

## **MMC 6400: Mass Communication Theory**

Thursdays 12:50-3:50, Weimer 1078

### **PROFESSOR**

Frank Waddell, Ph.D.  
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352-294-1627

### **OFFICE HOURS**

3067 Weimer Hall  
Mon 9am-11am; Wed 10am-12pm  
Also available by appointment.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

No required textbook; All readings will be posted to Canvas

Access to hard copy of APA style book (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) is recommended

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Mass communication theory (MMC 6400) provides an overview of theoretical approaches to the study of communication, drawing primarily from the social science tradition. Topics to be covered include theory building, the historical background of communication as a field, and contemporary theoretical perspectives from communications, psychology, political science and consumer behavior, among other interdisciplinary approaches.

### **GRADING**

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Attendance/Participation:  | 10% |
| Weekly Questions:          | 10% |
| Theory Presentation:       | 20% |
| Annotated Bibliography:    | 10% |
| Research Proposal Outline: | 10% |
| Final Research Proposal:   | 40% |

Grading scale: A, 100-93; A-, 92-90; B+, 89-87; B, 86-84; B-, 83-80; C+, 79-77; C, 76-74; C-, 73-70; D+, 69-67; D, 66-64; D-, 63-60; E, 59 and below

## ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

**Attendance/Participation (10%):** Attendance is mandatory. All students are expected to come to class on a weekly basis, reading all assigned materials in advance. Your grade for attendance/participation will be determined based on the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion.

**Weekly Questions (10%):** Each week you will be asked to submit a minimum of one question for each of our assigned readings. Questions are expected to address one or more of the following prompts: (A) apply the tenets of theory from weekly readings to your everyday media habits; (B) discuss the limitations of theory with related commentary of how those limitations affect the theory's conclusions; (C) offer novel applications of theory to other domains or disciplines; (D) compare and contrast theory from readings with alternative theoretical frameworks. **Questions should be submitted via e-mail ([frank.waddell@ufl.edu](mailto:frank.waddell@ufl.edu)) at least 24 hours before our class meeting.**

**Theory Summary (20%):** Choose a theory from communication science or a related discipline (theory to be approved by professor prior to completing paper). In this paper (5-10 pages), summarize the key assumptions and predictions of the theory. Identify the seminal manuscripts where the theory was first introduced, then track how the theory has changed over time. Comment on how the theory has evolved, and how you see the theory changing in the future. In sum, your theory summary paper should (1) describe the evolution of the paper since its inception, (2) summarize the contemporary assumptions of the theory, and (3) offer directions for the theory's evolution. After writing the paper, you will do a presentation during class with a handout and PowerPoint presentation (**schedule for presentations TBD in week 2**).

**Annotated Bibliography (10%):** In preparation for your final paper, assemble an annotated bibliography of journal articles and book chapters that are relevant to your proposed project. Each annotation should include a citation for the work (formatted in APA style) alongside a summary of the study's findings and a description of how the study might inform your class paper. A minimum of 10 citations is required, although a bibliography that goes "above and beyond" to offer a comprehensive review of the literature (20+ citations) is ideal for success on the final paper.

**Research Proposal Outline (10%):** In the second stage of preparing for your final paper, please submit a detailed outline of your proposal. This outline should provide an overview of the

theoretical argument that your research paper makes, while also calling attention to the citations you will use throughout to support your arguments. Your anticipated hypotheses and proposed methodology should also be summarized by the outline. In sum, this outline should offer a “roadmap” for the eventual direction that your paper will head, covering the nuances of your theoretical argument, a summary of your theory-driven hypotheses, and the methods that will be used to test your proposed study. This outline should be a minimum of 5 pages; the more material you provide, the more I can provide you with useful feedback that may shape the direction and success of your final project.

**Final Research Proposal (40%):** Building on your annotated bibliography and proposal outline, submit a final paper that proposes a theory-driven study of a topical communication phenomenon. This paper should be both informed by and test the assumptions of theory, ideally by comparing the tenets of at least two theoretical frameworks that offer conflicting predictions. The paper will identify your problem and theoretical frameworks of interest, outline the assumptions of the theories in question, then propose a potential experiment, survey, or content analysis that allows the propositions of the theory to be tested. If you work alone, then it is acceptable for this project to merely be a proposal that includes an introduction, literature review, and methods section; no data needs to be collected. If you choose to work in a group on this final paper (4 people max), then you will need to also collect data and submit a full paper that also includes a results and discussion section. **You will need to declare your intention to work alone or in a group by 1/26.** The final proposal should be at least 15-20 pages in length, excluding references and supporting materials.

### LATE WORK POLICY

One letter grade (-10 points) will be deducted per day for work submitted past the assignment’s deadline. If students anticipate that they will be unable to meet a deadline due to university documented issues (e.g., health condition, death in family), please contact me as soon as possible to arrange an extension. In general, I am quite willing to work with students when issues arise that prevent you from submitting work on time. However, it is necessary for these discussions regarding late work to occur either before or recently after (e.g., within a week) the original deadline for the assignment. Work that is more than 10 days late will be given a “0” unless you contact the professor to arrange an alternative due date within the week that the assignment was due.

### HONOR CODE POLICY

This class strictly adheres to the UF honor code. Any prohibited behavior such as plagiarism, data fabrication, or cheating will result in a failing grade for the assignment in question and referral to the honor court, who may administer additional penalties such as a failing grade for the course or dismissal from the college. More information about the university honor code is

available online at the following link: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

## CLASSROOM CONDUCT

It is expected that all students will arrive to class on time and be respectful of fellow classmates during lecture and student presentations. Please turn all cell phones to silent. While laptops are allowed, it is expected that they will only be used for class-related work such as note-taking or group assignments. In the event that you need to answer an emergency phone call, please excuse yourself from class and answer the call in the hallway. The professor reserves the right to revoke the use of technology during class if the above policies are not followed.

### Schedule

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|----------------------------|--|
| January 5th:               | Course Overview; Basics of Theory                                |
| January 12th:              | Early Theoretical Approaches                                     |
| January 19 <sup>th</sup> : | Cultivation Theory; Exemplification                              |
| January 26th:              | Agenda Setting; Framing  |
| February 2nd:              | Spiral of Silence; Third Person Effect                           |
| February 9th:              | Priming; Social Cognitive Theory                                 |
| February 16th:             | General Aggression Model; Desensitization <b>ANNOTATIONS DUE</b> |
| February 23rd:             | Selective Exposure; Mood Management                              |
| March 2nd:                 | Dual Process Models of Persuasion                                |
| March 9th:                 | Spring Break; No Class   |
| March 16th:                | Narrative Persuasion; Parasocial Interaction <b>OUTLINE DUE</b>  |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| March 23rd:              | Media Enjoyment; Uses and Gratifications      |
| March 30 <sup>th</sup> : | Digital Media Theory, Part 1                  |
| April 6th:               | Digital Media Theory, Part 2                  |
| April 13th:              | Final Paper Presentations                     |
| April 20th:              | Reading day; no class                         |
| April 23rd:              | Final exams; no class. <b>FINAL PAPER DUE</b> |