

# Historiography in Mass Communication

JRSM 8200-001/S01

Spring 2026

Class meeting: Meeman 108(001)/Teams(S01)

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**Office Hours:** MW Noon to 2:30 p.m. or by appointment

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

An introduction to historical methodologies. Students learn about different methods of historical research and ways of constructing historical narrative and analysis, culminating in an original research project that explores one aspect of US media history.

### Course goals

Students who successfully complete JRSM 8200 should be able to:

- Analyze the substantive claims and findings of historical studies;
- Examine and assess the value of the methods used to produce historical work;
- Examine and assess the strengths and shortcomings of the evidentiary and theoretical bases of such works;
- Understand how the discipline of communication and information developed historically and how the study of mass communication history fits within the broader disciplinary conversations;
- Know, understand, and evaluate a range of methodological approaches to the writing of history;
- Recognize and understand some of the main issues, themes, and problems in communications history;
- To engage in respectful discussions about historical methods that originate from a variety of ontological and epistemological positions;
- To ask questions and use available sources to shape our knowledge of the past and our understanding of its significance; and
- To make contributions to historical knowledge in the field of communications history by writing a book review and a historical research paper that uses primary and secondary sources critically and in a methodologically sound manner.

### Textbooks and Required Materials

- Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition)
- Barbie Zelizer, *Explorations in Communication & History* (Routledge, 2008).

- Bonnie Brennan & Hanno Hardt, *The American Journalism History Reader* (Routledge, 2011).
- Additional readings (journal articles, etc.) provided by the instructor in Canvas.

## Classroom format

This is a graduate seminar with lecture and class discussion. Each week, we will discuss a new topic and selected readings. You must be prepared to discuss those readings each week. Please note that failure to attend class or to actively participate, even if all your assignments are turned in on time and done acceptably, will significantly affect your final grade.

## Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Click on the link for JRSM 7075-M50 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

## Grading and Course Assignments

Participation 200 points

Weekly Reading Reviews (25 points each) 200 points

Book Review Assignment 250 points

Final Research Paper 350 points

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 Canvas. All work is due at the start of class, 5:30 p.m. Central on the assigned Tuesday, unless otherwise noted.

### *Weekly Reading Reviews*

Each week (unless otherwise notified), in no more than two, double-spaced pages, each student should compose a synthesis/analysis of the week's readings. Summarizing statements should be relegated to the first graph. The remainder of the paper should focus on a critique of the historians' use of method and theory. Here are some useful questions that might guide you through the process: 1) What was the purpose of each individual piece? 2) How did the pieces fit together? 3) What theoretical claims did the various historians make in each piece? 4) What methodological approach did the various historians take in each piece? 5) What were the evidentiary or methodological strengths or shortcomings of the pieces?

### *Book Review*

Students will write an academic book review of a current book in the field of media history. The review will follow the current standards of the two most prominent journals in Media History—*American Journalism* and *Journalism History*. More detail will be provided on Canvas.

### *Research paper*

The main written work of this course is the research and writing of an academic history paper on a topic of the student's choosing in the field of communications history. This paper should be at least 20 pages in length and should be written with presentation at an academic conference and ultimate publication in an academic journal in mind. The paper is a serious piece of historical scholarship and should contribute something new to collective knowledge about communications history. You should begin work on this paper right away and work on it consistently and diligently throughout the semester. To that end, throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to turn in pieces of your paper: your topic, your research questions, your primary and secondary sources, your introduction, your literature review, your theory and method sections. Please see the tentative schedule for these dates. Please use Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, citation style.

Doctoral students are required to submit their paper to the AJHA national conference on June 1. Details to follow in class.

### *Course Requirements*

#### *In-person Classroom Format (for those in the 001 sections of JRS 8200)*

This class will take place in Meeman Journalism 108 on Wednesdays from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. You must be present and on time for all class meetings. There will be work weeks or virtual weeks during the semester where we will not meet in person. Those dates will be communicated to you as they arrise.

#### *Virtual Classroom Format (for those in the S50/S01 section of JRS 8200)*

This section of the class will use Teams, a web-based video conferencing platform. All students in this section will be in class synchronously, with everyone meeting at the same time whether on campus or virtual. Class will take place on campus in a classroom that is equiped with video and audio equipment. All students in this section must have a stable Internet connection, speakers and a microphone (or a headset with a built-in mic). Headsets can be purchased for approximately \$20. Students will need to be able to have video turned on for the entire class. Online students will not be permitted to attend class using a cellphone.

### *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 Chicago Manual Style, 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 line editing is unlikely, 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 Chicago formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources. In addition, Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

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.

#### *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.

#### *Grading Scale*

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 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 time. Thus, changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced on Canvas.

### *Week 1: An Introduction to the History of Communication & Information*

Readings:

Carl Becker, Everyman His Own Historian. *The American Historical Review* , Jan., 1932, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jan., 1932), pp. 221- 236. <https://democracy.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SOF-Readings-Pellerito-2.pdf>

David Paul Nord, "The Nature of Historical Research," in Guido Stempel and Bruce Westley, eds., *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, 2nd Edition, pp. 290-315 (Handout).

### *Week 2: Introduction to Historical Methods*

Readings: Zelizer Chapters 1 & 4, Additional readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 1

### *Week 3: The Problem of Communication History*

Readings: History Reader Chapter 3, Additional readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 2

### *Week 4: Memory and Media History*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 3

### *Week 5: Materiality in Media History*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 4, Research topics and proposals

### *Week 6: History of the Book*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 5

### *Week 7: History of Journalism Part 1—Objectivity, Lore, and Power of the Press*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 6

*Week 8: Spring Break*

*Week 9: History of Journalism Part 2—Identity, Alternative Press, Activism*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 7; Research Paper Updates with extended abstract and outline

*Week 10: History of Advertising*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 8

*Week 11: History of Broadcast*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 9; Book Review Due

*Week 12: History of Public Relations*

Readings: Readings on Canvas

Assignment: Reading Review 10

*Week 13: Research Paper Work Week*

*Final: Present final research paper on final night of class*

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Email

You must activate your UofM email account. If you use another provider, such as Google, you must forward all UofM emails 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 smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### AI/Chat GPT

In Journalism & Strategic Media, artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others. Please refer to the 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

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. For more information about the University's 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. You 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 your ideas' originality and evaluating the 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 a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely to detect plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or not accepted.

### **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, you must 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 before 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.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need 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. These 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 contribute to 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 understanding various perspectives 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.

## Weather policy

Always check with local media and 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 can assist in connecting you with campus or community support.