

# Introduction to media studies

Comm 3211 / Fall 2020

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Zoom-office hours: Th 9:45-11:00a CT and by appointment

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## Course description

This course provides a basic introduction to critical media studies: the analysis of media texts, institutions, audiences, and practices with a focus on the historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which those phenomena operate. The media play significant -- and powerful -- roles in our daily lives: enough so that trying to understand contemporary US society without a solid understanding of the media would be nearly impossible. Our readings and lectures this semester will provide an overview of different analytical and theoretical approaches to the study of the media that scholars have taken in the past, as well as a survey of recent shifts in the media terrain that will have (and are already having) significant impact on the future of media studies.

## Canvas

This course is offered entirely online via UMN's Canvas platform. To access Canvas, CLA suggests that you use:

- **computer:** less than 6 years old with at least 1GB of RAM
- **internet:** connection speed of at least 512 KB per second
- **web browser:** the most recent version of Chrome or Firefox, with JavaScript enabled

Canvas offers slightly different recommendations than those above, though the most significant variation is that they claim their software will work properly on the Safari and Edge browsers. Please note that these are **minimum** recommendations, and that your experience accessing the course materials will be much smoother if your technology exceeds them. This is **especially** true for your internet connection. If your connection is only 512K, you will have significant difficulty accessing and downloading the required course materials.

If you're on the course roster, you should already have access to the course's Canvas site. Log in to the [U's main Canvas page](#) and select "COMM 3211" from either the Dashboard or the Courses menu. Canvas offers additional information about how to use the platform in both [text](#) and [video](#) formats

There are Canvas smartphone apps (search for "Canvas Student") for both Android and iOS, though these are probably not the most efficient way to use the site on a regular basis. (Canvas admits this quite frankly: "The Canvas interface was optimized for desktop displays, so using small form factors such as phones may not be a pleasant experience in using Canvas. . . . Since Canvas uses small elements of Flash, not all Canvas features may be supported on mobile devices, especially on iOS. However, Canvas offers limited support for native mobile browsers on tablet devices. For additional details, please reference the [limited-support mobile browser guidelines](#).")

The online course materials will be available in the following file formats:

- **texts:** pdf
- **audios:** mp3
- **videos:** mp4
- **images:** jpg / jpeg

Devices that meet the technical requirements above should be able to handle these formats without any difficulty.

We will use Canvas for several things this semester:

- access to the official course documents
- access to all the required readings **except** for the required book
- access to the audio lectures for each Block
- a Q&A Forum where you can ask -- and answer -- questions about the course material
- a repository for various media examples relevant to our required readings
- business-related announcements about the course

For support with a wide range of technical issues, the U has set up a helpful [resources page](#).

## Workload

This is a 3 credit hour course, which means that you should expect to spend **at least 9 hours each week** doing the work necessary to complete the course satisfactorily. Please note that this figure is both an **estimate** (since actual reading/writing speeds will vary significantly) and an **average** (some weeks may require more work than others). It reflects the **minimum** amount of work necessary to pass the course. If you're aiming to earn an above-average grade, you may need to spend more than 9 hours/week on this course.

**Tip:** Do not overburden yourself. 12-15 credit hours is a full-time courseload, since it translates (roughly) into 36-45 hours of total work per week: i.e., the equivalent of a full-time job. If you are enrolled in more than 15 credit hours, you may be taking on more than is healthy. This is especially true if you are also working and/or have major life responsibilities (e.g., parenting, taking care of elderly/ill family members, etc.). There are only 168 hours in any week. If your average schedule has you spending more than 80 hours/week on Big Tasks (i.e., school, work, and other major responsibilities), you may want to find ways to ease your load.

## Times

All scheduled items are listed in US Central Time. If you are taking the course from some other time zone, you are responsible for making the arrangements necessary to match that schedule. (If this describes you, know that you're not alone. Gil is working from Germany until sometime in November, and Kevin's working from China all semester.) Deadlines -- i.e., the locking of the Q&A forum on Day 10 and the start/end of the Quiz period on Days 13-14 -- are automatically enforced by Canvas.

## Groups

To make a large course (~125 students) more manageable for everyone, you will be assigned to a small group (~25 students). Each group will have its own Q&A forums to use, and will be guided by one of the three members of the instructional team (i.e., Gil, Kevin, or Sylvia). You should use the scheduled Zoom-office hour listed for the team member assigned to your group.

## Blocks

The course is organized in 7 two-week Blocks, each of which will use the following schedule:

- Day 1 (first Tuesday), 9:45 am - audio lecture #1 posted
- Day 3 (first Thursday), times vary by group - Zoom-office hours
- Day 8 (second Tuesday), 9:45 am - audio lecture #2 posted
- Day 10 (second Thursday), times vary by group - Zoom-office hours
- Day 10 (second Thursday), 5:00 pm - Q&A forum is locked to students
- Day 12 (second Saturday), 5:00 pm - answers to unanswered questions will be posted by this day/time
- Day 13 (second Sunday), 5:00 pm - Quiz opens
- Day 14 (second Monday), 5:00 pm - Quiz closes

## Readings

There is one required book, which is available from the [University Bookstore](#) in Coffman Union:

- Nick Couldry, *Media: Why It Matters*

If you choose to acquire the book from somewhere else, you are responsible for doing so in a timely fashion. The rest of our required readings are available on Canvas.

The asynchronous nature of the course gives you some leeway in terms of when you read. In general, though:

- All the listed readings are required, and I would encourage you to do them in the order they are listed. You should assume that any/all of them will present concepts, issues, and/or arguments that you will need to know in order to do well on the Quizzes.
- Listening to the lectures will **not** serve as a substitute for doing the readings. The lectures will complement and augment the readings, rather than summarizing them.
- Finishing the readings early in the Block will give you ample opportunity to think about them carefully, to ask and answer questions about them in the Q&A forum, and to review them prior to the Quiz.

## Grades

Each Block is worth up to 22 points (i.e., your Quiz score, plus any points you earn via the Q&A forum). **Only** your 5 highest-scoring Blocks will count toward your final grade. Overall point totals translate to letter grades as follows:

- A 93+
- A- 90-92
- B+ 87-89
- B 83-86
- “S/N” grades will only be given to students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis.
- “I” grades will only be given under **extraordinary** circumstances (i.e., major life emergencies).
- B- 80-82
- C+ 77-79
- C 73-76
- C- 70-72
- D+ 67-69
- D 60-66
- F 0-59

## Quizzes

There will be 7 Quizzes: one at the end of each Block. Each quiz will consist of 20 multiple-choice questions and will be semi-cumulative: i.e., it will focus on material covered in the relevant Block, but that material will often depend on material from previous Blocks. Each Quiz is worth up to 20 points. Because only your 5 highest scoring Blocks count toward your final grade, **no** make-up Quizzes will be offered.

Quizzes will take place on Canvas. For any individual version of a Quiz:

- It will be available for 24 hours at the end of the Block: from 5:00 pm on Day 13 (2nd Sunday) until 5:00 pm on Day 14 (2nd Monday).
- You have 60 minutes from the moment you start a Quiz to complete it. There is **no** option to pause a Quiz once you have begun. If you want the full hour available to complete a Quiz, make sure to start it no later than 4:00 pm on Day 14, as Quizzes will automatically shut down when the scheduled Quiz period ends.
- Questions will focus on major concepts, issues, and arguments from that Block’s readings and audio lectures. Those questions will require you to **apply** those concepts, rather than simply regurgitate them.
- The 20 questions that comprise your Quiz will be drawn at random from a question bank containing 30-40 different questions. Questions will be presented in random order, and potential answers for any given question will also be shuffled randomly.

You are free to consult whatever resources you want while you take the Quizzes: e.g., the readings, the audio lectures, the Q&A forums, your classmates. That said, the hour that you have for any given Quiz will **not** be enough time for you to depend entirely on such “lifelines.” To do well on the Quizzes, I strongly recommend the following:

- **Study.** This is old-fashioned advice, but it’s still worthwhile. The better you know and understand the major concepts of the course, the easier any given Quiz will be for you.
- **Study together.** Or as “together” as is possible while social distancing. Create study groups with your classmates. Your individual Quizzes will all be slightly different, but study groups are a good way to help everyone improve their understanding of the material.
- **Consult the Q&A forum.** One of the main goals of this forum is to give y’all a kind of collective study guide for each Quiz. The discussions there may help to clarify key concepts for you.
- **Create a study guide.** A one-page summary of the Big Ideas from any given Block will be more useful to you during a Quiz than a dozen pages of notes.
- **Be prepared.** If you want to be able to consult the readings during the Quiz, have them downloaded and open (or, if you prefer, printed) before you start. You don’t want to lose 10 minutes of Quiz time waiting for a download to complete or a print job to finish running.
- **Focus.** The online nature of the Quiz means that you can, in theory, do it anywhere that you have internet access. But don’t. Treat that hour as if it were a normal in-class Quiz: i.e., take it in a quiet room, with as few distractions as possible, so that you can concentrate fully on answering the questions well.

## Q&A forums

Each Canvas group will have its own Q&A forums (one for each Block), where you will be able to ask questions about the required course material **and** answer questions that your classmates have asked.

- The main goal of these forums is to serve as a helpful resource for the Quizzes. To this end, questions and answers should focus on the **major** concepts, issues, and arguments from the lectures and readings.
- You are **not** required to use the forum, and there are enough Quiz points to earn whatever final grade you are aiming for. That said, if used well, the Q&A forum is worth the equivalent of a full letter grade boost.
- You can ask and answer as many questions as you want, but you can only earn points for 1 question and 1 answer (2 points total) per Block.

- The Q&A forum for any given Block opens for business at the start of each Block (9:45 am on Day 1 (1st Tuesday) and is locked to students at 5:00 pm on Day 10 (2nd Thursday)). Any point-worthy questions that remain unanswered at that point will be answered by the respective group leader (e.g., Gil, Kevin, or Sylvia) no later than 5:00 pm on Day 12 (2nd Saturday).
- The relevant group leader will **not** weigh in with answers to the forum questions until either:
  - at least 2 students have made good faith efforts to answer a question, or
  - the Q&A forum is locked to students at 5:00 pm on Day 10 (2nd Thursday) of the Block
- In order to earn a point for **asking**, your question
  - needs to be focused on a **specific** concept, issue, or argument from the required material for the Block (e.g., a question someone could conceivably answer in a paragraph or two, rather than needing a 5-page essay to do so)
  - needs to be a **significant** one with respect to the scholarly study of media (e.g., asking for clarification about what Stuart Hall means by “encoding” is fine, but asking for information about Stuart Hall’s personal history will not earn you a point)
  - should be a genuine attempt for **clarification** about something that confuses you, rather than a simple definitional or background question (e.g., if your question can reasonably be answered with a Yes or No, a dictionary definition, a quick Google search (etc.), it will not earn you a point)
  - should be accompanied by your own attempt to **answer** it (e.g., give your readers a clear sense of where your confusion lies, so that they can help you better)
  - should **not** simply repeat or rephrase a question that someone else has already asked
- In order to earn a point for **answering**, your response
  - needs to be an answer to a **point-worthy question** (e.g., if someone asks about Stuart Hall’s personal history, you don’t earn a point for describing his childhood or family life)
  - needs to be **correct** (e.g., you don’t earn a point simply for making an effort)
  - should use **your own words** as much as possible (e.g., don’t just quote the reading that the original poster has already said they didn’t understand)
  - should **not** simply repeat or rephrase an answer that someone else has already provided, either in the Q&A forum or during Zoom-office hours
- Q&A points will be calculated and awarded at the end of each Block.

## Academic dishonesty

The following is a partial list of examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying another student’s work (in whole or in part)
- having someone else do any of the course’s required work on your behalf
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

The **minimum** penalty for academic dishonesty is a grade of **zero (0)** for the Block in question. For more details, please see the U’s information page on [student integrity](#).

## Miscellaneous

- If you have not already done so, please fill out the [pre-semester student survey](#) for this class. If you do so before 9:45 am on 8 Sep, you will earn 1 free point toward your Block #1 grade.
- The U has created “[Learning Online 101](#)” to help students adjust to online classes. It’s a self-paced course that the U estimates will take 2-4 hours to complete. It is completely optional, but if you take it and upload your “Certificate of Completion” to the course Canvas site by the end of Block #1, you will earn 1 free point toward your Block #1 grade.
- The contents of this course -- i.e., the readings, the audio lectures, the Q&A forum posts -- are not intended for public circulation or distribution. You are permitted to download and make personal backup copies of such materials to help you complete the course successfully, but not otherwise.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students’ needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for such accommodations to be arranged.
- Please make note of both the U’s [policy statements for syllabi](#) and the U’s COVID-related updates to the [policy regarding makeup work](#).

## Reading schedule

[Except for the Couldry book, all readings are available on Canvas.]

### Block #1 8-21 Sep

#### Keywords: Media / Communication / Culture

- Couldry, "Introduction" and "Connecting" (Chapter 1)
- Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication"
- Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary"
- Banet-Weiser & Gray, "Our Media Studies"
- Mayer, "The MAAFIA Mystique"

### Block #2 22 Sep - 5 Oct

#### Keywords: Representations / Semiotics / Interpretations

- Couldry, "Representing" (Chapter 2)
- Nealon & Giroux, "Reading"
- Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements* [selections]
- Williamson, "Three Kinds of Dirt"
- Hayes & Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Film"

### Block #3 6-19 Oct

#### Keywords: Profits / Economies / Commodities

- Williams, "Communications and Community"
- Smythe, "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work"
- Sinnreich, "What Is Intellectual Property?"
- Vaidhyanathan, "The Googlization of Us"

### Block #4 20 Oct - 2 Nov

#### Keywords: Ideology / Hegemony / Articulation

- Couldry, "Imagining" (Chapter 3)
- Nealon & Giroux, "Ideology"
- Hall, "The Narrative Construction of Reality"
- Hebdige, "From Culture to Hegemony"

### Block #5 3-16 Nov

#### Keywords: Audiences / Fans / Affect

- Couldry, "Sharing" (Chapter 4)
- Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
- Fiske, "Active Audiences"
- Wood & Baughman, "Glee Fandom and Twitter"
- Seigworth, "Sound Affects"
- Rodman & Vanderdonck, "Music for Nothing"

### Block #6 17-30 Nov

#### Keywords: Identities / Communities / Globalization

- Couldry, "Governing" (Chapter 3) and "Conclusion"
- Nealon & Giroux, "Differences"
- Shome & Hegde, "Culture, Communication, and the Challenge of Globalization"
- Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*"

### Block #7 1-14 Dec

#### Keywords: Technologies / Digitalization / Algorithms

- Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* [selections]
- Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"
- Douglas, "The Turn Within"
- Noble, "A Society, Searching"