

Comm. 518 — Media Effects

Dr. Mike Schmierbach
mgs15@psu.edu
Mobile #: 814-933-9934

Th 6-9

Office hours: Tues 12-2, 4-5 & appt.
Office: 217 Carnegie
Office #: 814-865-9582

Course overview: “Advanced study of the effects of media messages and technologies via theories and empirical evidence pertaining to processes of effects.” In other words, this class examines how users are shaped by various media, taking into account variations in media content and forms as well as the users themselves. The relevant theoretical material is centered on communication but draws upon such diverse disciplines as psychology, sociology and political science. In this class, we will primarily take a social scientific, empirical approach to addressing these questions.

Objectives: Students who successfully complete assigned coursework should develop the following skills:

- Familiarity with key theories of media effects
- Ability to effectively compare theories and evaluate the relative strengths of each in terms of both logical underpinnings and empirical support
- Increased understanding of research methodology, specifically in the context of effects research

Text: Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research (3rd Edition). Edited by Jennings Bryant and Mary Beth Oliver.

Additional readings available via ANGEL.

Policies: You're grad students. Act like it. Do the reading, attend class, participate, respect your peers, and let me know if anything is keeping you from doing the above.

Regarding Comm. 506: Intro to Mass Communication Research is a pre-requisite for this course. While I have generally been willing to waive that requirement for interested students, I will nonetheless proceed from the assumption that students are reasonably comfortable with the terminology and logic of quantitative social science research. Students with comparable background in methods from other institutions or out-of-department courses should be fine, as should those taking 506 simultaneously with this course. I encourage you to ask questions about methodology issues that confuse you, but please bear in mind that this is not a course in methods and that if you simply cannot understand the course material you may want to consider completing the relevant requirement before attempting this class.

Note to students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS located in room 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit its website at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at: <http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/tutorial/>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20, and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

Grades: Course grades are based on several elements. Each element is graded and converted to a percentage scale; for elements with multiple assignments, each portion will be averaged (more important elements will be weighted as necessary):

Participation & reading responses	35%
Outside topic summary	20%
Additional article submission	5%
Final paper and presentation	40%

Grading scale: Final grades are assigned based on percentage scores using this scale:

93-100+	A
90-92.9	A-
87-89.9	B+
83-86.9	B
80-82.9	B-
77-79.9	C+
70-76.9	C
60-69.9	D
0-59.9	F

I may employ a more lenient scale as course grade distributions warrant. That is, you might receive a higher grade than your numerical score would merit. You will never receive a lower score than your final numerical score would receive based on this scale.

Participation/reading responses: As graduate students, you should expect to play an active role in the class, and I will assess both the quantity and quality of your in-class contributions. I recognize that your individual ability to contribute will vary, but I expect to see a consistent good-faith effort to be a part of a thoughtful, intellectual discussion of the readings and underlying course concepts.

In addition, to help foster participation and provide me with a more objective measure of engagement, you are required to submit response questions for each assigned reading as well as

additional material, as described below. Responses are due by 9 p.m. the Wednesday prior to when the reading is assigned and should be submitted via e-mail.

Response questions. For each reading, including textbook chapters and outside articles, you should submit one *or more* discussion questions to help drive in-class discussion. Appropriate questions should be sufficiently detailed and give necessary context that I can get a sense of what aspect of the material you are focusing on and why. Questions may reflect methodological or theoretical elements you found genuinely puzzling or highlight key elements you thought were interesting and would warrant further discussion.

Concept definitions. Based upon the chapters assigned for a given week, I have identified and listed key concepts found in that material. Most often, these are media effects theories, although occasionally they are variables or even methodological techniques. For each concept, you should provide a clear, concise one-paragraph definition, based upon the reading. It should generally not be necessary to consult any outside references, and all references, including course readings, should be properly cited. Effective definitions will be *in your own words*, with minimal and properly cited quotations.

Grading. Response question and definition completion are tracked, and missing or late submissions will adversely affect your grade — the latter more than the former. You may miss up to three discussion questions without penalty. Additional missing questions will affect your grade except in extraordinary circumstances with a clear, valid excuse — regardless of whether you are able to attend class for the day of an assigned reading. Definitions are graded pass/fail — failing definitions may be resubmitted once within one week of the original assigned class. You may have up to three missing or failing definitions without penalty.

Outside topic summary: To supplement the assigned readings and definitions, each student will research an additional theory or concept related to media effects, selected from a list provided by the instructor or chosen by the student, with instructor permission. Students will choose their topics and be assigned a presentation date in week 2 of the semester. You will be expected to locate multiple scholarly texts addressing your topic and synthesize this material into a written report as well as a brief, 10-minute in-class presentation. Both elements will be graded, with the bulk of the weight placed on the written component. Revisions are possible for that component. Complete details are provided in a separate document.

Additional article submission: The last day of the semester will feature additional empirical or theoretical articles dealing with media effects, based upon student submissions. To facilitate this, you will be asked to submit two potential articles in advance of this date, including a brief summary of each and a discussion of why the article is appropriate for the course to discuss. You may select articles that you have located and read as part of your outside summary or final paper. Full details, including grading information, are found on a separate document.

Final paper and presentation: The key “capstone” for this course is a research proposal, in which you will present a complete literature review (as if written for a scholarly journal article) and provide the necessary IRB paperwork to thoroughly describe a proposed study to test the ideas laid out in that review. Full details of this paper and its preliminary stages are provided in a separate document. The key initial stages are briefly listed below:

- **Proposal & annotated bibliography.** The initial step of the paper process is to lay out your proposed area of study, identifying the central research questions you would want to answer, giving a rough explanation of how you might tackle these, and explaining why such a project would be important and relevant for media effects. In addition, you will begin the process of developing your final literature review by providing a list of potentially relevant articles and giving a short summary of each.
- **Presentation.** Each student will present their basic study proposal and research objectives in a relatively brief (approximately 10-minute) presentation toward the end of the semester. (We are not doing presentations on the very last day because the goal is to give you time to integrate and respond to peer feedback and suggestions.) Your focus should be on your thoughts regarding study design and measurement, more than on matters of theory and literature. Students should allocate a portion of their time for questions and peer feedback.
- **Final paper.** Each student will present a complete literature review that outlines the media effects topic they propose to explore, integrating the literature and presenting a clear set of research questions and/or hypotheses that would be tested using their proposed methodology. In addition, you will complete the necessary IRB forms with sufficient detail to show exactly how you would go about testing these questions/hypotheses. You should not actually submit the paperwork to the IRB, but the goal of this format is to position you to be able to move forward with your proposed study in a timely fashion based on feedback and personal interest.

Course schedule: The following lists topics by day and assigned chapters from the Bryant and Oliver book. All other readings are posted to ANGEL, and readings assigned for most weeks are TBD after the first meeting of class, so a separate bibliography will be posted. This schedule is subject to change as circumstances might warrant – I will always notify the class via ANGEL of any changes. *Italicized terms represent the assigned topics to be defined for each date.*

Week 1 — August 25 — Introductions.

No readings/topics.

Week 2 — September 1 — Emerging issues in media effects.

Chapters 9 & 23; Bennett and Iyengar; Slater

Orienting responses; arousal; emotion; need satisfaction; minimal effects era; selective exposure; reinforcing spirals perspective

Week 3 — September 8 — Basic psychological processes

Chapters 5 & 6; Harris, Bargh & Brownell; Nabi & Clark

Media priming; mental models; social cognitive theory; diffusion of innovation

Week 4 — September 15 — Entertainment theory

Chapter 8; Oliver (“Entertainment”); Raney; Zillmann

This is a “special guest week” featuring Dr. Mary Beth Oliver. You are still required to submit definitions of the following concepts, but you do not have to submit response questions.

Uses & gratifications; mood management; disposition theory; transportation; enjoyment

Week 5 — September 22 — Shaping public opinion

Chapters 1 & 2; Miller; Wang

Agenda setting; attribute agenda setting; frame building; frame setting

Week 6 — September 29 — Political communication and engagement

Chapters 10 & 11; Cho & McLeod; Valenzuela, Park & Lee

Social capital; communication mediation model; knowledge gain & the knowledge gap

Week 7 — October 6 — Cultivation & social reality construction

Chapters 3 & 4; Bradley; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz

Cultivation; mainstreaming; social cognition; accessibility model for cultivation

Week 8 — October 13 — Violence and fright

Chapters 13 & 14; Barlett et al.; Bartsch, Appel & Storch

Desensitization; excitation transfer; stimulus generalization; fear-coping strategies

Week 9 — October 20 — Sexually explicit content; third-person effects

Chapters 12 & 15; Peter & Valkenburg; Sun, Shen & Pan

Third-person effect; social distance corollary; sexual socialization; disinhibition

Week 10 — October 27 — Stereotyping

Chapters 16 & 17; Dixon & Azocar; Dill & Thill

*** Final paper topic proposal and annotated bibliography due ***

Stereotype priming; social identity theory; gender schema theory

Week 11 — November 3 — Marketing and persuasion

Chapters 7 & 18; McDaniel, Lim & Mahan; Park, Turner & Pastore

Elaboration likelihood model; media planning models; interactivity

Week 12 — November 10 — Educational TV and public communication campaigns

Chapters 19 & 20; Baydar et al.; Niederdeppe et al.

Cognitive theory of multimedia learning; capacity model; message tailoring; systems-theoretical approach to evaluation

Week 13 — November 17 — Student presentations

No readings

*** Student presentations of final paper topics ***

Please note that there is no class on November 24 because of the Thanksgiving holiday.

*** Outside article submission and summary due by 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 29 ***

Week 14 — December 1 — Health

Chapters 21 & 22; Grabe, Ward & Hyde; Rains & Karmikel

Unintended consequences; health-information seeking; thin-ideal internalization; social comparison; media literacy

Week 15 — December 8 — Student-selected readings

Readings TBD

Discussion questions are required, but there are no concepts to define

*** Final paper submissions due by 11:59 p.m. Monday, December 12 ***