

MMC 6936: *Applied Theories in Mass Communication*

Spring 2024 (section 8999)

Weimer 2056

Days/Times: W/P6-8 (12:50 – 3:50)



Course Description

Applied Theories in Mass Communication aims to bridge theory with practice in mass communication industries. The course objective is to help students understand mass communication theories, as well as media law and ethics, and use them to address contemporary issues. The course focuses on theories that can be utilized as the foundation for effective communication strategies using traditional and new media. In a final project, students will apply mass communication theories in their development of strategies to solve problems or capitalize on opportunities.

Purpose

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a greater understanding of how communication theories can be employed to investigate, analyze, and well-founded recommendations for solving real-world problems, particularly those pertinent to mass communications contexts, practices, processes, and industries.

Course Materials

Required textbook: *A First Look at Communication Theory* (10th ed.) by Em Griffin, Andrew Ledbetter, and Glenn Sparks (2019). McGraw Hill Education: New York, NY.

Supplemental readings and presentation materials also will be made available through the CANVAS course site and via UF ARes course reserves throughout the semester.

Dr. Cynthia Morton
cmorton@ufl.edu
and via ***Canvas mail***

Office hours:
M/W 10-12 and Zoom by appointment
Office Location: Weimer 2082



Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will nurture a repertoire of tools that lay a foundation for the skills to:

1. Identify, explain, and critique major paradigms, theories, and conceptual frameworks for that have shaped the field of mass communications
2. Demonstrate an appreciation for the ethical and social responsibility considerations for those engaged in the mass communications professions
3. Interpret, critique, and evaluate the published research of others as a step to develop one's research hypotheses.
4. Articulate in-depth understanding of conceptual foundations presented in scholarly writing and oral communication
5. Design and facilitate applied communication activities (i.e., presentations, groups discussions, interpersonal exchange) in professional contexts utilizing the conceptual foundations relevant to mass communications research.



Assessments

Assessments provide opportunities for the instructor to get a sense of how well students comprehend and/or synthesize the course content. The quality of one's experience in this course — and the general success of the class objectives — will be largely attributed to his or her level of involvement in the learning process. Assessments are not meant to be “make or break” events, but rather to be *checkpoints* that facilitate the instructor's ability to evaluate students' comprehension of the course content. Course assessment opportunities include the following criteria:

- Discussion Board Posts (20 points per post, approximately 6): This category of assessments provides opportunities for students to be an active participant in the review of topics introduced in course readings. It is the responsibility of every individual in the class to come having read the weekly assignments and prepared to discuss (even debate) the material. Discussion board posts are intended to assist students think more deeply about the subject matter and to encourage rich discussion about the theories and topics explored. Using the Padlet app, students will start the weekly conversation in advance of the upcoming class via their responses to instructor-guided thought starters.
- Reaction papers (2 @ 75 points each): Reaction papers are short essays that offer your major reactions, questions, and critiques to the assigned readings for a given theory. Students are encouraged to provide a well-reasoned analysis of the body of work reviewed to demonstrate his/her understanding of the theme of the week's readings. The point is not to summarize the readings in the reaction paper, but rather to use the perspectives offered in the reading materials as a foundation for comparing, contrasting, and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the perspectives advanced in the readings. The paper will serve as the basis of your contribution to the class discussion for the week.
- Take-Home Exams (2 @ 100 points each): Two take-home exams will be given during the semester. The first exam will occur at mid-semester, and the second will occur near the end

of the semester. The purpose of the exams is to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of concepts discussed in class and their application to research inquiry.

- Peer Roundtables (10 points per roundtable, TBD): Peer roundtables provide a means that students can utilize the forum of peers to advance the development of ideas about applied strategy. The process of peer interaction is expected to provide students will a practical appreciation for how abstract thoughts can become focused research questions bound by theory-based propositions.



- *Applied Theory Proposal Paper* (265 cumulative points)- Regular written assignments will be issued to help students crystallize their final applied theory term paper. The general nature of the written assignments and the weight apportioned to the final grade are as follows:
 - Topic proposal paper (25 points): Provide a one-page summary of a question or topic that will define your interest for future research. In keeping with some to the textbook chapters and research introduced in class, your proposal should strive to explain the issue of interest, its relevance to mass communication, and why you believe it is an important topic for exploration. At this stage, you are not required to identify a particular theory to frame your topic. Therefore, the lion's share of your energy should be allocated to what would otherwise serve as "an introduction to your topic."
 - Annotated bibliography (75 points): The annotated bibliography assignment should directly relate to the topic of your theory paper. Its purpose is to provide a foundation on which you can build your research interest and represents a synopsis of the key research literature related to the theory you choose to explore in greater detail. The annotated bibliography is an individual assignment. It should include full citations from no less than 20 relevant sources, a short summation of the points raised by each source author, and a "key quote" that aides you in remembering the

significance of the work. Each annotated bibliography citation should be single-spaced by source.

- Theory-focused literature review (50 points): For this assignment, students are asked to explore a single theory in the context of three scholarly works that are unique from any that we have reviewed in class. Students should introduce the theory that they have selected to guide their investigation, including an explanation of the theory itself, its history/evolution, the dimensions that characterize the theory, and the theory's utility to the fields in mass communication. Then, students should illustrate the application of theory using three unique scholarly papers that integrate the theory to structure their research questions, hypotheses, or research propositions.
- Applied Theory Comprehensive Proposal (100 points): The culmination of your work to understand your topic within the framework of a mass communication theory will be reflected in the applied theory in mass communications proposal. This assignment requires you to integrate your findings from the literature review on your theory (from the annotated bibliography assignment) with a practical secondary review of your selected topic (i.e., topic proposal paper). The proposal is 10-15 pages in length and should conclude with propositions or hypotheses for research.
- Applied Theory Paper Presentation via Zoom (15 points): Students are asked to produce a :15-minute Zoom presentation that recaps their comprehensive Applied Theory proposal paper. Each presentation will take the audience through the proposal development process from idea to literature to theory framework to propositions. Presentations should aspire to generate interest and depth of understanding for the topic addressed by the applied theory paper.

Course Administrative Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is an important issue of concern at the University of Florida. Students who violate University rules on scholastic integrity are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and dismissal from the University. Since dishonesty harms the individual, other students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is implied:

“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

Attendance

This skills-based, professional training course meets twice a week and is founded on student engagement and hands-on work. Much can be missed if an individual is absent. Although emergencies, illness (self or dependent others), and unforeseen circumstances can not be anticipated in advance, I do encourage students to do all necessary to commit to reliable, on-time attendance every week. Students should be cautioned that his/her record of attendance has a direct impact on his/her understanding of the course materials, and excessive unexcused absence will affect your final grade.

Each student is allowed two “free” missed classes on non-exam days without penalty to the final attendance point total. Keep in mind that the free absences do not automatically excuse the student from assignment due dates, point awarded for in-class participation, or other point-based activities. Routine unexcused absences over the two-missed-class minimum will result in a loss of one-half point per absence and may directly affect the student’s grade. This does not apply, however, to excused absences due to activities sponsored by the College or endorsed CJC organizations or that require student participation in official University business.

Class Format and Protocol

Class periods are meant to be interactive. I aspire for students to gain confidence enough to make their points with professionalism and conviction, yet to not be so thoroughly entrenched in “right-fighting” that they are not willing to be coached on alternative approaches to thinking through the problem-solving process.

For the two-period lecture block, the class will have a short break about halfway through the discussion. Attendance, if taken, will generally occur in the second half of class.

Contacting the Instructor

I am committed to helping you grow as a future professional and will make myself available for individual or group consultation as necessary to do so. At the top of this document, please note the various ways you may use to contact me – by phone, answering machine, email, Canvas chat, or pre-scheduled Zoom meeting. Written correspondence through Canvas mail is the most efficient means for contacting the instructor. I will make every effort to reply to your email within 36 hours of you sending it. Please note that this period excludes weekends, holidays, or University-recognized breaks. If you have sent an email message that is still awaiting a reply after 36 hours, please resend the message. You may also verbally alert me during class time or call/come by during office hours.

Personal Emergencies/ Excused Absences

It is the student's responsibility to advise me of any personal emergency that could affect his/her attendance and/or participation in the course. In the case of personal emergency or extenuating circumstance that results in you missing class over an extended period, please notify me as soon as possible via e-mail at the earliest opportunity. The student will be responsible for following up on any missed class discussion, notes, handouts, and/or announcements made in his or her absence.

Occasionally, a student's participation in extracurricular organizations will require that s/he miss class to participate in organizationally sponsored events. Under such circumstances and whenever possible, students are required to provide the instructor with appropriate documentation from the sponsoring organization BEFORE the absence.

Support for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodations must first register with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu>) in the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting an accommodation. Each of us is likely to face challenges that may adversely affect our class performance. I am willing to help. However, I can only help if you notify me before your performance is affected.

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Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.



Tentative Course Schedule

The course outline is presented to you at the onset of the semester lays out broad topics and the order of progression that will guide us. The instructor will advise the class in advance should there be any need for timeline adjustment.

Week	Theme for the Week
Week 1 (1/10)	Course & Topic Introduction What is applied theory?
Week 2 (1/17)	Module 1: Getting Started
Week 3 (1/24)	Topics through the lens of mass communication
Week 4 (1/31)	Applied Theory through the lens of media effects
Week 5 (2/7)	Media Systems theories
Week 6 (2/14)	Media and Culture
Week 7 (2/21)	Media and Culture

Week 8 (2/28)	Take Home Exam 1 Due
Week 9 (3/6)	Media and Society Theories
Week 3/9 -16	SPRING BREAK WEEK – NO CLASS MEETING
Week 10 (3/20)	Theories related to Cognition and Information Processing
Week 11 (3/27)	Persuasion Theories
Week 12 (4/3)	Theories about Uses and Reception
Week 13 (4/10)	Completing the Student Research Project
Week 14 (4/17)	Take Home Exam 2 Due/ Research Roundtables
Week 15 (4/24)	Final Paper Presentation and Submission