

**MEJO 705**  
**Theories of Mass Communication**  
**Fall 2019**  
**Carroll Hall 338**  
**Mondays 9:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

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*Office hours: Wed 2-3 & by appointment*

**Course Description and Purpose**

The purpose of this course is to explore the theories that are most directly tied to our understanding of media. Our field is a multidisciplinary field, and as such, we have borrowed and learned from theories which originated in other disciplines. To honor that tradition, we will explore theories from communication, sociology, psychology, political science, to name a few, and we will discuss theories from a variety of worldviews (social science theories and critical/cultural theories).

**Learning Objectives**

Following completion of the course, you should be able to:

- ✓ Articulate the main premises of theories used in media/communication research
- ✓ Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the theories and what they offer to media scholarship
- ✓ Critique how the theories have been used to frame and direct research in media scholarship
- ✓ Write a theory literature review and develop a proposal built on a theory

**Contacting me and turning in assignments**

If you have questions, please email me at the address listed above. If I don't respond to you within 24 hours during weekdays, please assume that I didn't receive your email, and email me again. I would also be happy to set up an appointment to meet with you. I will check email weekly from Monday morning until Friday afternoon. Please turn in a hard copy of any papers or assignments unless otherwise instructed.

**Laptops**

You are welcome to use your laptop in class, but please use them for purposes relevant to our course for that day. In other words, you're welcome to use them for note-taking, in-class assignments and readings, or class-related research relevant to our discussion during a particular class period. I'm sure you know that graduate coursework and classes require that you be fully present. The course will be better if we support a collaborative learning environment and give our full attention to our colleagues in class.

## **Important UNC policies and procedures**

### **Honor Code**

Students must adhere to the letter and spirit of the [university honor system](#). Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated – this includes plagiarism, cheating or any false means of obtaining a grade – and may result in failure of the course, and suspension or expulsion from the university. If I suspect academic dishonesty, I have a duty to report it to the MJ-School’s senior associate dean for undergraduate studies, the Student Attorney General, or the judicial programs officer in the Dean of Students’ office for further action. For information on how to avoid plagiarism, go to The Writing Center’s [plagiarism](#) site.

### **Special Accommodations:**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

### **Diversity:**

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is [here](#). UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

### **Title IX/SAFE at UNC**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here <http://campusconversation.web.unc.edu/resources/>

### **AEJMC values**

The School of Media and Journalism’s accrediting body outlines a number of values that our majors should be aware of and competencies our majors should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate from our program. You can learn more about them here under the heading “Professional values and competencies” <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

In this class, we will focus on the following values:

- think critically, creatively and independently;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

## Required Readings

### Textbooks:

Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2015). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Littlejohn, S.W., Foss, K. A., and Oetzel, J. G. (2017). *Theories of human communication* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

*These two textbooks do a good job of providing a comprehensive overview of media and communication theories. But I might post additional readings or resources depending on the interests of the class.*

## Course Requirements and Grades

In all graduate courses, students are expected to participate in discussions on assigned readings and on their own research interest, to provide critiques of and comments on course readings, and to produce a final original research paper (or in the case of this class, a proposal) by the end of the semester.

Graduate grades are H, P, L, and F. Student grades will be determined this way:

H - Student reads and critically engages with all of the assigned material. Participation in discussion and written assignments exhibit the ability not only to apply the material, but also to extrapolate ideas, expand into new areas, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. Reserved for truly outstanding work.

P - Student usually reads and engages critically with the assigned material. Able to apply material and extrapolate ideas. Work is consistent, demonstrates good progress and is completed on deadline.

L - Student reads and engages critically with only some of the assigned material. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances. Quality of work is uneven and student misses deadlines.

F - Student occasionally misses class, does not always read the material, fails to critically engage with it, and is unable or unwilling to apply the material. Written work is below par and student disregards deadlines.

Below, I've tried to give you a general idea of how different requirements will be weighted in this course. Your grade, generally, is determined by: active participation in class, grades on assignments and papers, and your work in class in relation to others.

- Attendance & Participation – 10%
- Discussion of your research interests (and the theories that have been used in that scholarship)- 10%
- Paper I\_ Introduction, theory literature review, RQs – 35%
- Final Paper\_ Research proposal for a study using the theory covered in your lit review – 45%

**Attendance & participation (10%):** As you know, attendance and participation in graduate classes are critically important. Skipping class or missing class for travel is not an option at the graduate level. However, if you have an emergency and need to miss class, please email me beforehand and tell me the day you plan to miss and the reason. You are also expected to be in class when the class starts and to come prepared to participate in class discussions. That is, you are expected to be familiar with all of the readings and prepared to discuss them.

Specifically, for any of the chapters in our textbooks that we read, please come prepared every week to discuss the textbook chapters in at least the following ways:

- material that identified or discussed a theory or theories that you have some familiarity with and think might be applicable to your research area;
- material that discussed a theory/theories you are not familiar with, but you find intriguing (yes, I wrote intriguing) and think there are parts of it that might be applicable to your research interests;
- material that identified or discussed a theory/theories that you want to know more about, have questions about and would like to explore its implications to research and scholarship.

We may work in pairs or groups for some of this discussion, and we will talk about ways in which theories might be critiqued/analyzed.

**Discussion of your research interests and the theories that have been used in that scholarship (10%).** Because you may all come from different backgrounds and have different interests in communication/media research, part of the course is designed to help us learn about the various research interests of the group. And to learn how theories have been applied to communication/media research. This means, you will each have a chance to talk with the class about your research interests and to highlight the main theories that have been used in this research...or in similar research areas.

**Paper I\_ Introduction, theory literature review, RQs (30%):** You will write an 8 to 10-page introduction to, literature review of the theory and scholarship, for the area you would like to study (and plan to present in your research proposal). You may use any reference style you wish (APA style is fairly straightforward and easy to use), but please use it consistently throughout your paper. You will include a revised version of this work in your final paper for the class: a research proposal.

**Paper II\_ Research proposal (50%)**

The proposal will include a title page, a revision of Paper I, with a discussion of the procedures you would use to investigate research that flows from your literature review and theory discussion. You will explain how you will explore the topic, with special attention to providing a detailed discussion of how your proposed study will use the theory outlined in your theoretical background/literature review, and what important information your proposed research will add to an understanding of and to the development of the theory you've selected. The research proposal should be about 15-18 pages.

## Tentative Course Schedule

Once we have introduced some of the basic concepts of communication theory, we will move to the following schedule for most days of the seminar. This will start September 30<sup>th</sup>. We'll identify the schedule for students to discuss their research interests and theories. (NOTE: We might rearrange this if we have a guest speaker or other class activity/assignment.)

- Part I (9:30-10:30): Discussion of assigned readings listed on syllabus.
- Break (10:30-10:45)
- Part II (10:45-11:45): Discussion of individual students' research interests and the theories that have been used in that scholarship.
- Part III (11:45-12:15): Focus on the individual projects/individual work and questions. Participants can work individually or in pairs to work on research they need to do, to gather resources, to read and get feedback on their material, etc. We'll talk about what types of tasks would be most useful to focus on during the semester...at least for in class work.

### **MONDAYS**

August 26	Introduction & overview to the course, course polices, assignments
September 2	Labor Day – no class
September 9	Theories: What are they and how do we evaluate them? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 1)</li><li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 1)</li></ul>
September 16	Theories: Comparing media traditions and communication traditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch.2)</li><li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 2; Ch. 5, pp. 145-157)</li></ul>
September 23	Theorizing the effects & influences of media/communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 4 &amp; 9)</li><li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 5, pp. 157-167)</li><li>✓ Hand in paragraph about potential theories for your papers</li></ul>
September 30	Theories about culture's influence on message construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 10, &amp; 11)</li><li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 4 &amp; Ch. 6, pp. 200-210)</li></ul>
October 7	Individual consultations on Paper I_Introduction, Theory, Literature Review, RQs
October 14	Paper I due/Discussion of paper

October 21	Theorizing culture, gender, race and identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 5)</li> <li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 3, pp. 75-92; Ch. 11 &amp; 12).</li> </ul>
October 28	Theories addressing communicators and audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 7 &amp; 8)</li> <li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 3, pp. 51-75; Ch. 5, pp. 167-180)</li> </ul>
November 4	Theories about organizations and group behavior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 3)</li> <li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 8 &amp; 9)</li> </ul>
November 11	Theories governing special audiences or contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baran &amp; Davis (Ch. 6)</li> <li>• Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 10)</li> <li>• <i>Optional reading - Littlejohn, Foss &amp; Oetzel (Ch. 7)</i></li> </ul>
November 18	Individual consultations re: final papers/research proposals
November 25	Individual consultations re: final papers/research proposals
December 2	Last day of class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ “High density” presentations of research proposals</li> </ul>
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December 9	Final papers/research proposals due at <u>noon</u>