

MMC 6408

# Applied Theories in Mass Communication

Spring 2024. Wednesdays from 9:35am to 12:35pm in Weimer 2050.

Instructor: Dr. Ben Lynn

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Office hours: Online by appointment.

## Course description

*Applied Theories in Mass Communication* aims to bridge theory with practice in mass communication. The purpose of the course is to equip students with the ability to use mass communication theories to solve specific real-world problems. The course focuses on mass communication theories that can be utilized as a foundation for effective problem solving in traditional and new media. Through two white papers, students will apply mass communication theories and develop strategies for solving problems and/or capitalizing on opportunities in mass communications.

## Learning objectives

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Employ a systematic approach to investigating, analyzing, and solving real-world mass communication problems.
2. Clearly articulate the difference between academic theory development and applied theory.
3. Select appropriate mass communication theories for solving specific real-world problems.
4. Communicate their findings in academic journals and industry white papers.
5. Communicate their findings to a general audience through presentations, discussions, and direct interactions.

## Course Requirements

### Textbook:

Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2021). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press.

## Administrative Policies

### Attendance

This skills-based, professional training course is founded on student engagement and hands-on work. Although emergencies, illness (self or dependent others), and unforeseen circumstances cannot be anticipated in advance, you are encouraged to commit to reliable, on-time attendance every week. Recognize that your attendance has a direct impact on your understanding of the course content and excessive unexcused absences will affect your final grade.

Each student is allowed one non-illness related missed class on non-presentation days without penalty to the final attendance point total. Starting with the second unexcused absence, there will be a 6% deduction in your final grade for every unexcused absence thereafter. However, students must still turn in assignments on their due dates, whether they are in class that week or not.

Absences related to activities sponsored by the College or endorsed CJC organizations that require student participation in official University business are excused but assignments are still due on their due dates. **It is strongly encouraged that students do not miss presentation days.** However, if a student is scheduled to miss a presentation due to an official activity, they must submit a video recording of their presentation by 8am on the day of the presentation. In addition to being evaluated for the content of the presentation, video presentations will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

### Video presentation requirements

- Image is properly composed
- Image is adequately lit
- Camera is positioned roughly nose-level to the speaker (no laptops on tables looking up at the speaker)
- **Audio is clean and clear**

- **Background is completely free of distracting items and there is no movement in the background during the presentation**
- Student is engaged with the camera as if they were presenting to a live audience
- Presentation slides fill the frame and the student is positioned in the upper right corner of the screen with a picture-in-picture effect so the student is visible throughout the presentation
- The student's video does not cover any text in the presentation slides

The technical quality of the presentation will account for 15% of the overall grade. Video presentations should be professional-level presentations that utilize external cameras, microphones, and careful planning of the scene. In other words, a laptop camera and microphone will not suffice for these presentations. See instructor if you have any questions regarding the technical requirements and professional expectations.

### **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.”

In this course, unauthorized aid will be defined as the use of another person to perform the work required for this course.

## 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.

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](mailto: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.

## Grading

| Assignment                                 | Points     |
|--|------------|
| Attendance                                 | 15         |
| Examples of 5 industry white papers        | 10         |
| Identify problem #1                        | 15         |
| Student presentations #1 - Problem #1      | 10         |
| Theory review of literature #1 - 3 sources | 20         |
| Student presentations #2 - Theory #1       | 10         |
| Student presentations #3 - White paper #1  | 25         |
| White paper #1                             | 100        |
| Identify problem #2                        | 15         |
| Student presentations #4 - Problem #2      | 15         |
| Theory review of literature #2 - 5 sources | 40         |
| Student presentations #5 – White paper #2  | 25         |
| White paper #2                             | 100        |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>400</b> |

## Assignments

Applied theory is intended to be a practical course where students bring their own unique communication problems into the course and collaboratively work to solve them. As such, the course focuses on practicing and facilitating the problem-solving process. Because problem solving is an iterative process, one that benefits from group feedback, and because applied theory requires effective oral communication outside the academy, students will deliver five presentations during the semester and respond to audience feedback about their ideas. The two main written assignments in this course will be the white paper and the research proposal.

**White paper examples (10 pts)** – White papers are a form of communication that organizations use, both internally and externally, to present research findings. You will familiarize yourself with this format by collecting and submitting five white papers from industries associated with your area of interest.

**Identify two problems in mass communication (15 pts each)** – Applied theory is about using theory to solve specific real-world problems. To do that, you must first identify and articulate a mass communication problem. Twice during the semester, you will identify and articulate mass communication problems.

**Presentation #1: Mass communication problem (10 pts)** – In your first presentation, you will present your mass communication problem to the class. You will detail why this is a problem generally and, specifically, why it is a communication problem.

**Theory review of literature #1 (20 pts)** – With your first problem and theory identified, you will conduct a review of the literature about the theory you'll use to solve the problem. The goal is to identify at least three sources that clearly explain the theory you've selected and what the theory's underlying assumptions are.

**Presentation #2: Theory #1 (10 pts)** – In your second presentation, you will guide the class through the theory you'll be using to solve the problem you introduced in your first presentation.

**Presentation #3: White paper #1 (25 pts)** – You will present your first white paper to the class.

**Presentation #4: Problem #2 (15 pts)** – Having solved one problem, you must present another mass communication problem.

**Theory review of literature #2 (40 pts)** – Similar to your first review of the literature, you will expand your search of articles and sources to learn about a theory you believe can explain and solve the second problem you identified.

**Presentation #5: Research proposal (25 pts)** – You will present your research proposal to the class.

**White papers (100 pts each)** – You will create two white papers detailing mass communication problems and describing how two different theories can solve them.

### **Out of class readings**

Periodically additional out-of-class readings will be assigned during the semester. These will include academic journal articles, industry reports, and popular press articles related to the content being covered in the class.

## Weekly outline

|                           | Readings  | Class Content  | Homework and assignments   |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Week 1</b><br>Aug. 28  | Ch. 1 - Understanding and evaluating mass communication theory                      | Introductions  | Due Sept. 1 (Sun) - Five examples of industry white papers                 |
|                           |   | What are white papers and how do we craft them?  |  |
|                           |   | Chapter 1 content discussion   |  |
|                           |   | Training – Understanding the difference between academic theory development and applied theory |  |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 2</b><br>Sept. 4  | Ch. 3 – Normative theories of mass communication                                    | Chapter 3 content discussion   | Due Sept. 8 (Sun) - Identify problem #1                                    |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 3</b><br>Sept. 11 | Ch. 11 - Effect of media on knowledge, information, and perception of social issues | Student presentations #1 – Problem #1  |  |
|                           |   | Training - Reconceptualizing problems  |  |
|                           |   | Chapter 11 content discussion  |  |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 4</b><br>Sept. 18 | Ch. 12 - Effect of media on community and everyday culture                          | Training - How to conduct a review of the literature   |  |
|                           |   | Chapter 12 content discussion  |  |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 5</b><br>Sept. 25 | Ch. 13 – Meaning making in the social world   | Chapter 13 content discussion  | Due Sept. 22 <sup>nd</sup> (Sun) - Theory review of literature - 3 sources |
|                           |   |  |  |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 6</b><br>Oct. 2   | Ch. 14 – Commodification of culture and mediazation                                 | Student presentations #2 - Theory #1   |  |
|                           |   | Chapter 14 content discussion  |  |
|                           |   |  |  |
| <b>Week 7</b><br>Oct. 9   | Ch. 7 - Theories of media and social learning                                       | Chapter 7 content discussion   | Due Oct. 15 <sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) - White paper #1                       |

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|---------------------------|---|---|---|
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   | Training – Visual communication           |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 8</b><br>Oct. 16  | No readings – Finish white paper #1                             | Student presentations #3 – White paper #1 |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 9</b><br>Oct. 23  | Ch. 8 - Theories of media and human development                 | Ch. 8 content discussion                  | Due Oct. 27 <sup>th</sup> (Sun) – Problem #2                              |
|                           |   | Training – Formatting APA documents       |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 10</b><br>Oct. 30 | Ch. 9 - Audience theories: Uses and reception                   | Student presentations #4 – Problem #2     |   |
|                           |   | Chapter 9 content discussion              |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 11</b><br>Nov. 6  | Ch. 10 - Theories of media cognition and information processing | Chapter 10 content discussion             |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 12</b><br>Nov. 13 | Ch. 6 - Critical cultural trend in North America                | Chapter 6 content discussion              | Due Nov. 17 <sup>th</sup> (Sun) - Theory review of literature - 5 sources |
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 13</b><br>Nov. 20 | Ch. 5 - Consolidation of the media-effects trend                | Chapter 5 content discussion              |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 14</b><br>Nov. 27 |   | <b>* No Class – Thanksgiving Break *</b>  |   |
|                           |   |   |   |
| <b>Week 15</b><br>Dec. 4  |   | Student presentations #5 – White paper #2 | Due Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup> (Tues.) – White paper #2                         |
|                           |   |   |   |
|                           |   |   |   |



|                           |             |  |  |
|---------------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Week 16</b><br>Dec. 11 | Finals week |  |  |
|                           |             |  |  |