



COMM 313: Communication and Mass Media 4 Units

Summer 2021 – T/TH – 9:30 am–1:40 pm PT

Section: 20499

Location: ONLINE (Zoom link accessible via Blackboard)

Instructor: Olivia González

Office: Online (Zoom)

Office Hours: Thursdays 2-3 pm PT, and by appointment

Contact Info: oagonzal@usc.edu

Land Acknowledgement: The University of Southern California’s (USC) University Park campus is located on the traditional land and unceded territory of the Tongva People (further information available at <https://dornsife.usc.edu/hist/land-acknowledgement/>). You can visit <https://mila.ss.ucla.edu/> to learn about the history of, and read stories shared by, Indigenous communities in Los Angeles. To learn about the Indigenous land on which your remote learning location resides, you can visit <https://native-land.ca>. To learn about the Land Back movement, and the need for institutions of higher learning to return institutional land to the stewardship of Indigenous communities, you can read this [policy and practice brief](#) and this [article](#).

Labor Acknowledgement: Many thanks to Rossier instructors Dr. Tatiana Melguizo and Aireale Rodgers, after whose EDUC 650 syllabus these land and labor acknowledgements were modeled, and to Annenberg doctoral student Jessica Hatrick, who has contributed to the development of this course.

I. Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to key theories and empirical research in mass communication, with a specific focus on mass media’s influence on individuals and society. Students will learn about foundational theoretical perspectives and methods in media effects research, and how these can be used to study various types of media and inform policy. Students will also engage with questions around representation, identity, and power in mass media content and production, and cultivate their critical media literacy skills.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Understand key theories and empirical approaches in mass media research
- Recognize the cognitive, behavioral, affective, and physiological effects that mass media can have on audiences
- Practice applying mass communication theories and methods to historical and contemporary media examples
- Understand the impact of media narratives and media research on policy issues
- Develop critical media literacy knowledge and skills

III. Course Notes

Course information and materials will be posted on Blackboard. Please note that this syllabus may change based on student feedback, the progress of the class, events, and/or guest speaker availability. I

will communicate any syllabus and content changes in class and via Blackboard.

Remote learning resources and information about accessing and navigating Blackboard and Zoom can be found through USC Keep Teaching (<https://keep-teaching.usc.edu/students/student-toolkit/>) and the Annenberg Digital Lounge (<http://www.annenbergdl.org/>)

IV. Course Policies and Procedures

Creating a Respectful and Inclusive Digital Classroom Environment

Be respectful. Some of the topics that we discuss in this class may be sensitive. It is okay for you to disagree with me or with each other, but please do so respectfully. One of my goals is to make this class a place where we can explore topics that are at times difficult with respect, openness, and empathy for others who may not share your views or experiences. Our notion of respect in this classroom will follow Robert James Jr.'s (@SonOfBaldwin) belief that "We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist."

Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes that this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to connect you with resources.

Communication with Instructor

If you have any questions about the course, please reach out to me via email and/or attend office hours. I am available via email (oagonzal@usc.edu) Monday through Friday, from 9 am - 5 pm PT. I should reply to your emails within 48 hours. If I have not responded within that period, please resend your email.

Office hours will be held on Thursdays from 2 - 3 pm PT. If you cannot attend these office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment at an alternative time.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. USC students can apply to rent a laptop or internet hotspot from The Student Basic Needs department (<https://studentbasicneeds.usc.edu/resources/technology-assistance/>). Please check your laptop's camera and microphone capabilities and let me know about any technological questions or concerns that may arise.

Your active participation and attentive engagement will be an important part of this course. Please be mindful of your technology use and avoid utilizing laptops and other technologies for non-course purposes during class time. To create a connected learning community, you are encouraged to turn your camera on during each class session and to mute your microphone when you are not speaking. To reduce the potential for disruption, please ensure that you join our class sessions on time.

Synchronous Session Recording Notice

Live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard (including transcriptions). You will be advised before the recording begins, and can ask to pause the recording during the session if you are sharing personal information that you do not wish to be recorded.

Please remember that USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/files/2020/07/SCampus-Part-C-1.pdf>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

Accommodations

The Office of Disability Services and Programs (DSP) provides support and services for students with disabilities. Students seeking academic accommodations should register with DSP (<https://dsp.usc.edu>) and obtain a letter of verification for accommodations. Please share your letter with me as early in the term as possible.

The DSP office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am – 5:00 pm PT, and can be reached via phone (213-740-0776) or email (DSPFrontDesk@usc.edu).

Information about registering with DSP: <https://dsp.usc.edu/new-to-dsp/when-how-to-register/>

Information about remotely accessing accommodations: <https://dsp.usc.edu/coronavirus-update-students/>

V. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Sparks, G. G. (2015). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. (You can rent a print or digital copy of this text through the [USC Bookstore](#), [Cengage](#), [Amazon](#), [Google Books](#), or [Vital Source](#). If you need any assistance accessing a copy please let me know.)

Additional readings and course materials will be available on Blackboard.

VI. Assignment Descriptions, Assessments, and Submission Policy

Introduction Exercise (5%)

Due: Friday, May 21st

During our first class session, you will be asked to write a short reflection (~1–2 pages, double-spaced) on your mass media engagement (e.g., your mass media consumption, production, and/or dissemination practices) and your goals for this course (e.g., what you aim to learn, accomplish, and/or develop). You will be given time in class to complete and share this reflection.

Reaction Papers (25%; 5 total, worth 5% each)

Due: Tuesday June 1st, June 8th, June 15th, June 22nd, June 29th.

Throughout the term, you will write five (5) reaction papers in which you draw from course content to assess contemporary media content, practices, policies, or events. Reaction papers will vary in length from 1–3 pages (double-spaced). Additional instructions will be communicated in class and via Blackboard when each reaction paper is assigned.

Participation (15%)

You are highly encouraged to actively participate in class to help you thoughtfully engage with the course material. Forms of participation include: speaking up during class (e.g., to raise questions, to offer insights, to address/answer questions), engaging in class discussions and activities (e.g., short

surveys), and actively listening and taking notes. You are expected to come to class having read/watched/listened to the assigned materials, and will be evaluated on your preparedness and contributions to class discussions and activities.

You are expected to attend all of our course sessions, other than excused absences (e.g., illness, religious observance, university-sanctioned activities) or emergencies. If you are unable to attend a class session, you can complete an assignment engaging with the lecture materials to make-up your participation points (contact me via email for details on these make-up assignments). Please notify me of any absence(s) as soon in advance as possible.

Final Paper/Project (25%)

Due: Thursday, July 1

Over the course of the term, you will develop a paper or creative project that further explores and applies a mass communication theory or topic as it relates to your own interests. For example, if you decide to develop a paper, you might: draw from a theory/theories that we cover in class to analyze a piece or collection of media content; use one of the methodologies that we discuss to design a small-scale study; analyze debates around, or craft a critique of, a particular mass communication theory. These papers should be 5–7 pages, double-spaced. If you decide to develop a creative project, you might: craft a piece of art (e.g., painting, collage, drawing), creative writing (e.g., story, poetry), or media (e.g., video, digital zine) that explores a course concept or theme. If you decide to pursue a creative project, you will be asked to write a 2–3 page summary/explanation of your project.

You will have the opportunity to iteratively develop this paper/project through completing, and receiving feedback on, three related assignments: the Proposal, the Progress Report, and the Presentation (described below).

Paper/Project Proposal (5%)

Due: Friday, June 4th

For this assignment, you will be asked to begin brainstorming/planning your final paper/project. Specifically, using at least one page (double-spaced), you will be asked to describe:

- The theories/topics that you are interested in exploring
- The anticipated goal/purpose of your paper/project
- The format you are interested in/anticipate using (e.g., paper, creative writing, piece of art or media, etc.)
- A rough timeline outlining the steps you anticipate taking to complete the paper/project

Paper/Project Progress Report (15%)

Due: Friday, June 18th

For this assignment, you will create a 3–4 page (double-spaced) document detailing, and demonstrating your progress on, your final paper or project. Specifically, this paper should include an introduction in which you provide an overview of your paper/project, a literature review in which you discuss the central mass media theory/concept and scholarship that you are engaging with for this work, and a description of the approach that you are using to apply that theory/concept and scholarship in practice (in other words, describe how are you exploring, building upon, illustrating, or contributing to your selected theory/concept/scholarship through your specific paper or project.).

Paper/Project Presentation (10%)*Due: Thursday, June 24th*

You will deliver a 5–7 minute presentation sharing your paper/project with the class. This presentation—which is scheduled one week before your final paper/project is due—is intended to provide you with the opportunity to receive feedback from both your peers and professor that you can incorporate into your final submission. Additional details about this assignment will be communicated in class and via Blackboard.

Extra Credit (1%)

There will be opportunities to earn extra credit throughout the term. Examples of extra credit assignments may include attending a virtual event and writing a short reflection, or analyzing a piece of media. Details about these assignments and their respective deadlines will be discussed in class and communicated via Blackboard.

Assignment Submission Policy

Written assignments must be submitted via Blackboard by 11:59 pm PT on the due date (unless otherwise specified in the assignment instructions). If you encounter any technical difficulties submitting your assignment, please email it to me (oagonzal@usc.edu).

If circumstances arise that prevent you from completing an assignment before its specified deadline, please let me know as soon as possible. Unless we have discussed and agreed upon an alternative due date, late submissions will receive a 10% grade deduction for each day that they are late.

Written assignments should be double-spaced, use 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font, and follow APA style (APA resource: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/).

VII. Grading**Breakdown of Grade**

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Introduction Exercise (In-Class)	20	5%
Reaction Papers (5 total, worth 5% each)	100	25%
Participation	60	15%
Paper/Project Proposal	20	5%
Paper/Project Progress Report	60	15%
Paper/Project Presentation	40	10%
Final Paper/Project	100	25%
TOTAL	400	100%

Grading Scale

93 to 100%: A	80% to 82.9%: B-	67% to 69.9%: D+
90% to 92.9%: A-	77% to 79.9%: C+	63% to 66.9%: D
87% to 89.9%: B+	73% to 76.9%: C	60% to 62.9%: D-
83% to 86.9%: B	70% to 72.9%: C-	0% to 59.9%: F

Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.

Grading Timeline

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments and exams. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments and post grades within one week after the due date. Scores for all assignments will be regularly updated on Blackboard. You are responsible for notifying me **within one (1) week** of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. Moreover, you only have this period of time to contest a score on an assignment. If you fail to inquire/notify me of any discrepancy, missing score, or contest a score within one week of the date the score is posted, no further changes will be made.

IX. Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Mass Communication and Media Effects

- Thursday, 5/20 Course Overview
- Readings:** 1) Neuendorf, K.A., & Jeffres, L. W. (2017). Media effects: Accounts, nature, and history of. *Communication Theory*, 21. **Read the Introduction only (pages 1–2).**
- 2) Renken, E. (2020). How stories connect and persuade us: Unleashing the brain power of narrative. *NPR*.

Week 2: Scientific and Humanistic Approaches in Mass Media Research

- Tuesday, 5/25 Historical Overview, Scientific Methods
- Readings:** 1) Neuendorf, K.A., & Jeffres, L. W. (2017). Media effects: Accounts, nature, and history of. *Communication Theory*, 21(2011). **Read pages 2–10.**
- 2) Sparks (2015). Scientific methods in media effects research (Chapter 2). [CW: mentions of gun violence on page 26; discussions of PTSD on pages 32–34 and 39; weight-stigmatizing language on pages 32, 36, and 39–41].
- Thursday, 5/27 Humanistic Methods
- Readings:** 1) University of Minnesota. (2016). Methods of researching media effects (Section 2.2).
- 2) Jensen, K. B. (2002). Introduction: The qualitative turn. In K. B. Jensen, & N. W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (pp. 1–11).
- 3) Jensen, K. B. (2002). Reception analysis: Mass communication as the social production of meaning. In K. B. Jensen, & N. W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (pp. 135–148).

Week 3: Understanding Audiences & Media Engagement

- Tuesday, 6/1 Uses and Gratifications, Parasocial Relationships
- Readings:** 1) Sparks, G. G. (2015). Time spent with mass media: Reasons and consequences (Chapter 4). **Read pages 76–86.** [CW: discussions of substance abuse, addiction on pages 78–80 and 83].
- 2) Sparks, G. G. (2015). Media that stir emotions (Chapter 7). **Read pages 163 – 171, 174 – 178, 180 – 186.** [CW: discussions of anxiety and depression on pages 171 and 182–185.]
- 3) Grose, J. (2021, May 5). When grown-ups have imaginary friends. *The New York Times*.
- Thursday, 6/3 Identity and Relationship Formation, Negotiation
- Readings:** 1) Sparks, G. G. (2015). The impact of new media technologies (Chapter 11). **Read pages 279 – 292.**

2) Manago, A. M. (2015). Media and the development of identity. In R. Scott & S. Kosslyn (Eds.), *Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 1–14). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Week 4: Media Representation, Production, and the Politics of Difference

Tuesday, 6/8 On-screen representation, stereotypes and their effects
Readings: 1) Ross, T. (2019). Media and stereotypes. In S. Ratuva (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity* (pp. 397–413). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. **Read the Abstract, Introduction, and Media Effects sections (pages 397–399 and 405–406).**
 2) Sink, A., & Mastro, D. (2017). Depictions of gender on primetime television: A quantitative content analysis. *Mass Communication and Society*, 20(1), 3–22. [CW: references to sexual harassment and violence on pages 4, 7, and 19.]
 3) “Why identity matters” by The Critical Media Project

Thursday, 6/10 Behind-the-scenes representation; bringing mediated stories to life
Guest Lecture: Lauren Sowa
Readings: 1) Edwards, E. B. & Esposito, J. (2020). *Intersectional analysis as a method to analyze popular culture: Clarity in the matrix*. **Read pages 1–20.**

Week 5: Investigating Cognitive and Behavioral Effects

Tuesday, 6/15 Mass Media and Violence
Readings: 1) Sparks, G. G. (2015). Effects of media violence (Chapter 5). **Read pages 100–118, 122–130.** [CW: discussions of violence, abuse, homicide, death, SA.]
 2) Jones, G. (2002). *Killing monsters: Why children need fantasy, super heroes, and make-believe violence*. **Read pages 23–27; 29–36; and 40–44.**

Thursday, 6/17 Narrative Persuasion and Entertainment Education
Readings: 1) Sparks, G. G. (2015). Persuasive effects of the media (Chapter 8). [CW: reference to addiction on page 189; mentions of SA on pages 191 and 200; references to death on pages 194, 207, and 216; mention of depression on page 220.]
 2) Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a theory of entertainment persuasion: Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education messages. *Communication Theory*, 18, 407-425. [CW: mention of DV and SA on page 407.]

Week 6: Mass Media and Social Movements

Tuesday, 6/22 **Guest Speaker:** Jessica Hatrick, doctoral student studying higher education student activism
Readings: 1) Fleming, C., & Morris, A. (2015). Theorizing ethnic and racial

movements in the global age: Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.), 1(1), 105–126.

2) Bonilla, Y. & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *American Ethnology*, 42(1), 4–17. [CW: discussions of state-sanctioned and white supremacist vigilante violence.]

Thursday, 6/24

Final Presentations

Week 7: The Future of Media Effects Research

Tuesday, 6/29

Readings: 1) Sparks, G. G. (2015). The impact of new media technologies (Chapter 11). **Read pages 293–300.**

2) Neuman, W. R. (2018). The paradox of the paradigm: An important gap in media effects research. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 369–379.

Thursday, 7/1

Due: Final Paper/Project

X. Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school’s policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault,

non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund and Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities. Apply [here](#).

The Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund is available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. Apply [here](#).