**Media Literacy: Decoding Media Images and Messages**

**COMM 3263, Spring 2012**

**Tuesday/Thursday 4-5:15pm**

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Course description and Objectives

The goal of this course is to help us all develop skills for critiquing media images, messages, and means of production. To examine media from a critical perspective is to question why things are the way they are and howthey came and continue to be as such. We discuss if and how media institutions can be challenged and changed through activism and policy work. To do this work will require that we approach media texts and practices as historical, constructed, and political. We will ask and try to answer tough and pressing questions including:

* How have media texts and practices contributed to my sense of who I am and how I think about my social world?
* What is the relationship between media representations and existing social inequalities?
* How have media images and messages changed over time, and how have these changes helped to shape our contemporary media culture?
* How can we challenge negative impacts of media?

Your job this semester will be to articulate your own critical arguments about the political and social significance of particular media texts and practices. This work will require us to question much of what we might normally take for granted about the media, our culture, our democracy and ourselves.

Required Text

1. Moodle Site—Readings are posted to the course Moodle Website at <https://moodle.umn.edu/course/view.php?id=12874>. A link to this site is also available through your portal at <http://www.myu.umn.edu> under the “Courses” tab. You should check this site regularly for announcements, assignments, reading questions, and homework in addition to the course readings.
2. You may also purchase a Course Packet from Paradigm Copies.

Class Participation and Conduct

Active class participation is vital to this course and will play a role in your final grade. You should do the reading assigned for the day beforehand and be prepared to discuss the material. It is important that the classroom remain a safe space in which **all** students feel respected. This means keeping an open mind to both the readings and the diversity of opinions that may be expressed. Some of the topics that we cover in this class may be sensitive and/or controversial in nature. While you are encouraged to share your opinions openly, discriminatory language will not be tolerated in the classroom. In addition, personal attacks will not be tolerated. You are permitted to critique the argument or the reading, but not the person who is making the argument. This also means that you are actively listening when your peers are speaking. Class participation will be based on a student’s ability to contribute to class discussions in a thoughtful manner.

Attendance & Punctuality

Attending class is critical to your success in this course. You should come to class everyday prepared to critically engage with the texts and your peers. I do not hold a formal attendance policy, but note that participation is a large part of your grade. Frequent absences will absolutely lead to low participation points, and will likely result in poor performance on assignments. Keep this in mind when deciding how you went to spend your time and tuition dollars. If you’re sick or have other legitimate excuses, let me know so we can work something out to keep you caught up. I cannot go over class material via e-mail, but I would be happy to go over assignments and notes during my office hours.

Punctuality is also critical to the course. Arriving late is distracting and disrespectful to your peers. Habitual tardiness will also detract in participation points.

Submissions of assignments

Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the due date. Please pay attention to how I want you to submit your assignment (hard copy vs. email or blog), as it will vary. **I will accept assignments up to one week late; I will grade it as I normally would but will deduct an entire letter grade off the final score. After a week, I will not accept any late work.**

Plagiarism & Cheating (Don’t Do This….Seriously)

All submissions must be the student’s original work. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances.** Please see howthe University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty: (<http://advisingtools.class.umn.edu/cgep/studentconduct.html>).

Special Needs

If you require special accommodations (e.g. learning disabilities, visual or hearing problems), please contact the University of Minnesota Disabilities Services (<http://ds.umn.edu>) in order to make the appropriate arrangements. This information will remain confidential.

Laptops and cell phones

All cell phones must be turned on silent before class. I understand that there are instances when you need to be connected to a phone in case of emergencies, but I expect that you will not use them for anything else during class time. I may or may not call you out for texting during class, but be aware that I can see you (even under the desk) and it will be reflected in your participation grade.

You may use laptops to take notes, but I maintain the right to look at your screen at any point during class. Please do not use it for non-class related items.

E-mail

I will be checking my e-mail once every 24-hours and once every 48-hours on the weekends. You can expect a response within the above-mentioned time frame.

Grading

A 94-100 C+ 76-79

A- 90-93 C 73-75

B+ 85-89 C- 70-72

B 83-84 D 60-69

B- 80-82 F Below 60

Assignment Format

All assignments must be typed and double-spaced using a 12-point font, with appropriate margins. Pages should be numbered (except the title page) and stapled (if turning in a hardcopy). Make sure that you **proofread your work** before handing it in**.** I will deduct marks for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. You are welcome to use double-sided printing, but it is not required.

*\*Note About Writing Intensive Designation:**This is a writing-intensive course, as designated by the University. Expect to be doing a lot of writing, and expect to be rigorously evaluated. The University requires that written papers counts for at least 1/3 of your grade, and also that one writing assignment be revised and resubmitted after taking my comments into consideration. I* ***strongly*** *encourage you to make an appointment with the Centre for Writing:* [*http://writing.umn.edu/index.htm*](http://writing.umn.edu/index.htm)*. The Centre for Writing exists to help students become better writers; they will work with you on specific assignments, and will likely ensure you get a better grade.*

**ASSIGNMENTS: 600 points total**

**Class Participation (100 pts):** As a discussion based class, you are expected to come prepared to class to engage with the course materials and participate in classroom activities. Please bring the readings with you to class (either hard copy or electronic) along with your discussion questions (see below). You will be graded on your participation in class discussions, listening skills, your engagement with the material, and your participation in class activities. 20 of the 100 points will come from discussion leading.

*Discussion Leading (20/100):*You will be expected to lead discussion about the day’s readings for ONE class session. You will be required to either create a power point or a handout that does the following: 1) identifies and defines key terms; 2) summarizes the main arguments; 3) includes a media clip (either one that is referenced in the text, or one that applies to the argument); 4) lists at least four discussion questions for the group.

**Blog (75 pts); Due weekly:** You can access the class blog at <http://medialiteracy2012.wordpress.com/>. You’ll get an email with instructions on how to join. The reading blog is central to the course, and it’s meant to help you remember the material better and begin processing it before our discussion.

You will post **one discussion question/comment on the class blog OR** you will **respond to at least one blog discussion question or blog post a week.**  So, *you’ll be posting at least once every week*. You can miss up to two weeks without consequences to your grade. We will use these questions/comments in class to begin conversation. These can be clarification questions or more in-depth analysis prompts. If you are responding to a question, this doesn’t mean you have to “answer” the question. You may just to add on a related question, or ask for clarification, etc.

So: Each week

In addition, please feel free to use the blog to post relevant articles, media clips, or events that you think are worth sharing with the group. Blogs in classes can be hit or miss, but when they “hit,” they add A LOT, and I hope this will be the case with our class!

**Short Papers (200 pts, 50 pts each); Due 1 week after each unit:** On the last class day of each unit, you will hand in a 3-5 page analysis paper that applies the concepts from that section to a media example. You are required to write FOUR section papers, which means you can skip one unit (with the exception of Unit 2), without penalty. Additional details of what is expected in the section analysis papers will be given out and discussed in class at the beginning of each section.

**Major paper (125 pts); April 12th/May 9th:** Each student will be expected to complete an 5-7 page paper (double-spaced, 1-inch margins). Students will be allowed to choose from three options for their paper. The first is a theoretical paper, which asks that you critically engage with 4-5 of the course readings by placing them in conversation with one another. The second is an analysis paper, which asks that you use 2-3 of the course readings to evaluate a media text of your choice. The third option is the media problem paper, which asks you to pick a “problem” in media (it could be one covered in class or one of your choosing) and delve more deeply in debate. More details on the final paper will be given out in class. *Major Paper Re-Write:* After I return your paper with comments, you will be required to revise and resubmit, using my editorial comments as a guide for revising. On April 12th , we will take class time to workshop your papers with your peers.

**Final Group Presentation on Media Justice (100 pts); Due May 1 & May 3:** The final group project will be a 10-15 minute presentation in which you and your group members tell the class about a group or organization that is actively involved in issues of media justice, media literacy, or any form of media activism. You will be required to tell us about the mission of the organization, things/campaigns they’ve done to promote their mission, and whether or not you feel like they are doing effective work. You will also create a hypothetical campaign, activity, etc. that the organization could utilize. You will be required to bring in at least one article from class to explain their work, your opinion about their work, and/or your addition to their work. A list of potential organizations will be given in class. You will also be given time to work together in your groups during class time, but you should expect to make time for some outside group work as well. Groups will be determined based on topic interest.

**Service Learning Option (100 pts); Due throughout semester:**

Those of you interested in incorporating service learning into the class will be exempt from participating in the group project. In it’s place you will write a reflection paper about your SL experience. The service learning option will require that you volunteer at a media-related organization for at least 20 hours over the course of the semester. I have already been in contact with relevant sites for this course, and representatives from these organizations will come to class to tell you more about these options. Please see the last page of the syllabus for more details.

SCHEDULE

*The following is a course schedule for the semester. Students should note that it is tentative and subject to change.*

(T) January 17th: Welcome!

-Go over syllabus, introduce the class

-Presentation from Community Service-Learning Center

(Th) January 19th: Cathy Cohen lecture, “Politics, New Media and Inequality: from the Occupy Movement to the 2012 Elections”

\*MEET AT THE LECTURE LOCATION: Cowles Auditorium in the Humphrey Center (West Bank)

**Unit 1: Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Media Criticism**

(T) January 24th: What is media literacy?

\*New Mexico Media Literacy Project, “Media literacy concepts” and “Deconstructing media messages”

Lewis, & Jhally, The struggle over media literacy. *Journal of Communication, 48*(1), 1-8.

(Th) January 26th: Semiotics

Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”

(T) January 31st: Ideology and Hegemony

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State"

Dana Cloud, “Hegemony or Concordance?: The Rhetoric of Tokenism in “Oprah” Winfrey’s Rags-to-Riches Biography”

(Th) February 2nd: Political Economy

Waetjen & Gibson, “Harry Potter and the Commodity Fetish: Activating Corporate Readings in the Journey from Text to Commercial Intertext”

**Unit 2: Media Representation**

(T) February 7th: Representation and Race

Hall, “The white of their eyes”

Escobedo Shepherd, “New Film ‘The Help” Whitewashes Civil Rights Struggle…”

Dubrofsky & Hardy, "Performing Race in *Flavor of Love* and *The Bachelor*"

(Th) February 9th: Race

bell hooks, “Eating the Other”

Pham, “Unintentionally Eating the Other”

*Due: Short Paper 1*

(T) February 14th: Gender/Feminism

Mulvey, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”

Brasfield, “Re-reading Sex and the City”

(Th) February 16th: Gender/ Post Feminism

Gill, “Post-feminist media culture: Element of a sensibility”

Keller, “Fiercely Real?: Tyra Banks’ Body Politics and Post-Feminist Branding”

Sanders, “Eat, Pray, Spend”

(T) February 21st: Gender/Masculinity

Katz, “Advertising and the Construction of Violent White Masculinity”

Tarrant, “Guy Trouble”

Solomon, “Hip Hop Scholars Talk About Combating Homophobia”

(Th) February 23rd: Intersectionality

KickAction.ca, “Intersectionality” (<http://www.kickaction.ca/node/1499>)

Shugart, “Crossing Over: Hybridity and Hegemony in Popular Media”

(T) February 28th: Class

Bettie, “Class Dismissed? *Roseanne* and the Changing Face of Working-Class Iconography”

Barr, “Fames a Bitch. It’s hard to handle and drives you nuts.”

Butsch, “Ralph, Fred, Archie and Homer: Why Television Keeps Re-creating the White Male Working-Class Buffoon”

(Th) March 1st: Sexuality/Pornography

Murphy, “On Sex-Positivity and Misunderstandings”

Kipnis, “(Male) desire and (female) disgust: Reading Hustler”

(T) March 6th: Sexuality/Queer Lives

Raymond, “Popular Culture and Queer Representation: A Critical Perspective”

# Rawls, “Why Do We Have to be ‘Born This Way’?”

Henderson, **“**Queer Visibility and Social Class.”

# (Th) March 8th: Sexuality/Queer Lives

# Halberstam, “The Transgender Look”

(T) March 13th: NO CLASS! SPRING BREAK!

(Th) March 15th: NO CLASS! SPRING BREAK!

**Unit 3: Disciplining (Non-Normative) Bodies**

(T) March 20th: The Prison Industrial (Entertainment) Complex

Yousman, “Inside Oz: Hyperviolence, Race and Class Nightmares, and the Engrossing Spectacle of Terror”

*Due: Short Paper 2*

(Th) March 22nd: Fat-Phobia and Able-Bodyism

Sender and Sullivan, “Epidemics of will, failures of self esteem: Responding to fat bodies in *The Biggest Loser* and *What Not To Wear*”

# Rilley, “Heroes of Assimilation: Or How the Media Transform Disability”

# (T) March 27th: Sports

# Oates, “The Erotic Gaze in the NFL Draft”

# Zirin, “Sports, Bin Laden, and the New Normal” (http://www.edgeofsports.com/2011-05-02-617/index.html)

**Unit 4: News & Celebrity Culture /Advertising & Branding**

# (Th) March 29th: News/Crime and Disaster Coverage

# Stabile, “White Victims, Black Villains”

# National Association of Black Journalists, “An Open Letter to the BBC [in response to coverage of the London riots]”

# Urbina, “Mobs are born as word grows by text message”

# (T) April 3rd: Celebrity Culture

# Bailey, “Coming Out as Homophobic: Isaiah Washington and the *Grey’s Anatomy* Scandal”

# Gordon, “Can’t You Take a Joke?: On Tracy Morgan and Free Speech vs. Hate Speech”

Freudian-Slip Blog, “If My Daddy Thinks I’m Fine”

*Due: Short Paper 3*

# (Th) April 5th: Advertising

Twitchell and Jhally. “On Advertising: Sut Jhally v James Twitchell.” (<http://www.stayfreemagazine.org/archives/16/twitchell.html>)

(T) April 10th: Convergence Culture & Branding

Jenkins, Worship at the altar of convergence (Introduction)

Klein, “How Corporate Branding Took Over the White House”

(Th) April 12th: Peer Review Day + Group Project Overview

King, “4 Campaigns Holding Big Media Accountable for How It Treats Us”

*Due: Draft of final paper*

**Unit 5: Globalization, Postcolonialism & Xenophobia**

(T) April 17th: Postcoloniality & Transnationalism

Roy, “Worlds Apart: Nation branding on the National Geographic Channel”

Ayish, “Television reality shows in the Arab world”

*Due: Short Paper 4*

(Th) April 19th: Immigrants and Foreign “Others”

Chen, “Lowe’s *All-American Muslim* Fiasco and the Politics of Normalcy”

Novoa, “American Heritage Editor on ‘Anchor Baby’ Definition: ‘We Were Wrong’”

**Unit 6: Media Activism, New Media, and Media Labor**

(T) April 24th: Social Media and Social Movements

Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted”

Mirani, “Sorry, Malcom Gladwell, the revolution may well be tweeted”

(Th) April 26th: Creative Labor in the Culture Industries

Banks, “The Picket Line Online: Creative Labor, Digital Activism, and the 2007-2008 Writer’s Guild of America Strike”

Whedon, Joss Whedon on the Writer’s Strike (http://whedonesque.com/comments/14650)

*Due: Short Paper 5*

(T) May 1st: Final Presentations

(Th) May 3rd: Final Presentations

*Due: Short Paper 6*

Final Paper Due May 9th by 5pm via Moodle.

**Service-Learning Option**

There are lots of great reasons to participate in the service-learning component of a college course. Service-learning allows you to get out of the classroom and into the “real world,” and to learn from communities and organizations instead of simply text books and class discussion (not that those things aren’t important too!). In addition to being given the opportunity to be transformed through your service, you will also have the chance to share your skills in a way that will hopefully benefit the organization where you serve. If you’ve ever done service in the past, you know how tremendously rewarding it can feel to utilize your knowledge and abilities to make a difference in a life or community.

Each organization has a mission relevant to this course. Throughout the term, we’ll be discussing a number of issues related to media justice, including: access, representation, and ownership. Your time at these organizations will show you examples of how people are trying to fight back against media injustices that persist in our society.

In order to participate, you must work with an organization that is provided by the Community Service-Learning Center. Representatives will be coming to class on January 21st to explain your options in more detail. I am willing to work with you if you have been doing work with an organization prior to this course and would like to continue working with them, but no one can start working with a new organization that is not tied directly to the class. The following sites will be offered this semester:

**OpenAccess Communications Broadband Access Project**

**Line Break Media Twin Cities Daily Planet**

**Main Street Project**

In addition, please be aware of the following:

**Academic integrity also applies to community work done for academic credit.** Any of the following actions constitute academic dishonesty within a community-based learning context and will be addressed in the same way as any other act of academic dishonesty:

1. Misrepresenting hours completed at a community site or spent working on a community project (students can count time spent off-site doing work that is required to complete a project for a community organization).
2. Writing reflections or completing other assignments about events or activities the student was supposed to attend and participate in, but did not actually attend or participate in.
3. Signing in at a site or training session and leaving before the hours or training was completed OR signing in for a friend or classmate at a site.
4. Writing reflections based on previous community work or documenting hours done at a

community organization during a previous semester and misrepresenting it as your current service-learning experience.

**Accommodations for Students Registered with Disability Services Doing Service-Learning**

If you are registered with Disability Services, you are eligible to receive accommodations from the University when doing service-learning in the community. While not all buildings where community groups are located are 100% accessible to students with physical disabilities, service-learning staff can work with you to find a service-learning site that meets your needs. If you have an invisible disability, we encourage you to talk with your service-learning liaison and/or your DS specialist to discuss the type of work environment and structure you need to be successful during your community experience.

**Confidentiality and Privacy Issues within the Service-Learning Context**

Community organizations participating in service-learning expect students to work to the best of their abilities and act in a responsible manner. Furthermore, many service-learning students will be working with individuals who fall into protected categories, such as children, seniors, or individuals with disabilities. Be aware that through your service-learning, you may come to know information about individuals that is covered by rules and ethical guidelines about confidentiality. You should speak to your community supervisor about how confidentiality obligations apply to you. Examples of how these issues might arise in your service-learning include:

1. You should not take photographs of anyone at your service-learning site without following the policy the organization has in place. This often involves getting written permission from the individual and/or written permission or the parent/guardian of children under 18 years of age.
2. During class discussions, be careful about revealing any information that could be used to personally identify any individual you work with in your service-learning.
3. In written assignments and especially when using online learning tools (Moodle, class blogs, etc.), be particularly attentive about the information you disclose about your service-learning experience, in case the site you are using is publicly available online. Refrain from mentioning the name of your organization and change the names of any individuals you write about if you are utilizing these online tools for your class.

**Criminal Background Checks are required for many service-learning placements. If the agency asks about any convictions and you have a criminal record:**

• Be honest. Failure to state convictions that are then uncovered in a background check will likely result in your immediate dismissal from your service organization.

• Ask the agency representative to explain what types of convictions are not acceptable (these often involve convictions such as those involving theft, violence, drug sales, and/or crimes against minors).

• If you believe that your record could disqualify you from the approved service-learning options, **please be proactive and talk to your service-learning liaison** to discuss alternative placement options.