



## COM 275 • Effects of Mass Communication

Spring 2024 | Section 002 | TR • 10:20-11:40am

**Instructor:** Jacob T. Fisher, Ph.D.  
**E-mail:** [jtf@msu.edu](mailto:jtf@msu.edu)

**Office Hours**  
Tue. 2-4 pm - CAS 445 or Zoom

### Course Description:

---

This class serves as a broad introduction to the major social effects of mass media from the individual to societal level. Topics to be covered include (but are not limited to): media and communication technologies, cognitive, emotional, and social effects of media, political and moral communication, media effects on children and child development, mediated persuasion and attitude change, message sharing, and the interrelationships between mass media and interpersonal communication.

### Objectives

---

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Identify and describe the key effects of mass communication technologies and strategies, ranging from individual cognitive and emotional impacts to broader societal influences.
2. Analyze and critically evaluate how design and content features of mass media influence how we pay attention to, process, and are affected by media.
3. Develop and articulate insights into the dynamic interplay between individuals, media, and society, evaluating the ethical and societal implications of mediated communication.

This class will be a mix of lectures, discussions, and various other activities. It is important that you attend class and that you complete all of the readings ahead of time. Your readings will be the launching pad for the discussion and activities you will complete in this course

### Digital Tools:

---

- **D2L** - We will be using D2L to manage all assignments, reading materials, and quizzes. If you have not yet logged into D2L, you can do so at [d2l.msu.edu](http://d2l.msu.edu). Note that this is one of the first semesters that I will be using D2L, so it's possible that there may be some bumps along the way. I appreciate your patience. Please reach out if you have questions or if something is confusing or seems missing.
- **iClicker** - We will be using iClicker to track attendance and participation in the course. You can use your smartphone, tablet, or laptop to purchase an iClicker Cloud subscription. As of the time this syllabus was written, a 6-month subscription to iClicker Cloud is \$15.99.

## ***Personal Digital Technology***

Personal technologies such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets can be immensely useful tools for learning and for staying connected with one another. They can also be distracting and disruptive to you, your peers, and your instructors. Academic research conclusively shows that: 1) the mere presence of a smartphone can increase distraction and decrease the academic performance of you and your classmates, 2) multitasking with digital devices while learning leads to reduced knowledge retention and greater difficulty understanding course material. With this in mind, I *strongly* encourage you to minimize your use of personal devices in the classroom, and I reserve the right to ask you to put away your device, remove your earbuds, or otherwise alter your use of digital technology to facilitate more effective learning and communication within the classroom.

## **Readings**

---

There will be one required textbook for this course:

**Title:** [\*Digital Media Effects\*](#)

**Author:** James Potter

**Publisher:** Rowman & Littlefield

We will also have a collection of additional readings consisting of chapters/selections from journal articles, book chapters, longform journalism, and other online resources. I will post these readings on D2L as they are assigned.

## **COVID-19 and our class**

---

COVID-19 is still a rapidly evolving situation, and it is difficult to predict how it will affect our class this semester. Although vaccination requirements will undeniably be helpful in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, it is critical that each of us does all that we can to keep ourselves and the campus community safe. All students are expected to comply with the guidance provided by the university with regard to vaccination, mask-wearing, and other health-related behaviors.

Please note that although this class is scheduled as an in-person lecture, there is always the possibility that we will have to transition to online learning for at least part of the semester if the prevalence of COVID increases and university policies change. If this is necessary, I will communicate any changes to the course structure as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

## **Course Requirements Overview**

---

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>When?</b>	<b>Worth?</b>
Quizzes [x 5] [6 total, lowest dropped]	~ Biweekly	250 [50 each]
Reaction Papers [x 5]	~ Biweekly	150 [30 each]
Discussion 1	3/7	200
Discussion 2	4/18	200
Class Participation	Ongoing	100

---

Research Participation	Ongoing	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>1000 pts</b>

---

## **Assignments & Grading**

---

### **Quizzes**

Your comprehension of the course material will be evaluated with six quizzes (on following each unit of course content). These quizzes will be a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions. You will have 30 minutes to complete each quiz. At the end of the semester, your lowest quiz grade will be dropped, and only your top five quiz grades will be counted in your final grade.

### **Reflection Papers**

### **Discussion Prep and Participation**

Your comprehension of the course material will also be assessed through two in-class discussions. These discussions will provide valuable opportunities to delve into course content, and to display your understanding and engagement with the material. Discussions are currently scheduled for the following dates:

- **March 7th, 2024**
- **April 18th, 2024**

You will be divided into discussion groups at the beginning of the semester. Each group member will be assigned a topic that they will be responsible for discussing with their group. By 11:59 pm the evening prior to each discussion, you will submit a ~1 page “discussion memo” that provides an overview of the topic and at least three well-thought-out questions about the topic that can guide your group’s discussion.

### **Attendance and Participation**

---

Attendance in this course is strongly encouraged. Being “present” mentally and physically in this class will position you for success. That being said, I understand that sometimes it is not possible to attend due to sickness, personal emergencies, and other reasons.

**Lectures** - Lecture attendance will be considered as a component of your general participation grade. You will be granted three no-questions-asked absences. Every non-documented absence beyond three will result in a 10% deduction in your participation grade.

**Discussions** - We will have a total of two discussion days this semester—**March 7th** and **April 18th**. If you miss a discussion day, you will have to complete an alternative assignment in order to receive credit for the discussion.

Please note that if you check in on iClicker on any day that you are not physically present in class, your participation grade for the course will be reduced to zero, resulting in a 10% deduction in your overall grade

for the course. This is academic dishonesty, and is unfair to the students who accurately and honestly report their own participation.

## Participation

---

Your participation grade will be determined based on attendance and various in-class activities. To earn full participation credit, you will be expected to participate in class and engage with the discussion prompts and your classmates' responses.

## Grading Scale

---

Below is the grading scale for this course. Please note that I reserve the right to change the final grading scale based on the distribution of class scores at the end of the term.

< 650	650-699	700-749	750-799	800-849	850-899	900-949	> 950
0.0	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0

## A Few Notes on Grading

---

If you have a question or concern about a grade, please contact me. If you have questions about your grade or believe that it should be changed, you must contact me no more than 7 days after the grades are announced or posted. When I re-grade your assignment, your score may go up OR down, and the grade is final. I will not discuss grades after this seven-day period.

There will be no rounding up of points. For example, if you 899 points, that translates into a 3.0 and will not be rounded up to a 3.5.

When I grade your work, you will earn points based on the quality of the work. You do not start with full points and then lose them based on the mistakes you might make. Your final grade represents the total points earned for that assignment, not the number of points "taken away" for errors or omissions.

## Late Work

---

I understand that extenuating circumstances sometimes prevent turning in work on time. Because of this, I have a relatively generous policy on late submissions. This policy is as follows:

So long as the assignment is turned in within 12 hours of the deadline, it will be graded for up to full credit. After this, there will be a 10% automatic deduction from the maximum possible score for every day after the deadline has passed until the grade reaches zero.

You will be granted one "partial credit pass" per semester. This pass may only be applied to an assignment that is worth 5% of the final course grade or more. The pass can be used to either:

- Submit one assignment that is less than 10 days overdue for up to 90% credit.
- Submit one assignment that is more than 10 days overdue for up to 75% credit.

The partial credit pass cannot be used for assignments that are more than 30 days past due, and cannot be used within two weeks of the last day of the semester.

No other exceptions will be granted for late work in the absence of an officially documented excuse.

## **Extra Credit**

---

The main way to earn extra credit in this class is by participating in additional studies on SONA beyond the 1 credit required for the course. These studies help faculty and graduate students in our department conduct their research to learn more about media and communication phenomena. You can apply up to 4 SONA credits to this class, each of which will be worth 5 bonus points on your final grade. You will receive instructions near the end of the semester regarding how to apply your SONA credits to this class.

You may have a few additional chances to earn extra credit during the semester, although these opportunities are not guaranteed. If those opportunities arise, I'll let you know and explain what you need to do to earn it. Extra credit work will not disadvantage the students who choose not to participate.

Reading the syllabus to this point qualifies you for an additional opportunity for extra credit. Please email me before January 15th at 11:59 pm with a picture of your favorite animal. All students who do this before the deadline will get one extra credit point applied to their final grade :)

## **Email**

---

The main ways to communicate with me is either through D2L or via email. Please follow [professional standards](#) in your email communications. This entails including a subject line that indicates the nature of the message - not "Hi" or (no subject) - and a greeting at the beginning of the email (e.g., "Dear Prof. Fisher"). Subsequent communication in the same conversation may be less formal, but please remember to be respectful.

I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend, although my typical response time is usually quicker. Please note that I will not respond to email questions about an assignment or project within 12 hours of its due date, or about a grade more than 7 days after it is posted. If you have a pressing last-minute question during this timeframe, please look over course materials (often the answer is in the syllabus or assignment directives) or seek help from your peers.

## **Academic Integrity**

---

Michigan State University affirms the principle that all individuals associated with the academic community have a responsibility for establishing, maintaining, and fostering an understanding and appreciation for academic integrity. Academic integrity is the foundation for university success. Learning how to express original ideas, cite works, work independently, and report results accurately and honestly are skills that carry students beyond their academic career.

The Spartan Code of Honor Academic Pledge embodies the principles of academic integrity through a personal commitment to ethical behavior in a student's studies and research. All undergraduate students are expected to uphold the academic pledge throughout their enrollment at MSU. Student conduct that is inconsistent with the academic pledge is addressed through existing policies, regulations, and ordinances governing academic honesty and integrity. Those policies include:

- [Integrity of Scholarships and Grades Policy](#)
- [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [General Student Regulations \(includes Protection of Scholarship and Grades\)](#)
- [Ordinance 17.00 Examinations](#)

Students are encouraged to review the following websites to learn more about academic integrity, student rights and responsibilities, and the Spartan Code of Honor:

- [Spartan Life Handbook \(Student Affairs\)](#)
- [University Ombudsperson](#)
- [ASMSU](#)

The Spartan Code of Honor was adopted by ASMSU on March 3, 2016, endorsed by Academic Governance on March 22, 2016, and recognized by the Provost, President, and Board of Trustees on April 15, 2016.

### ***Use of AI Tools (ChatGPT, etc)***

The use of AI tools can confer a powerful advantage in many contexts. However, transparency, honesty, and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these tools is expected from all students who choose to use them. Non-disclosure or misrepresentation of the use (or the extent of use) of AI tools in your work constitutes academic misconduct and will be handled accordingly.

For the purpose of this policy, 'AI tools' refers to any software or digital instrument powered by artificial intelligence designed to assist users in creating, editing, or generating content. This includes, but isn't limited to ChatGPT, Google Bard, Claude, and Bing Chat.

- **Usage:** Unless specifically noted otherwise, students are permitted to use AI tools to aid their research, generate ideas, proofread assignments, or operate other tasks essential to their work in this course.
- **Disclosure:** Any use of AI tools must be explicitly declared by the student in an *AI Disclosure Statement* attached to the submitted assignment. The disclosure should include the following details:
  - The name of the tool
  - The tasks for which the tool was used (i.e., idea generation, proofreading, paraphrasing)
  - The components of the assignment that you contributed without AI assistance.
  - A brief reflection on the effectiveness (or non-effectiveness) of the tool.
- **Responsibility:** Students are responsible for any work produced with the help of such tools. Using AI tools to assist in assignments does not absolve students of the need to understand and be capable of explaining their work in its entirety. I reserve the right to ask you specific questions about assignment submissions if I suspect that an AI tool was used but not disclosed.
- **Consequences:** Failure to disclose the full extent of the use of AI tools for completing an assignment will result in a zero on the assignment, as well as an academic misconduct report that will become a part of your academic file.

***Bottom Line: If you think it might be wrong, don't do it. If you're unsure, ask Jacob and he will help guide you in the right direction.***

## ***Turnitin***

Consistent with MSU's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student's work with multiple sources and detect the use of AI content generators. The tool compares each student's work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a "similarity score." The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student's work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.

Students should submit papers to Turnitin Assignments without identifying information included in the paper (e.g., name or student number), the system will automatically show this information to faculty in your course when viewing the submission, but the information will not be retained by Turnitin.

## **Student Accommodations**

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu).

Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation ("Accommodation Letter") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible, but will not be applied retroactively.

## **Mental Health and Wellness**

College students often experience issues that may interfere with academic success such as academic stress, sleep problems, juggling responsibilities, life events, relationship concerns, or feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, or depression. If you or a friend is struggling, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Helpful, effective resources are available on campus, and most are free of charge.

- If you are struggling with this class, please check-in during office hours or contact me by email ([jtf@msu.edu](mailto:jtf@msu.edu)).
- Check-in with your academic advisor if you are struggling in multiple classes, unsure whether you are making the most of your time at MSU, or unsure what academic resources are available at MSU.
- Access CAPS Services for new counseling and psychiatric services by scheduling a consultation.
- **CAPS is providing remote crisis services 24/7/365. Students can call us at 517-355-8270 and press "1" at the prompt to speak with a crisis counselor.** Other prompt options are available for those not in crisis.
- Visit [caps.msu.edu](http://caps.msu.edu) for additional information and resources.

## **Change Statement**

Please note that I reserve the right to change course policies, scheduling, assignments, or other content in this syllabus at any time.

## **Key Dates**

---

*Note that these dates may change as needed to accommodate unforeseen circumstances or other schedule changes. As the semester progresses, please refer to the Key Dates listed on D2L for the most updated information.*

Quiz 1	1/26
-----	
Quiz 2	2/9
-----	
Discussion 1	3/7
-----	
Quiz 3	3/8
-----	
Quiz 4	3/22
-----	
Quiz 5	4/5
-----	
Discussion 2	4/18
-----	
Quiz 6	4/19
-----	