

MMC 6402: Mass Communication Perspectives

Fall 2013: Periods 3-4 Wednesdays and Fridays, Weimer 3020

Instructor

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About me: See my [website](#) or follow me (@bikeprof) on [Twitter](#)

If office hours are inconvenient, make an appointment. Or if my door is open, drop in.

Welcome to Doctoral Studies

Mass Communication Perspectives is required for doctoral students in the College of Journalism and Communications. Most students take it their first semester. To understand why this course is required, consider the purpose of doctoral studies in our college. Here's my definition:

The purpose of doctoral studies is to enable you to teach yourself how to think like a social scientist.

That statement has two important elements:

1. You're going to *teach yourself* how to think. Although I can help guide you, I cannot teach you how to think. Only you can. And that self-teaching will continue the rest of your life.
2. You're learning to be a *social scientist*. A doctorate is not merely a terminal degree. It is a license to conduct research. And research must be scientific in order to have validity.

Course Description

If the purpose of doctoral studies is to enable you to teach yourself how to think like a social scientist, this course exists to acquaint you with how social science works. This course examines the principles and assumptions underlying the scientific process. It focuses on the philosophy of science and the role theory plays in scientific inquiry in mass communication.

This course asks questions such as: What is truth? What makes the social sciences different from the physical sciences? Is reality independent of our observations? Does good social science require a theory? If theory is important, why does mass communication have so many when physics and biology each have one? Addressing these philosophical questions is a core element of acquiring a Ph.D. - which, after all, is a doctorate in *philosophy*.

Thinking philosophically is tough, so don't be discouraged if the early readings seem daunting. If your master's involved a thesis, you may have broached some of these questions before. If you have a professional master's or an MBA, you may want to do extra reading to catch up.

Course Objectives

The course is intended to enable you to:

1. Improve your ability to write research papers through cogent conceptualization and clear explication as you apply principles gleaned from examining the philosophy of science.
2. Understand the historical development of mass communication theory and the role it plays in academic research.
3. Become socialized in the world of academic research.
4. Write cogent papers exploring the philosophy of science and the development of mass communication theories that can help you prepare for qualifying exams.
5. Write a final paper worthy of acceptance at an academic conference.

Required Textbooks

Baran, S.J., & Davis, D.K. (2012). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (6th ed.) Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. ISBN: 0-495-89887-2.

Godfrey-Smith, P. (2003). *Theory and reality: An introduction to the philosophy of science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press. ISBN: 0-226-30063-3.

Shoemaker, P.J.; Tankard, J.W., Jr. & Lasorsa, D.L. (2004). *How to build social science theories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN: 0-7619-2667-4.

Other Readings

Journal articles and other assigned readings are available through the course website on the University of Florida e-learning system, [Sakai](#). These readings are identified with a “PDF” in the class Readings Schedule (a separate document).

Keeping Up With Readings

Part of doctoral work is learning to acquire information efficiently under an intensive reading load. Some tips:

- Plan ahead. Budget your time over the semester according to due dates.
- Learn how to look for topic sentences and key arguments as well as what you can skim and what needs more attention.
- You have learned when you can summarize an author’s main points in your own words. Write brief summaries for your own use. You may find them helpful for qualifying exams.

Class Participation

Part of becoming a scholar is learning how to engage others to challenge assertions. Thus, class participation is critical. Don’t let shyness or lack of confidence keep you from contributing to discussion, for it is when we engage each other that we learn the most. Moreover, I’m going to call on people at random in class to ensure everyone participates.

In turn, class participation absolutely depends on each student having read the material ahead of class. Therefore, you are expected to have read (or skimmed, as the schedule denotes) the material for each class.

Each student gets one “free pass” from having done the readings for that class to accommodate unexpected circumstances. If you wish to claim that pass, e-mail me ahead of class so I won’t think you’re trying to avoid participating and so I won’t call on you. But do come to class.

Attendance is mandatory unless extraordinary circumstances arise that are discussed in advance. Repeated unexcused absences may result in a grade reduction.

Electronic Devices in Class

Voice recorders or Livescribe-style pens are acceptable. Cellphones and iPods are not. Please limit laptop and tablet use to immediate classroom purposes. (In other words, ignore Facebook.)

Electronic devices are disruptive to a seminar atmosphere and ineffective for your learning. Rather than furiously try to take notes on everything said, come to class having marked up readings with questions or comments and be prepared to challenge the author’s arguments. Use class time to synthesize your learning and engage in higher-order thinking through classroom participation.

Besides, cellphone use in class is my pet peeve. ‘Nuff said.

Assignment Weighting

Science paper	20%
Theory paper	20%
Conceptualization paper introduction	5%
Conceptualization paper	55%

Grading Scale

A	100 to 90
B+	89 to 87
B	86 to 83
B-	82 to 80

Course Papers

What makes this course 4 credit hours instead of the usual 3 is the range of material and the three required papers. Two of those are shorter (8 to 10 pages) papers on assigned topics. The third is the major paper for the course, a conceptualization paper of 20 to 25 pages that is of sufficient quality to be accepted by an academic conference. All three are explained below.

Why Two Topical Papers?

You will write two overview/summation papers, each on a core element of the course: philosophy of science and the development of mass communication theory. These papers are designed to help you prepare for potential qualifying exam questions. Your exact question, of course, will depend

on your dissertation prospectus as well as your adviser and committee members. Here are some examples of exam questions that draw from material covered in this course:

Philosophy of science

- Although rarely acknowledged, all social science research faces limitations in epistemology and ontology. Describe those limitations from a philosophical standpoint and how knowing them can inform and improve your dissertation.
- Drawing from Steven Chaffee's book on the topic, discuss the process of explication beginning with the focal concept, and describe the steps you will need to take to delineate your study's epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Theory

- Identify the benefits and limitations of theory in mass communication research in general, and for your dissertation in particular.
- What does "theory" mean in mass communication scholarship? What criteria determine whether a mass communication theory is "good"?

Thus, the purpose of these two topical papers is that, two years from now, you can pull these papers from your files and use them to help you prepare for a related qualifying exam question.

About the Topical Papers

1. These are summary papers, not original research studies.
2. Each topical paper must be no less than 8 double-spaced pages but should not be much more than about 10 pages (excluding endnotes/references).
3. These are not full-blown papers, so no abstract is needed. Neither are section headings.
4. For these two topic papers, you're probably not going to be able to focus on your field of study (advertising, public relations, etc.). These are overview papers about the social sciences and mass communication. They are not discipline-specific.
5. Most of these papers will summarize what you have learned from the readings and class discussion, so you won't have many sources. Six is sufficient. You may consult other sources beyond those assigned, but you are not required to do so.
6. Every academic paper has to advance an argument. Plan to spend your final 2 pages detailing the argument you wish to make. This will serve as your conclusion.

See the Technical Details section, the Academic Writing Tips section and the rubrics at the end of the syllabus for more details.

Topical Paper 1: Science

This paper will have a title such as "What Makes the Social Sciences Scientific?" The paper should summarize the key topics covered by the readings and class discussion while sustaining an argument that supports a conclusion.

The paper should address at least six of these issues:

1. How science differs from other ways to obtain knowledge
2. How empiricism differs from rationalism and why it matters
3. How deduction differs from induction and why it matters
4. How Kuhn and Popper differed in their conceptualization of the way science is (or should be) practiced and why those distinctions matter
5. Whether the social sciences can or should imitate the physical sciences
6. Whether truth is relative or independent of our observations
7. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological parameters of science

Upload the science paper to the class website on Sakai by noon Monday, September 16.

Topical Paper 2: Theory

This paper will have a title such as “The Historical Development of Mass Communication Theories.”

The paper will begin (about 2 pages) by:

- Comparing and contrasting a few definitions of theory and its role in research.
- Describing the characteristics of “good” theory for mass communication research.

Next is the core of the paper (about 4 pages). Here you will trace the arc of mass communication theory over the four eras defined by Baran & Davis while incorporating world events and parallel academic developments in sociology and psychology. Because much of the paper will draw from Baran & Davis, you are likely to have several paragraphs that will have only one citation – for Baran & Davis. (If so, the citation goes at the end of the paragraph.)

The end is your argument/conclusion (about 2 pages). Some examples:

- Whether the “prosumer” era changes how theory is conceptualized.
- Whether mass communication theory could exist without sociology and psychology.
- Have we resolved the debate over whether media are powerful or have limited effects?

Upload the theory paper to the class website on Sakai by noon Monday, October 14.

Conceptualization Paper

Because this is an advanced-level course, the main work product is a paper of sufficient quality to be accepted at an academic conference such as the AEJMC Midwinter Conference or the Southeast Colloquium (which our college will host March 20-22, 2014). Meeting this requirement is necessary to receive an A or a B grade for the course.

The conceptualization paper must be at least 20 pages and not much more than about 25 pages, double-spaced, not counting the cover page or references section. For more details, see the rubric later in the syllabus.

Unless an extraordinary circumstance such as a medical emergency arises, deadlines are firm:

- The first two to three pages (paper copy) are due by noon Thursday, October 31.
- Upload the final, completed paper to the Sakai website by noon Monday, December 9.

Begin thinking of topics early. Feel free to consult with your doctoral adviser. You will submit your proposed introduction (2 to 3 pages) by October 31 so that we can discuss it when we meet individually for 15 minutes starting the next day. However, we can always meet sooner if you wish.

A good example of a conceptualization paper is one that offers a model or a typology:

- A **model** uses standard symbols to help explain relationships and causality among concepts. Examples: identify moderators and mediators that influence how commercial weight-loss advertising is persuasive, show why modalities matter in advertising messages, or explain how transparency in public relations helps nonprofits.
- A **typology** is a parsimonious classification or categorization of a phenomenon. Examples: types of government public diplomacy using public relations theory, types of media literacy, or an examination of who benefits from convergence, all placed along a continuum.

We'll talk more about models and typologies in class, along with examples of such papers (on Sakai, if you want an early look) that have been published in academic journals.

Although a model or typology is not easy to develop, either can benefit you as a new doctoral student. Developing a model or typology builds your conceptual skills, which can improve your ability to get traditional research papers published. Aside from errors in methodology or data collection, academic journals reject papers most often because of three problems:

1. The paper is not rooted in or does not advance theory.
2. The paper fails to offer conceptual clarity or explication.
3. The paper fails to answer the "so what" question.

A good paper advancing a model or typology will help you avoid all three problems.

Two other possibilities include explication papers that:

- Apply theory. For example: identify theories that explain why synergy is effective in integrated marketing or why social marketing campaigns against HIV/AIDS are ineffective in much of Africa.
- Apply outside research to a mass communication issue. For example: draw from economic research to justify an unconventional argument that an asymmetrical model can be beneficial in public relations.

However, a conference-worthy paper is more difficult to produce using those two approaches. Papers with models or typologies are more likely to be accepted by an academic conference.

Conceptual Paper Structure

A social science research paper involving data has five parts:

1. Introduction
2. Literature review

3. Method
4. Findings
5. Discussion & conclusion (followed by references)

Because a model or typology has no data to report, the structure will be a little different:

1. Cover page with title and the author's name (1 page).
2. Abstract of 100 to 125 words (1 page).
3. Introduction (about 3 pages) as follows:
 - a. Identify the problem to be solved academically.
 - b. Have a sentence that begins, "The purpose of this study is to"
 - c. Specify the paper's unique contribution to academic knowledge and its "so what."
 - d. Identify a theoretical base.
4. Literature review that draws from previous studies to illuminate what is known about the problem to be solved (about 4 pages).
5. Presentation of the model or typology as the "data" for the paper backed by citations to related academic studies. If you have a model, include propositions (which are untested hypotheses) at the end of each variable or construct (about 10 pages).
6. Discussion/conclusion (about 3 pages) as follows:
 - a. Explain how the model or typology advances academic knowledge.
 - b. Detail (2 to 3 paragraphs) how the model or typology could guide future research
 - c. Identify the study's limitations.
 - d. Conclude with a graph with the most persuasive argument for the "so what."

Technical Details for All Three Papers

- **Cover page:** Include just your name and the title on the cover page.
- **Purpose:** Each paper should have a sentence that begins "The purpose of this study is to ..." In addition, address the "so what?" question in the introduction and conclusion.
- **Length:** Topic papers must be 8 to about 10 pages (not counting a reference list). The final project must be 20 to 25 pages (not counting the cover page and the reference section).
- **Sources:** Use proper academic sources. Use the databases available through the library, not solely Google Scholar, which misses a lot of material behind paywalls unless you're on the UF network. Wikipedia is not an academic source.
- **Style:** APA (references) or Chicago (endnotes) is acceptable. Legal papers can use Bluebook style (footnotes). Follow your chosen style. Style is an important element of academic writing.
- **Writing:** Clarity is essential in formal academic writing. Be precise in word choice, grammar and spelling. Follow grammar guides and dictionaries. Don't worry about an occasional mistake; perfection is elusive. However, papers with writing that is obtuse, sloppy in the use of mechanics or hobbled by garbled syntax won't be accepted for an academic conference – and thus won't pass muster for this course.
- **Deadlines.** Unless an extraordinary circumstance such as a medical emergency arises, deadlines are firm.

Academic Writing Tips

1. Academic work is distinguished by frequent use of citations, the explication of terms and concepts, and writing that is focused and lucid.
 - a. Cite early and often. Citations document where you got your material and serve as evidence. For your conceptualization paper, more sources = a better paper.
 - b. Define terms. Apply Chaffee's *Explication*. Vanquish vagueness.
 - c. Write lucidly. Multi-syllabic words swimming in a convoluted syntax is not academic. Clarity in thought and precision in writing is.
2. Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence, which describes what the paragraph is about. You can create an outline from a good research paper by stringing together the first sentence from each paragraph. Conversely, you can organize your paper by writing the topic sentences first.
3. Therefore, write all the topic sentences for the paper first, and then write the paper. If you do, your paper will be much better organized and read more fluently.
4. Skip the throat-clearing pronouncements such as "this paper will first describe ... then it will detail" or "in the next section we'll explore." Such pronouncements waste space and are to be avoided except for lengthy papers in legal journals.
5. Use past-tense verbs for references of previously published material. A published study does not *say* or *writes* (present tense). It *said* or *wrote* (past tense).
6. Use quotes sparingly. Summarize and paraphrase the core idea in your own words.
7. Avoid personal pronouns. "I believe" statements weaken arguments. The statement is what matters, not who said it. Avoid "the researcher" statements, too.
8. Because what matters most is *what* is said, rather than *who* said it, most references to authors should be reserved for citations.
 - a. Weak: As Godfrey-Smith (2003) wrote, induction is inherently flawed.
 - b. Strong: Induction is inherently flawed (Godfrey-Smith, 2003).
9. Support conclusions with evidence. A paper cannot conclude that "social scientists shouldn't feel inferior to physical scientists" without first describing why inferiority exists and offering evidence for why the social sciences are equally valid. Unsupported assertions are not conclusions.
10. Use active voice to identify actors. Writing that "it is believed that science involves math" hides from the reader the key issue of *who* believes that statement.
11. Use your stylebook (APA or Chicago) for stylistic issues such as whether to refer to concepts with quotation marks, capital letters, or italics.
12. In addition to helpful sections in the APA and Chicago style manuals, use a grammar text such as Strunk & White's *Elements of Style* or *A Writer's Reference* to avoid errors in noun-pronoun agreement, the use of possessives, dangling participles, sentence fragments, etc. Such errors lessen clarity.

Statistics Resources

This is *not* a methods course. It is *not* a statistics course. However, new doctoral students sometimes wish they had a better grounding in the language of research. I recommend these books (listed in order of usefulness) *only* if you wish to get a head start on your understanding of quantitative research. None of these books is expected in any way for this class.

- *SPSS Survival Manual* by Julie Pallant (excellent guide on stats and how to use SPSS)
- *Statistics in Plain English* by Timothy C. Urdan (rooted in education, a social science)
- *What is a P Value Anyway* by Andrew Vickers (biostatistics, but exceptionally cogent)
- *Naked Statistics* by Charles Wheelan (popular press for a general audience)
- *The Signal and the Noise* by Nate Silver (popular press for a general audience)

Academic Integrity

University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, engaging in unauthorized collaboration, reusing your master's thesis or a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own, and having someone else write your paper.

Be aware of the policies in the college's Doctoral Handbook. Students have an affirmative obligation to know what is in the handbook and to abide by it. The handbook includes a detailed description of plagiarism, copies of which are available in Chinese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish. If you are unsure of citation rules or what requires attribution, ask me *before* turning in a paper. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the course and to recommend the student be removed from the graduate program.

Students with Disabilities

If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

Help with Coping

The UF [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted [online](#). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. You'll be given specific times when evaluations are open. Summary [results](#) of these assessments are available to all students and to the public.

Schedule

Part 1: Science paper			
Wed	Aug. 21	What is science?	
Fri	Aug. 23	How do we know what we know?	
Wed	Aug. 28	Why do Kuhn and Popper matter?	
Fri	Aug. 30	What makes the social sciences different?	
Wed	Sept. 4	Does science require replication?	
Fri	Sept. 6	Is reality independent of our observations?	
Wed	Sept. 11	Explication	
Fri	Sept. 13	(no class so you can work on your paper)	Paper due noon Monday, Sept. 16
Part 2: Theory paper			
Wed	Sept. 18	Does theory matter?	
Fri	Sept. 20	What makes good theory?	
Wed	Sept. 25	Theory era 1: Mass society	
Fri	Sept. 27	Theory era 2: Limited effects	
Wed	Oct. 2	Theory era 3: Cultural/critical	
Fri	Oct. 4	Theory era 4: Meaning-making	
Wed	Oct. 9	Does a "pro-sumer" era require new theory?	
Fri	Oct. 11	(no class so you can work on your paper)	Paper due noon Monday, Oct. 14
Part 3: Conceptualization paper			
Wed	Oct. 16	Building theory 1	
Fri	Oct. 18	Building theory 2	
Wed	Oct. 23	Models	
Fri	Oct. 25	Typologies	
Wed	Oct. 30	Legal studies (Dr. Calvert & Dr. Bunker)	Introduction due noon Thursday, Oct. 31
Fri	Nov. 1	In lieu of class, individual student meetings 1	
Wed	Nov. 6	In lieu of class, individual student meetings 2	
Fri	Nov. 8	No class; homecoming	
Wed	Nov. 13	Conceptual paper presentations 1	
Fri	Nov. 15	Conceptual paper presentations 2	
Wed	Nov. 20	(no class so you can work on your paper)	
Fri	Nov. 22	(no class so you can work on your paper)	
Wed	Nov. 27	No class; Thanksgiving	
Fri	Nov. 29	No class; Thanksgiving	
Wed	Dec. 4	(no class so you can work on your paper)	Paper due noon Monday, Dec. 9

Science Paper Rubric

	100-90 Excellent	89-80 Good	Less than 80 Unsatisfactory
Topic (20%)	Focuses on an element of the philosophy of science in a fresh and creative manner	Addresses an element of the philosophy of science	Does not address the philosophy of science or does so too broadly
Sourcing (20%)	Demonstrates proficient mastery with at least six sources that powerfully supports the paper's main arguments	Demonstrates competence in grasping the fundamentals with at least six sources to maintain an argument	Subject is treated in a cursory manner and sourcing is insufficient to sustain an argument
Analysis (20%)	Expertly draws from a core body of evidence using both analysis and synthesis to illuminate the subject	Competently evaluates applicable material with some analysis, if not synthesis	Material is presented without analysis or synthesis
Rhetoric (15%)	Unambiguous, compelling and persuasive argument offered through superior writing and conceptualization	Though the paper may falter at times, the point is clear and supported by competent writing	Point is unclear, either through faulty conceptualization or inadequate framing of arguments
Writing (15%)	Precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling result in a lucid and intelligible paper	Syntax is clear and the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede understanding	Syntax is sometimes garbled and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disrupt understanding
Style (10%)	Consistently follows APA, Chicago or Bluebook style	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is generally followed, and any errors do not retard readability	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is applied so inconsistently that readability is affected

Theory Paper Rubric

	100-90 Excellent	89-80 Good	Less than 80 Unsatisfactory
Topic (20%)	Adroitly describes and contextualizes arc of mass media theory development	Capably describes arc of mass media theory development with some context	Covers less than the whole arc of mass media theory development or fails to contextualize it
Sourcing (20%)	Demonstrates proficient mastery with at least six sources that powerfully supports the paper's main arguments	Demonstrates competence in grasping the fundamentals with at least six sources to maintain an argument	Subject is treated in a cursory manner and sourcing is insufficient to sustain an argument
Analysis (20%)	Expertly draws from a core body of evidence using both analysis and synthesis to illuminate the subject	Competently evaluates applicable material with some analysis, if not synthesis	Material is presented without analysis or synthesis
Rhetoric (15%)	Unambiguous, compelling and persuasive argument offered through superior writing and conceptualization	Though the paper may falter at times, the point is clear and supported by competent writing	Point is unclear, either through faulty conceptualization or inadequate framing of arguments
Writing (15%)	Precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling result in a lucid and intelligible paper	Syntax is clear and the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede understanding	Syntax is sometimes garbled and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disrupt understanding
Style (10%)	Consistently follows APA, Chicago or Bluebook style	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is generally followed, and any errors do not retard readability	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is applied so inconsistently that readability is affected

Conceptualization Paper Rubric

	100-90 Excellent	89-80 Good	Less than 80 Unsatisfactory
Topic (10%)	Purpose stated clearly on a focused topic that fills a gap in knowledge	Purpose stated clearly; topic addresses gap in academic knowledge	Purpose is unclear or topic fails to fill a gap in knowledge
Sourcing (10%)	At least 25 journal articles, mostly from top journals	At least 25 worthwhile journal articles	Less than 25 worthwhile journal articles
Explication (10%)	Terms and scope of the project are clearly defined	Most terms and the scope of the project are defined	Terms and scope of the project are unclear or undefined
Conceptualization (25%)	Models, typologies, etc., are unambiguous, compelling and persuasive	Models, typologies, etc., are clear and coherent but may omit a few concepts	Models, typologies, etc., are vague or incoherent, or omit crucial concepts
Significance (20%)	Clearly contributes to academic knowledge by advancing theory, identifying key propositions, exposing latent relationships, linking typologies to important variables or clarifying ambiguities in the literature	Somewhat contributes to academic knowledge by advancing theory, identifying key propositions, exposing latent relationships, linking typologies to important variables or clarifying ambiguities in the literature	Fails to advance academic knowledge or answer the “so what” question
Writing (15%)	Precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling result in a lucid and intelligible paper	Syntax is clear and the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede understanding	Syntax is sometimes garbled and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disrupt understanding
Style (10%)	Consistently follows APA, Chicago or Bluebook style	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is generally followed, and any errors do not retard readability	APA, Bluebook or Chicago style is applied so inconsistently that readability is affected