

Instructor: Carmen M. Lee, PhD

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Spring 2025 – Mon. & Wed., 3:30-4:50 p.m.

Section: 20500R

Location: [ANN L101](#)

Course Description

This course provides an empirical examination of the impact of mass media on individuals and society. It begins with an overview of the history of media effects research, highlighting key paradigm shifts and their implications for understanding how mass media influences individuals. The course then explores major theoretical perspectives (e.g., priming theory and social cognitive theory) and the methods used to test media effects (e.g., surveys and experiments). A significant portion of the course will focus on the intended and unintended effects of various types of media content on individuals and society.

Student Learning Outcomes

The primary objective of this course is to provide an extensive examination of the effects of the mass media. By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- **Discuss** media effects theories and how they help explain research findings;
- **Explain** how mass media effects are studied;
- **Identify** and critically **reflect** on the biases inherent in media;
- **Illustrate** how media selection and avoidance habits influence individuals on a cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral level;
- **Apply** empirically derived knowledge to everyday media situations;
- **Explain** how media effects research can be used to inform policy issues
- **Identify** ongoing ‘unknowns’ within the discipline and propose potential solutions to these issues.

This course has no prerequisites, co-requisites, or concurrent enrollment requirements.

Brightspace Learning Management System

USC transitioned to a new online platform called Brightspace. To access it, visit the [Brightspace login page](#) or find it on [myUSC](#), then log in using your USC NetID. We recommend downloading the Brightspace Pulse mobile app from the [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#). Brightspace offers an enhanced learning experience with detailed class progress reports and a consolidated view of assignment due dates. For additional support, refer to the [Brightspace Student Tutorials](#), call the technical support line at 888-895-2812, or email usc@d2l.com.

Required Readings/Materials

Sparks, G. G. (2016). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (5th ed.). Cengage Learning [on **Brightspace**].

Additional required readings/course materials will be available on **Brightspace** (B).

Course Requirements

1. Course Participation & Community

Your voice matters in this course! Active participation enriches everyone’s learning experience and drives meaningful discussions. Students are expected to read assigned materials or watch videos before class, come prepared with insights and questions, and actively engage in discussions and activities. Participation also involves attending office hours or scheduling appointments, emailing about real-world applications, and using Brightspace resources. Regular attendance is essential for academic success. If you miss a class, catch up by reading the material, getting notes from classmates, and seeking clarification from the instructor, as lecture notes or slides are not provided.

USC policy indicates that “no portion of the grade may be awarded for class attendance, but non-attendance can be the basis for lowering the grade, when clearly stated on the syllabus” (UCOC, March 2019). If students miss more than six classes, their final course grade may be lowered (e.g., from B+ to B, B to B-, etc.). A more detailed discussion of course participation can be found in the 'Assignments' module on Brightspace. Course participation is worth 10% of your final grade.

2. Exams

Two closed-book, closed-note exams will evaluate your grasp of course concepts. Students must bring a laptop or tablet to complete the exam in our classroom, as these exams are in-person. Although the exams are not cumulative, course concepts naturally build on one another throughout the semester. Both lecture material and assigned course readings will be included in the exam; therefore, paying attention to lecture content and thoroughly understanding all assigned readings is essential. The exams consist of true/false and multiple-choice questions. Each exam is worth 80 points, accounting for 40% of your final grade.

There are no make-up exams allowed. In the rare event that an *extreme* emergency arises (e.g., you were in the hospital or a death in your family), you must inform your instructor before the scheduled exam time. If your excuse falls within the spectrum of an extreme emergency, we will work toward a solution. Exam I will be held on March 03, 2025, and Exam II on April 30, 2025.

3. Case Studies

Case studies are detailed examinations of specific situations, events, or phenomena that allow us to understand complex issues in real-world contexts. In this course, a case study is an in-depth examination of how specific media content or platforms influence individuals or society, exploring the relationship between media exposure and changes in cognition, attitudes, emotions, or behavior. The case study approach allows you to demonstrate your understanding of media effects at multiple levels while developing critical thinking and analytical skills. **A more detailed description can be found under the ‘Assignments’ module on Brightspace.**

Media Impact Analysis (25%; 100 points). A 4-5 page analysis examining how media content or platforms influence individual cognition, attitudes, and/or behavior. You will select and analyze a real-world case demonstrating micro-level media effects, applying course theories and empirical evidence to understand the relationship between media exposure and individual outcomes. **Due: Fri., March 28, 2025 (no later than 5:00 p.m.)**

Media Policy Analysis (25%; 100 points) A 4-5 page analysis of an existing media policy that demonstrates how research informs and shapes policy decisions affecting society. You will critically evaluate the policy's effectiveness, analyze its societal implications, and propose evidence-based recommendations for improvement. **Due: Fri., May 9, 2025 (no later than 5:00 p.m.)**

Late Submissions

Assignments should be submitted by the dates listed in the syllabus unless communicated otherwise. I understand life can be unpredictable. If you face unforeseen and compelling circumstances preventing timely submission, such as health emergencies or personal crises, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. Assignments submitted after the deadline, without prior discussion, will receive a 5% penalty for each day they are late. I will do my best to accommodate genuine challenges. Always keep me informed.

Assignment Feedback & Grade Inquiries Policy

I am committed to providing timely feedback on your work and will try to grade and post scores within 10-14 days of submission. Please monitor Brightspace for updates. If you notice an error or believe a mistake has been made, inform me within one week (7 days) of the grade posting. To discuss your grade, write a brief explanation of your concerns and email it to me. This process creates a formal record and allows you to present a reasoned case for review. If no inquiries are made within the one-week window, I will assume you agree with the grade, and no further changes will be entertained.

Grading Standards

You will be assessed on the following requirements.

<u>Requirements</u>	<u>% Final Grade</u>	<u>Point Equivalent</u>	<u>Date Due</u>
Course Participation	10%	40	<i>weekly</i>
Exams (2)	40%	160	03/03 & 04/30
Case Studies			
Micro-Level: Media Impact Analysis	25%	100	03/28
Macro-Level: Media Policy Analysis	25%	100	05/09
100%		400 pts. possible	

The following scale will be used to assign final course grades.

<u>Points</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Grade</u>
376-400	94-100	A	292-307	73-76	C
360-375	90-93	A-	280-291	70-72	C-
348-359	87-89	B+	268-279	67-69	D+
332-347	83-86	B	252-267	63-66	D
320-331	80-82	B-	240-251	60-62	D-
308-319	77-79	C+	0-239	≤ 59	F

NOTE: Per USC policy, “No student is allowed to re-take a final examination or do extra work in a course after the semester has ended to improve his or her [or their] grade.”

What does a letter grade mean?

Enrollment in this course does not mean you earned an “A” in this course. Doing the bare minimum is not A-level work. The description of letter grades is below.

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates <i>extraordinarily</i> 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.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity at Annenberg. The School of Communication is committed 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 ([USC Catalogue 2024-2025](#)).

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 or Learning Lab without the approval of the instructor.

Academic Integrity at USC. The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university’s mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other academic misconduct violations include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has far-reaching consequences and is considered a serious offense against the university. It could result in failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity, see the student handbook, the Office of Academic Integrity’s website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Generators. This course has a generative AI policy to acknowledge that technology, including AI, can play a supportive role in the learning and feedback process. The course policy allows using AI tools for assignments when explicitly permitted and under certain conditions. You should be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

Turnitin.com. Students agree that by taking this course, required papers might be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted documents will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely to detect plagiarism of such papers. You may submit your documents so that no personal identifying information is included.

Students and Disability Accommodations. USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) determines appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible, as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Religious Observances. Religious holidays and cultural practices are important parts of one’s identity—they reflect diversity. As your instructor, I am committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, please review the course requirements for any potential conflicts with your religious observances. If you anticipate such conflicts, contact me within the first two weeks of class. We will work together to make reasonable adjustments to ensure participation without disrupting your religious practices.

Student-Athlete Travel Excuse Letters. Before a university-sponsored away competition, Student-Athletes are responsible for providing their Instructor with a Competition Excuse Letter (from their academic counselor) for the classes missed while on the road (i.e., excused absence). Without faculty approval, these arrangements do not relieve student-athletes from submitting all assignments on time.

Computer Access. USC Annenberg has a policy requiring all students enrolled in an Annenberg class to bring their laptop device to campus. Windows OS and Mac OS software necessary to complete assignments in this course are available on computers in the following USC Computing Centers: King Hall (KOH 206) and Waite Phillips Hall (WPH B34).

Laptops and Electronic Devices: Laptops and tablets are permitted in class for course-related activities (e.g., note-taking). Other electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, iPods, headphones/headsets, etc.) must be turned off or silenced and stored away. If you need to use your phone, please step outside the classroom. Excessive non-course-related use of electronics that disrupts the learning environment may lead to adjustments in your privileges to use devices during class to help maintain focus and engagement.

Laptops or tablets are mandatory on exam days. Please ensure your device is fully charged before class. All currently enrolled students with a valid ID are eligible for the USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program. You are responsible for ensuring you have access to a device capable of performing the necessary functions for the course.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recording Policies. USC has policies that prohibit recording and distributing any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Students may only record or distribute a portion of a classroom lecture, discussion, or review with the course instructor's prior and explicit written permission. The unauthorized use of any device to audiotape, photograph, video-record, or otherwise reproduce (in whole or in part) lectures, course notes, or teaching materials provided by the instructor is forbidden. Recording a university class without the instructor's express permission and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students and the instructor (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, p. 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property based on university classes or lectures without the instructor's express permission for purposes other than individual or group study is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information that had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, p. 13).

Classroom Compartment. Students are expected to engage in behaviors that enhance the learning environment. The instructor is responsible for optimizing learning for individual students and all students in the course. Thus, disruptive behaviors will not be tolerated. These behaviors include not listening, pretending to listen while secretly texting or using electronic devices, speaking without being recognized, making fun of, or otherwise criticizing/disparaging the remarks of another person. Disruptive behaviors may adversely affect your overall course grade.

Learning Experience Evaluations. Learning Experience Evaluations will be conducted on the last day of the class. This will be your opportunity to provide feedback about your learning experience in the class. This feedback helps the instructor determine whether students have the intended learning experiences for the class. It is important to remember that the learning process is collaborative and requires significant effort from the instructor, individual students, and the class. Students should provide a thoughtful assessment of their experience and their own effort, with comments focused on specific aspects of instruction or the course. Comments on the personal characteristics of the instructor are not appropriate and will not be considered. All students should complete the evaluation for this feedback to be as comprehensive as possible.

Email Policy. Email *can* help address questions or concerns between classes, office hours, or appointments. While emails are welcome, attending lectures and office hours often leads to a more comprehensive understanding and immediate clarification. Please be clear in your emails to ensure efficient responses. I am committed to responding within 24 hours on weekdays and 36 hours on weekends. If you are still waiting to receive a reply within the expected timeframe, please send a gentle follow-up email or approach me before or after class. I'm here to support your learning journey, but sometimes emails can get overlooked or lost.

Support Systems

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate](#)- and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

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.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full tuition expenses but serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information as possible in their applications and contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources.

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

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

Annenberg Embedded Counseling

Annenberg has its own Counseling and Mental Health location (ASC 304). Students can schedule in-person or telehealth appointments through the Student Health [MySHR](#) or call (213) 740-9355.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on-call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on-call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500

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

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including how 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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on-call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health-promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Course Schedule*

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Due
Week 1	Jan. 13	Introduction to Course & Study of Media Effects	Syllabus	
	Jan. 15	Understanding Media Effects: Types and Variations	^T Sparks (Chpt. 3, pp. 72-73 <u>only</u>); ^B Potter (Chpt. 3, pp. 33-49)	
Week 2	Jan. 20	No Class – Martin Luther King Jr. Day		
	Jan. 22	Historical Overview of Media Effects Research	^T Sparks (Chpt. 3, pp. 54-72 <u>only</u>)	
Week 3	Jan. 27	Scientific Study of Media Effects	^T Sparks (Chpt. 1)	
	Jan. 29	Scientific Study (cont.)	^T Sparks (Chpt. 2)	
(Jan 31: Last day to add, drop w/out mark of “W” and full refund; Change enrollment to P/NP)				
Week 4	Feb. 03	Audiences: Gratification, Identification, Interaction	^B Nielsen (pp. 19-31 <u>only</u>)	
	Feb. 05	Audiences (cont.).	^T Sparks (Chpt. 4)	
Week 5	Feb. 10	<i>Consuming Kids: Commercialization of Childhood</i>	-----	
	Feb. 12	Unique Audiences: Children and Adolescents	^T Sparks (Chpt. 7); ^B Potter (Chpt. 5, pp. 55-70)	
Week 6	Feb. 17	No Class – President’s Day		
	Feb. 19	Violence in the Media: Content and Its Influence	^T Sparks (Chpt. 5)	
Week 7	Feb. 24	Violence in the Media (cont.)	-----	
	Feb. 26	Violence (cont.) & Exam II Review	^B Huesmann & Taylor (2006)	
(Feb. 28: Last day to drop w/out mark of “W” on transcript; Change P/NP to letter grade)				
Week 8	Mar. 03	Exam I		
	Mar. 05	Gender Stereotypes and their Impact	^T Sparks (Chpt. 10, pp. 253-265)	
Week 9	Mar. 10	Gender (cont.)	^B Santonico et al. (2023)	
	Mar. 12	Sexuality and the Media (cont.)	^T Sparks (Chpt. 6)	
March 16 - 23 Spring Recess				
Week 10	Mar. 24	Sexuality and the Media (cont.)		
	Mar. 26	Race/Ethnicity Stereotypes and their Impact	^T Sparks (Chpt. 10, pp. 266-278)	Case Study #1 [Fri. 03/28]
Week 11	Mar. 31	Race/Ethnicity (cont.)		
	Apr. 02	Disability Representation & Social Impact	^B Nielsen (2022)	
Week 12	Apr. 07	Mass Media and Health: Substances & Campaigns	^T Sparks (Chpt. 8)	
	Apr. 09	Mass Media and Health (cont.)		
(Apr. 11: Last day to drop a class w/ mark of “W”)				
Week 13	Apr. 14	News Media Influence: Perception and Behavior	^T Sparks (Chpt. 9)	
	Apr. 16	News Media (cont.)		
Week 14	Apr. 21	Diffusion of Innovations through Media Channels	^B Nsereka (2021)	
	Apr. 23	Diffusion (cont.)	^T Sparks (Chpt. 11)	
Week 15	Apr. 28	Exam II Review & Course-Wrap Up		
	Apr. 30	Exam II		
FINALS WEEK		Friday, May 9, 2025	Case Study #2 due [by 5:00 p.m.]	

***Course schedule/content subject to change at Instructor discretion**

^TTextbook (Sparks)

^BBrightspace Reading