

# MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY • BTMM 1011 • SECTION 001 • CRN 031325 SPRING 2008

TUTTLEMAN 101 • 10:40 – 12:30 MW • 4 credits



## COURSE SUMMARY

Did you know *The Matrix* is a film about mass communication theory? In fact, many films explore the role of media and mass communication in society. Most everyone is surrounded by technologies of *mass communication*, yet we rarely consider the underlying theories and methods of these global media systems. Using examples from many films, this course will introduce students to the use of theory for analyzing and understanding the processes of mass communication. Class discussion and the textbook will be combined with the films to create an active learning experience within a multimedia environment. In so doing, we will learn about mass communication via oral, print, and electronic media — the word, the text, the image.

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

The essential goal of this course is for students to comprehend the fundamental theories of mass communication and the role these theories play in how we understand the cultural roles of media. By the end of this course, students will:

- understand the basic mass communication theories that guide our understanding of the effects and roles of mass media.
- be able to analyze media messages from many perspectives, all through the use of mass communication theories.
- have a much deeper understanding of the personal and cultural role of the mass media industries.
- comprehend how mass communication theories are accepted throughout society.
- understand the mass communication processes embedded in the technologies and industries of their future careers.
- discover that mass communication is often at the center of how we perceive “truth” and “reality.”

## INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Barry Vacker

Office: Annenberg 224 Office hours: 12:45 – 1:45 MY; at TUCC 425 3:30 – 4:30 TH; or by appointment.

bvacker@temple.edu Office phone: 215.204.3623

**Preferred methods of contact** – interpersonal: 1) come up to me before or after class; 2) drop by during office hours  
electronic: 1) send an email; 2) call on the office telephone

## TEACHING ASSISTANTS

These are the Teaching Assistants assigned to this course, along with contact information and office hours:

Angela Carter angela.carter@temple.edu 1:00 – 2:00 W Annenberg Atrium

Sueen Noh sueen.noh@temple.edu 9:30 – 10:30 W Tuttleman Basement Cafe

## REQUIRED TEXT

*A First Look at Communication Theory* (Sixth Edition), by Em Griffin (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005). ISBN: 0-07-301018-9.  
Available at Temple University bookstore.

### Additional Readings

Online readings and news stories provided throughout the semester.

## GRADING AND EXAMS

There will be three exams and one media critique over the course of the semester. If you miss one of the exams, then your grade for that exam will be zero. The breakdown is as follows:

|                  |              |                          |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Exam 1           | = 20%        | (February 20, Wednesday) |
| Exam 2           | = 20%        | (April 2, Wednesday)     |
| Final Exam       | = 30%        | (May 14, Wednesday)      |
| Mass Comm Report | = 15%        | (April 30, Wednesday)    |
| Attendance       | = <u>15%</u> |                          |
|                  | 100%         |                          |

Exams may contain three kinds of questions — essay, short answer, multiple choice. The difficulty of the exam questions will vary, but they are designed to test student reading and comprehension of class materials — readings, class discussion, and films/videos. Exam questions will stress the “big picture” rather than trivial details. Approximately 1/3 of the questions will come from the readings in the text, 1/3 from the lectures and class discussions, and 1/3 from the films and videos. The final exam is comprehensive and mandatory.

### Mass Communication Report

In this project, you will work with the TAs in developing a 3-page written report about how a magazine or newspaper article illustrates one of the mass communication theories discussed in the course. After the first exam, you will receive a handout that provides all the details on the project. *Due date: Wednesday, April 30 (no exceptions)*

### Academic Dishonesty

Regarding academic dishonesty, this class will abide by the rules of Temple University. Cheating on exams will get you dropped from the class — NO EXCEPTIONS. The Temple Student Handbook states:

*Temple University strongly believes in academic honesty and integrity. Plagiarism and academic cheating are, therefore, prohibited.*

There is nothing wrong with citing the works of others, just make sure you give them credit. In return, you get credit for doing so, and citing them can enhance your learning. If you are not certain that you are using or citing materials properly, then please check with the TAs or Dr. Vacker.

#### Academic honesty and plagiarism

*Adapted from the Temple University policy statement on academic integrity, passed by the Academic Senate on April 19, 1989.*

*Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor: another person's ideas, words, or assistance.*

*There are many forms of plagiarism: repeating another person's sentence as your own, adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own, paraphrasing someone else's argument as your own, or even presenting someone else's line of thinking in the development of an idea as though it were your own. Academic writing is built upon the use of other people's ideas and words — this is how ideas are developed — but appropriate credit must always be given to the originator.*

*In general, all sources must be identified as clearly, accurately, and thoroughly as possible. When in doubt about whether to identify a source, either cite the source or consult your instructor. Here are some specific guidelines to follow:*

*a. Quotations. Whenever you use a phrase, sentence, or longer passage written (or spoken) by someone else, you must enclose the words in quotation marks and indicate the exact source of the material, including the page number of written sources.*

*b. Paraphrasing. Avoid closely paraphrasing another's words. Substituting an occasional synonym, leaving out or adding an occasional modifier, rearranging the grammar slightly, or changing the tenses of verbs simply looks like sloppy copying. Good paraphrasing indicates that you have absorbed the material and are restating it in a way that contributes to your overall argument. It is best to either quote material directly, using quotation marks, or put ideas completely in your own words. In either case, acknowledgment is necessary. Remember: expressing someone else's ideas in your own way does not make them yours.*

*c. Facts. In a paper, you will often use facts that you have gotten from a lecture, a written work, or some other source. If the facts are well known, it is usually not necessary to provide a source. (In a paper on American history, for example, it would not ordinarily be necessary to give a source for the statement that the Civil War began in 1861 after the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.) But if the facts are not widely known or if the facts were developed or presented by a specific source, then you should identify that source.*

*d. Ideas. If you use an idea or ideas that you learned from a lecture, written work, or some other source, then you should identify the source. You should identify the source for an idea whether or not you agree with the idea. It does not become your original idea just because you agree with it.*

*Penalties for violation of Temple University's academic honesty policies can range from a failing grade for the assignment or the entire course to referral to the university disciplinary committee.*

Your professor and TAs stand by that policy.

## Attendance

this class relies on class discussion and student participation. To encourage attendance, we have created an attendance plan. Simply put, the more classes you attend, the more points you earn toward your final grade. *If you miss class or film screening, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate and watch the film on your own time. Films and videos will not be loaned out for private viewing.* Excluding the first week, exams days, and holidays, there will be a total of 25 class meetings. Attend all 25 and get the full 15 points.

| Classes Attended | Points Earned | Classes Attended | Points Earned | Classes Attended | Points Earned | Classes Attended | Points Earned |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| 25               | 15            | 23               | 12            | 21               | 6             | 19 or less       | 0             |
| 24               | 14            | 22               | 9             | 20               | 3             |                  |               |

*Note: It is your responsibility to ensure you are in your assigned seat, otherwise you will be counted absent. If you need to miss class for a religious holiday, please let the professor know in writing and verbally (before or after class, or in office hours).*

## Make-up Exams

NO makeup exams are permitted for the tests, unless you miss class for Temple-approved academic events or sports activities, or a religious observance. If you need to miss an exam for one of these reasons, then you need to provide the professor with written and signed (by appropriate school representative) documentation prior to the exam. NO other reasons are acceptable. This is only fair to those fellow students who take the exam as scheduled. Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

|            |            |            |            |          |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| 100-93 = A | 89-86 = B+ | 79-76 = C+ | 69-66 = D+ | 59-0 = F |
| 92-90 = A- | 85-83 = B  | 75-73 = C  | 65-63 = D  |          |
|            | 82-80 = B- | 72-70 = C- | 62-60 = D- |          |

## Slackers

If you miss many classes or an exam, then you will have difficulty passing this course. You are expected to actively participate in this course, just like you do with mass communication in your life! Any topic discussed in class will be assumed to have been heard by everyone. If you miss a class, please feel free to ask questions of the professor or TA; however, do not expect us to recite the class lecture and discussion for you.

## How to do well in this class

The best way to do well in this class is simple: come to class, stay up on the readings, study hard, and have an open mind. Also, let your professor and/or TAs know if you have any questions!

## SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Dr. Vacker privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215.204.1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Temple University has requested that the following information be included on all course syllabi:

*Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy\\_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02).*

## CLASS PROTOCOL

In general, your professor is an easy-going guy who prefers his classes to be open forums for ideas and opinions relevant to class topics. However, a few rules are needed:

- please arrive to class on time; lectures, discussion, and films will begin promptly.
- turn off all cell phones and PDAs.
- please show respect and courtesy to fellow students at all times
- feel free to ask questions during discussions or at appropriate moments during class lecture.
- the TAs and I all want you to do well in this class, so feel free to approach your professor and/or TA with questions before or after class, or during our office hours.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

NOTE: you should complete the readings prior to the scheduled class period.

| Week   | DATE          | TOPIC   | READING FOR THE WEEK  |
|--------|---------------|---|---|
| Week1  | Jan 23        | <b>INTRODUCTION</b><br>Introduction to course; review syllabus.<br>What is “theory” and why does it matter?<br>film clips: <i>The Matrix</i> (Wachowski brothers 1999)  | Chapter 1   |
| Week2  | Jan 28, 30    | <b>PARADOX: COMPETING THEORIES AND EVOLVING TRUTH</b><br>film clips: <i>The Manchurian Candidate</i> (Jonathan Demme 2004)<br>from Plato’s cave to postmodernism: mapping the territories of media theory   | Chapter 2   |
| Week3  | Feb 4, 6      | <b>PARALLELS: MASS COMMUNICATION &amp; MASS SOCIETY</b><br>communication: oral, print, electronic<br>film clips: <i>Meet John Doe</i> (Frank Capra 1941)  | Chapter 2   |
| Week4  | Feb 11, 13    | <b>MEDIA RHETORIC</b><br>film clips: <i>A Face in the Crowd</i> (Elia Kazan 1957)<br>the “rules” of rhetoric  | Chapter 22  |
| Week5  | Feb 18, 20    | <b>MEDIA RHETORIC (cont.)</b><br>assessing media persuasion; review for Exam 1<br><i>Exam 1: Wednesday February 20</i>  | Chapters 1-2, 22  |
| Week6  | Feb 25, 27    | <b>CORPORATE MEDIA</b><br>film clips: <i>Network</i> (Sidney Lumet 1976)<br>big media, cultivation, and imperialism   | Chapter 26  |
| Week7  | Mar 3, 5      | <b>PROPAGANDA</b><br>film clips: <i>Wag the Dog</i> (Barry Levinson 1997)<br>semiotics and images as truth<br><i>SPRING BREAK: March 9 – March 16</i>   | Chapter 25<br>Chapter 27  |
| Week8  | Mar 17, 19    | <b>SETTING THE AGENDA</b><br>film clips: <i>The Year of Living Dangerously</i> (Peter Weir 1982)<br>the media agenda and the public agenda  | Chapter 28  |
| Week9  | Mar 24, 26    | <b>GENDER STYLES</b><br>film clips: <i>You’ve Got Mail</i> (Nora Ephron 1998)<br>gender styles and standpoints  | Chapter 33  |
| Week10 | Mar 31, Apr 2 | <b>MORE ON PROPAGANDA, AGENDAS, AND GENDER</b><br><i>what to think? or what to think about? or how to think?</i> review for Exam 2<br><i>Exam 2: Wednesday, April 2</i>   | Chapter 28<br>Chapters 25-28, 33  |
| Week11 | Apr 7, 9      | <b>“TRUTH” IN MASS COMMUNICATION</b><br>film clips: <i>Quiz Show</i> (Robert Redford 1994)<br>assessing truth and deception in communication  | Chapter 7   |
| Week12 | Apr 14, 16    | <b>THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE</b><br>film clips: <i>The Truman Show</i> (Peter Weir 1997)<br>technological determinism   | McLuhan Chapter<br><a href="http://www.afirstlook.com">www.afirstlook.com</a><br>(click: McLuhan Chapter) |
| Week13 | Apr 21, 23    | <b>PARODY &amp; SATIRE</b><br>film clips: to be determined<br>the roles of parody, satire, and humor in rhetorical mass communication   |   |
| Week14 | Apr 28, 30    | <b>THE MAP IS THE TERRITORY</b><br>film clips: <i>Blade Runner</i> (Ridley Scott 1982)<br>postmodernism, reality and media.<br>What are the “patterns in the chaos” of mass communication theories?<br><i>Mass Comm Report due: Wednesday, April 30</i> | pp. 354-357<br>Chapter 36   |
| Week15 | May 5         | <b>REVIEW FOR FINAL</b><br>wrap-up course and review for final  | —   |

### COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM Wednesday, May 14, 9:00 - 11:00

The FINAL EXAM is comprehensive and mandatory. There are NO exceptions. This date cannot be changed. EVERYONE will take the exam as scheduled.

## BTMM 011 – Spring 2008