Mass Communication Theory

Among the many changes that characterized the development of modern society were the spread of communication technologies, the growth of a commercialized leisure sector, and the emergence of a mass audience for the resulting products. For the past century, social scientists have endeavored to understand the significance of these developments. This course provides an introduction to many of the major theories and perspectives that have been used to explain mass communication and the mass media. We will read some of the classic thinkers in the field, and examine the ways in which subsequent theories have built on or diverged from their predecessors. Additionally, we will consider the relevance of these various theories for understanding contemporary communication media. Topics discussed will include mass media effects, the institutions involved in mass communication, the autonomy of the audience, and the relationship between the mass media and economic and political power.

The TA for this course is Brian Fair (bpf@brandeis.edu). His office hours will be announced in class.

Learning Goals

Students who complete this course will:

1. Gain familiarity with seminal theoretical works and ideas in mass communication.
2. Develop an understanding of competing perspectives on the social significance of the mass media.
3. Improve the ability to comprehend and evaluate theoretical statements.
4. Learn how to apply abstract theoretical ideas to concrete phenomena in the field of mass communication.

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class, and actively participate in discussions. Twice during the semester, there will be in-class writing exercises, which will require you to analyze passages from the readings. These exercises will be announced during the class before they are to take place; there will be no opportunity to make them up if you are not present. In addition, you will complete two short papers and a take-home final covering readings and other course material. Each of these assignments will ask you to show that you understand the theories being discussed and are able to apply them to contemporary phenomena. Assignment instructions will be distributed approximately two weeks before the due date.

I expect courtesy in the classroom. That means arriving to class on time, turning cell phones off before class begins, no texting, and no side conversations. Please recognize how distracting these latter behaviors are for your classmates and your instructor. If you bring food or drink to class, remember to clean up after yourself.

My policy on laptops is that they should be used only for class-related purposes. Other uses are
highly distracting for you, for me, and for those sitting around you. If we notice you reading email, checking Facebook, watching a broadcast or anything else not related to class, we will call you on it. If these behaviors become a persistent problem, then laptops will be prohibited in class.

Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class writing exercises</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First short paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second short paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-home final</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
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Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to the course instructor.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Undergraduate Academic Affairs at 736-3470. Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase in the bookstore:


These books are also on reserve at the main library. However, the library copies are both different editions than the books on order at the bookstore. Page numbering may not be the same (though chapter numbers do not vary). Also, in the case of the Jenkins book, the content may be slightly different between the two editions. If you are purchasing books elsewhere, try to get the editions listed on the syllabus.

The readings for Weeks 2 & 4 are on the Latte site for this class. Look at the section titled "Readings."

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.


**Course Schedule**

week 1  
Sep 1

**Introduction**

week 2  
Sep 7-8

**A New Force in Society**


week 3  
Sep 12-15

**Reaction: The Theory of Limited Effects**


week 4  
Sep 19-22

**Mass Culture and the Frankfurt School**


weeks 5-6  
Sep 26-Oct 3


weeks 6-7  
Oct 5-11

**Organizational Studies and the Production of Culture**


Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980, pp. 3-

first paper due Thursday, October 12th

weeks 7-8
Oct 12-19

**Hegemony**


week 9
Oct 24-27

**From Cultural Imperialism to Globalization**


week 10
Oct 31-Nov 3

**The Active Audience: Reception and Uses**


week 11
Nov 7-10

**Participatory Media**

week 12  
Nov 14-17

**The Medium Matters**


second paper due Monday, November 14th

weeks 13-14  
Nov 21-28

**The Network Society**


weeks 14-15  
Nov 30-Dec 5

**The Media and the Public Sphere**

James Curran, "Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere." In Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks, eds., *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 27-57.


weeks 15-16  
Dec 7-12

**Mass Media as Ritual Activity**


Take-home final due Thursday, December 15th