COMM 7841

Mass Communication & the Social System

Autumn 2025, 3 credits, Wed/Fri 9:35-10:55 am Hybrid Course

Faculty Instructor:

J. Alex Bonus, Ph.D. he/him/his 3138 Derby Hall bonus.1@osu.edu Office hours: By appointment

Course Overview

This course examines the impact of mass media on the social system. We explore foundational theories across macro- and micro-levels of inquiry, including cultivation theory, media dependency theory, two-step flow, the knowledge gap hypothesis, influence of presumed influence, spiral of silence theory, and more. Furthermore, we evaluate the enduring relevance and explanatory power of these frameworks in contemporary media environments that are highly fragmented, increasingly social, and largely governed by algorithmic curation.

This course is structured as a "teaching-infused" seminar, meaning students will have multiple opportunities to develop teaching skills that are often neglected in graduate student training. For example, students will demonstrate mastery of communication theories by designing and implementing lesson plans about those theories for undergraduates. Additionally, students will design a course syllabus for their final project. Because these instructional skills are likely unfamiliar to many students, we will spend ample time discussing principles of effective pedagogy, such as backward design and authentic assessment. These skills are fundamental to a career in academia, yet they are transferable to any professional setting where employees are required to translate complex topics for lay audiences.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to...

- 1. ...summarize the predictions of foundational mass communication theories.
- 2. ...evaluate the contributions and limitations of foundational mass communication theories.
- 3. ...design and deliver classroom lessons on foundational mass communication theories.
- 4. ...develop assignments and course policies that adhere to principles of effective pedagogy.

Grade Distribution

This class has 100 possible points. Points are distributed as follows:

Questionnaires (x4)	12 points
Lesson Plan	40 points
Lesson Evaluations (x5)	10 points
Syllabus Proposal	20 points
Proposal Milestones (x3)	18 points

Letter Grade Distribution

You must attempt each assignment to receive a grade. Your final grade will be determined based on the combined score of all assignments. The grading distribution is as follows:

Course Structure

This is a hybrid course, with Zoom meetings reserved for weeks when students are likely to be traveling (e.g., the days preceding Fall break and the NCA conference). Most weeks are structured so that Wednesdays entail discussion about the assigned readings and Fridays entail a group activity.

Wednesdays: We will begin Wednesday sessions by reviewing the basics tenets of the communication theory addressed in the assigned readings. Afterward, we will engage in discussion around the assigned readings. You are encouraged (but not required) to submit your own discussion topic prior to the start of class. A discussion topic could include a question or observation about the assigned readings, or a piece of short media (e.g., video, podcast) related to the readings. If Dr. Bonus opts to include a student-generated topic in class, that student will receive a "Dr. Bonus" point. The student who earns the most Dr. Bonus points at the end of the semester will receive a prize.

Fridays: At the start of the semester, you will select a week during which you will design and deliver a 45-minute classroom lesson related to the course material. On weeks where you are not assigned to present a lesson, you will serve as a participant in the lesson plans designed by other students. During the remaining 30 minutes of these class meetings, we will provide feedback to our colleagues to help them improve their lessons before they submit their revised plans for grading.

Some weeks will deviate from the structure described above and instead serve as professional development weeks. Specifically, we will discuss principles of effective pedagogy. These meetings are structured as interactive lectures, in which I will review the principles described in the assigned readings and provide insights about my own experiences applying those principles in my classes.

Overview of Assignments

The following descriptions provide a brief overview of the assignments in this course. More detailed information about each assignment (as well as grading rubrics) are available on Carmen.

Questionnaires: I will periodically ask you to complete short questionnaires that inquire about your experiences in this course. These questionnaires will only take a few minutes to complete, and they will provide the foundation for class discussion and/or for improving the class as the semester progresses. These questionnaires will be graded out of 3 points for completion (i.e., 3 = complete; 0 = incomplete).

Lesson Plan: At the start of the semester, you will select a week during which you will

design and deliver a lesson plan. This lesson should be directed toward upper-level undergraduate students, it should focus on some dimension of the theories or research articles examined in the assigned readings for that week, and it should involve some component of active learning (e.g., hands-on activities; small-group discussion). After delivering your lesson to the class, you will have the opportunity to revise and improve your lesson plan. Finalized lesson plans are due by Sunday at 11:59 pm the week **after** you deliver your lesson in class.

Lesson Evaluations: Whenever you participate in a lesson plan delivered by your peers, you will have the opportunity to complete a feedback survey. Your feedback will consist of close-ended ratings and open-ended suggestions for improving the lesson. You are not permitted to evaluate lesson plans that you did not attend. These evaluations will be graded out of two points for completion (i.e., 2 = complete; 0 = incomplete). You will have the opportunity to complete 7 total evaluations during the semester, but you only need to complete 5 for full credit. (In other words, you can miss one lesson without any penalty to your grade).

Syllabus Proposal: For your final project, you will develop a syllabus for a college course. Your syllabus should address a topic related to communication and consist of a course description, student learning goals, assignment descriptions, course policies, course schedule, and example readings. Prior to turning in your final project, you will have the opportunity to obtain feedback from Dr. Bonus during one of our final class meetings.

Proposal Milestones: In preparation for completing your course syllabus, you will periodically turn in drafts of key components (e.g., learning goals, course policies). Dr. Bonus will provide feedback on each of these components to assist you with developing your ideas as the semester progresses.

Late Work Policy

I generally prefer that students benefit from completing course assignments, even if those assignments are completed late. Consequently, I am willing to accept questionnaires and proposal milestones late. However, you should do your best to notify me in advance of the deadline, and you must provide justifiable cause (e.g., illness, mental health, emergency). You are not required to provide me with detailed information about the reason you are turning in those assignments late. Assignments that are turned in late without notice will receive a zero.

I am unable to accept the following assignments late:

- Lesson Plans: If you miss the day you are scheduled to deliver a lesson plan, I cannot schedule a makeup (given that it would require asking students to attend class outside of our regular meetings or restructuring our schedule to accommodate your absence). Consequently, failure to deliver your lesson plan on the day you are scheduled will result in a zero for that assignment.
- 2. <u>Lesson Evaluations:</u> If you are absent the day that your peers deliver a lesson plan, your feedback on that lesson plan would not be particularly helpful. Consequently, I will not accept lesson evaluations late.

3. <u>Syllabus Proposal:</u> I cannot accept syllabus proposals late, given that there is a tight turnaround to complete final grades at the end of the semester. Consequently, failure to turn in your final project by the scheduled deadline will result in a zero for that assignment.

Use of AI Tools in This Course

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) are transforming higher education, and AI literacy is now a core professional skill. This policy is designed to help you develop the ability to use AI ethically and effectively—skills that will serve you in academia and beyond.

Because this course prepares you to design learning experiences for college students, you are encouraged to experiment with AI thoughtfully and transparently. AI tools can be incredibly helpful for brainstorming lesson plans, assignments, or discussion questions. If you use AI for any part of an assignment, clearly note what tool you used and how (e.g., "Used ChatGPT to generate an outline for my lesson plan"). You should also turn in a pdf of your conversation with the AI tool.

Importantly, you will not be penalized for using AI. I am interested in learning what you find useful and sharing those insights with other students in the class. However, submitting AI-generated work without meaningful human input or reflection is prohibited. Additionally, misrepresenting AI-generated work as entirely your own is prohibited.

Standard Syllabus Statements

Ohio State policies regarding academic misconduct, religious accommodations, disability services, intellectual diversity, grade grievances, and discrimination are all <u>available online</u>.

	WEEK 1 (Aug 27 & Aug 29)	
	Course Introduction	
READINGS	 Wednesday Trautner, N. N. (2014). Teaching-infused graduate seminars: Incorporating pedagogy into substantive courses. Teaching Sociology, 42(1), 61-68. Brevetti, M. (2024) (Re)imagining AI for educators: How to Improve learner-centered classrooms with futuristic possibilities. Retrieved from 	
	Friday 3. Chaffee, S. H. (1982). Mass media and interpersonal channels: Competitive, convergent, or complementary? In G. Gumpert & R. Cathcart (Eds.), Inter/Media: Interpersonal communication in a media world (pp. 57–77). New York: Oxford University Press.	
	4. Walter, N., Saucier, C. J., Brooks, J. J., Suresh, S., Fiers, F., and Holbert, R. L. (2024). The Chaffee principle: the most likely effect of communication is further communication. <i>Annals of the International Communication Association</i> , 48(4), 302-319.	
ASSIGNMENTS	Questionnaire 1 (Introduction) – due before class on Wednesday	

	WEEK 2 (Sept 3 & Sept 5)
Cor	ntemporary Issues in Mass Communication Theory
READINGS	Wednesday 1. Walter, N., Dobmeier, C., Rains, S., Feeley, T. H., & Noar, S. M. (2025). Is time of the essence? A temporal meta-synthesis of seven media effects theories. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , advance online publication.
	2. Coenen, L. (2025). Lost in a maze? On the philosophical problems with differential and individual-level susceptibility in research on media effects. <i>Communication Research</i> , 52(2), 262-286.
	3. Rohrer, J. M., Hunermund, P., Arslan, R. C., & Elson, M. (2022). That's a lot to process! Pitfalls of popular path models. <i>Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science</i> , 5(2), 1-14.
	Friday • Lesson Plan: Dr. Alex Bonus
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 1 (during Friday's meeting)

	WEEK 3 (Sept 10 & Sept 12)
Pri	inciples of Effective Pedagogy I: Backward Design
READINGS	Wednesday 1. Michael, N. A. & Libarkin, J. C. (2016). Understanding by design: mentored implementation of backward design methodology at the university level. <i>Journal of College Biology Teaching</i> , 42(2), 44-52.
	2. Bernstein, D. A. (2017). Bye-bye intro: A proposal for teaching introductory psychology. <i>Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology</i> , <i>3</i> (3), 191-197.
	3. Shabatura, J. (2022). Using Bloom's Taxonomy to write effective learning outcomes. Retrieved from https://tips.uark.edu/using-blooms-taxonomy/
	4. Using AI to Assist with Course Design. Retrieved from NCSU.com
	Friday • Discuss Proposal Milestone 1
ASSIGNMENTS	Questionnaire 2 (College Reflection) – due before class on Wednesday

	WEEK 4 (Sept 17 & Sept 19)	
	Cultivation Theory	
READINGS	Wednesday	
	1. Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: the violence profile. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 26(2), 173-199.	
	2. Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Hermann, E. (2025). Television and the mainstreaming of political attitudes: A 40-year comparison. <i>Mass Communication and Society</i> , 28(3), 485-510.	
	3. Hermann, R., Morgan, M., & Shanahan, J. (2023). Cultivation and social media: a meta-analysis. <i>New Media & Society</i> , 25(9), 2492-2511.	
	Friday • Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	 Lesson Evaluation 2 (during Friday's meeting) Proposal Milestone 1 (Sunday 11:59 pm) 	

	WEEK 5 (Sept 24 & Sept 26)	
	Media Balkanization and Human Screenomes	
READINGS	Wednesday 1. Benoit, W. L., & Billings, A. C. (2020). Media balkanization theory: axioms and implications. In W. L. Benoit & A. C. Billings (Eds.), The rise and fall of mass communication (pp. 143-158).	
	2. Reeves, B., Robinson, T., & Ram, N. (2020). Time for the Human Screenome Project. <i>Nature</i> , <i>577</i> , 314–317.	
	3. Cerit, M., Lee, A. Y., Hancock, J., Miner, A., Cho, M. J., Muise, D., Garròn Torres, AA., Haber, N., Ram, N., Robinson, T. N., & Reeves, B. (2025). Person-specific analyses of smartphone use and mental health: intensive longitudinal study. <i>JMIR Formative Research</i> , 9(1), e59875.	
	Friday 4. Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 3 (during Friday's meeting)	

WEEK 6 (Oct 1 & Oct 3)		
	Two-Step Flow of Communication	
READINGS	Wednesday	
	1. Katz, E. (1957). Two-step flow of communication: an up-to-date report on a hypothesis. <i>The Public Opinion Quarterly</i> , <i>21</i> (1), 61-78.	
	2. Hunt, K. & Gruszczynski, M. (2024). "Horizontal" two-step flow: the role of opinion leaders in directing attention to social movements in decentralized information environments. <i>Mass Communication and Society</i> , 27(2), 230-253.	
	3. Soffer, O. (2021). Algorithmic personalization and the two-step flow of communication. <i>Communication Theory</i> , <i>31</i> (3), 297-315.	
	Friday • Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 4 (during Friday's meeting)	

	WEEK 7 (Oct 8 & Oct 10)
Princ	iples of Effective Pedagogy II: Authentic Assessment
READINGS	Wednesday:
	1. Montgomery, K. (2002). Authentic tasks and rubrics: Going beyond traditional assessment in college teaching. <i>College Teaching</i> , 50(1), 34-40.
	2. Mueller, J. (2005). The <i>Authentic Assessment Toolbox</i> : Enhancing student learning though online faculty development. <i>Journal of Online Learning and Teaching</i> , Retrieved from https://jolt.merlot.org/documents/VOL1No1mueller.pdf
	3. Create Rubrics with an AI ChatBot. Retrieved from <u>AIforEducation.com</u>
	Friday 1. Discuss Proposal Milestone 2
ASSIGNMENTS	None!

	WEEK 8 (Oct 15 & Oct 17)	
	Diffusion of Innovations	
READINGS	Wednesday: [ZOOM MEETING]	
	1. Haider, M., & Kreps, G. L. (2004). Forty years of diffusion of innovations: utility and value in public health. <i>Journal of Health Communication</i> , 9(1), 3-11.	
	2. Atkin, D. J., Hunt, D. S., & Lin, C. A. (2015). Diffusion theory in the new media environment: toward an integrated technology adoption model. <i>Mass Communication and Society</i> , 18(5), 623-650.	
	3. Cruz, S. M., Manata, B., High. A. C., & Worley, T. R. (2025). On the nature of influence: identifying and characterizing superdiffusers in seven countries. <i>Human Communication Research</i> , <i>51</i> (1), 29-39.	
	Friday NO CLASS (Fall Break)	
ASSIGNMENTS	 Proposal Milestone 2 (due Sunday 11:59 om) Questionnaire 3 (due Sunday 11:59 pm) 	

	WEEK 9 (Oct 22 & Oct 24)	
	The Knowledge Gap Hypothesis	
READINGS	Wednesday	
	1. Lind, F., & Boomgaarden, H. G. (2019). What we do and don't know: a meta-analysis of the knowledge gap hypothesis. <i>Annals of the International Communication Association</i> , 43(3), 210-224.	
	2. Neuman, S. & Celano, D. (2006). The knowledge gap: implications of leveling the playing field for low-income and middle-income children. Reading Research Quarterly, 41(2), 176-201.	
	3. Cook, T. D (1975). Objectives and summary of the major findings. In T. D. Cook, H. Appleton, R. F. Conner, A. Shaffer, & S. J. Weber (Eds.), <i>Sesame Street revisited</i> (pp. 1-25). Russell Sage Foundation.	
	Friday • Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 5 (during Friday's meeting)	

	WEEK 10 (Oct 29 & Oct 31)	
	The Influence of Presumed Influence	
READINGS	Wednesday 1. Gunther, A. C., Bolt, D., Borzekowski, D. L. G., Leibhart, J. L., Dillard,	
	J. P. (2006). The influence of peer norms: How mass media indirectly affect adolescent smoking. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 56, 52-68.	
	2. Tal-Or, N., Cohen, J., Tsfati, Y., & Gunther, A. C. (2010). Testing the causal direction in influence of presumed media influence. <i>Communication Research</i> , <i>37</i> (6), 801-824.	
	3. Cho, H., Shen, L., & Peng, L. (2021). Examining and extending the influence of presumed influence hypothesis in social media. <i>Media Psychology</i> , 24(3), 413-435.	
	Friday 4. Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 6 (during Friday's meeting)	

	WEEK 11 (Nov 5 & Nov 7)	
	Spiral of Silence	
READINGS	 Wednesday Matthes, J., Knoll, J., & Sikorski, C. (2018). The "spiral of silence" revisited: a meta-analysis on the relationship between perceptions of opinion support and political opinion expression. <i>Communication Research</i>, 45(1), 3-33. 	
	2. Fox, J. & Warber, K. M. (2015). Queer identity management and political self-expression on social networking sites: a co-cultural approach to the spiral of silence. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 65(1), 79-100.	
	3. Matthes, J. (2017). Observing the "spiral" in spiral of silence. <i>International Journal of Public Opinion Research</i> , 27(2), 155-176.	
	Friday • Lesson Plan: TBD	
ASSIGNMENTS	Lesson Evaluation 7 (during Friday's meeting)	

WEEK 12 (Nov 12 & Nov 14)			
Principles of Effective Pedagogy III: Learner-Centered Design			
READINGS	Wednesday		
	1. Fornaciari, C. J. & Dean, K. L. (2014). The 21 st -century syllabus: From pedagogy to andragogy. <i>Journal of Management Education</i> , 38(5), 701-723.		
	2. Richmond, A. S., Morgan, R. K., Slattery, J. M., Mitchell, N. G., & Coopers, G. A. (2019). Project Syllabus: An exploratory study of learner-centered syllabi. <i>Teaching of Psychology</i> , 46(1), 6-15.		
	3. AI Considerations for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from OSU's Teaching & Learning Resource Center.		
	4. Developing an AI syllabus statement. Retrieved from NCSU.edu		
	Friday • Discuss Proposal Milestone 3		
ASSIGNMENTS	• None!		

WEEK 13 (Nov 19 & Nov 21)		
What is Theory Anyway?		
READINGS	Wednesday [ZOOM MEETING]	
	• Levine, T., & Markowitz, D. M. (2024). The role of theory in researching and understanding human communication. <i>Human Communication Research</i> , 50(2), 154-161.	
	• Craig, R. (1993). Why are there so many communication theories? <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 43(3), 26-33.	
	• Neuman, W. R., Davidson, R., Joo SH., Park Y. J., & Williams, A. E. (2008). The seven deadly sins of communication research. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 58(2), 220-237.	
	Friday NO CLASS (NCA Conference)	
ASSIGNMENTS	Proposal Milestone 3 (due Sunday 11:59 pm)	

THANKSGIVING BREAK

(Nov 26 & Nov 28)

NO CLASS – Have a relaxing break!

WEEK 14 (Dec 3 & Dec 5)		
Syllabus Proposal		
READINGS	Wednesday [ZOOM MEETING]	
	1. No class – sign up for a final project meeting with Dr. Bonus	
	Friday [ZOOM MEETING]	
	1. No class – sign up for a final project meeting with Dr. Bonus	
ASSIGNMENTS	Syllabus Proposal Due	

WEEK 15 (Dec 10)		
Principles of Effective Pedagogy IV: Teaching Statements		
READINGS	Wednesday [ZOOM MEETING]	
	1. O'Neal, C., Meizlish, M. & Kaplan, M. (2007). Writing a statement of	
	teaching philosophy for the academic job search.	
	2. Kelsky, K. (2015). Just say no to the weepy teaching statement. In K. Kelsky (Ed.) <i>The professor is in</i> (pp. 164-178).	
	3. Example teaching statements from Professor Bonus	
ASSIGNMENTS	Questionnaire 4 (Course Reflection)	