

Theory of Mass Communication

MMC 6400

Dr. Wayne Wanta

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Office hours: Tuesdays 8:30-10:30 a.m., Wednesdays 1-2, and by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course will introduce students to the study of mass media theories. The course is designed to help students: 1. gain an understanding of the theoretical perspectives that direct mass media research; 2. develop the ability to apply these perspectives in critically analyzing mass communication research; 3. expand their appreciation for the history and traditions of mass communication research; 4. gain a foundation that will aid students in the development of a thesis or dissertation and the preparation for comprehensive examinations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Readings:

No texts are required. However, there will be several readings each week. Details of how to access the readings will be distributed in class.

While no text is required, students may find the following books useful:

Severin and Tankard, *Communication Theories*

Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*

DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, *Theories of Mass Communication*

Tan, *Mass Communication Theories and Research*

McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*

Bryant and Zillmann, *Media Effects*

Lowery and DeFleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*

Dennis and Wartella, *American Communication Research*

McCombs and Becker, *Using Mass Communication Theory*

A number of academic journals are also excellent sources of theory-based research.

Among the more useful ones are:

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly

Journal of Communication

Communication Research

Public Opinion Quarterly

Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media

Newspaper Research Journal

Mass Communication & Society

Journal of Advertising Research

Public Relations Review

Critical Studies in Mass Communication

Journal of Communication Inquiry

Grading:

Grades will be determined in the following way:

Final papers	50%
Presentations	20%
Reactions to readings	20%
Participation	10%

Final papers:

Students will produce a research paper that will be of sufficient quality for submission to the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication or the International Communication Association. The paper will be written in sections. The due dates for individual sections are listed on the tentative schedule. The paper can deal with any theory we will discuss this term and involve any appropriate methodology.

Presentations:

Each class period from week 3 through week 15, 2 or 3 students will discuss current research on the topic of the week. Students will be responsible for finding articles pertinent to the assigned topics and clear the articles with the instructor. The number of presentations that each student will be responsible for will depend upon the size of the class. A sign-up sheet will be brought to class next Wednesday. Topics will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Students will also write a two to three page paper discussing the article. This paper will be turned in along with a Xeroxed copy of the article under discussion.

Reactions to readings:

Students will be required to turn in brief reactions and questions dealing with the assigned topic of the week. The papers should be no longer than 1 or 2 pages. In these papers, students should critically evaluate the readings and include points made in the readings that were not clear. Papers are due Tuesday at noon and should be sent via email to me.

Participation:

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings for that day. Students should not feel shy or intimidated. There are no dumb questions or comments. Ask lots of questions if you don't understand something. Comment if you think something is stupid. All students should offer their thoughts in class.

Expectations:

Students are expected to attend each class session and will be graded on class participation. Assignments must be turned in on time on the date they are due. One full

letter grade will be deducted for each day an assignment is late. Your written work should be of professional quality; spelling, grammar, and punctuation count. Please make sure that all work is your own and that the sources of information are accurately quoted and represented.

Plagiarism; Cheating or other Academic Misconduct: The Academic Integrity Statement for the College of Journalism and Communications can be found here:

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/grad/forms/Plagiarism-Guideline.pdf>

In addition, all students are bound by the university's Honor Code Policy at

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>. **Anyone who violates these policies in this course will receive a failing grade in this course and face further sanctions from the college and university.**

Special needs: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting an accommodation. This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.

Syllabus Changes: The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises. This includes the possibility of guest speakers and special presentations, some of which may be scheduled outside of class time. Note: Some of the content for this syllabus was taken from syllabi from previous classes.

Final tips on getting good grades:

Come to class on time. Contact me before class if you cannot attend. Come to class prepared to discuss topics by completing all of the assigned readings ahead of time. TURN OFF your cell phones. Laugh at my jokes.

Tentative schedule:

Week 1:

Jan. 7: Intro, Definitions

Readings: Handouts.

Week 2:

Jan. 14: History of research

Readings: Handouts

Assignment I due

Week 3:

Jan. 21: Cultivation I: Violence

Student presentations I

Readings: Hirsch; Gerbner; Hirsch; Kahlor.

Week 4:

Jan. 28: Cultivation II: Gender

Student presentations II

Readings: Chen; Ogles

Introduction sections due

Week 5:

Feb. 4: Agenda-Setting I

Student presentations III

Readings: McCombs & Shaw; McCombs; Li.

Week 6:

Feb. 11: Agenda-setting, priming and framing II

Student presentations IV

Readings: Entman; McCombs; D'Angelo; Zhang; Lim; Killebrew.

Literature review sections due

Week 7:

Feb. 18: Diffusion of Innovations

Student presentations V

Week 8:

Feb. 25: Introduction to Uses & Gratifications

Student presentation VI

Readings: Katz; Greer; Creasman; Dimitrova; Edwards
Methodology sections due

Week 9:

March 4: Spring Break, No class.

Week 10:

March 11: Knowledge Gap and Digital Divide

Student presentation VII

Readings: Tichenor; Vishwanath; McLeod; Weir.

Week 11:

March 18: International News Flow

Student presentation VIII

Week 12:

March 25: Third-person effect, Spiral of Silence

Student presentation IX

Readings: Davison; Boynton; Salwen.

Week 13:

April 1: Journalism traditions and news routines

Influences on media content

Student presentation X

Readings: White; Tuchman; Breed; Brown, Feldstein; Kim.

Week 14:

April 8: Critical/Cultural research

Student presentation XI

Readings: Carey; Brennen.

Additional readings

Week 15:

April 15: Final paper presentations

Week 16:

April 22: Final paper presentations

Final papers due at the beginning of class.

J8056, Assignment I

Scan any mass communication academic journal (see the partial list on the syllabus).

Find a article that address a “theory” not mentioned on our syllabus.

Provide a full citation of the article.

Write a theoretical definition of the theory.

Summarize the results of the article in one paragraph.

Is this a “theory” or not? Why?