**Spring 2013**

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**and by appointment**

**MCS 358 - Persuasion: The Power of Language and the Visual Image**

Description:

Every day, we are all the targets of countless media messages meant to persuade us and change our behavior. This course explores the workings of media persuasion with a special focus on advertising, political campaigning, and propaganda. We will examine the modern historical development of these forms and theories attempting to understand their social significance, while building critical skills for analyzing and decoding advertising and propaganda messages in various guises.

Some of the questions we will explore include:

* Do advertising, propaganda, and democratic persuasion always differ from each other? If so, how?
* How did advertising become such a weighty social force? What can its modern origins tell us about its role today?
* How does advertising create meanings for products and brands? How has advertising changed throughout the history of mass media?
* How do modern advertising, political campaigning, and propaganda shape our culture and society.

**Is this course right for you?**

With every course, I encourage students to carefully consider at the beginning whether the class fits their own goals, time constraints, and interests. Aside from looking over the syllabus and attending the course introduction, here are some points to consider in making this decision about MCS 358:

* This class is not about how to make effective ads and, certainly, not a how-to course on propaganda. It may indeed be a useful and provocative course if you are thinking of a career in marketing, but please know that our focus here is going to be about asking tough, complex questions about the place that advertisements and propaganda have in our society.
* This class entails a significant amount of close reading, mini-research assignments, and participating in class conversations exploring detailed claims from the reading. This reading comes from a variety of sources – some of it will be quite challenging. I do not expect everyone to understand everything in each article, but I do expect that you will put in an honest effort to make sense of and consider the perspectives you encounter as thoroughly as possible. That might entail re-reading passages and looking up words or references. I will give out guides for most of the readings, and you should use these to guide you as you grapple with ideas from the reading.
* It is my hope that you will not only encounter arguments and perspectives that speak to your own experiences and resonate with your own ways of thinking, but that you will find some arguments that you disagree with or react to with strong skepticism. The guiding ethic of this class is that I am asking you to strive to understand the perspectives you encounter here – through readings, videos, lectures, and discussion with other class members – as fully and empathetically as possible. But you should also approach them critically – questioning, evaluating, and extending the ideas you encounter. To live up to this ethic takes work.
* Class participation is absolutely essential. Everyone should come to class prepared to discuss the readings and ready to put forward your best effort. I will regularly call on members of the class who have not volunteered to speak. This is not meant to intimidate anyone, and I understand if you are unprepared to respond to any particular question. But this shouldn’t be a pattern. If you have a lot of anxiety about speaking in class – please talk with me within the first two weeks of class. We can work together on a plan to help you find comfortable ways to participate.
* While the class blogs are meant to be a space for informal writing that will only be circulated among your classmates (barring unanticipated exceptions), your final paper should be a project that you feel enough pride in to share publically – and we might do so through a class website. This course requires a good deal of concentrated reading and analyzing media. Some of the reading will be challenging, some will require that you do web searches to fill in terms or references you might not be familiar with, and most will require patience as you wade through diverse views. With every reading you should be striving to understand its point of view as fully as possible, but also to analyze, assess, and/or extend its arguments. I recommend setting aside at leasttwo to three hours for every class period for concentrated reading.

**Grading and Assignments**

* Participation and special assignments: 25%
* 3 Exams (5% on first, 12.5% each second and third ): 30%
* Class Blogs: 18%
* Advertising Presentation: 7%
* Final paper (including proposal and peer review): 20%

Exams: The exams in this class will be based mostly on short to medium essay questions that ask you to demonstrate your understanding of and ability to analyze arguments and perspectives we’ve encountered in class. The first exam (and perhaps the others) will be open-book and open-notes, so make sure you have your own printed copy of all the material.

Class blog: Each week, I’ll post a blogging prompt that hits upon arguments and ideas from the reading for that Tuesday. You’ll be divided into two groups. Switching off every other week, each member of one group will respond to the prompt before class on Tuesday (this means you’ll need to get the reading done ahead of time to be able to respond to the blog on time). Your posts should be at least 250 words and can be written informally -- they will not be graded on grammar as long as what you are saying is clear. One the weeks when your group is not assigned to respond to the prompt, you’ll need to respond to two of your classmates’ posts by that Friday at 4 pm.

Advertising Presentation: For this assignment you will give a 4-6 minute oral presentation to our class analyzing an advertisement using concepts from course reading. I’ll post more details on an assignment sheet.

Participation

Participation is a major component of this class. Strong class participation means contributing to group discussions daily with informed comments that demonstrate careful thinking about ideas from class, coming prepared with questions and insights on the readings, keeping up regularly on the “microblogging” assignment and adding meaningful questions and observations, and taking a leading role in stimulating discussions. It also means practicing what Dr. Louise Woodstock calls “good classroom citizenship.” Some of the characteristics of good citizenship here include (adapted from Dr. Woodstock):

* Bringing texts and notes with you to class
* Posing questions in class about new concepts or other observations from the readings.
* Reading actively – marking up and responding to the issues your texts raise – and looking up new words or important references.
* Listening actively and respectfully to whoever is speaking, and asking questions of your fellow students to understand their views.
* Learning and using your colleagues’ names
* Turning off cell phones and internet during class time

Participation grades will especially reflect these criteria:

A -- Voluntarily contributing substantive comments and/or questions in every class, contributing incisive questions and comments to the microblogs, regularly asking probing questions and listening attentively to classmates, responding to them by name, frequently leading and inspiring further discussion in class.

B -- Voluntarily contributing substantive comments and/or questions in most class sessions, contributing meaningful questions and comments to the microblogs, regularly engaging your classmates with questions and listening carefully, occasionally leading and inspiring further discussion.

C -- Voluntarily contributing occasionally, contributing regularly to the microblogs, listening attentively to classmates but only occasionally asking questions of them, responding to most of the questions I direct toward you in ways that demonstrate you’ve been following discussion and thinking about the reading.

D – Attending regularly but volunteering to contribute only infrequently, sometimes demonstrating a lack of engagement when called upon, rarely posing questions to classmates or leading discussion.

F – You can get an F for any of these reasons: showing disrespect to classmates, having poor attendance, rarely volunteering to speak in class and often appearing disengaged when I call on you, or regularly not participating in the microblog.

Feel free to check in with me about your participation grade at any time. I will often call on students, and I certainly understand if you are sometimes unprepared to answer. However, this should not be a pattern. If you have anxieties or special difficulties speaking in class – I understand. And I’m willing to work with you to create a fair set of participation expectations and possible alternatives to speaking in class. *But if this applies to you - please contact me within the first 2 weeks of the class!* The earlier you speak with me, the more help I can offer. I will not be able to offer much help if you contact me late in the course.

Final Paper: Your final research paper should be a 12-15 page structured argument that analyzes an advertising campaign, a particular brand identity, or analyzes an argument or controversy from the course. I will give you more details on an assignment sheet.

Grading Scale

93-100 A 77-79 C+

90-92 A- 70-76 C

87-89 B+ 60-69 D

83-86 B 59 and below F

80-82 B-

**Course Policies**

Attendance

My expectation is that you’ll attend every class except in cases of illness, emergency, or religious holiday. If you miss a day for any of these reasons, you can turn in a written absence form and contact me as soon as possible about making up in-class activities. Missing more than 4 classes outside of these circumstances will result in penalty (half letter grade per day off your final score) in addition to reducing your participation score.

Mobile devices and web surfing

Courses like this succeed best when everyone is fully present and respectfully engaging each other. So distractions, like texting and web surfing, not only affect your own learning, but they can sour the whole environment. All cell phones should be off or in airplane mode (clock only) during class and all laptops should have their wifi disabled unless we’re working on an in-class project that requires internet use. Honestly, I really dislike enforcing rules like this, but I dislike, even more, when the energy is sucked out of a classroom by other media. So here’s what will happen if I see you texting or using the net in class:

1st Time = I’ll ask you to stop.

2nd Time = I’ll ask you to stop, and you’ll receive an absence for the day.

3rd Time = I’ll ask you to leave class, and you’ll lose 10% on your final grade (and 10% more each time this happens).

If you have an emergency circumstance, of course, I’ll make an exception regarding cell phones.

Late Work

Late blogs or presentations will not be accepted. For all other assignments, the penalty will be one grade level (i.e. a C becomes a C-) for each day late.

Inclement weather

Coming from Minnesota, I’m not used to snow hampering traffic flow too much. But if weather creates road conditions such that I cannot get to class, I’ll send an email to everyone that morning. If you commute to class and cannot make it to class safely, please email me ahead of class.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Ursinus College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.  Students with a disabilities should contact Yuriko Beaman ([ybeaman@ursinus.edu](https://webmail.ursinus.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=a40b7c5202dd46338efd04d1808b8d67&URL=mailto%3aybeaman%40ursinus.edu) or 484-762-4329) as soon as possible to discuss academic accommodations and/or services.  Yuriko Beaman is located in the Center for Academic Support, lower level of Myrin Library. Please also contact me about any accommodations you will need as soon as possible.

Syllabus changes

I’ll try to stick closely to this syllabus, but I want to reserve the right to make changes when there’s something I think would improve the course. I appreciate your feedback and suggestions at any time during the semester. I will announce any changes in class and try to give you advanced notice of any changes with deadlines or readings.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Please read Ursinus College’s “[Statement on Plagiarism](http://webpages.ursinus.edu/jfryer/researchmanual/plagiarism/ursinus_statement.htm)” fully (see link on course Blackboard). I want to encourage you to creatively draw on existing works and enter into ongoing conversations in your own media projects and writing. But you should always indicate clear attributions for the sources you are drawing on for ideas, words, sounds, images, etc. At a minimum, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for an assignment and/or an additional assignment to demonstrate your understanding of academic ethics . In cases of where there’s a clear intent to deceive on an assignment or exam (including any form of willful plagiarism or cheating or aiding others in cheating), you will receive a failing grade for the class. If you have any questions or concerns regarding what is appropriate in this class, please address them with me or in class as soon as possible. Please also see the “MCS Statement on Plagiarism” under the Information section of the course page on Blackboard.

**Schedule**

Please complete these readings/viewings before class on the day they are assigned. On days when you have a blog response due, keep in mind you’ll need to finish the readings at least a day before class.

Week 1

Tue, 1/15 Course Intro

Thur, 1/17

* Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Chapters 1 and 11)
* Adam Curtis, *Century of Self* (first 31 minutes)

Week 2

Tues, 1/22 Origins of Modern Advertising and Consumer Culture

* Raymond Williams, “Advertising: The Magic System” (*ACCR*)
* Susan Strasser “The Alien Past: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective” (*ACCR*)

Thurs, 1/24 A Semiotic Approach I

* Judith Williamson “A Currency of Signs” (subject to change)

Week 3

Tues, 1/29 A Semiotic Approach II

* Judith Williamson, “Signs Address Somebody”

Thurs, 1/31 Debating the Cultural Role of Advertising

* James Twitchell, “Reflections and Reviews: An English Teacher Looks at Branding” (*ACCR*)
* Sut Jhally, “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse” (*ACCR*)

Week 4

Tues, 2/5 More Cultural Approaches to Advertisements

* Michael Schudson, “Advertising as Capitalist Realism” (*ACCR*)
* Eric Watts and Mark Orbe, “The Spectacular Consumption of ‘True’ African American Culture” (ACCR)

Thurs, 2/7 Advertising and Cool 1

* David Foster Wallace, “Irony’s Aura”
* Thomas Frank, “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent”
* Recommended
  + Kelly, Lawlor, and O’Donhoe “Encoding Advertisements: The Critical Perspective” (*ACCR*)

Week 5

Tues, 2/12 Advertising and Cool II

* Malcolm Gladwell, “The Cool Hunters”
* Sarah Bird and Allen Tapp, “Social Marketing and the Meaning of Cool”

Thurs, 2/14 Exam 1

Week 6

Tues, 2/19 Case Study – Advertising the Beauty Ideal

* Fern Johnson “Different Tropes for Different Folks”
* **Paper Proposal Due**

Thurs, 2/21 Commodity Fetishism

* Anne McClintock , “Soft-Soaping Empire”
* Thomas Riggins, “What Is The Fetishism Of Commodities?”
* Recommended
  + Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof”

Week 7 -- Student Presentations (Tues, 2/26; Thurs, 2/28)

Week 8 Spring Break (Tues, 3/5; Thurs, 3/7)

Week 9

Tues, 3/12 Understanding Propaganda

* Jacques Ellul, Selections from *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*
* Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, “What is Propaganda and How Does It Differ From Persuasion”

Thurs, 3/14 Art and Propaganda

* Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, Selections from *Propaganda and Persuasion*
* Additional Reading TBA

Week 10

Tues, 3/19 Propaganda Model of News

* David Cromwell,” The Propaganda Model of News: An Overview
* Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, “The Propaganda Model after 20 Years: Interview with Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky”

Thurs, 3/21 Political Economy of Advertising

* Ben Bagdikian, “Dr. Brandth Has Gone To Harvard” (*ACCR*)
* Jef Richards and John Murphy, “Economic Censorship and Free Speech” (*ACCR*)

Week 11

Tues, 3/26 Political Advertising

* Hardy “Political Advertising in U.S. Presidential Campaigns: Messages, Targeting, and Effects” (*ACCR*)
* Readings on *Citizens United* TBA

Thurs, 3/28 New Frontiers in Political Advertising

* Charles Duhigg, Selections of *New York Times* articles
* Jane Mayer, “Attack Dog”

Week 12

Tues, 4/2 Final Paper Workshop

* **Final Paper Draft Due**

Thurs, 4/4 **Exam 2**

Week 13

Tues, 4/9 Daily You 1

* Joseph Turow, *The Daily You* Introduction – Chapter 1
* Note: Additional news articles will be assigned during these weeks

Thurs, 4/11 Daily You 2

* *The Daily You*, Chapters 2-3

Week 14

Tues, 4/16 Daily You 3

* *The Daily You*, Chapters 4-5

Thurs, 4/18 Daily You 4

* *The Daily You*, Chapters 6-7

Week 15

Tues, 4/23 Resistance

* Christine Harold, “Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism” (*ACCR*)
* Saunders, “In Persuasion Nation”

Thurs, 4/25 Student Choice Topic

Final Exam: Monday, May 6 @ 1 pm