MCOM 5366 (Section 2): Seminar in Mass Communication Theory  
Fall 2017

**Instructor:** Dr. Eric Rasmussen, Assistant Professor, Public Relations  
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**Office hours:** T/Th 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 pm

**Class meets:** Tuesdays, 6:00pm – 8:50pm (MC 168—changed to room 414)

**Course Catalog Description:**  
In-depth study of the theory and epistemology of mass communications. Integration, comparison, and extension of theories with respect to a specific problem area including practice in development of research hypotheses.

**Course Overview:**  
This class is an introduction to the social scientific theories that guide the study of communication and its various sub-fields, with a focus on understanding how these theories are employed to help answer some of the major research questions in these sub-fields. Because we have only one semester to cover a lot of ground, we will approach these theories from the social scientific side of communication in order to bring some coherence to the course. Please recognize that we are placing to the side the humanistic traditions that make up at least half of the field of communication. While I value these traditions, we just do not have time to cover them in sufficient detail while also giving satisfactory service to the social sciences.

The course is designed to introduce you to the role of media in our lives—how we use media, how the media function, how media use affects individuals, how individuals construct meaning from the media, what factors make media effects more or less likely, and how theory-based research is conducted in order to appropriately answer questions related to mass media. The overarching goal of the course is to prepare graduate students with a strong theoretical background so they can pose significant research questions, build literature reviews and hypotheses for their own questions, and to make a substantial and meaningful contribution to the field.
### Expected Learning Outcomes

| Identify the components of social scientific theory building | Class discussion. Mid-term. |
| Describe major mass communication theories in detail | Final theory paper. Class discussion. Class discussion leadership. Mid-term. |
| Explain how mass communication theories explain the effects and dynamics of media exposure and use | Class discussion leadership. Mid-term. |
| Evaluate the quality of research testing and extending mass communication theories | Class discussion. Mid-term |
| Compare the utility of theories as they are used in research and practice | Class discussion. Final theory paper. |
| Integrate new understanding of social science theory with existing experiences and applied contexts | Class discussion leadership. Classroom discussion. |
| Develop a study that tests mass communication theory | Final theory paper |
| Communicate your knowledge of mass communication theory orally and in writing | Final theory paper. Class discussion leadership. |

### Required Course Materials:


### Course Requirements

**Attendance/participation (10 points):** This is a discussion-based class. Student participation is necessary for the success of this class. Students are expected to attend class regularly and engage actively and thoughtfully in class discussion. Students are expected to do all of the readings for each class period. To facilitate engagement with class discussion and the assigned readings, each student will write a short paper (about half a page, single-spaced) briefly outlining theoretical or applied questions or critiques (i.e. opinions or arguments) concerning issues that you would like to hear discussed in class. This assignment should be emailed to me ([eric.rasmussen@ttu.edu](mailto:eric.rasmussen@ttu.edu)) and to the student who will help facilitate that day’s discussion no later than 9am on the morning of the class. The purpose of these papers is two-fold. First, they will be used as a way to guide the class discussion toward topics of interest. Second, they will permit me to see your thinking grow and develop over the course of the semester. Papers and participation will be evaluated based on the originality and clarity of your ideas.

**Discussion facilitator (20 points):** Each student will facilitate or co-facilitate one or more class discussions. As the facilitator, you are expected to (a) write a three-page critical analysis of the readings assigned for the day, (b) create a facilitator guide (and make copies for each member of
the class) to help maintain the flow and focus of the course discussion, and (c) facilitate a meaningful discussion of the course materials. As facilitator, you should briefly review relevant material from the readings, pose discussion questions, and bring ideas/material beyond the readings into the discussion. Your grade for this assignment will be based on both your preparation (i.e. creating a high-quality critical analysis and discussion guide) and the quality of the class discussion around the topic for the day.

Mid-term (20 points): Near the halfway point of the semester, you will be required to complete a mid-term examination. This mid-term examination will require you to answer one or two questions with original essays. You will respond to prompts provided the day of the exam during class. Material covered from the start of the semester through the exam date may be included on the exam. All required readings, class discussion, and additional course work are “fair game” for this examination.

Term paper (40 points): The objective of the term paper is to advance your scholarly career in some way. The term paper should be 10-15 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font, not including any title page, abstract, or references. In addition, you should include a references list (not included in the required page count) of at least 25 citations beyond the book chapters. The term paper is a research proposal. The research proposal includes the first 2 major sections of a study you’d like to conduct, write-up, and present at a conference and/or submit to an academic journal (full literature review and proposed methods). You should include a 150-word abstract, followed by an introduction section (no more than 1 page), followed by a literature review and methods section. You will be required to turn in a summary/topic proposal of your planned paper by the 9th week of class (see schedule below). This summary will be 1-page (no more, no less), and should include a general research question, which I expect will be refined by the time you actually write the paper. You should also include, in addition to the 1-page summary, a list of at least 25 references from peer-reviewed academic journals that you plan to use for the paper. References in all classwork should be presented using the most recent APA style guidelines.

Term paper presentation (10 points): Near the end of the semester, each student will give an oral presentation on your term paper (length of presentation TBD by the number of students in the class).

Grading Scale:

The following grading scale is used for determination of final letter grades in the course and as a general rubric for how student assignments are evaluated. I do not round up.

A = 90 - 100 Excellent. Mastery of the assignment/concepts at the highest level of attainment.
B = 80 - 89.9 Good. Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment.
C = 70 - 79.9 Average. An acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment.
D = 60 - 69.9 Inferior. A marginal performance; a minimal passing level of attainment.
F = 0 - 59.9 Failure. Unacceptable performance revealing almost no understanding of content.
**Graded Assignments:**

Late assignments will not be accepted (and will receive a score of zero), and incompletes will not be granted except under extreme circumstances.

**Special Grading Policies (please take note):**

1. No extra credit is available.
2. Grades are not rounded up.
3. No special assignments are available to “boost” a student’s grade.
4. There is no curve.

**Questions about your grades:**

I am more than happy to talk with you about your grade and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your graded work. That said, I require a 24-hour “cool off” period. We will not discuss your grade until we both have time to gather our thoughts and have a productive conversation. After the initial 24 hours, students have one week to meet with the instructor to discuss the grade. If the student does not meet with the instructor within a week, then the instructor considers the matter closed. All discussions regarding grades are conducted in person, in my office; I do not discuss grades during class time, over the phone, or via email.

**Attendance and other class policies:**

Students are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, stay for the entire class, and participate in class discussions while present. There are no excused absences, except for religious holidays and for officially approved TTU trips greater than 40 miles from campus (with advanced notification). It is up to you to manage your absences.

Attendance is required and necessary for your success in the course. You are responsible for all material covered in class, including readings, class discussions, and any other material introduced by the instructor, guest speakers, or other students during presentations. Students missing class must obtain class notes from another student, even if the absence is excused.

**No Make-ups:**

Students will not be allowed to make up missed assignments. Weddings, family vacations, commitments related to other classes, etc. don’t count. No exceptions, so please don’t ask.

**Expectations for Class Participation/Conduct:**

The Student Code of Conduct applies to all work related to this class (available online at [http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/)). All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars and professionals. Please reference [OP 34.12](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/) regarding Academic Integrity.
Please be respectful of your instructor and the other students in the class; again, the class relies on healthy, constructive discussion and debate.

Please turn your mobile devices off while in class. Use your laptops and other devices for class-related purposes only. Please no texting during class.

I reserve the right to remove you from the class should it become necessary to maintain a civil and constructive classroom environment. If necessary, I will reduce your class participation grade to provide the appropriate ‘motivation’ to secure your compliance with the policies regarding classroom conduct.

**Students with Challenges:**

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor’s office hours. Please note instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, you may contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or 806-742-2405. Please reference **OP 34.22** for additional information.

**Observance of Religious Holidays:**

A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an exam or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. Please reference **OP 34.19** for additional information.

**TTU Resources for Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Violence**

Texas Tech University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from gender and/or sex discrimination of any kind. Sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and other **Title IX violations** are not tolerated by the University. Report any incidents to the **Office for Student Rights & Resolution**, (806)-742-SAFE (7233) or file a report online at titleix.ttu.edu/students. Faculty and staff members at TTU are committed to connecting you to resources on campus. Some of these available resources are: **TTU Student Counseling Center**, 806-742-3674, [https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/](https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/) (Provides confidential support on campus.) **TTU Student Counseling Center 24-hour Helpline**, 806-742-5555, (Assists students who are experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. If you call the helpline, you will speak with a mental health counselor.) **Voice of Hope Lubbock Rape Crisis Center**, 806-763-7273, [voiceofhopelubbock.org](http://voiceofhopelubbock.org) (24-hour hotline that provides support for survivors of sexual violence.) **The Risk, Intervention, Safety and Education (RISE) Office**, 806-742-2110, [rise.ttu.edu](http://rise.ttu.edu) (Provides a range of resources and support options focused on prevention education and student wellness.) **Texas Tech Police Department**, 806-742-3931, [http://www.depts.ttu.edu/tpd/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/tpd/) (To report criminal activity that occurs on or near Texas Tech campus.)
Miscellaneous:

- The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to the syllabus, schedule, assignments, readings, forms, lecture topics, assessments, and any other course content if deemed necessary to facilitate classroom management and to achieve the learning objectives for the course. Students are responsible to stay aware of these changes.
- I take plagiarism very seriously. I expect your work in this class to be completely your work. It should also be original for this class—you may not receive credit for work you do in this class for another class, or vice versa. If you have a question about the originality of your work, please discuss with the instructor as soon as possible. I reserve the right to report plagiarism or suspected plagiarism to the university. The same policy goes for both presenting another’s work as your own, for recreating another’s work in substantially the same form, or for using work you’ve done for another class in this class. The instructor will be the sole judge of what constitutes “substantially the same form.” Any and all instances of plagiarism will receive a zero, and your final course grade will be Fail, at the instructor’s discretion.

Lecture Schedule and Readings

Course schedule is subject to change. In such a case, announcements will be made in class and/or via e-mail or blackboard announcement.

Week 1: August 29
Course introduction, overview

Week 2: September 5
The field of communication, history, intersections, disciplines, and future of communication research.
- Chapter 3 in Media Processes book

Week 3: September 12
Graduate school and publishing. Theory-building.
- Chapter 9 of *How to build social science theories*.

**Week 4: September 19**
Message production and processing
- Chapter 9 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 13 in Media Processes book
- Chapter 14 in Media Processes book

**Week 5: September 26**
Media effects
- Chapter 1 in Media Processes book
- Chapter 33 in Media Processes book

**Week 6: October 3**
Social cognitive theory, cultivation, diffusion of innovations, third-person effects
- Chapter 3 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 4 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 6 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 7 in Media Processes book

**Week 7: October 10**
The audience, selective exposure, attention and comprehension, uses and gratifications
- Chapter 8 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 2 in Media Processes book
- Instructor will prepare and bring a mid-term study guide to this class.

**Week 8: October 17**
Mid-term exam.

**Week 9: October 24**
Term-paper summary topics due
Media violence
- Chapter 13 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 24 in Media Processes book

**Week 10: October 31**

Sex and stereotypes
- Chapter 15 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 16 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 17 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 27 in Media Processes book

**Week 11: November 7**

Agenda-setting, persuasion, priming
- Chapter 1 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 5 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 18 in Media Processes book

**Week 12: November 14**

Public opinion, spiral of silence
- Chapter 17 in Media Processes book
- Chapter 35 in Media Processes book

**Week 13: November 21**

Health communication, and media’s effect on health
- Chapter 21 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 22 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 21 in Media Processes book

**Week 14: November 28**

Children and media, parental mediation, media literacy
- Chapter 19 in Media Effects book
- Chapter 23 in Media Processes book
- Chapter 31 in Media Processes book

**Week 15: December 5**
Class presentations

**Final Theory Paper Due:**
December 9 (11:59 p.m.)