Course Description:

This course examines theory and research on the social psychological foundations of individuals’ relationship with mass media. The course will consider the cognitive, attitudinal, affective, motivational, and behavioral processes that underlie individuals' uses of mass media and their interactions with media content (and one another). Topics include attention and encoding, schema use, attitudinal structure, heuristic processing, persuasion and attitude persistence, memory-based and online processing models, emotional and functional approaches, and the connection between attitudes and behaviors, including attribution and cultivation processes. For each of these topic areas, we will consider research that embrace and often expands upon the psychological theory. Adopting this approach, we will consider media psychology research on race, news, politics, entertainment, information and health campaigns, media violence and pornography. In addition, we will often cover broader methodological issues involved in the construction and evaluation of communication theory. Students will gain an idea of the issues and sources in each area, along with tools for their own further research. Our emphasis will always be on the search for explanation, rather than just description. This course aims to convey basic theory in social psychology on which students can build and test propositions growing out of the ideas we encounter. It is intended to provide new insights about the relationship between individuals and media while providing a grounding in social psychology.

Required Texts:

Course Requirements:

Grades in the class will be based on your performance on the following requirements: (a) final research paper — 50%, (b) two review reports as class discussant — 20%, (c) five comment papers — 20%, and (d) participation in seminar discussion — 10%.

Final Research Paper: The major requirement for this course is an original research paper written individually by each student and presented to other seminar participants. The paper should grow out of one of the topical areas covered in the course. The goal of the paper is to contribute, however modestly, to research in on the social psychology of the media. The paper should not simply be a literature review. It must propose and begin the process of testing theory. Doctoral students are expected to present actual research findings, or a coherent proposal for dissertation research. Masters’ students may develop thesis proposals or opt to write a New Yorker or Atlantic Monthly-style argumentative research review and policy synthesis. For most of you, the goal for the final paper should be submission and acceptance to an academic conference. If you wish to extend work developed in previous classes or research groups, consult with me first.

The originality of your paper and its implications for theory in media psychology will be the key criteria for evaluation. As long as your research reflects some original departure from ideas we have encountered in class, and is not a simple recapitulation of past work, you can build directly on existing theory. A two-page prospectus for your seminar paper is due WEEK 7. You will make a presentation of your paper on WEEK 14 OR 15. Based on comments you receive from other seminar participants you may revise your paper and submit a final draft for grading on December 15th by 4:00. This paper will be worth 50 percent of your final grade.

If you opt for an academic paper, it should contain the following sections: (1) brief introduction, (2) literature review, (3) statement of hypotheses, propositions, or research model, (4) actual or proposed methodology, (5) results of analysis or proposed analytic approach, (6) concluding discussion about what was or will be learned. Students may present findings based on existing data sets (e.g., National Election Study, General Social Survey, DDB Life Style Archive, The Pew Internet and American Life Project, MCRC Archive, etc.) or collect original data. Although all papers need to explicitly discuss issues in media psychology, they need not be quantitative.

Seminar Discussants: Each student will be required to serve as a discussant for two class sessions. In class, discussants will work with the professor to keep conversation moving forward, providing examples from the reading when appropriate and posing questions for all seminar
participants to answer. Discussants will also be required to write an 8 to 10 page summary and critique of the week’s readings and provide a brief list of questions to facilitate discussion. This report should be posted to the class e-mail list by midnight on the night before class so that other seminar participants have a chance to review your comments and questions for the class session. Ideally, you will choose a week that coincides with your broader interests so that your review of the readings will serve as a foundation for your research paper. This work will be worth 20 percent of your final grade.

Comment Papers: The next 20 percent of your class grade will be based on the production of five brief comment papers on readings for weeks that you are not the discussant. These comment papers should be 1-2 pages. Papers should reflect your reactions to one or more of the readings from that week. Some of you may use these comment papers to summarize the key points of each of the readings into notes for future use. Others may organize their comments into critical essays or critiques on the general themes of the week. Yet others may focus on detailed reviews of a single reading, digging deeply into a topic of particular interest. You will bring these comment papers to class and submit them at the end of each session. These will not be graded, but each completed report will be worth 4% toward the total 20 percent of your final grade.

Seminar Participation: The final 10 percent of your class grade will be based on participation in seminar discussion. It is not enough that you just come to class. You must actively discuss the readings and engage in exchanges with other seminar participants. I will not formally lecture, because the function of a seminar is to encourage interaction among participants. Therefore, each student must contribute to the development of a classroom environment where ideas are debated.

Course Policies:

If a student cannot complete an assignment at the scheduled time, arrangements must be made in advance with the instructor. Failure to do so will result in the reduction of one grade level (at a minimum) from the earned score. Exemptions may be made for unusual circumstances.

Permission for a student to receive an incomplete grade (I) is at the discretion of the instructor and must be accompanied by a written contract for completion of course requirements. Failure to take exams, complete assignments, or attend class is not acceptable reasons for an incomplete.

This class will follow University and L&S guidelines concerning scholastic misconduct and grievance procedures. Be particularly clear on the rules concerning plagiarism.
Weekly Readings

(++ Required Reading ; ** Recommended Reading)

Week 1 (9/4): Introduction to the Course

Overview of the course and discussion leader assignments

Week 2 (9/11): Studying Mass Media from a Social Psychological Perspective:

** In Bryant & Oliver, Shah, Rojas, & Cho, Media and Civic Participation: On Understanding and Misunderstanding Communication Effects, Chap 10

++ Eagly & Chaiken, The nature of attitudes, Chap. 1

** Eagly & Chaiken, The measurement of attitudes, Chap 2

++ Fiske & Taylor, Introduction, Chap. 1


Week 3 (9/18): Schema Theory and Media Constructions of Race:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Mastro, Effects of Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping, Chap 16

++ Fiske & Taylor, Social categories and schema, Chap. 4

** Fiske & Taylor, Conditions of schema use, Chap. 5


Week 4 (9/25): Mental Structure and Communication Influence on Social Cognitions:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, Political Communication Effects,
Chap. 11

++ Eagly & Chaiken, The structure of attitudes and beliefs, Chap. 3.

** Fiske & Taylor, Cognitive approaches to attitudes, Chap. 11


Week 5 (10/2): Social Encoding and Processing; Social Perceptions and Preferences:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Shrum, Media Consumption and Perceptions of Social Reality, Chap. 4.

** Fiske & Taylor, Social encoding: Attention and consciousness, Chap. 7;

++ Fiske & Taylor, Social Inference, Chap. 9


Week 6 (10/9): Media Effects on Attitude Formation & Change: Risk and Learning

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Petty, Briñol, & Priester, Mass media attitude change: Implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. Chap. 7.

**Eagly & Chaiken**, Process theories of attitude formation and change: Reception and cognitive responding, Chap. 6

++ Eagly & Chaiken, Process theories of attitude formation and change: The elaboration-likelihood and heuristic-systematic models, Chap. 7.


Week 7 (10/16): Affective Processes and Emotional Responses through Media:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Cantor, Fright reactions to Mass Media Chap. 14

**Fiske & Taylor**, Affect and cognition Chap. 10


Week 8 (10/23): Motivational Approaches to Media Uses and Effects in an Information Age:
++ In Bryant & Oliver, Rubin, Uses-and-gratifications perspective of media effects, Chap. 8
++ Eagly & Chaiken, Motivational processes in attitude formation and change, Chap. 10
** Fiske & Taylor, Social cognition and the self, Chap. 6

Week 9 (10/30): Information Campaigns and Attitude-Behavior Links:
++ In Bryant & Oliver, Rice & Atkin, Public communication campaigns, Chap. 20.
++ Eagly & Chaiken, The impact of attitudes on behaviors, Chap. 4
** Fiske & Taylor, Behavior and cognition, Chap. 12
Week 10 (11/6): Attributional Processes, Impersonal Impact, and Hostile Media:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Perloff, Mass media, social perception, and the third-person effect, Chap. 12.

** Eagly & Chaiken, Process theories of attitude formation and change: Attribution approaches and social judgment theory, Chap. 8

++ Fiske & Taylor, Attribution theory, Chap. 2

++ Fiske & Taylor, Attribution Theory: Theoretical refinements and empirical observations, Chap. 3.


Week 11 (11/13): Media Cultivation: Portrayals of Sex and Violence and Their Effects:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Morgan et al., Growing up with television: Cultivation processes, Chap. 3.

** In Bryant & Oliver, Sparks et al., Media violence, Chap. 13.

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Harris & Barlett, The effects of sex in the media, Chap. 15.


Week 12 (11/20): Media Entertainment: Untangling Its Effects:

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Vorderer & Hattmann, Entertainment and enjoyment as media effect, Chap. 24.

++ In Bryant & Oliver, Lee et al., Effects of computer/video games and beyond, Chap. 25.


Week 13 (11/27): No class - work on papers and presentations

Week 14 (12/4): Class Paper presentations

Week 15 (12/11): Class Paper presentations

Three papers per hour – 10 -12 minute presentation + 5-6 minute Q&A