

COMMUNICATION POLICY ADVOCACY, TECHNOLOGY, AND ONLINE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: A TOOLKIT FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

Organized by the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) at the Central European University (CEU), and Internews Network, and the Center for Global Communication Studies (CGCS) at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania

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Statement of purpose:

This intensive summer course is designed to help both researchers and activists gain new insights into the role which civil society can play in advocating for free expression online and communication policy change, and will highlight the potential of technology and online tools for mobilizing and organizing constituencies and for enhancing the security and privacy of advocates.

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Prospective additional faculty include:

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- Elizabeth Eagen, OSI Information Program, US
- Mark Thompson and Marius Dragomir, OSI Media Program, UK
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Coordinator:

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Course Structure and Objectives

The goals of the course are:

1. To stimulate and advance research, scholarship and academic discourse on the role of civil society in the communication policy-making;
2. Provide a forum for concrete skill sharing of online tools for advocacy and enhancing the security and privacy of Internet activity
3. To identify a core group of scholars working in this area and nurture their research interests and capabilities with the aim of future collaborations amongst faculty, course participants, institutions and CEU;
4. To work with partners such as the OSI Information Program and Google to identify a network of human rights activist, bloggers and media policy advocates who are interested in contributing to the development of research in the field;
5. To give participants the opportunity to gain valuable experience in developing an advocacy campaign through hands-on case study projects, field trips to local organizations involved in innovative new media technologies, and interaction and networking with a diverse group of participants.

Participants will be exposed to a wide range of practical and theoretical views related to communication policy advocacy and online tools and tactics, and how to integrate research into communication policy advocacy. The course will be run as a combination of conceptual and research-oriented sessions, in addition to hands-on work in developing advocacy campaigns and the latest developments in online tools for advocacy, security and privacy. The course will feature a range of lectures, group discussions, hands-on practicums, time built in to the schedule for group work, as well as field trips within Budapest to meet with organizations engaged with work in this field, including multimedia innovation labs and “hacktivist spaces”.

The course will begin by conceptualizing civil society and policy advocacy as well as providing an understanding in to Internet governance issues and online free expression policies. The course will also look broadly at a range of technologies and tactics, in addition to hands-on tutorials and case studies in video advocacy work from Witness. The course will further examine the work in two very different contexts, Zimbabwe and Brazil. In Zimbabwe, activists have been using a mixture of online and offline communication strategies to exchange information in an environment hostile to free expression. In Brazil, using the social network site "Digital Culture", which was created by the Ministry of Culture to discuss digital and cultural government policies, the officials published an initial draft text of the new statute online in an interactive format, with the intent to launch a collaborative editing process that would "crowdsource" the final text of the new law. A range of social media was used to invite citizens to comment on the text paragraph by paragraph, line by line.

As part of the course, participants will also work in teams on a group assignment for the duration of the course. Each group will be presented with a case study for which they should develop an advocacy campaign for communication policy change. Each team will be required to prepare a written report (approximately 10-15 pages in total), and give a multi-media presentation to the group at the end of the course.

In order to maximize the output and opportunities for participants the course will have a maximum of 20-25 students.

Prerequisites

This course is intended for practitioners, policy makers, media policy advocates, PhD students, advanced MA students, and media development professionals (drawing from government, civil society/NGOs, foundations), journalists and other media practitioners with a demonstrated interest in new media and technology and communication policy advocacy.

Applicants will demonstrate an interest in the connection between theory and practice through their advocacy experience and research topics and output. They will be required to submit an English-language writing sample related to the topic of the course which gives us an idea of their academic and/or professional writing skills in the field, and an idea of their experience in the course subject; a statement of interest that addresses the relevancy of this course to their research, work or field of study; a CV; and possess sufficient English skills (reading and writing) in order to participate in the course.

Background

Recent events in Egypt and Tunisia remind us that the development of the internet as a global, free and open resource stands at a perpetual crossroads. The dynamic and decentralized nature of the internet, and other new technologies, continually offers new avenues for open communication and free expression as well as new challenges and threats. The strategic use of digital technologies and information tools with the goal of empowering civil society and building capacity for an open society is critical. And at the same time, so-called 'old media' continues to play a vital role in communication, especially during times of crisis and conflict.

The issue of free and open communications is not only relevant in the case of repressive regimes and transitional democracies, but it remains crucial across all layers of socio-politics. The complexities of the relationship between technology, free expression, privacy and policy lie at the heart of the relationship between global security and human rights.

But who is shaping internet freedoms? What is the relationship between technology and law with respect to free expression? What are the complexities raised by the use of the internet by repressive governments as well as by forces of opposition? What is the role of industry standards and corporate policies in the promotion and /or restriction of openness and communication freedoms? The issue of free and open communications on the internet is not only relevant in the case of repressive regimes and transitional democracies, but is also crucial in the context of innovation and economic recovery worldwide. What is the relationship between companies, governments and civil society with regards to pressing policy questions such as network neutrality, privacy, filtering, security and broadband promotion? The complexities of the relationship between technology, free expression, and policy lie at the heart of the relationship between global security and human rights.

Further, there is the role of civil society in developing and sustaining an enabling environment for free expression online and communication policy advocacy. Civil society actors challenge established political processes and are opening up space for new forms of

governance. Civil society has become both an important force in policy processes and a buzzword for conceptualizing citizen involvement. Central to this is the evolution of digital technologies, advocacy, and the range of issues at play.

There exists a body of research around media and communication policy, and research that investigates social movement, civil society and grassroots activism. There is growing research around the role of civil society in communication policy advocacy, but it is a small but emergent field. At the same time, there exist workshops that train participants on certain tools and technologies, but little opportunity for researchers, advocates and activists to come together and explore both conceptual frameworks around public policy and advocacy in the communication and information sector, as well as to share practical skills, tools and technologies in practice and development. Researchers can better develop questions and methodologies if confronted with a deeper understanding of practical work, and practitioners in return benefit from engaging in work with researchers who have experience framing the issues in a broader context.

In short, online free expression does not come easy nor can it be guaranteed. Online free expression is beginning to take center stage as an important area for policy concerns, but moreover, as an integral part of media development and democratization agendas. The Information and Communication Technologies for Development (*ICT4D*) movement continues to grow and with it, demands for further research as well as a more common understanding of tools, strategies and tactics for policy advocacy.

This intensive summer course is designed to help both researchers and activists gain new insights into the role which civil society can play in advocating for free expression online and communication policy change, and will highlight the opportunities and challenges of technologies and online tools for mobilizing and organizing constituencies and for enhancing the security and privacy of advocates. During the course, we will explore a wide range of practical and theoretical views related to communication policy advocacy and online tools and tactics, and how to integrate research into these fields. The course will include hands-on work in developing advocacy campaigns and seek to cover some of latest developments in online tools for advocacy, security, privacy and crowd-sourcing. We will also look at Internet governance issues and online free expression policies.

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