

COMM 201 Media Theory & Criticism
TR 230-345p
Corboy 105

Loyola University Chicago
School of Communication
Dr. Meghan Dougherty
Office hours: TR 100-200p
SOC 223D

Course Description

This course examines schools of thought surrounding the systematic operation and impact of media, particularly moving image media and sounds. Students will be introduced to the history of media theory, from the Frankfurt school to the public sphere, as well as to critical methods for designing, producing, and writing about media. Topics include truth and representation, design and impact, story and argument. Students will use different approaches to critique media objects with critical insights, conversations, essays, creative designs and by thinking through ethical contexts for media production, consumption and distribution.

Assignments

Quizzes (25%)

There will be five quizzes throughout the semester - each worth 5% of your final grade. Quizzes will be based on readings.

Media Object Selection Paper (25%)

Choose a media object to use all semester. Identify, describe, and justify your choice. Detailed instructions are posted in #assignments.

Media Criticism Paper (40%)

Write three critical papers applying critical theory to your Selected Media Object.

Presentation (10%)

Combine your three Criticism papers into one complete narrative, and present your Media Object to the class.

Schedule

I.
INTRODUCTION/MEDIA
CLASS MECHANICS, SLACK, SYLLABUS, EXAMPLES, BIG IDEAS

WEEK ONE

Plato, Allegory of the Cave

WEEK TWO

Hendy, Rewiring the Mind (five 15m radio essays)
The Ethereal Mind
The Cultivated Mind
The Anxious Mind
The Fallible Mind
The Superficial Mind

Class will not meet face-to-face. Use Slack instead.

Post comments on readings in #readingdisc: offer 1 comment, 1 question, and reply to 1 classmate.

Start thinking about your Media Object Selection Paper (see instructions posted in #assignments). Post your half-baked ideas in #help to get some feedback. For every post you make, give feedback to someone else.

WEEK THREE

Class will not meet face-to-face. Use Slack instead.

Write your Media Objects Selection Paper. Use

Post your completed paper in #assignments.

Paper Due Thursday 13 September

Your participation (or lack thereof) in Slack will be noted!

II.

Workshop

FEEDBACK, CRITIQUE, REVISE

WEEK FOUR

Proposal revision workshop Tuesday and Thursday

Bring your Media Object Justification to class Tuesday for feedback from classmates.

Come to class Thursday to revise your proposal and meet with the prof.

Participation in the workshop Tuesday, and individual meetings Thursday counts as Quiz 1

III.

Theory

CONCEPTS, FRAMEWORKS, WAYS OF KNOWING, PERCEPTION, SEMIOTICS, HOW DO MEDIA WORK?

WEEK FIVE

Quiz 2

McLuhan & Fiore, The Medium is the Message

Federman, What is the Meaning of The Medium is the Message?

Madrigal, The Triumph of Kodakery

WEEK SIX

Quiz 3

Berger, Ways of Seeing Chapter 1

Solnit, River of Shadows, Annihilation of Time and Space

Wilgus, What is a camera obscura

WEEK SEVEN

Quiz 4

Danesi, Messages, Signs, and Meanings (pgs. 3-21 + pgs. 87-92)

Hall, Encoding and Decoding

Readings due on Thursday this week. No class Tuesday for Mid-Semester Break.

IV.

CRITICISM

WHAT DO MEDIA SAY? IMPLICATIONS, POLITICS, ETHICS, ECONOMICS,
FORM AND FUNCTION, TRUTH, ECSTATIC TRUTH, FEMINISM,
REPRESENTATION, LABOR, WORK,

WEEK EIGHT

Ledford, Thanks for Not Shooting Me

Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others

WEEK NINE

Watkins & Emerson, Feminist Media Criticism and Feminist Media Practices

Minic, Feminist Media Theory and Activism: Different Worlds or Possible
Cooperation

Dunbar-Hester, "Free the Spectrum! Activist Encounters with Old and New
Technologies

Optional Opoku-Mensah, Marching On: African Feminist Media Studies

Optional Losh, Beyond Biometrics: Feminist media theory looks at Selfiecity

Due Thursday Week 9:

Paper 1: Critical Cultural Analysis of Media Object (representation)

WEEK TEN

Defining Characteristics of Political Economy Analysis

West, Manufacturing Consent: Why is it so difficult to wage a legal campaign against
sexual harrassment?

Hargattai, The Role of Expertise in Navigating Links of Influence

Explore theyrule.net

Optional Horkheimer & Adorno, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass
Deception

Due Thursday Week 10:

Paper 2: Feminist Media Analysis of Media Object (feminism)

WEEK ELEVEN

Postigo, The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money

Massanari, DIY Design: How crowdsourcing sites are challenging traditional graphic design practices

Terranova, Free Labor: Producing culture for the digital economy

Due Thursday Week 11:

Paper 3: Institutional Analysis of Media Object (political economy)

WEEK TWELVE

Quiz 5

Mack, Lexicon of Lies

Roscoe & Hight, Faking It: Factual discourse and the cultural placing of the documentary

Poppy, An Interview with Errol Morris

Herzog, On the Absolute, the Sublime, and the Ecstatic Truth

WEEK THIRTEEN

Thanksgiving Week. No class meetings Tuesday or Thursday.

V.

PRESENTATIONS

PRESENTATIONS, SHARING, SUMMARIZE, REVIEW

WEEK FOURTEEN

Presentations

Two sessions: one Tuesday and one Thursday. Attendance and participation on both days is required, and will be counted as part of your final grade.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Presentations

Policies

ATTENDANCE/LATENESS

Attendance counts. If you miss more than 25% of the class meetings (4 classes) without an authorized excuse you will automatically fail this class. At two unexcused absences, your participation grade will begin to drop by 1/2 a letter grade for each absence. Missed work cannot be made up or excused except in the case of severe illness, death in the family, or religious holiday - these absences must be documented if you'd like to make up missed work. Documentation for a university-authorized absence must be cleared with the professor in advance. Come to class on time. Coming in late disrupts the class, and you'll likely miss important information.

It is your responsibility to ask classmates for announcements you may have missed by arriving late. Arriving late repeatedly will bring down your participation grade.

ILLNESS

If you have, or think you have a cold or the flu (swine, bird or whatever) do not come to class. Do not come to class to tell me you are sick. Message me on Slack before class and contact the Wellness Center for advice - and get documentation! Ask a classmate for what you missed before you ask me.

DO NOT come back to class until you are fever-free for 24 hours!

PARTICIPATION

Attendance and lateness policies described above factor into your participation grade, and so does your contribution to the community of learning in our classroom. Your participation in class depends on quantity and quality of participation. In this class, you'll attend lectures, discuss, work in groups, and provide peer review feedback to classmates. Your positive and substantive contribution to each of these class elements is expected for a passing grade - doing the bare minimum will earn you a bare minimum grade. Your physical presence in the room is less than bare minimum participation; participation includes attendance, attention, and attitude as well as substantive contributions. Leaving early, texting, checking facebook, chatting, sleeping, eating meals, and doing other non-class related work are distractions to you, me, and your classmates and will bring down your participation grade. If you need to leave class early, please tell me before class starts and sit near the door.

CLASSROOM CITIZENSHIP

Students are expected to respect each other. When you enter a classroom, you are a member of a cohort - a community of learning. Your success depends on your neighbors' success. Learning is a collaborative effort - in discussion, group work, and even lecture, understanding is co-produced. Your questions and perspectives matter, and so do your classmates'. Treat each other with tolerance and understanding. The people you'll interact with in class are your peers and future colleagues. Strive to do better on your own, but also strive to help your classmates to elevate the level of conversation in the classroom. You are responsible for your own work, but you are also responsible to your teacher and your peers - your positive substantive participation in discussion and group work is a valuable aspect of the class.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Use of technology in the classroom is encouraged! Bring laptops, smartphones, etc. Use note-taking software; use bibliographic software; use the Internet. Class topics are not bound to lecture, discussion, and the room we are sitting in. Take your discussion, questions, exploration online - look up definitions and more information as we discuss and share that with the class. With laptops, smartphones and other communication devices, you have a world of resources to help you learn - use them!

A Warning: Be respectful with your use of technology. Using technology is a skilled literacy and is a privilege - do not take advantage of this privilege. If you have a laptop or smartphone in front of you, expect to be called on to look up additional information. The presence of technology in the classroom does not give you an excuse to be physically present in the room but intellectually absent. If you are not using your technology as a learning tool relevant to this classroom, put it away. Technology can be a distraction to you, me and your classmates. You are here to substantively add to a community of learning. Texting under the table, using headphones to listen to music, messages or videos, giggling at facebook status updates, chatting, etc. during lecture, discussion, workshops, or any other in-class activity is rude! If I suspect that you are not using your laptop, smartphone, or whatever as a learning tool, I will call you out in class. Each time I have to call you out for using technology inappropriately in class, your participation grade will drop by a whole letter grade. If I have to call you out a second time you will be asked to leave the class. If I call you out a third time your technology privileges will be revoked entirely, which will make it very difficult for you to complete the course well.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of the course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment. The case may carry further sanctions from the School of Communication or the University, the most serious being permanent expulsion. Avoid turning in work that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academically dishonest (e.g., failing to properly credit a source or using someone else's ideas without clarifying that they are not yours).

This is an academic community; being uninformed or naïve is not an acceptable excuse for not properly referencing your sources.

It is dishonest to:

turn in the same work for two classes without speaking to your profs first;
turn in a paper you have not written yourself; or copy from another student or use a "cheat sheet" during an exam, unless otherwise allowed by the course professor.

LATE WORK/ LOST WORK

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions will not be granted. Incompletes will not be assigned. Make-up work will not be assigned unless pre-arranged, or due to an authorized documented absence. If you anticipate you will miss an assignment, please discuss it with the professor early in the semester to arrange an alternative. You must give at least one week notice to arrange alternative exam/quiz locations

and times. Save early, save often, and archive your emails. If an assignment is lost or you discover a discrepancy later in the semester, email documentation will be required (e.g., if you are sure you handed in an assignment that I do not have a grade listed for, be prepared to show me your dated original files or dated emailed work). Always double-check your emails when you send in assignments - all files should be PDFs; all links should be functioning. It is your responsibility to make sure I get your work - it is not my responsibility to tell you your file was corrupted, or your email bounced, or to remind you to hand in work.

GRADING

The grade given to average work on all assignments is a C. So, if you just complete the bare minimum for each assignment, expect to earn a C for your work. Grades of B or A indicate impressive achievement above the average. Grades of A in particular indicate especially exceptional work. Grades below C indicate inadequacies or errors in any or all of the grading criteria.

The grading scale is as follows:

94% A
90% A-
87% B+
84% B
80% B-
77% C+
74% C
70% C-
67% D+
65% D

Percentage grades are not rounded up. An 87.45 % is a B+, not an A-.

Students will receive comments and grades for each assignment. It is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. I will not send you updates on cumulative grades. I will not send you warnings when you drop below some point value. I will not send you prompts to participate more or to work harder. Again, it is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. The total points for the class and for the assignment are listed in the syllabus so at any point in the semester, you should be able to calculate an approximation of your grade easily. Students may meet with me during office hours throughout the semester to discuss their grades and comments.

If you would like a grade on an assignment reevaluated you must make an appointment to visit me during office hours. Bring the assignment, my comments, and a written explanation of how your work met the requirements of the assignment, and showed impressive achievement above the average. You have two weeks from the day I return the assignment to dispute my assessment of that work. After two weeks, I will assume you are satisfied with my assessment, and I will not reconsider the assessment for any reason. If you'd like to discuss a grade to clarify comments or get advice on improving in the next assignment, make an appointment for office hours and bring specific questions.