

MMC 6400
Mass Communication Theory
Fall 2025

Meeting Time: Thursdays 9:35 am – 12:35 pm
Meeting Location: WEIM 2050

Instructor:

Dr. Yang Feng

E-mail: y.feng@ufl.edu

Office: Weimer Hall 1200

Office Hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2-3 pm (Zoom: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/2878807530>)

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Course Catalog Description

Prerequisites: This course is open to students with classified or conditionally classified graduate standing in the College of Journalism and Communications.

Purpose of the course

This course delves into contemporary and emerging theories of mass communication. Specifically, it seeks to familiarize students with fundamental social science concepts, mass communication theory, research methodologies, library resources, professional associations, and appropriate academic writing styles. Additionally, the course is designed to equip students with the analytical skills required to navigate the various approaches to studying mass communication.

Course website: This course has a website on Canvas. Please visit it often as announcements and related course materials will be posted on the site throughout the semester: <https://ufl.instructure.com/>

Objectives of the course:

By the end of the semester, students in MMC 6400 will be able to:

- Explain the nature of theory and its significance to academic research
- Describe, compare, and contrast prominent theoretical approaches to the study of mass communication
- Conduct academic research and evaluate sources appropriately
- Write papers that conform to proper APA writing style

Recommended Materials

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Seventh Edition, Washington, D.C.

Also, the following academic journals service as excellent sources of theory-based research:

Journal of Advertising

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly

Journal of Communication

Communication Research

Public Opinion Quarterly

Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media

Mass Communication & Society

Public Relations Review

Reading Materials

Reading materials are available on Canvas.

Grading

Your final grade for the semester will be determined by your cumulative work and classroom participation. Special emphasis will be placed on significant shifts in your performance throughout the semester. For instance, students who begin the semester with strong performance but lose momentum towards the end will find this decline reflected in their final grade.

The figures below indicate how I will evaluate your performance in this class:

Grading:

Weekly reflection	20%
Class Discussion	5%
Discussion Facilitation	5%
APA Style Exercise	10%
Library Discovery Assignment	5%
Research Participation (SONA)	5%
Essay Papers	50%

Grading Policy: How I'll Determine Your Grade

The overall grading system in this course:

A = 93-100	C = 73-76
A- = 90-92	C- = 70-72
B+ = 87-89	D+ = 67-69
B = 83-86	D = 63-66
B- = 80-82	D- = 60-62
C+ = 77-79	F = 59 and below

1. Weekly Reflection Posts: (20 points)

Given the seminar format of this course, your participation is critical. You should finish all your readings prior to class and reflect on the readings. **Each week on Wednesday (by 12 pm), you are required to post what you have read in that week and your opinions about the reading material on Canvas Discussion Forum (except for Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, Week 13, Week 14, Week 15, and Week 16).**

Your reflection should be written in **paragraph format** rather than as a bulleted list. In each post, begin by briefly summarizing the key ideas from that week's reading(s) to demonstrate your understanding of the material. Next, transition into a critical evaluation, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Be sure to place your observations in the context of the broader course themes and, where appropriate, connect them to concepts or discussions from previous weeks. Finally, conclude your post by raising at least one thoughtful question about the reading(s) that can help prompt further class discussion.

Your posts will be evaluated on a 10-point scale (0 for poor, 10 for excellent), based on the following:

- Student ability to summarize the key ideas from the reading of the week.
- Student ability to evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of the reading.
- Student ability to raise questions on the reading of the week.

*****Note:** Your weekly reflection post should contain **at least 300 words**.

2. Class Discussion: (5 points)

Given the seminar format of this course, your participation in discussion is critical. You are encouraged to finish all the readings and be prepared to talk and contribute to class discussions.

Assignment Grading:

Your participation in class discussions will be evaluated by the instructor during lecture weeks on a 5-point scale, with 0 indicating no participation and 5 representing the most active participation. This evaluation will be based on three main criteria:

1. Active participation in discussions on course topics.
2. Responding to questions posed by the instructor or classmates.
3. Raising questions about course topics during class.

3. APA Style Exercise & Library Discovery Assignment: (15 points)

APA Style Exercise: In the first week of class, you will be given an APA style exercise, with errors. Your task is to correct all errors and submit your final correct version via Turnitin on Canvas. The exercise will be posted on Canvas and the answers will be reviewed in the second week of class. **(10 points, due: August 28, 9:35 am)**

Library Discovery Assignment: A librarian will be invited to come in the second week of class to go through research resources in the UF Libraries. Then, you will be given a to-do list and you need to complete all the tasks on the list. The assignment is designed to help you become acquainted with the UF library resources for your research and how to be savvy at doing research as a future scholar. **(5 points, due: September 4, 9:35 am)**

4. Research Participation (5 points)

University of Florida is one of the nation's premier research universities. As part of this course, you will be required to complete **two** research participation credits through the College Research Participation Pool (<https://ufl-cjc.sona-systems.com>). Please register a SONA account and choose studies to participate in to receive credits for this class. Check SONA regularly to see what studies have become available. Typically, it is not until around maybe the third week of the semester that studies will become available. You should NOT wait until the last minute to sign up for participation because people tend to procrastinate and research opportunities will be limited by the end of the semester. In fact, it is probably wise to participate early in the semester when your course loads are the lightest. Please see this video below for how to set up your SONA account: https://youtu.be/_1OnT2ZU6QQ If you have any questions, please contact the CJC SONA administrator through this email: uf-cjc-sonasystems@jou.ufl.edu

In lieu of participating in a research study, you may complete an alternate assignment consisting of a 5-page report on a recent communication-related journal article (contact me for details).

5. Discussion Facilitation: (5 points)

You will facilitate a class discussion by **devising a class activity that links theory to a real-life case scenario**. Specifically, this means:

- i. You will select one contemporary case that can be analyzed using your assigned theory (order of discussion will be posted after the first week).
- ii. You will provide **a one-page handout and email it to your instructor before Wednesday 12pm**. The handout should include: 1) summary of the selected case, 2) discussion questions, 3) anything else you'd like to include. Creativity is encouraged and rewarded.

- iii. You will lead the class activity and the follow-up discussion (total activity time: no more than 20 minutes).

6. Essay Papers (50 points)

Essay 1 (4 pages, excluding references, APA style): Define and critically analyze the concepts introduced in the syllabus from Weeks 4 through 6. Support your ideas with concrete examples from media practices and insights from published works. Ensure you reference a minimum of **five** academic sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, or book chapters, in your essay. **(10 points, due: October 2, 9:35 am)**

Essay 2 (4 pages, excluding references, APA style): Define and critically analyze the concepts introduced in the syllabus from Weeks 7 through 8. Compare and contrast the two-step flow theory with the selective exposure theory. Support your ideas with concrete examples from media practices and insights from published works. Ensure you reference a minimum of **seven** academic sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, or book chapters, in your essay. **(10 points, due: October 16, 9:35 am)**

Essay 3 (4 pages, excluding references, APA style): Define and critically analyze the concepts introduced in the syllabus from Weeks 9 through 10. Compare and contrast the spiral of silence theory with the third-person effect theory. Support your ideas with concrete examples from media practices and insights from published works. Ensure you reference a minimum of **five** academic sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, or book chapters, in your essay. **(10 points, due: October 30, 9:35 am)**

Essay 4 (8 pages, excluding references, APA style): Select a mass communication theory introduced in the syllabus. Define its key concepts and provide a critical analysis. Further, assess the validity of the theory's assumptions in the context of today's social media landscape and develop research question(s) and/or hypotheses. Support your ideas with concrete examples from media practices and insights from published works. Ensure you reference a minimum of **seven** academic sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, or book chapters, in your essay. **(20 points, due: December 4, 9:35 am)**

You will present your essay (with slides) in no more than 20 minutes to class, one week before the due date. The purpose of the presentation is to seek feedback from class and your instructor **(non-graded, due: November 20)**.

Late Work and Absence

An absence from class will only be excused if it is due to (1) religious observance, (2) participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, or (3) a debilitating illness. Any notes excusing these absences must include phone numbers or email addresses for verification purposes. Students claiming excused absences are tasked with demonstrating to the instructor that their absence was due to one of these three causes. This demonstration should be in the form of a letter signed by, or a formal email from, a person capable of authoritatively verifying the legitimacy of the student's absence. Notifications related to planned absences should be sent to the instructor by the end of the second week of classes. For unplanned absences, letters or emails must be submitted to the instructor within one calendar week from the date of the absence, irrespective of any holidays during that week. The instructor reserves the right to verify the authenticity of such demonstrations. If the absence does not pertain to one of the three aforementioned causes, a formal explanation as to why the absence should be excused needs to be submitted. This explanation must come from a person in a position to make an authoritative determination, either through a signed letter or a formal email.

Academic Dishonesty - Plagiarism and Cheating

The University adheres to a strict policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. These activities will not be tolerated in this class. Become familiar with the policy: http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/srr/conduct.aspx

Any cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by Student Affairs.

Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own
- Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
- Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class

If you have questions on what is plagiarism, please consult this helpful guide from the Library:

<http://library.sdsu.edu/guides/tutorial.php?id=28&pid=138>

Schedule for Semester:

The following outline is not absolute and subject to revision as the semester progresses. You will receive ample notice regarding changes to the schedule.

Week 1 AUG 21: Class Introduction /Explanation of APA Style

READ: Recommended APA book, Chapters 4, 6, 8, & 10 are particularly important

READ: <https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/handouts-guides>
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

Endnote: <https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/EndNote>

Guest Speaker: Xinyi Zuo, Goodness Godwin-Usoro

Week 2 AUG 28: Nature of Theory and Research/Library Orientation

READ: Recommended APA book, Chapters 1 & 2

Guest Speaker: April Hines

Due: APA Style Exercises

Week 3 SEPT 4: Film Screening: *The Stanford Prison Experiment*

Due: Library Discovery Project

Week 4 SEPT 11: Gatekeeping, Agenda-Setting Theory

READ: 1. The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media
 2. The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data

Guest Speaker: TBD

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 5 SEPT 18: Revised Agenda-Setting: Agenda Melding Model and Network Agenda Setting Model

READ: Network issue agendas on Twitter during the 2012 U.S. presidential election

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 6 SEP 25: Framing

READ: Wanted, Dead or Alive

Guest Speaker: TBD

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 7 OCT 2: Two-Step Flow, Agenda Diffusion

READ: Agenda Diffusion: An Integrated Model of Agenda Setting and Interpersonal Communication

Guest Speaker: Guest Speaker: TBD

Due: Weekly reflection

Due: Essay 1

Week 8 OCT 9: Selective Exposure Theory

READ: Birds of a Feather Tweet Together

Guest Speaker: TBD

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 9 OCT 16: Understanding the Audience: Spiral of Silence

READ: Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion

Due: Weekly reflection

Due: Essay 2

Week 10 OCT 23: Third-Person Effect

READ: Third-Person Effects and the Environment

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 11 OCT 30: Persuasion Knowledge Model & Social Media Advertising

READ: Sponsorship Disclosure: Effects of Duration on Persuasion Knowledge and Brand Responses

Guest Speaker: TBD

Due: Weekly reflection

Due: Essay 3

Week 12 NOV 6: Understanding Persuasion through Big Data (Extended Parallel Processing Model)

READ: Are You Scared Yet?

Due: Weekly reflection

Week 13 NOV 13: Essay 4 Review

Individual Meetings

Week 14 NOV 20: Essay 4 Presentations**Week 15 NOV 27: No Class, Happy Thanksgiving****Week 16 DEC 4: No Class Meeting****Due:** Essay 4**Essay 4 Due, Thursday Dec 4 at 11:59 pm, submit via Turnitin on Canvas*****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. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see:

<http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

Courser 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.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center. 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.

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/>.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu.
<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.
<https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
<https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

Student Complaints Campus: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf.

On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.