

Introduction to US electronic media

Comm 3211

Syllabus
Spring 2009

Prof. Gil Rodman

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Course description

This course provides a basic introduction to critical media studies: the analysis of mass media texts, institutions, audiences, and practices with a focus on the historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which those phenomena operate. The mass 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 mass 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 mass 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.

Readings

There is one required book -- *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture, and Technology* (sixth edition), by Straubhaar *et al.* -- available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union. If you choose to acquire the book elsewhere, you should make sure to get the sixth edition. Exam questions and paper prompts will be based on the sixth edition, so if you use an older edition of the book, you do so at your own risk.

Grading

Each exam is worth a maximum of 30 points towards your final grade. Each paper is worth a maximum of 10 points towards your final grade. Your final course grade will be based on the best combination of your exams and papers that adds up to a potential 100 points: i.e., either your best three exam scores plus your best paper score or your best two exam scores plus all four paper scores.

Final grade point totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

- "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).

Exams

There will be four exams: one each during our regularly scheduled class periods on 17 Feb, 12 Mar, 14 Apr, and 7 May. Exams will consist of “check all that apply” multiple-choice questions and will be “semi-cumulative”: i.e., they will formally focus on material covered in the readings/lectures since the previous exam . . . but since that material will often depend on an understanding of the material that has come before it, you shouldn’t simply forget everything we cover in, say, the first four weeks of the semester after the first exam is over. Each exam is worth up to 30 points towards your final course grade.

On exam days, our classroom will be cleared prior to the start of the exam. As soon as you enter the room, you will be given your copy of the exam and an answer sheet. You will not be allowed to consult any outside materials once inside. For reasons of exam security, leaving the room for any reason (including bathroom breaks) during the exam means that you are officially done with the exam: your answer sheet will be collected and you will not be allowed to re-enter the room. To be fair to the inevitable latecomers, no one will be allowed to leave the room until 11:30 am (which shouldn’t be a major problem, since you probably won’t be able to complete the exam that quickly and still pass). Latecomers arriving after 11:30 have to take their chances that they manage to arrive before anyone else finishes.

Papers

There will be four short papers. Prompts for these papers will be posted to the course blog at least a week in advance of their respective due dates. Each paper should run roughly 750-1000 words in length and is worth up to 10 points towards your final course grade.

Papers must be typed or printed, double-spaced, and stapled. Papers must be submitted (a) in class, (b) directly to me, or (c) to my mailbox in 250 Ford. Do not submit your papers via email, under office doors, or to any of the GTAs (except when they’re helping to collect them during class).

The following grade penalties apply automatically to papers that fail to meet the requirements above:

- lateness 1 point per day or fraction thereof
- not typed/printed 1 point
- not double-spaced 1 point
- not stapled 1 point
- less than 750 words 1 point
- submitted to the wrong place 1 point

Where applicable, these penalties are cumulative (e.g., a short paper that’s 2 days late is automatically penalized 3 points). For purposes of assessing lateness, the clock starts ticking at the end of class on the relevant due date and it stops whenever I actually have the printed copy of your paper in my hands. So if you place a paper due on Thursday in my mailbox on Friday and I don’t actually pick it up until Tuesday, it goes into the gradebook as having been turned in on Tuesday: i.e., five days late. Please bear in mind that 250 Ford closes at 4:00p on weekdays and is not open at all on the weekends.

Course blog

The address for our course blog is <http://comm.umn.edu/~grodman/sp09-3211/> The blog’s primary use will be for course-related reminders and announcements, though you may also find it useful to use it as a forum for general queries about the lectures, assigned readings, and course business. The blog is publicly readable. Instructions on how to post to the blog (should you so desire) are available on the blog itself.

Grade queries

Queries about individual exam questions (e.g., “why is C the correct answer to question #4?”) can be directed to me or any of the GTAs. Queries about individual exam grades (e.g., requests for grade changes) should only be directed to me, as the GTAs are not empowered to change exam grades once they’ve been assigned.

Queries about individual paper grades (e.g., “why did my paper get a grade of 7/10?”) should be directed to the specific GTA who assigned the initial grade. Disputes over individual paper grades (e.g., “I think this paper deserves better than a 7/10”) must be submitted in writing to me along with the graded copy of the paper in question. Written disputes must include a clear explanation for why you believe your assigned grade is wrong. In the event of such disputes, I will regrade your paper myself and the new grade -- regardless of whether it’s higher, lower, or the same -- will be your final grade for that paper.

Queries about overall course grades (e.g., “what’s my point total so far?” or “what do I need on exam #4 to get a B for the course?”) should be directed to me. The GTAs do not have access to the full gradebook.

Academic integrity

To help avoid potentially disastrous misunderstandings, the following is a partial list of major examples of academic dishonesty:

- Copying another student’s work on papers or exams.
- Having someone else take exams or write papers for you.
- Attempting to consult notes, books, or other outside sources of information during exams. [And, for the record, “other outside sources” includes phones, mp3 players, pagers, PDAs, headsets, headphones, and other electronic devices.]

The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is a score of zero (0) for the paper or exam in question. When in doubt, play it safe. During exams, do not allow your gaze to wander in ways that might look like you’ve got crib notes stashed somewhere or you’re “borrowing” answers from a neighbor.

Further information about the University’s official policies with respect to academic dishonesty can be found online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

Miscellaneous

- With the sole exception of circumstances covered by the University Senate’s official policy on “makeup work,” there will be no makeup options for exams or papers.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using phones in class, excessive side chatter, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- You may make audio recordings of our class meetings for your personal use, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings is strictly prohibited.

Reading/exam/paper schedule

Jan 20	no reading	Mar 17	NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK
Jan 22	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 1	Mar 19	NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK
Jan 27	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 2	Mar 24	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 9
Jan 29	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 3	Mar 26	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 10
Feb 3	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 4	Mar 31	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 11
Feb 5	no reading	Apr 2	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 12
Feb 10	no reading	Apr 7	no reading
Feb 12	Paper #1 due review session	Apr 9	Paper #3 due review session
Feb 17	Exam #1	Apr 14	Exam #3
Feb 19	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 5	Apr 16	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 13
Feb 24	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 6	Apr 21	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 14
Feb 26	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 7	Apr 23	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 15
Mar 3	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 8	Apr 28	<i>Media Today</i> , ch. 16
Mar 5	no reading	Apr 30	no reading
Mar 10	Paper #2 due review session	May 5	Paper #4 due review session
Mar 12	Exam #2	May 7	Exam #4