

# Mass Communication Theory

JRSM 7050-M50

Summer 2025

Class meeting: Online/Asynchronous

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**Office:** 328 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** TR 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. or by appointment

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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.

### 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. 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 and are prepared to discuss it.

This is an asynchronous course, which means students need to actively take part in the course each week to ensure they are completely discussions and assignments. Each week, students will complete a different module that will contain some sort of lecture, discussion post, and a brief assignment to ensure you're grasping the material presented to you.

### 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

Discussion boards	30%
Theory paper	30%
Application paper	40%

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; 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. 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 using quotes.

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment. Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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

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

*Week 2: Propaganda, the Magic Bullet, and Normative Theory & Media Effects*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 2 "The First Trend in Mass Communication Theory." Baran and Davis, Chapter 3 "Normative Theories of Mass Communication." Baran and Davis, Chapter 4 "The Emergence of the Media Effects Trend"

*Week 3: Two-step flow and entertainment & Critical cultural*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 5 "The Consolidation of the Media Effects Trend" Baran and Davis, Chapter 6 "The Emergence of the Critical Cultural Trend in North America"

*Week 4: Social Learning & Uses & gratifications; types of audiences*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 7 "Theories of Media and Social Learning." Baran and Davis, Chapter 8 "Theories of Media and Human Development" & Baran and Davis, Chapter 9 "Audience Theories: Uses and Reception"

*Week 5: How media influences information processing*

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

*Week 6: Agenda Setting and the Spiral of Silence & Cultivation and Media Literacy*

Readings: Baran and Davis, Chapter 11 "Media Theories on Knowledge, Information and Perception of Social Issues." Baran and Davis, Chapter 12 "Media Theories on Community and Everyday Culture"

*Week 7: Framing and frame analysis*

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

*Week 8: Mediatization theory*

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

*Week 9: Project Work Week*

*Finals: Turn in final project 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.