

Mass Communication Theories

JOUR7050/8050

Fall 2012

Mondays, 5:30-830, #106 Meeman Journalism

Dr. Erin Willis (Follow me on Twitter: @enwillis)

Office: #328 Meeman Journalism Building

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday – 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.; Thursday – 10 a.m. to noon; or e-mail for appointment

Office phone: (901) 678-2404

Cell phone: (417) 593-1005

Campus email: enwillis@memphis.edu

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

CATALOGUE/COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Key concepts and development of theories offered to explain operation and effects of mass communication media; multidiscipline overview of theories dealing with advertising, broadcasting, print, and public relations messages, media, and effects.

PREREQUISITES:

None

TEXTBOOK:

None required. Your readings will be distributed to you via eCourseware.

We live in an era in which the processes of news production and the patterns of media consumption are changing rapidly with the advent of new digital technologies. Even the most seasoned professionals are struggling to determine what the media landscape of the future will look like and what business models can be used to support it. It is in times like these when the theories of mass communication are particularly valuable. The broadly explanatory concepts of theory help us understand some of the underlying ways in which humans respond to and share different types of information, and as thus can help us to make some informed predictions about what the future may hold.

This class will provide you with an overview of the important theories in our field, and will encourage you to think about how these apply to the real world and how they will inform your future work as a media professional.*

CLASSROOM FORMAT:

This class will be used as a seminar, which is a form of instruction where all students are asked to actively participate. Each week, we will discuss a new topic and the designated discussion leaders will be responsible for presenting the class with ideas for debate from the readings or examples from the field, and critically analyze the week's theoretical concepts.

GRADING:

Discussion Leader 75 points (2 total)

*Thank you to Dr. Jane Singer, University of Iowa, for the inspiration for some aspects of this syllabus, as well as Drs. Betty Winfield, Glenn Leshner, Margaret Duffy and Shelly Rodgers, University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Weekly thought paper	50 points (10 total)
Short assignments	100 (3 total)
Final paper	200 points
Paper presentation	50 points
Participation	50 points
TOTAL	1250 points

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

1. **Read the material BEFORE you come to class.** I cannot stress this enough. Be prepared to discuss it. Class participation counts toward your final grade.
2. Each week, one person from the class will serve as the **discussion leader**. S/he will develop a list of questions based on the readings for the class to discuss, paying special attention to the “real world” implications of the research and theory we will be reading. The discussion leader will also highlight a few of the “most important” or “most interesting” points from the readings. Be creative and find ways to engage the class and help us remember the important concepts.
3. Each week, students are asked to summarize the week’s readings in the form of a typed, 1-page paper, single-spaced. **Thought papers** are to be printed out and turned in at the beginning of class on Mondays. The idea is not to regurgitate the readings but to analyze by providing insights and comments that demonstrate knowledge and deep thinking about theories, methods and concepts found in the week’s readings. Given the brevity of the papers, there is no need to define concepts or theories, but students should provide examples where appropriate.
4. You will be asked to complete a **literature review** of approximately 15 pages, double-spaced. You may want this to be the literature review for your project or thesis proposal, or maybe you will submit research to a journal or conference. You must have at least 10-15 different citations, the bulk of which must be from books or academic journals. You are to read the original research. Do not cite someone who is citing someone else, for instance. Find the original research. Papers should synthesize major conclusions and themes in the literature. Chicago or APA style must be followed. **You will have several deadlines before your final paper is due: (1) paper topic; (2) annotated bibliography; (3) draft of paper with a brief, informal presentation of your findings; and (4) final paper.**
5. You will have a few **short assignments/papers** due throughout the semester. No late assignments will be accepted. All assignments should use clear, concise writing and excellent grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. This is a graduate course and therefore, I expect your skills in this area to be exemplary. The Department of Journalism employs a “writing coach,” and I suggest having her (or someone from the University’s Writing Center) proofread and help edit your work.

ASSESSMENT

PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR MASS COMMUNICATION

THEORY:

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy, fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET:**Cognitive Objectives To Be Mastered (Ability To Explain, Analyze, Understand, Think Critically):**

- Students will develop an understanding of what constitutes a “theory” and how the scientific method works in building and advancing theory.
- Students will attain familiarity with the broad range of theories in the field of journalism and mass communications, as well as an understanding of how this body of theory and research has developed over the history of the field.
- Students will learn how to meaningfully apply mass communication theory to the practical daily work of journalists, advertisers and public relations professionals.
- Students will learn how to develop sources for and write an academic literature review in association with a set of hypotheses or research questions.
- Students will develop skills in synthesizing substantial amounts complicated information and identifying important points in literature.
- Students will learn the important role gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other forms of diversity play in the production and effects of mass communication.

Performance Standards To Be Met (Demonstrable Skills, Abilities, Techniques, Applied Competencies):

- Students will read and critically analyze journal articles and book chapters on major mass communications theories.
- Students will practice breaking down academic research articles to their most important points to facilitate their understanding of the first steps in synthesizing a broad array of information.
- Students will lead and participate in class discussions that deepen their understanding of theories and how they apply to the real world.
- Students will research and write a 15-page literature review that will require them to demonstrate in-depth understanding of an academic theory or theories and the ability to clearly synthesize the information.

HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET FOR MASS COMMUNICATIONS THEORY:

- Students will lead and participate in class discussions in which readings and their implications are explored.

- Students will complete a number of short writing assignments that require them to synthesize and critically analyze class readings.
- Students will develop their own research questions or hypothesis, find and obtain relevant academic literature, and synthesize this literature into a comprehensive literature review.

PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be to:

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:

The Council seeks to promote student learning and encourages experimentation and innovation. Assessment is a system of evaluation of student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to grading at the individual level). Three criteria should guide assessment of student learning:

- *Awareness*: familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects.
- *Understanding*: assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas.
- *Application*: competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.

DEPARTMENT POLICIES

EMAIL:

You must have your UM email account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You should check your email regularly, as I may communicate with you outside of class. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the university.

In addition to email, we will use the UM drive this semester. I will post additional readings, assignments, and other course communication on my UM drive, so check this site frequently as well.

CELLPHONES:

No cellphones are permitted in class. You will be asked to leave if your cellphone is used during class. Be respectful and make professional choices.

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is **mandatory** in the Department of Journalism. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence due to illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another class. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

You have **two** excused absences to use at your discretion. After the third absence, your grade will drop half of a letter grade for each additional absence. Use your absences wisely. I don't care if you want to skip class to get your hair done or go hang out with your friends, but if later something serious happens (even a job interview!) and you have no "free" absences left – too bad. Your grade will suffer.

CHEATING:

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

"Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all." (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

DISABILITY:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (901) 678-2880 in #110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

ONLINE SETEs:

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that class. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.