

Introduction to media studies

Prof. Gil Rodman (rodman@umn.edu)

GTA Kevin Liu (liux2275@umn.edu)

GTA Bree Trisler (trisl005@umn.edu)

Comm 3211 / Spring 2021

Zoom-office hours: Th 10-11a CT and by appointment

Zoom-office hours: Th 9-10a CT and by appointment

Zoom-office hours: Th 11a-12n CT and by appointment

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

There are Canvas smartphone apps for both Android and iOS, though these are **not** the most efficient way to use the site on a regular basis, and you are **strongly** advised not to use these apps as your primary platform for accessing the course content.

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

- **texts:** pdf
- **audios:** mp3
- **videos:** avi / mkv / mp4 / m4v
- **images:** jpg / jpeg

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

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.

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
- Q&A Forums 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

Workload

This is a 3 credit hour course, which means that you should plan on **at least 9 hours of work each week** in order to pass the class. Please note that this figure is both an **estimate** (since actual reading/writing speeds will vary) 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.

Don't overburden yourself. 12-15 credit hours translates into at least 36-45 hours of work per week: i.e., the equivalent of a full-time job. If you're enrolled in **more** than 15 credit hours, you may be taking on more than is wise. This is especially true if you're also working and/or have major life responsibilities (e.g., parenting, taking care of elderly/ill family members). There are only 168 hours in any week. If your average schedule includes more than 80 hours/week on school, work, and other major responsibilities, then 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 necessary arrangements to match that schedule. (If this describes you, know that you're not alone. Gil will be working from Germany from late March onward, and Kevin will be working from China all semester.) Deadlines -- i.e., the locking of the Q&A forums 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, you will be assigned to a small group (~25 students). Each group will have its own Q&A forums and be guided by one of the instructional team (i.e., Gil, Kevin, or Bree). 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 and lectures

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 and listen to the required material. In general, though:

- All the readings are **required**, and you would be wise to do them in the order they are listed. 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 summarize them.
- Finishing the readings **early** in the Block will give you time to think about them carefully, to ask and answer questions about them in the Q&A forum and/or Zoom-office hours, and to review them prior to the Quiz.
- Similarly, listening to the audios as **early** as you can after they're available will give you more time to think about them, ask/answer questions about them, and review them prior to the Quiz.
- I will try to make captioned video versions of the lectures available on Canvas at the same time as the audio lectures. Except for the captions, there will be **no** images in these videos. The U's process for creating captioned videos from audios is generally pretty fast, but because I have no direct control over that process, I cannot guarantee that the videos will always be available in a timely fashion -- or even that they will be available at all. The captions are generated automatically, and -- given the limitations of that technology -- they are relatively accurate. But they are definitely still imperfect, and you should treat them strictly as a **supplement** to the audio lectures.

Grades

Each Block is worth up to 22 points (i.e., up to 20 for the Quiz, plus up to 2 for 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+ | • B- | 80-82 | • D+ | 67-69 |
| • A- | 90-92 | • C+ | 77-79 | • D | 60-66 |
| • B+ | 87-89 | • C | 73-76 | • F | 0-59 |
| • B | 83-86 | • C- | 70-72 | | |
- “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).

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 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 your own study guides.** 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 so that you can consult a reading.
- **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 you use it well all semester long, the Q&A forum is potentially 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 Bree) 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 5:00 pm on 19 Jan, 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 should take ~2-4 hours to complete. If you take it and upload your “Certificate of Completion” to our 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 for any other reason.
- 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 19 Jan - 1 Feb

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 2-15 Feb

Keywords: Representations / Semiotics / Interpretations

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

Block #3 16 Feb - 1 Mar

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 2-15 Mar

Keywords: Ideology / Hegemony / Articulation

- Couldry, "Governing" (Chapter 5)
- Becker, "Ideology"
- Nealon & Giroux, "Ideology"
- Hall, "The Narrative Construction of Reality"
- Williams, "Hegemony"

Block #5 16-29 Mar

Keywords: Audiences / Fans / Affect

- Couldry, "Sharing" (Chapter 4)
- Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
- Fiske, "Active Audiences"
- Bobo, "Black Women's Responses to *The Color Purple*"
- Seigworth, "Sound Affects"
- Rodman & Vanderdonck, "Music for Nothing"

Block #6 30 Mar - 19 Apr

Keywords: Identities / Communities / Globalization

- Nealon & Giroux, "Differences"
- Kumar, "National/Transnational/Global"
- Shome & Hegde, "Culture, Communication, and the Challenge of Globalization"
- Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*"

Block #7 20 Apr - 3 May

Keywords: Technologies / Digitalization / Algorithms

- Couldry, "Imagining" (Chapter 3) and "Conclusion"
- Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* [selections]
- Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"
- Noble, "A Society, Searching"