



Media Theory

COMM303

Fall 2022

Learning Outcomes

This course provides students with an introduction to media theory from multiple perspectives. We will begin by understanding how the history of mediated communication has been connected to ideology and lived experiences. Through readings, lectures, discussions, and case studies, you will understand how technical, historical, economic, social, and political forces have helped shape media content and the media themselves. You should also become familiar with the debate over how much influence the media have over their audiences and what types of influences are present. The course will introduce issues relevant to the consideration of media and historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, as well as individual and societal functions of the media.

At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- (1) Describe and discuss mass media as a system of interrelated forces, including historical foundations, technological advances, economic dynamics, regulatory constraints, and ethical concerns.
- (2) Describe and discuss the complex relationship between media theories and a diverse set of individual, social, and professional practices.
- (3) Describe and discuss the processes of media messages and effects.
- (4) Describe, discuss, and be able to apply theories for interpretation of diverse forms of technology, communication, and media.

Required Resources

Course website: elms.umd.edu

McQuail, D., & Deuze, M. (2020). *McQuail's media & mass communication theory* (7th Ed.). Sage Publications.

All other course readings are available on the course website

Dr. Catherine Knight Steele (Dr. Steele)

Pronouns: she/hers

Teaching Assistants:

Alex Thomas

(pronouns: they/them)

Abigail Vázquez Rosario

(pronouns: she/hers)

Class Meets



Dr. Steele's Student Hours



Alex's Student Hours



Abigail's Student Hours



Course Assignments and Grades

Grades are not given but **earned**. Your grade is determined by your performance on the learning assessments in the course. We are always happy to provide clarity on the assignments and discuss your ideas, but do not review draft assignments.

Learning Assessments	#	Category Weight
Unit Assessments (6 assessments and 1 dropped)	5	40%
Collaborative Notes (6 notes and 1 dropped)	5	20%
Unit application assignments OR	5	40%
Extended Application assignments	2	40%
Total Percentage		100%

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%		
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%		

Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentages presented above. To be fair to everyone we must establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same as making the cut (89.99 \neq 90.00). In other words, there is **NO ROUNDING** in final grade calculations.

Course Assignments

- 1. Unit Assessments (40% of your final grade):** There will be six assessments throughout the semester, one for each of the units in the course. These assessments are in lieu of a midterm and final exam. Assessments must be completed within 4 days of the quiz opening on ELMS. Each unit quiz will focus primarily on the material from that section but will also include questions that integrate material from past sections. These assessments must be completed on your own and will be online, open-note, and timed. You are allowed to use the internet for the quizzes, but you are not allowed to use student assistance websites, such as Chegg.com. Relying on student assistance websites, like Chegg.com, for answering questions in support of graded course assignments is not permissible and will be considered a violation of UMD's academic integrity policy. You have 60 minutes to complete and the assessment will only show one question at a time. The final question is a short answer question. You may notice that there is no grade for attendance or participation, however, in class we will introduce and define concepts and engage in in-class activities, some of which you will see on your module assessments. We therefore strongly recommend attending and participating in class regularly in order to maximize your success in the course. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped, even if it is a non-attempt.






- 2. Reading/Class notes (20% of your final grade):** Students complete and submit their notes on six occasions during the term. Using a template provided by the instructional team, students complete a notes document in advance of a class session that outlines the key theory, definitions, and examples from the text. In class, they will then add/edit to complete the document and submit it by the end of the day. We will complete the first set of notes together as a class, you will then be assigned a group which will determine which days you submit notes. If you know in advance that you have a conflict on more than one of your assigned days, you can request to switch groups with a willing peer by September 6th. To do this, you must email one of the class TAs and receive a confirmation by EOD on the 6th. This assignment is graded as full credit/partial credit/no credit.

CHOOSE ONE OF THE TWO ASSIGNMENT PATHS BELOW

- 3. Path 1: Unit Application assignments (40% of your final grade):** You will complete a mini-project for units 2-6 of the course. In this assignment, you are expected to demonstrate your engagement with course readings and select 1-2 key theories to create a product suitable for an adult audience outside of this course. In addition to providing a clear definition (in your own words), you are expected to apply the theory/ies to a media text (movie, television show, news report, blog, social media event, etc.) of your choosing. This assignment helps you see the connection between the course material and the media you encounter regularly. Students can create a short blog/medium style post of 500 words (which includes at least one media element (video, image, meme, etc), a TikTok video (1 min minimum), Instagram post (3-4 images plus 100 word min caption) or YouTube video (between 2 and 3 mins in length). All of these options should be paired with a 150-200 word explanation of their content (What they did and why—what medium they chose and how it helps you get your message across). Content should not be submitted via a link to the application, rather, students should upload videos or other digital content directly to ELMS. Students are not required to post this content through their social media accounts. An assignment description and grading rubric is posted on ELMS. Regardless of format, your content must summarize the theory and media text, identify the origin or importance of the theory, apply the theory to the text and use course readings to provide a deep understanding of the social implications of your application. An assignment description, sample, and grading rubric are posted on ELMS.
- 4. Path 2: Extended Application Assignments (40% of your final grade):** You will propose and write a midterm and final paper (6-8 pages each) in the course. For this assignment, you will create a thesis (argument), applying at least two theories from the course to a media text, demonstrating not only the applicability of the theory but its significance to the reader/viewer/listener. In addition, you must summarize the theory and media text, identify the origin or importance of the theory, and use course readings (2) and two additional academic sources to provide a deep understanding of the social implications of your application. An assignment description, sample, and grading rubric are posted on ELMS.

Format standards for written work: Follow these guidelines to avoid having points deducted from writing assignments.

- Submit your work via ELMS.
- Include the university honor code and your e-signature.
- Type your work in black and use double space unless otherwise noted. Use 1-inch margins, and 12-point serif typeface (Times New Roman, Cambria, Garamond, etc.).
- Use page numbers if there is more than one page.
- Proofread all your work. Do not rely solely on spell-check.
- Always keep a copy of your work.
- References are required in work that includes citations, quotes, or other people's ideas. Use APA (American Psychological Association) referencing: <http://www.apastyle.org>.

	 OPEN NOTES	 USE BOOK	 SEARCH ONLINE	 ASK FRIENDS	 WORK IN GROUPS
Assessments	✓	✓	✓	xx	xx
Application assignments	✓	✓	✓	✓	xx
Collaborative notes	✓	✓	✓	✓	xx

While you are allowed to search online for information, you are NOT allowed to use student assistance websites, like Chegg.com

Course Communication

This course uses ELMS and email regularly. All course documents, information, grades, and readings will be available on ELMS. Please make sure your email information with UMD is up-to-date so that you can receive all relevant information. You are responsible for receiving information sent through ELMS and email. You have two teaching assistants this semester, Alex Thomas, M.A. (pronouns: they/them) and Abigail Vázquez Rosario (pronouns: she/hers). The teaching assistants are here to help you with your assignments and understand the course materials. Given that we do not have discussion sections, you can go to either TA whose schedule matches yours to assist you. Alex and Abigail are available to meet with students on Zoom as well as in-person.

Our preferred method of contact for short clarifying questions is email. However, be sure to first check the syllabus and schedule as the answers to many questions can be found in these documents. We return emails during business hours M-F and within 24 hours on the weekend. For extended questions and feedback on assignments, grades, and readings you are encouraged to visit online office hours. Always include the course title (COMM 303). If your message requires a complex answer, we will ask you to schedule an appointment during student hours.

Appointments are available using the following links (also available on ELMS on the home screen.

Dr. Steele: [REDACTED]
 Abigail: [REDACTED]
 Alex: [REDACTED]

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with us if you have questions.

Indoor Mask and COVID-19 Protocols

KN95 masks are no longer required in all classroom settings, however we strongly encourage students to still use masks as desired to slow the spread on campus. Anyone who is positive, has symptoms of COVID-19 or has been exposed to someone with the virus should follow all campus guidance regarding quarantine and isolation.

Academic accessibility statement: The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The University of Maryland provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals. Reasonable accommodations shall be made in a timely manner and on an individualized and flexible basis.

Discrimination against individuals on the grounds of disability is prohibited. The University also strictly prohibits retaliation against persons arising in connection with the assertion of rights under this Policy.

Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS) facilitates reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals. For assistance in obtaining accommodations, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at (301) 314-7682, or adsfrontdesk@umd.edu. More information is available at the [ADS website](#).

After receiving an Accommodations Letter from ADS, as a student, you are expected to provide your course instructors with a copy of the Accommodations Letter and meet with them, either virtually or in-person to obtain their signature on the Acknowledgement of Student Request form. You must do so within the first two weeks of the semester if you already have an existing Accommodations Letter or two weeks within the issuance of such letter during the semester. You and your instructors will discuss a plan for how the accommodations will be implemented in the course throughout the semester. Specific details regarding the implementation of certain ADS-approved accommodations agreed upon among ADS, you as the student, and the individual course instructor must be documented on a Detailed Implementation Plan, signed by you and the instructor, and submitted to ADS.

Separately if you would like to talk about ways in which the classroom can be more welcoming and we together can better ensure your success regardless of issues documented with the University, please feel free to reach out via email or in person.

Course-Specific Policies

Making up missed work: Unit Assessments are due four days after the conclusion of the unit (by 11:59pm). The lowest of your assessment grades will be dropped. Therefore you will *only* be allowed to make up missed work in cases of excused absences/illnesses, which encompass the four days students have to complete this assignment. If you find that your absence meets this standard and has prevented your completion of the assignment. In that case, you must contact an instructional team member by email/ELMS message within 24 hours of your absence and make up the work within 5 days of your release from your unscheduled absence. Notes are due on the day you are assigned, without exception. The lowest of your notes grades will also be dropped. If you know in advance that you will have to miss more than one of your assigned notetaking days, you can find another student who wishes to switch groups with you. You are responsible for letting an instructional team member know (in advance) that you will be switching groups with another student at the start of the term (by September 6). Application assignments are due on the date assigned without exception. No switching will be allowed after this date. Technology issues will not be considered as a valid reason for missing deadlines.

Late work: No late work is accepted in the class outside of the excused absence policy noted above. While we hope each student has the time they need to complete each assignment, we must also ensure that all students can receive their assignments back on time and that graduate assistants have a reasonable workload in grading. If extenuating circumstances exist, please make an appointment to speak to Dr. Steele ASAP.

Emergency protocol: In case of weather-related or other emergencies that would close the University for an extended period, we will follow the University's guidelines for completing any remaining course content, assignments, and/or quizzes. You can sign up to receive emergency alerts from the University via email and/or text message here:

<https://alert.umd.edu/index.php?CCheck=1>

Discussion of grades: We are happy to discuss any issues you are having with the course, including your grade. However, we do not discuss grades over ELMS messaging or email. Please make an appointment and chat during student hours so we can discuss your grade(s) at that time. You are expected to contact us within 7 days of the grade being published on ELMS to discuss any discrepancies in the reporting of your grade(s).

Religious Observances: Students will not be penalized because of the observances of their religious beliefs. Whenever feasible, students will be given an opportunity to make up within a reasonable period of time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances (see Making up Missed Work above). Please note that traveling for religious observances is not covered by this policy. Per university guidelines, the student must inform the instructional team of any intended absences for religious observations during the first three weeks of the semester.

Copyright: In addition to the University copyright policy noted above, we do not allow students to make audio or visual recordings of our lectures unless specifically stated in your ADS accommodations. If your accommodation does allow for recording lectures, you must meet with a member of the instructional team before any recordings are made.

Lectures and notes: The instructional team posts their PowerPoints on ELMS by the start of class.

Classroom Etiquette and Technology Use:

Students are expected to be in class on time and leave class only when it is finished. The instructor is committed to doing the same. Frequent late arrival or early departure will be considered as a disturbance to class and will affect your participation grade. Should you leave the class early or arrive late for unavoidable reasons, please let me know before or after the class. Please show respect to your peers and the instructional team by focusing your attention on the day's subject rather than work from other classes or side conversations. This course is based on the premise that technology is integral to our lives and learning. Therefore we encourage you to bring your technology to class (e.g., phone, laptop) to facilitate activities. If you don't have access to this technology, you may borrow it through the [UMD Library Equipment Loan Program](#) with your UMD ID. If you need to take a call or respond to a text during a class session, please step outside to do so. Please do not allow your use of technology to interfere with your classmate's ability to remain engaged in class activities. If this is the case, and we notice, we will request that you stay after class to discuss it. If this becomes a persistent challenge, your grades will suffer. I do not anticipate needing to remind adults of these basic rules of respect.

Names/Pronouns and Self Identifications:

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. We invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). We encourage students to add their pronouns to their ELMS profile (under the Account tab) and to record their name's correct pronunciation using the Namecoach Roster function on the course page.

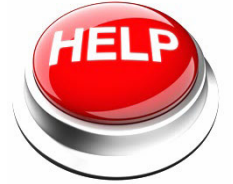
Additionally, however you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, it is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. We will do our best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and we ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Use of student assistance websites: Relying on student assistance websites, like (but not limited to) Chegg.com, for answering questions in support of graded course assignments or quizzes is not permissible and will be considered a violation of UMD's academic integrity policy.

Basic Needs Security: If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live and believe this may affect your performance in this course, please visit go.umd.edu/basic-needs for information about resources the campus offers you.

Get Some Help!

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. We hope you will talk to us so that we can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and we encourage you to visit tutoring.umd.edu to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you. In particular, everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improve their grade) by visiting ter.ps/writing and scheduling an appointment with the campus Writing Center. You should also know there is a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (see go.umd.edu/assistance), and if you just need someone to talk to, visit counseling.umd.edu.



Most services are free because you have already paid for them, and **everyone needs help**... all you have to do is ask for it.

Course Schedule

Dates in **Bold** indicate class sessions
 ** indicate theories you can use for Application assignments
 Please note which assignments correspond to Path #1 and Path #2
 Remember you select 4 class sessions (beginning September 13th) to take notes

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Unit 1: Foundations of Media Theory			
August 30	Course introduction	Syllabus	
September 1	Making products for the public/research and citing our sources		
September 6	What are media? What is Theory?	McQuail Ch 1, p. 5-18	
September 8	What are media? What is Theory?	Groups 1&2: Thomas (2022) Group 3&4: Steele (2016)	
September 13	Media history	McQuail Ch. 2	
September 15	Concepts and models for mass communication	McQuail Ch. 3	Submit form indicating preference for Path #1 or Path #2
September 18			Assessment 1 (unit 1): Due September 18 at 11:59 p.m.
Unit 2: Media Effects Theories			
September 20	Processes and models of media effects	McQuail Ch. 16	
Sept 22	Cultivation** and Social Learning Theory**	Lee, S. Y., Chen, Y. S., & Harmon, M. (2016)	
September 27	Agenda Setting** and Priming**	Feezell (2017)	
September 29	Framing**	Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & de Vreese, (2018)	
October 2			Assessment 2 (unit 2): Due at 11:59 p.m.
Unit 3: Audience Theory and Research			
October 4	Audience theory and research traditions	McQuail Ch. 14; Schroder (2009)	
October 5			Module 2 application assignment (Path 1 only): Due at 11:59 p.m.
October 6	Uses & gratifications**	Pearce (2009)	

October 11	Text and context (reader-response theories**)	Radway (1983)	
October 13	Encoding and decoding**	Hall (2001)	
October 16			Assessment 3 (unit 3): Due at 11:59 p.m.
Unit 4: Representation and Critical Cultural Studies			
October 18	Media and culture	McQuail Ch. 5; Rowe (2018); Kellner (2007)	
October 19			Module 3 application assignment (Path 1 only): Due at 11:59 p.m. Extended Application Assignment 1 (Path 2 only): Due at 11:59pm
October 20	Post/colonial theory **	TBD	
October 25	Queer theory**	Manning (2016)	
October 27	Matrix of domination**	Steele (2016)	
October 30			Assessment 4 (unit 4): Due at 11:59 p.m.
Unit 5: Media Structures and Production			
November 1	Media economics and governance	McQuail Ch. 8	
November 2			Module 4 application assignment (Path 1 only): Due at 11:59 p.m
November 3	Political economy**	Mansel (2004)	
November 8	Globalization**		
November 10	Producersage**	Bruns, A. (2008)	
November 13			Assessment 5 (unit 5): Due at 11:59 p.m.
Review Session			
November 15	TBD		
November 17	TBD		
November 22	TBD		

Unit 6: New Media Theory

November 29	New media theory	McQuail Ch. 6	
November 30			Module 5 application assignment (Path 1 only): Due at 11:59 p.m
December 1	Affordance Theory**	Evans et al. (2017)	
December 6	Fandom and participatory culture**	Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2017)	
December 8	Algorithmic Bias** and Digital Inequality**	Noble (2018) Benjamin (2021)	
December 11			Assessment 6 (unit 6): Due at 11:59 p.m.
Final Paper			
December 13	Reading Day Appointments available for office hours		
December 15			Module 6 application assignment (Path 1 only): Due at 10am Extended Application Assignment 2 (Path 2 only) Due at 10am

Note: Readings need to be completed before each class as we will be covering the material during our meeting. This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the University, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed