials pertaining to student's area of specialization as prescribed by instructor(s).

PP 595 Special Topics 3 credits

This course deals with topics in Development Communication at an advanced level and is designed to give students an indepth understanding of recent advances in Development Communication. The choice of topics will be determined by the lecturer giving the course.
PP 599  Master's Thesis  6 credits

A thesis is to be completed in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Development Communication.

PP 699  Ph.D. Dissertation  12 credits

A thesis is to be completed in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy in Development Communication.
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