

# Mass Communication Theory

JRSM 7050-001, S01

Spring 2024

Class meeting: 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Mondays

**Thomas J. Hrach, Ph.D.**

**Office:** 308 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** 9:30 a.m. to noon Wednesdays; 1 to 3:30 p.m. Thursdays.

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog 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.

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. 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.

### Prerequisites

Graduate status.

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Baran, Stanley J. and Dennis, K. Davis (2021) *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations Ferment and Future* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press (2021).

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. (have access to this, available from McWherter Library)

Additional course readings will be available via Canvas. A tentative list of readings is included in the syllabus; course readings may be altered during the semester.

### Classroom Format

This is a graduate seminar with lecture and class discussion. Each week, we will discuss a new topic and I and/or designated discussion leaders will be responsible for presenting the class with ideas for debate from the readings or examples from the field, and critically analyzing the week's theoretical concepts. Please note that failure to attend class or to actively take part – even if all your assignments are turned in on time and done acceptably - could significantly affect your final grade. Be sure you have read the material BEFORE class and come prepared to discuss it.

Students who attend graduate courses online meet in real time via the videoconferencing program Zoom and must plan to spend three hours a week in class, per class. Students will need an Internet connection, speakers and a mic (or a headset with a built-in mic). This form of instruction is referred to as "synchronous" and is the signature teaching method at The University of Memphis.

Online students must have a dedicated Internet connection with stable signal to support video conferencing. Students must be in a quiet place where they can fully participate in the courses. Zoom cameras must be turned on for the duration of the class period.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JRSM 7050 – S01 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

### Grading and Course Assignments

This is meant as a general guideline to the major assignments within the class. More detail will be provided in class and on Canvas. Deadlines are also listed in the Class Schedule. All work should be turned in as a Word document or PDF via assignments portal in Canvas. All work is due at the start of class, 5:30 p.m. Central on the assigned Tuesday, unless otherwise noted.

#### *Weekly Short Papers/Questions*

Each week, students will be asked to respond to the readings in the form of a 1 page paper (double-spaced). The idea is not to regurgitate the readings but to analyze them by providing insights and comments that demonstrate knowledge and deep thinking about theories, methods and concepts found in the week's readings. Using this space to ask questions is also appropriate. Students may make connections to readings from other weeks, connections to their final paper, connections to something they have read about or learned in either popular media or another course, among others. The purpose is to interact with the material in such a way as to be prepared to discuss it in class, and to write out your thoughts on the ideas presented. Given the brevity of the papers, there is no need to define concepts or theories, but students should provide examples where appropriate.

Students who submit solely (or mostly, defined by professor's discretion) an outline of the readings will NOT be given credit for that week's short paper. This is meant to be your thoughts, reactions, questions, and connections to the readings, not an outline of the readings themselves.

Students will NOT be required to turn in short papers for the week(s) in which they are the discussion leaders.

Papers should BOTH be uploaded to Dropbox (for grading) and be brought to class in some form (printed, on a laptop/tablet, etc.) in order to help the student remember their ideas and connections during the class discussion. Students MUST post these questions to the Discussion Board on Canvas by an hour before the start of class that week to give the professor time to review them before class. If it becomes necessary to cancel class for any reason, questions will still be required for that batch of readings and will be included in the next class session.

### *Discussion Leader*

Each week, one or two people will serve as the discussion leader(s). Discussion leaders will be responsible for leading the majority of the class period, both through presenting a brief overview of all of the material read, and through leading discussion on that material. They 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. Please be creative and find ways to try to engage the class and help us remember the important concepts. For example, show us a video clip, a cartoon, a photo, or a Web site and ask the class to analyze it from the theoretical perspective(s) of the week.

Discussion leaders should present on every piece of material assigned for that week, but can choose where to focus the majority of their energy/time. It is my responsibility to help fill in gaps, answer questions (even those from the discussion leaders), and help the class make connections among the material, both for that week and from other weeks. Discussion leaders should upload their materials (PowerPoint, video, whatever) to Dropbox to be shared with the rest of the class for reference. The questions below are meant to offer some guidance on general ideas for things to discuss.

1. What contribution has this theory/approach made to the field of mass communication?
2. What are the theory's strengths and weaknesses? What are the argument's strengths and weaknesses?
3. What is the theoretical significance of this research?
4. What are the practical applications of this approach/theory to journalism and strategic media?
5. What are the most important or interesting points from the readings?

Every discussion leader MUST take time during the presentation to relate the theory/theories presented to their job, or to the job that they want to do. How is this theory helpful in the real world? What does it offer us in our understanding of the world we want to live in? How can it be applied in a professional/practical context?

You are welcome to create a visual presentation (PowerPoint, etc.), but that is not required; however, some creativity and engagement of the class is expected. You will be graded on that engagement, plus how in-depth and detailed your critique of the theory is, and how well you apply class readings and vocabulary/concepts. Students who choose to work with others will all receive the same grade for the overall presentation, unless an alternative situation has been discussed with me ahead of time, and an individual grade for the application to practice/professional/real world.

### *Front Half of a Research Paper*

Complete the front half of a research paper (through RQs/hypotheses) based upon individual research interests of each student (approximately 12-15 pages double-spaced). Research must be original. Ideally, this completed project will be useful to you in your thesis, practicum, or project, or something you could submit to a conference (AEJMC Southeast is a great place to start!). You should not be using significant amounts of work from another class.

This paper will help students to synthesize a variety of material on a particular topic. I will discuss the mechanics of completing a literature review in class, but generally, it should act as an argument for why

your particular project helps the field move forward. Think of the literature review as a map, helping people understand what has already been discovered in this area, and what remains to be uncovered or studied. The research questions/hypotheses should follow clearly from the literature review, pointing to the specific aspects of the map you hope to reveal with this particular project. Many of the readings for this course include excellent reviews of relevant literature, which may be used as a model for this assignment.

The paper should include at least 15 appropriate citations, the bulk of which must be from books or academic journals. You are to read the original research (don't cite someone who is in turn citing somebody else). APA style must be followed, for formatting, in-text citations, and the reference list.

You will have several mini deadlines before the final paper is due. You will turn in the introduction/general proposal, an annotated bibliography (as an entry point to the literature review), research questions/hypotheses, and the full literature review, plus a final paper (including all of the previously mentioned pieces) and a presentation to the class. Additional details and direction will be given in class.

*Introduction/general proposal:* All students must have their proposals approved by the professor before they can proceed with the rest of the paper. The proposal in brief should include the significance of project, some broader cultural support for why this project matters, and introduction of theoretical/conceptual framework. Approximately 2-3 pages.

*Annotated bibliography:* The annotated bibliography must include a full and complete APA citation and two paragraphs of commentary for each source included. The first paragraph should summarize the work and the second paragraph should explain the usefulness of the source to the research topic. Approximately 8-10 pages.

*Research questions/hypotheses:* This project should either ask research questions (2-4) or have hypotheses (2-6); mixed methods projects should be approved by the professor. Questions/hypotheses should be appropriately narrow, relevant to the topic, and fit within research question/hypothesis requirements (to be discussed in class).

*Full literature review:* Taking an annotated bibliography and turning it into a streamlined, coherent argument requires work and an understanding that this is more than simply listing all of the things that other people have found. How does all of this research interact with one another? What are the holes that are left for your project to fill? What is the argument being presented?

*Presentation and final paper:* You will give a presentation of your research paper to the class during our two final meeting periods. Your final paper will be due the day you do the presentation.

#### *Research Colloquium Response Paper*

Graduate students must attend and write a 1-2 page reflection paper about, at least one research colloquium sponsored by the Department. All are on Fridays from noon to 1 p.m. in Meeman 202.

Students enrolled in more than one course in the department may write multiple reflections of one research presentation as long as the topic is customized to the individual class. For example, for JOUR 7050, a student should reflect on the theory/concepts discussed, while for 7530, a student should reflect

on the use of visuals. Papers must be turned in by 5:30 p.m. CT on the Wednesday following the colloquia.

### *Grading Scale*

There are 815 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class average will be calculated and fractions will be rounded to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below.

Weekly Short Papers/Questions	12 weeks, 10 points each	120 points
Research Colloquium Response Paper		15 points
Discussion Leader		100 points
Research Paper		
Intro/Proposal		40 points
Annotated Bibliography		50 points
Research questions/hypotheses		50 points
First draft final paper		0
Second draft final paper		140 points
Presentation		25 points
Total		540 points

A = 92.5-99.9%; A- = 89.5-92.4%  
B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%;  
C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%  
D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%  
F 0-59.4%

### **Course Information**

#### *Repetition of Courses and Coursework*

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

#### *Quality of Work*

All work in this course should follow APA format, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of effective communication is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Although the professor may or may not line edit your work, problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good and to be yours. What is not yours should be fully cited. In documenting sources you should use APA formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

Your papers will be graded on content, including writing quality, comprehensiveness of research, adherence to complete and proper citation style, grammar, punctuation and spelling. All of these will be analyzed to determine a final paper grade. Avoid overusing long or block quotes. Within your paper, you will have an introduction, a review of pertinent literature, and research questions or hypotheses.

### *Questions About Grades*

If you would like to ask about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me outside of class time, as I will not discuss grades via email or during class. If you have a question or problem with a grade, exam question, or in-class assignment, you have 48 hours after the assignment is returned to you to contact me, or the grade stands. Your question or appeal must be stated in writing, citing your position and why you feel the mark is incorrect. The appeal should be turned in to the professor or sent via email within the stated time frame.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your grade online and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting with me early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-professor understanding and quality of work.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that some material may require more or less discussion and class time. Thus, changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced in class.

### *Week 1: Jan. 22: What is theory? How to do stuff.*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 1 "Understanding and Evaluating Mass Communication Theory."

### *Week 2: Jan. 29: Propaganda and the Magic Bullet*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 2 "The First Trend in Mass Communication Theory."

Assignment: Chapter 2 short paper

\*\*embedded librarian, in class\*\*

### *Week 3: Feb. 5: Marketplace of Ideas, Libertarianism and Social Responsibility*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 3 "Normative Theories of Mass Communication"

Assignment: Intro/proposal due, Chapter 3 short paper

### *Week 4: Feb. 12: Media Effects*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 4 "The Emergence of the Media Effects Trend"

Chapter 4 short paper

### *Week 5: Feb. 19: Two-step flow and entertainment*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 5 "The Consolidation of the Media Effects Trend"

Chapter 5 short paper

### *Week 6: Feb. 26: Critical cultural*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 6 "The Emergence of the Critical Cultural Trend in North America"

Chapter 6 short paper

*Week 7: March 4: Spring Break, no class*

Annotated bibliography due

*Week 8: March 11: Social Learning*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 7 “Theories of Media and Social Learning”

Assignments: Chapter 7 short paper;

*Week 9: March 18: Media influences on children, gender roles*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 8 “Theories of Media and Human Development”

Assignments: RQs/hypotheses due; Chapter 8 short paper

*Week 10: March 25: Uses & gratifications; types of audiences*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 9 “Audience Theories: Uses and Reception”

Assignments: Chapter 9 short paper

*Week 11: April 1: How media influences information processing*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 10 “Theories of Media Cognition and Information Processing”

Assignment: chapter 10 short paper

*Week 12: April 8: Agenda Setting and the Spiral of Silence*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 11 “Media Theories on Knowledge, Information and Perception of Social Issues”

Assignment: Chapter 11 short paper; first draft literature review due;

*Week 13: April 15: Cultivation and Media Literacy*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 12 “Media Theories on Community and Everyday Culture”

Assignments: Chapter 12 short paper

*Week 14: April 22: Framing and frame analysis*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 13 “Media and Culture: Making Meaning in a Social World”

*Week 15: April 29: Mediatization theory*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 14: “Commodification of Culture and mediatization”

Assignment: Full final papers due via Canvas; presentation of final papers

*Week 16; May 6: Wrap Up*

Assignment: Full final papers due via Canvas; presentation of final papers

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build

skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

## Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

## Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

## AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

## Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

## Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or



working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### **Academic integrity**

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and

punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.