

## Mass Communication Theory: MMC 6400 - 2980

Fall 2021

**(Syllabus subject to change based on the best interests of students' learning in the course)**

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### **Basic Information**

Instructor: Haoran “Chris” Chu

Email: chu.h@ufl.edu (Preferred method of communication. Please include MMC6400 in the subject line.)

Office Phone Number: 352-294-9115

Class Periods: 1098 Weimer, Wednesday, 10-E1, 5:10 – 8:10 pm

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30 – 5:00 pm or by appointment, 2066A Weimer

### **Course Descriptions**

This course is an introduction to mass communication theories. We will investigate why theories are valuable to both scholars and communication practitioners and learn how to critically evaluate research that we encounter. You are encouraged to employ the course and its content to form the theoretical basis for a research paper, journal article, research proposal, master’s thesis, or dissertation. This course has a seminar format, which means that the contributions of each member of the seminar are critical to what will gain from the course.

### **LEARNING MATERIALS**

- No text is required. However, you expected to read all assigned readings, including any that are added later in the semester and those suggested by your fellow students.
- Readings for each week will be made available on Canvas or emailed to you, on occasion.
- For your own research and interest, check out academic journals such as *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, *Human Communication Research*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Communication Theory*, *Mass Communication & Society*.

#### **Please Note:**

- This syllabus and other course content are subject to change based the best interest of student learning. Changes will be announced on Canvas and via email. It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to check your UF email regularly.**

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Students will understand how theories are constructed and be able to articulate the components of mass communication theory and the steps in theory building.
- Students will develop a good understanding of nine areas of communication research and learn how to critically assess published research based on these theories.
- Students will be able to propose a theoretically based argument in relation to a specific research question and develop the skills to complete a research article.

### **GRADING CRITERIA**

**NOTE:** Please understand that **points and percentages are different units.** The total point of this course is 1,000 and the total percentage is 100%. Therefore, 10 points are equal to 1 percent. All the following grading criteria (including extra credit) are based on the point system (1,000 points). All assignment due dates can be found in the course schedule attached to this syllabus.

- **Class Participation** (50 points/5 percent)
  - Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings for that day. You may respond to questions posed by me and other students in their response papers and presentations, or ask questions related to the readings. Comments on the theories and specific research articles are also encouraged. You are expected to participate in the discussions during your presentation week and the weeks in which you have submitted a response paper.
- **Response Paper** (250 points/25 percent)
  - In keeping with the seminar design, you will be asked to read a considerable amount of original or in-depth materials before each class. To facilitate this, you will write short response papers (2 double-spaced page max.), raising questions or issues for discussion or responding to questions I may pose. There is no need to cite core readings, but external references should be properly cited. Response papers should not simply summarize the readings, but reflect your own thinking based on the readings
  - Please note that you need to read the readings even if you are not submitting a response paper.
  - Starting week 2, these short papers are due by 11:59 pm via email on the Monday before the relevant class. You may choose any week during week 4-13 to submit **five response papers** in total. However, please do not submit a response paper during weeks when you are doing the theory presentation.
  - Each response paper is worth 50 points and will be graded based on merit.
- **Theory Presentation** (200 points/20 percent)
  - From week 3 to 12, each student will be responsible for one presentation. The student will first illustrate the theory in one or more of the readings assigned for the week and present to the class an additional empirical study related to the theory. You will need to find the additional study by searching the scholarly research literature (e.g., UF Library; Google Scholar). Normally, it should have been published in a high-impact journal (e.g., *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*) within the past ten years.
  - If you are a presenter in a given week, you should complete the assigned readings before choosing the external article. Email the external article to me for approval no later than 8 pm on the Monday prior to your presentation. In the email, briefly explain your reason for choosing the article. If you can't decide between two or more articles, send them to me for a recommendation.
  - You need to prepare a brief informative abstract (limited to no more than one page, single-spaced) for distribution to the class. The abstract must include the full citation of the article, using APA style. In the abstract, please detail at least one theoretical strength and one theoretical weakness of the article. Use readings from Week 2 to guide your critique.
  - The presentation must not be a reading aloud of the informative abstract. Instead, you must explain how the external reading furthers your understanding of the theories assigned for that week. This approach will help everyone in the seminar understand the importance of what you are contributing, in a form suitable for seminar presentation
  - Your presentation should run about an hour, possibly up to 75 minutes excluding the Q&A session. You will sign up for one presentation topic during the week 1 class, based on your interests. I will do my best to assign everyone to a topic of his or her choice. Starting week 4, we will have one to two students presenting to the class depending on the class size.

- **Research Proposal (500 points/50 percent)**
  - Throughout the semester, you will develop a research proposal that provides a compelling rationale to study an observable communication phenomenon, a systematic literature review that would lead to interesting research questions or hypotheses, and a proposed research method section along with references in APA style. This process is broken into five phases. An additional handout will be given with more details related to these phases.
  - **Phase 1: Preliminary Proposal (50 points/5 percent)** – This 2 to 3-page (double-spaced) paper will be a brief statement of the idea you wish to explore during the semester. The proposed paper must deal with some aspect of the communication process, preferably one that interests you personally. It must be of the type that leads you to propositions that deal with observable phenomena (“empirical evidence” of some kind).
  - **Phase 2: Theory Overview and Literature Review (50 points/5 percent)** – This is a 5-to-7-page (double-spaced) systematic exploration of the literature relevant to the research question you are exploring. Make sure to incorporate Dr. Chu’s comments on your preliminary proposal.
  - **Phase 3: Complete Draft (100 points/10 percent)** – This is a 12-to-15-page complete draft in which you will make the transition from conceptualization to operationalization. Make sure to incorporate Dr. Chu’s comment on your literature review.
  - **Phase 4: Proposal Presentation (100 points/10 percent)** – You will make a 15-to-20-minute presentation about your research proposal followed by a short Q&A session. Feedback will be provided for your paper revision before final submission. The style of the presentation will be similar to conference presentations.
  - **Phase 5: Final Paper (200 points/20 percent)** – after receiving Dr. Chu’s and your discussants’ comments on the complete draft and presentation, you will need to turn in a 15-to-18-page final proposal. You may schedule an individual meeting with me to discuss on the final proposal.

**COURSE GRADING SCALE AND PERCENTAGES**

Grading Items	Points	Percentage Allocation
<b>Class Participation</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Response Papers</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Theory Presentation</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Research Proposal</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>50%</b>
Preliminary Proposal	50	5%
Literature Review	50	5%
Complete Draft	100	10%
Proposal Presentation	100	10%
Final Paper	200	20%
<b>Total point</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Letter Grades:

93.5-100%	A	83.5-87%	B	73.5-77%	C	63.5-67%	D
90-93.4%	A-	80-83.4%	B-	70-73.4%	C-	60-63.4%	D-
87.1-89.9%	B+	77.1-79.9%	C+	67.1-69.9%	D+	0-59.9%	E

## LATE/MISSED SUBMISSION

Late submission in general will not be accepted. Discuss with me in advance if you are not able to submit an assignment on time due to exceptional reasons.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GRADES

I am more than happy to talk with you about your grade and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your graded work. That said, I require a 24-hour “cool off” period. We will not discuss your grade until we both have time gather our thoughts and have a productive conversation. After the initial 24 hours, students have one week to meet with the instructor to discuss the grade. If the student does not meet with the instructor **within a week**, then the instructor considers the matter closed. All discussions regarding grades are conducted in person, in my office.

## EFFORT VS. EXCELLENCE

You do not receive a grade for how hard you worked, only on the final product. Instructor grades your work on the degree of excellence it demonstrates. Make no mistake about the relationship between the two, as hard work often results in solid evaluations. That said, just because you spent “10 hours in the library” before a test or a group project doesn’t guarantee you a good grade. You have to study properly, address assignment requirements, and the like in order to assure a solid grade. I will help out in every way I can along the way and ALWAYS want you to do well. Don’t hesitate for a second to reach out to me (just don’t do it at the last second!).

## UNIVERSITY HONESTY POLICY

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct/honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

## COURSE EVALUATION

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

## **STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMODATIONS**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester

## **COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

Materials in this course—unless otherwise indicated—are protected by United States copyright law [Title 17, U.S. Code]. Materials are presented in an educational context for personal use and study and should not be shared, distributed, or sold in print—or digitally—outside the course without permission. Students may not record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph, or distribute any video, audio, or visual content from this course. This restriction includes but is not limited to live discussions, discussion boards, posted course materials, course evaluation form, visual materials that accompany lectures/discussions, such as slides and whiteboard notes, etc.

## **VIDEO RECORDING**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

- The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to the syllabus, schedule, assignments, readings, forms, lecture topics, assessments, and any other course content if deemed necessary to facilitate classroom management and to achieve the learning objectives for the course. Students are responsible to stay aware of these changes.
- Only students enrolled in this course may attend (and receive credit for) this class.
- I take plagiarism very seriously. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and disciplinary action. Do not submit the same work to more than one class. Do not adapt work from another class for this class. Do not adapt someone else’s work and submit it as your own. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

\*This is a *tentative* schedule.

<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Topics &amp; Assignments</b>
Week 1	
8/25	Introduction to the class
Week 2	
9/1	Role of theory in communication research
Week 3	
9/8	Agenda-setting; priming
Week 4	
9/15	Media effects research (cultivation; uses & gratifications; presumed influence)
Week 5	
9/22	Framing research
Week 6	
9/29	Knowledge gap; digital divide Proposal workshop #1
Week 7	
10/6	Social norm; social identity
Week 8	
10/13	Dual process models
Week 9	
10/20	Narrative persuasion
Week 10	
10/27	Emotion

Week 11	
11/3	Social cognitive theory; efficacy
Week 12	
11/10	Diffusion of innovation; Technology Acceptance Proposal workshop #2
Week 13	
11/17	Other interesting theories (e.g., construal level theory, motivated reasoning)
Week 14	
11/24	No class (Thanksgiving break)
Week 15	
12/1	Final Proposal Presentations
Week 16	
12/8	Final Paper due