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 Becky Barton (rlbarton@brandeis.edu). Her 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.
5. Improve basic and academic writing skills.

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class, and actively participate in discussions. Writing assignments consist of the following:

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. These exercises will not be graded, but failure to complete them will result in a deduction from your course grade.

In addition, you will complete two short papers and a take-home final covering readings and other course material. These assignments will ask you to show that you understand the theories being
discussed and are able to apply them to contemporary phenomena. Assignment topics and instructions will be distributed approximately two weeks before the initial due date. The two short papers will include a rewrite component. After the first version of Paper No. 1 is graded, you will have a mandatory conference with your instructor or teaching assistant. You will then rework and resubmit the paper. After Paper No. 2 is graded, you will rewrite a portion that is selected by your instructor or teaching assistant. You will then resubmit the complete paper. You are encouraged, but not required, to meet with us while you are working on the rewrite of Paper No. 2.

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, preparation for discussion, etc.).

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.

No laptops or other electronic devices are to be used during class meetings. They present a distraction for you, for me, and for those sitting around you.

Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First short paper (4-5 pages) (initial version)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First short paper (rewrite)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second short paper (5-6 pages) (initial version)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second short paper (rewrite)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home final (2 essays; 3-4 pages each)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Failure to complete in-class writing exercises minus 2% each
Failure to attend mandatory first paper conference minus 5%

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, please note that the library copy of Jenkins is a different edition than the book on order at the bookstore. Page numbering may not be the same, and the content may be slightly different. If you are purchasing books elsewhere, get the editions listed on the syllabus.

The readings for Weeks 2-5 are on the Latte site for this class.

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**

**Aug 25**

**Introduction**

**weeks 2-3**

**Aug 29-Sep 7**

**A New Force in Society**


**weeks 3-4**

**Sep 8-15**

**Reaction: The Theory of Limited Effects**


**week 5**

**Sep 19-22**

**Mass Culture and the Frankfurt School**

1973 [originally published 1965], chap. 2.


**Organizational Studies and the Production of Culture**


first paper due Thursday, October 6th

**Hegemony**


**From Cultural Imperialism to Globalization**


Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. Lanham, MD:


**Mass Media as Ritual Activity**


second paper rewrite due Wednesday, December 7th

Take-home final due Friday, December 16th