



Course Syllabus: Mass Media & Society
Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts
MCOM 1233 Section 201
Spring 2025 MWF 10:00-10:50 | Fain Fine Arts Center D202

Contact Information

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Office: Fain Fine Arts Center D203

Office hours: Mon. & Wed. 3-4 | Tues. & Thurs. 3:30-5

and by appointment—just ask and we will find a time that works for you!
And by "stopping by"—I am in my office a lot!

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- NOTE: If you make the email subject line look like this:
MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY: Subject of Message
it will be easier for me to see the email sooner and get back to you sooner.
Here is an example email subject line:
MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY: Journal article question
or even
MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY: JOURNAL ARTICLE QUESTION
 - Please do not forget to include your name in the body of the email so that I know who the email is from.
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Course Description

Prerequisite: none

The mass media is profoundly affecting how we live our lives. It affects the way we work, play, and interact with other people. There are (at least) two sides to almost all of the questions we will consider in this course. We will spend much of our class time discussing the issues and exploring different points of view.

We will survey the mass communication process and mass media, including print media, radio/recording, television, Internet, and emerging media. We will learn about media issues, societal effects, trends, and media literacy.

Learning Outcomes

This course is a requirement for students majoring in mass communication. This course also satisfies MSU's Cultural & Global Understanding core curriculum requirement. Students of any major can benefit from this course because it will help them become better-informed media consumers.

- This course is designed to give you an overview of how the mass media operate and their place in American society.
- You will briefly examine career opportunities in mass communication.
- You will examine and analyze contemporary issues facing the mass media.

As this is a survey course, emphasis will be placed on gaining a broad, general understanding of the mass media, and it will be difficult to study specific topics in depth. However, I encourage you to approach me about suggestions for more in-depth readings and/or projects on various topics.

We will utilize attention, flexibility, experimentation, and critical thinking, abilities that will serve you well beyond this class.

The knowledge, attitudes, and skills you gain by successfully completing this course can help you in almost any career. Becoming a life-long learner and analyzing information you receive will be essential to your success as a professional and can also greatly impact your personal life and your life as a citizen of the world.

Recommended Textbook

Mass communication: Living in a media world (8th edition) by Ralph E. Hanson

Teaching and Learning Philosophy

A class is a process, an independent organism with its own goals and dynamics. It is always something more than even the most imaginative lesson plan can predict. --Thomas P. Kasulis

We are starting with this syllabus and tentative schedule. Our class will evolve based on our work together, driven by curiosity, experimentation, and discovery.

It is important to me that you are able to show up fully to our work together.

- As we collaborate, I trust you to make decisions about what feels safe for you, and we all want you to do what you can to keep others safe.
- I encourage you to connect with me and your classmates. This is a community, and there are lots of different ways we can each contribute.
- I look forward to getting to know you better, as a student, a creator, and a person.

Core Values

In this class we will strive to uphold the same shared core values that unite all Midwestern State University faculty, staff, and students:

- Engage others with respect, empathy, and joy (people-centered)
- Cultivating a diverse and inclusive campus environment (community)
- Always doing the right thing (integrity)
- Adopting innovative ideas to pioneer new paths (visionary)
- Valuing relationships with broader communities (connections)

See the [Values Journey web page](#) for more details.

I consider the classroom to be a place where ALL students will be treated with respect as human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religious affiliation, political beliefs, age, and other cultural identities and material circumstances. Moreover, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided we can agree to disagree.

Think of your peers as an audience for your work, as well as a source for feedback and encouragement. Draw on their expertise. This class will be as much (or more) about you teaching yourselves and each other as it is about me teaching you. Because of this, it's important that we create a community of belonging that is respectful of our differences and offers space for the boundary-setting necessary for positive relationships to form.

We are all responsible to ensure the classroom is a safe environment. This includes not posting classroom activities or materials to social media without the consent of everyone involved.

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Overarching principle:

In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original.

-- from the University of Iowa

Creators should be able to control what we create; appropriating others' ideas or labor without credit or attribution is theft; no creators want their stuff stolen. The entire scholarly enterprise depends upon an adherence to those norms. Citation and attribution are also important ways to ensure that scholarly discourse is open to all voices and does not silence marginalized or minority perspectives. In that regard, plagiarism can be a form of censorship, in that it removes someone's voice (and by extension, scholarly identity) from the conversation.
-- by Kevin Gannon in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Plagiarism is (1) the use of source material of other persons (either published or unpublished, including the Internet) without following the accepted techniques of giving credit or (2) the submission for credit of work not of the individuals to whom credit is given. If a student in the class is caught plagiarizing, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

The Student Creed developed and adopted by the MSU Student Government reinforces the discouragement of plagiarism and other unethical behaviors. The first statement of the Creed reads, "As an MSU student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else to do so." Plagiarism is lying, cheating, and stealing.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

ChatGPT and other AI tools can help to free up bandwidth in our currently traumatized and overloaded brains.

Using AI tools responsibly is an emerging skill that involves awareness of AI's capabilities and limitations.

Developing this awareness can support our using AI tools purposefully and ethically. Here are a few questions to help:

What is ChatGPT/AI good for?

What is it not good for?

What can we trust?

How can we check?

Purpose of AI in this Course

- AI tools, such as ChatGPT or generative design platforms, may be used to support learning by brainstorming ideas, generating suggestions, or assisting in problem-solving.
- AI is intended to **augment**, not replace, your learning process or creative work.

Permissible Uses of AI

- AI tools should be used wisely and reflectively with an aim to deepen understanding of subject matter; examples include:
 - Drafting and brainstorming ideas for projects or assignments
 - Getting help debugging your HTML code
- In all cases, you must attribute (see “Attribution and Transparency” section and the “Appendix” sections below)

Prohibited Uses of AI

- Submitting AI-generated work as your own without meaningful modification and attribution.
- Using AI tools to complete assignments in ways that bypass the learning objectives of the course (e.g., having an AI write essays or code for you).
- Using AI tools to plagiarize, fabricate information, or violate academic integrity policies.

Attribution and Transparency

- All ideas that are not originally one's own have a source and that source must be attributed. Please be aware that generative AI tends to invent sources. **You have a two-fold obligation:**
 - You need to document the process
 - You need to find and attribute the original source of the idea, identify the location within the source, and provide a working link to the location.
- Besides inventing sources, generative AI may invent facts as well. Verification is your responsibility: submitting factually wrong material is an academic offence, and whether the source of the error is you or the AI makes no difference. You need to check the facts, the quotes, the arguments, the logic, and document what you did to validate your material.
- This course assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and using artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT.
- If you are unsure about whether something may be plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty, please reach out to me to discuss it as soon as possible. Any allegation of academic dishonesty may be referred to Dean of Students Office, for possible review. Academic dishonesty is inclusive of the full range of academic penalties imposable by the university but not limited to penalties including a grade penalty and or dismissal from the course upon the *first* finding.

When Using AI Tools, Include an Appendix Showing:

- (1) The entire exchange, highlighting the most relevant sections
 - (2) A description of precisely which AI tools were used (e.g. ChatGPT private subscription version or DALL-E free version)
 - (3) An explanation of how the AI tools were used (e.g. to generate ideas, conduct research, etc.)
 - (4) An account of why AI tools were used (e.g. to save time, to surmount writer's block, to stimulate thinking, to handle mounting stress, to clarify writing, to translate text, to experiment for fun, etc.).
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Encouraged Practices

- Critically evaluate AI-generated suggestions, refining and personalizing the output to reflect your own understanding and creativity.
- Develop an awareness of AI limitations, such as its inability to verify facts or provide nuanced insights.
- Do not become overly dependent on ChatGPT for assignments or learning. Use it as a supplement, not a replacement, for your effort and understanding.

Consequences for Misuse

- Misuse of AI tools, including any prohibited uses listed above, will result in consequences consistent with the institution's academic integrity policy.

Support and Resources

- The instructor will provide guidance on how to use AI tools effectively and ethically throughout the semester.
- Students unsure about whether an AI tool is appropriate for a task should consult the instructor before proceeding.

In Other Words

- Don't type a question into ChatGPT/AI, exactly copy and paste its response, and turn it in/represent it as our own.
- Evaluate AI-generated text critically.
- Fact-check claims and watch for factual errors or omissions; we are responsible for content we submit.
- Don't use ChatGPT/AI on an assignment without disclosing in the assignment that we have done so and how we have done so.
- For example, you might describe using a tool to help brainstorm ideas or check grammar. This promotes transparency.
- Focus prompts on clarifying our own thinking rather than outsourcing it. High-quality prompts elicit outputs that aid our learning and original analysis. Make sure to save the prompt language that we use, and include this language in your disclosure of AI use statement.

- If you are ever unclear, or if you are unsure about anything AI, please ask. Your asking will help us all with clarity and learning.
- Again, our focus is on using ChatGPT/AI in ways that are intentional, accurate, ethical, and useful.

I strongly endorse collaborative learning when it increases your ability to succeed in this class and when it enhances your education and learning.

As a general rule, if you do not understand what you are handing in, you are probably cheating. If you have given somebody the answer, you are probably cheating.

In order to help you draw the line, here are some examples of clear cases of cheating:

- Copying files from another person, source, or tool, including retyping their files, changing descriptive names, copying code without explicit citation from previously published works, etc.
- Allowing someone else to copy your code or written assignment, either in draft or final form.
- Getting help from a peer or AI tool which you do not acknowledge on your solution.
- Copying from another student during quiz. This includes receiving quiz-related information from a student who has already taken the quiz.

I'm assuming we won't have a problem in this regard but want to make sure that expectations are clear so that we can spend the semester learning things together—and not worrying about the origins of your work.

Telling the truth is important, and I want to support you in the ways that I can. I have a lot of respect for people who are honest about their mistakes even when it's difficult. It is much easier for current and past unethical situations to be handled in honest, non-judgmental conversations, and I hope you'll feel safe engaging in those with me if ever needed.

For instances in which we cannot agree, or are unsure of a norm, we'll consult the "University Policies and Procedures" section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please be aware that other classes may have different policies and that some may forbid AI use altogether.

Policies: Classroom/Conduct

You are expected to adhere to the Standards of Conduct as published in the [Student Handbook](#).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Grading

Our work together in this course will include reflecting on your own learning process and supporting the learning process of others. Final grades will be based on the following.

Table 1: Percent allocations.

<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Journal	30
Assignments and quizzes	40
Final exam	25
Professionalism	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 2: Grading scale.

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percent</i>
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	Less than 60

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage.

If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Class Participation and Attendance

This course will be a cooperative learning experience, a true intellectual community. You and your work are, in a very real sense, the primary texts for this course. In order for us to work together as a community, we all have to come prepared to participate. If you can't finish work for any reason, chat with me (and your collaborators) in advance.

Class meetings are our main opportunity to create knowledge together and practice the skills you are learning this semester. Your attendance is crucial to your and your peers' learning as everyone misses out on your contributions if you are not present. However, sometimes life happens.

Over the course of the semester you can miss 3 class sessions without penalty. Please note that this does not include the last day of class or the day that you are scheduled for a presentation. If any other days end up not being eligible, you will be notified ahead of time. Please email me as soon as you can if you know that you will be missing class or, in the case of an unexpected emergency, as soon as possible after missing class.

If you do not use these absences, then extra points will be added to your lowest assignment score when computing your final grade (i.e., extra credit).

If there are extenuating circumstances that require you to miss class repeatedly or for an extended period, please come and discuss this issue with me so I can assist in connecting you with the appropriate support.

Regarding arrival time: Punctuality helps us make the most of our class time together and shows respect for our learning community. Being late or leaving early can disrupt learning activities. If you arrive after we've started class activities or need to leave early:

- Brief tardiness (arriving shortly after class begins) = no penalty as long as this does not become a habit, but please enter quietly
- Significant tardiness or early departure = may be counted as a partial absence
- Missing a substantial portion of class = may be counted as a full absence

Additionally, our class meetings will include activities; they will not be straight lecture. The activities are designed to be interesting and to help you learn. These

activities will often have a credit/grade component to them. Therefore, your attendance and active participation will affect how much you learn and how well you do in the course.

I understand that sometimes delays are unavoidable. If you know you'll be late or need to leave early, please let me know in advance when possible. If you have ongoing schedule conflicts, come talk to me so we can work out a solution together.

If you miss class, you miss the chance to participate in your education and the education of others in class. Your peers are counting on you to be in class and to participate. *You are responsible for all material presented in every class period, whether present or not.*

Campus Closures

If campus is closed due to weather or other situations on a class day, our class will not meet.

Professionalism

1. You are in this class to prepare for the professional world. Treat this class like the professional world. Build habits that will support your professional success!
2. In the professional world, you do not pull out your phone for non-meeting activities (e.g., texting friends, getting on social media, etc.). If you do, there are consequences. Some of those consequences may be explicit and obvious. Others may not be obvious but can still be significant. The same goes for this course.

Again, build habits that will support your professional success; don't build habits that will get in the way of your professional success.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices

Electronic devices are welcome (encouraged) in class *to support learning*.

Two things to remember for this:

1. Please be mindful that electronic devices do not serve as a distraction to you or those around you.

Research on learning shows that unexpected noises and movement automatically divert and capture people's attention, which means you are affecting everyone's learning experience if your cell phone, pager, laptop, etc. makes noise or is visually distracting during class.

2. I want our classroom to be free to have an open discussion. It's hard to have an open discussion when you know you are being recorded for everyone to see forever. Therefore, no one is to use any recording devices or recording media during the class unless we all decide, as a class, that this is okay. If recording class is needed as a learning accommodation, please see me so that we can discuss privacy guidelines.

Accommodations

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information that needs sharing, or if you need special accommodations in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Please also contact [Disability Support Services](#) at 940-397-4140 in Clark Student Center, room 168, to document and coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities if you have not already done so.

I want to work together to make sure the course meets your needs. You do not need to divulge any personal information in order to have these conversations or to receive accommodations. I trust you. Learning is something we do together. And, of course, I will hold information you do share with me in confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

If you do not require accommodations due to a disability, understand that some of your fellow students might, and it is important to me that you do not make assumptions about where, when, or how they learn.

Privacy

Federal privacy law prohibits me from releasing information about students to certain parties outside of the university without the signed consent of the student.

Managing Stress

You may experience situations or challenges that can interfere with learning and interpersonal functioning including stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol and/or other drug use, concern for a friend or family member, loss, sleep difficulties, feeling hopeless or relationship problems.

An important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

There are numerous campus resources available to you including:

- [Psychology Clinic](#) (940-397-4791 or psychology.clinic@msutexas.edu)
- [MSU Counseling Center](#) (940-397-4618)
- [Student Wellness Center](#) (940-397-4206)
- [Online resources](#)
- [Self-help apps](#)
- [Additional mental-health resources](#)

If you are experiencing an emergency, call 911 or the MSU Police Department at 940-397-4239. If you or someone you know is in a domestic violence or sexual assault crisis situation and wants information on what to do, call the 24 Hour Crisis Hotline at 1-800-621-8504.

If you have outside circumstances that may affect your performance in this class – including but not limited to difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, inadequate housing, and family issues – please contact me if you are comfortable in doing so.

I may be able to refer you to on-campus resources that will help you address the situation. Two examples include:

- [Canan Food Security Program](#)
- [Mustangs Pantry](#)

Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.

Portfolio Requirement

Please note that all mass communication majors are required to submit a portfolio as part of their Internship course (Internship is a prerequisite to Senior Production, the mass communication capstone project course). The portfolio requirement is a part of MSU's reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The portfolio helps you to demonstrate communication competence through the written word and visual communication; two examples of each competency are required.

As you go through this and other classes, you are responsible for saving course work that could be included in your portfolio.

Please see me, your adviser, the department chair, or any mass communication faculty member for handouts with more information ("Mass Communication Portfolio Competencies" and "Mass Communication Portfolio FAQ"). These handouts are also available on our department web page.

Research and Creative Activity Opportunities at MSU

Enhancing Undergraduate Research Endeavors and Creative Activities (EURECA) is a program that provides opportunities for undergraduates to engage in high-quality research and creative activities with faculty. EURECA provides incentives and funding through a system that supports faculty and students engaged in collaborative research and creative works. For more information contact the Office of Undergraduate Research at (940) 397-6274 or by email at eureca@msutexas.edu. You can also stop by the UGR office located in the atrium of the Clark Student Center, room 161. Information and resources are also available at the [EURECA web page](#).

Undergraduate Research Opportunities and Summer Workshop (UGROW)

Like EURECA, UGROW provides opportunities for students to conduct research with faculty. However, the research occurs in the summer. For five weeks UGROW students experience the authenticity of scientific research as well as research and creative activities in art, music, theater education, business, health and social sciences, English, history, etc. in a highly interdisciplinary environment. Students work on projects of their choice and present their findings at the end of program and the MSU Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Forum. If you have any questions, call (940) 397-4253 or by email at ugrow@msutexas.edu. More information and resources are available at the [UGROW web page](#).

Council on Undergraduate Research

To support undergraduate research and creative activities, Midwestern State University holds an enhanced institutional membership with the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). This institutional membership includes unlimited memberships for any interested faculty, staff, and students. Students may find information on benefits and resources at the [CUR Student Resource Center web page](#).

Suggestions

- Attend class regularly.
- Remember I am available to help you. Ask for help immediately if you don't understand something. Waiting to "get it later" doesn't always work and could get you into trouble.

- Back up your work. Have two backups.
- Consider saving your work under different names literally each time you work on a project. It just takes one click and could save you lots of time and frustration.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Try to do work for this class ahead of time. This will give you some cushion in case you have problems.
- Sometimes things will go smoothly, other times they won't – the important thing is to have fun and practice thinking and working with both sides of our brains.
- This is *your* class; we can do (or try) almost anything you want; be creative!

NOTE: Please remember that we are starting with this syllabus and *tentative* schedule. Our class will evolve based on our work together, driven by curiosity, experimentation, and discovery. This means that there may be changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule.

By accepting this syllabus and staying enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand and accept the terms of this syllabus.

Topics/Tentative Schedule

Course topics support achieving our course objectives. Please note this is a TENTATIVE schedule. This schedule is likely to change.

- Week 1:* Introductions, building community
- Weeks 2, 3:* Media and culture/media literacy
- Week 4:* Media law and ethics
- Week 5:* Media law and ethics (online)
- Week 6:* Ownership and books
- Week 7:* News and audio
- Week 8:* Spring Break (no class)
- Weeks 9, 10:* Movies and television
- Weeks 11, 12:* Online media, social media, & video games
- Week 13:* Global media
- Weeks 14, 15:* Wrap up
- Week 16:* Finals week

Academic Calendar

Martin Luther King's Birthday observed: Monday, Jan. 20

Classes begin: Tuesday, Jan. 21

Final deadline for May graduates to file for graduation: Monday, Feb. 17

Spring Break: Sunday-Saturday, Mar. 9-15

Holiday Break: Thursday-Sunday, Apr. 17-20

Last day to drop with a grade of "W": 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Apr. 30

Last day of classes: Friday, May 9

Undergraduate commencement: Saturday, May 17