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**Instructor:**

Elise Stevens, M.A.

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**E-mail:** emsteven@live.unc.edu

**Office location:** 392 Carroll Hall

**Office hours:** MW 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM or by appointment; just email, call or text 413.563.6469

*Note: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; subject to change*

## Course Description

This course is an introduction to various aspects of the processes and effects that characterize the world of mass communication. This course will adopt an empirical approach to understanding various media phenomena. Through a combination of readings, lecture, and discussion, we will examine the psychological effects of media—both content as well as technology—and the theoretical frameworks that have led to the development of the media effects paradigm as one of the most fascinating and important areas in mass communication. You will also learn to critically analyze and evaluate published research, and design and conduct a project that will demonstrate your understanding of media effects. At the end of the course, you should become more discerning consumers, and perhaps practitioners, of media, with a deeper understanding and appreciation of media effects and the processes governing them in modern society.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, each student should have developed an understanding of the following:

* How to critically assess the impact of media content on society and individuals
* How to identify and test theories of mass media effects
* How to critically engage research in this arena

## Target Audience

This seminar is intended for students who are interested in grappling with the effects of mass media, both as a matter of empirical inquiry and in terms of ethics and policymaking. The course is open to advanced undergraduates and graduate students. I will strive to create an inclusive discussion environment that will invite participation from both undergraduates and graduate students; previous social science training or coursework is not a prerequisite for successful participation in the class.

Required Text

Bryant, J., Thompson, S., & Finklea, B. W. (2013). *Fundamentals of media effects*. (2nd ed.) Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Additional assigned readings can be found on the Sakai site.

Course Requirements

Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam. The exams are designed to test your mastery of the materials presented in the readings and lectures.

Group Project: In order for you to engage in the research process, you will be required to produce a document that will propose in detail a project that you will design and conduct. The project will require you to demonstrate a rigorous understanding of one or more aspects of media effects. Groups of 3-4 students will work on answering a research question related to media effects. Once you have collected data, I will help you with analysis. Based on your results, you will make an in-class presentation and prepare a project report. More detailed guidelines will be distributed in class.

Class Participation: Show up to class on time, do the reading, be respectful of your classmates, and ask questions. In addition to active participation in class, you are responsible for posting at least one question for the class about the readings each week on the Sakai forum, or writing one response to a peer’s question. I will often use these posts as the starting points for classroom discussion.

IRB Completion: All students need to complete the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) certification process. This means that you will do the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative course on the Internet and print out the certification. This certification may take some time, so it may be helpful to do it in stages. The certification must be completed by Monday, September 30th. The course is available online here: [https://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/ researchers/training/index.htm](https://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/%20researchers/training/index.htm)

Grading

Midterm exam: 25% of final grade

Second exam: 25% of final grade

Group project: 35% of final grade

Attendance and Participation: 10% of final grade

IRB Certification: 5% of final grade

Grading Scale:

A = 93**-**100% C+ = 77**-**79% F = less than 66%

A**‐** = 90**-**92% C = 74**-**76%

B+ = 87**-**89% C**‐** = 70**-**73%

B = 84**-**86% D+ = 67**-**69%

B**‐** = 80**-**83% D = 60**-**66%

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for every class meeting, but I will allow two absences. Beyond that, a missed class will reduce your grade (e.g., if you miss 3 classes and have a grade of “A,” your final grade for the course will be an “A-; 4 missed classes will result in a grade of “B+,” and so on). Also, around 40-50% of the questions that appear on the exams are drawn from material discussed in class that may not be addressed in the readings. Therefore, you may have a hard time doing well on the exams without regular attendance. In addition, irregular attendance will also negatively affect your class participation score. If you know you are going to miss class, please notify me via email PRIOR to missing class.

Policies

Make-up Exams: See me for details if necessary.

## Policy on Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the Honor Code. For more information, please visit [honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu).

## Special Accommodations: If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities, visit the Department of Disability Services website: <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu> or call 919-962-8300.

Syllabus changes

I view the syllabus as a contract between you and me. I will do my best to adhere to the schedule outlined. I nonetheless reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. By and large, such changes will reflect student input and any such changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedule.

Technological Etiquette:

1) E-mails that fail to conform to basic fundamentals of etiquette (such as appropriate salutation/title, subject heading, signature, etc.) will NOT receive a response, as I consider such mail to be spam and delete them immediately.

2) PLEASE turn off your phone before you enter the classroom .

3) If your laptop distracts either me and/or other students, I will NOT allow it to be turned on.

Core Values and Competencies

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able 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.

Units requesting evaluation of a graduate program must also demonstrate how their master’s graduates attain this additional core competency:

* Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

**Course Schedule**

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| Wednesday, August 20 | First day of class; Introductions |
| Monday, August 25  | What is a “media effect?”\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 2 & 3 |
| Wednesday, August 27 | A primer of research methods\*\* Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 1 |
| Monday, September 1 | **Holiday: No class** |
| Wednesday, September 3 | A primer of research methods (continued) |
| Monday, September 8 | Social cognitive theory\*\* Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 4; Nabi & Clark (2008), provided on Sakai |
| Wednesday, September 10 | Social cognitive theory (continued) |
| Monday, September 15 | Media priming\*\* Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 5; Harris, Bargh, & Barnell (2009), provided on Sakai; IRB completed and due |
| Wednesday, September 17 | Media priming (continued) |
| Monday, September 22 | Cultivation; Media violence\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapters 8 & 11 |
| Wednesday, September 24 | Cultivation; Media violence (continued) |
| Monday, September 29 | Agenda setting\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 6 |
| Wednesday, October 1  | Agenda setting (continued) |
| Monday, October 6 | Uses and gratifications\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 9  |
| Wednesday, October 8 | Mood management; Enjoyment\*\*Have read Mary Beth Oliver’s chapter on Enjoyment; Zillmann (1988), provided on Sakai  |
| Monday, October 13 | Group project workday; Midterm review\*\*No readings assigned |
| Wednesday, October 15 | MIDTERM EXAM |
| Monday, October 20 | Group project workday |
| Wednesday, October 22 | Theories of persuasion\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 10 |
| Monday, October 27 | Media and sex; Media and health\*\* Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 12 & 15 |
| Wednesday, October 29 | Media and sex; Media and health (continued) |
| Monday, November 3 | Effects of new media\*\*Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 19 & 20 |
| Wednesday, November 5 | Screening of “Growing Up Online” |
| Monday, November 10 | Effects of children\*\* Have read Bryant, Thompson, & Finklea, chapter 17 |
| Wednesday, November 12 | Group project workday; Second exam review |
| Monday, November 17 | SECOND EXAM |
| Wednesday, November 19 | Group project workday\*\*No assigned readings |
| Monday, November 24 | Group project presentations |
| Wednesday, November 26 | **Thanksgiving Break: No class** |
| Monday, December 1 | Group project presentations |
| Wednesday, December 3 | Group project presentations |