Mass Media Studies and Theories JOUR 5040
Fall 2009
Instructor: Dr. Tracy Everbach
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Class blog: www.JOUR5040blog.blogspot.com

What you will learn: This class is designed to introduce students to theories about and studies of the American mass media. We will discuss how media operate, regulation of media, ethics, social, political and cultural issues and effects of media. You will learn various theories of media developed over time and put them into historical context. We also will discuss technology's role in media development and in the evolution of media theories. Students will examine mass media from a critical perspective and learn to use theoretical concepts to evaluate and study mass media.


What will happen in class/how to prepare for it: This is a graduate seminar, not a lecture class. Students are expected to read all assignments, lead class discussions and teach each other in addition to what you learn from the instructor and the readings. You must read all assignments before each class and be prepared to discuss them thoroughly. In this class we will discuss and present scholarly research into mass media. It also is crucial that you stay up to date with what is happening in the media by reading newspapers, watching television network/local/cable TV news, reading magazines, keeping up with Internet news sites, blogs and other forms of mass media. You also should pay attention to advertising, films, videos, video games and other forms of mass media. This is so you will be able to apply the theories you learn here to practical formats.

Course goals This course will help students:
- Trace the structures of news media and mass media forms.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they will work.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications.
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.

**Attendance:** You are expected to be present for every class and lab, unless otherwise instructed. If you have legitimate reasons for not attending (illness, disaster, death), contact the professor beforehand (by phone or e-mail) and present a note from a physician or other official at class. If you have a religious holiday, please let the professor know beforehand. Coming to class late or leaving early may constitute an absence for that day.

**Disabilities:** The Journalism Department, in cooperation with the Office of Disability Accommodation, complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodation for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written accommodation request before the 12th class day.

**Cell phone policy:** Cell phones should NEVER be used in class, including text messaging. You may be asked to leave class for using a cell phone.

**Honesty and Conduct:**

When you submit work for this class, it is the same as making a statement that you have produced the work yourself, in its entirety, and that this work has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course. Plagiarism, fabrication, copyright infringement, and similar uses of other people’s work are unacceptable.

Plagiarism, in a nutshell, is using other people’s written words as your own. Some people consider the use of 7-10 words in a row, copied from another source, as plagiarism. Be sure to include citations when using other people’s writing, because plagiarism is a serious offense in any discipline, especially in journalism. It’s a firing offense in the professional world. In this department, students face a range of penalties for plagiarism and for fabrication (depending on the importance of the assignment): a grade of “F” on a minor assignment; a request that the student drop the class; withdrawal of the student from the class, initiated by the professor; an “F” in the course; a referral to the UNT Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities; a notation on the student’s transcript; and suspension or expulsion from the university. A combination of these penalties may also be used.

**Assignments:**
Participation/discussion: 10 percent
Class presentation/discussion leader: 20 percent
Midterm exam: 20 percent
Final exam: 20 percent
Final proposal and paper: 30 percent

**Presentations:** Groups will be assigned to present mass media theories and concepts to the class. Your group of approximately three students will be assigned a particular week to make your presentation. Try to make these presentations interesting and entertaining. You will be able to use any form of mass media we have in the classroom including Web, DVD, music, Power Point, handouts, etc. I am not opposed to “Jeopardy!”-style games, interactive activities or other forms of learning. Your presentation should include some sort of teaching as well as some form of engaging your fellow students in a discussion. Be creative and have fun. The more practical examples you can present, the better. We want to learn how to apply these theories to real life. Your presentation should be somewhere between one hour and two hours long. (You can incorporate a break into your presentation.)

You probably will have to do further research beyond the book readings to illustrate the theories you are teaching us about. Please bring a bibliography of the studies you use and hand it in to the instructor before your presentation.

**Study proposal and paper:** Your final paper for this class will focus on a project you may be able to use for a thesis or other academic study. Before you go forward with your paper, you MUST submit a proposal, due Oct. 5, that must be approved by the instructor. Your proposal should be 1-2 pages long. Your final paper should be 10-15 pages long, with a bibliography attached. (The bibliography should be in addition to the 10-15 pages.)

Further information will be give on how to structure the paper, but you should think of a research question or hypothesis about an issue in mass media that you are interested in studying. You will complete a literature review on this topic and will describe the theories/concepts you would use to study this issue. You will have your choice of methods you would like to use for the study: qualitative, quantitative, historical, or a combination of methods.

NOTE: We meet only once a week, so if you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what was covered that week. Readings should be completed before each class.

**Tentative syllabus (some details may be subject to change):**

**Week 1, Aug. 31:** Introduction/overview on mass communication theory. Explanation of course, assignments, discussion groups, paper. Access to library databases.

**Week 2, Sept. 7:** NO CLASS/LABOR DAY

**Week 3, Sept. 14:** What is mass communication theory and why should we care? How has it developed over time?
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapters 1 & 2. Lull, Chapter 1

**Week 4, Sept. 21:** Mass society, propaganda and culture  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapters 3 & 4. Lull, Chapters 5 & 8  
*Group 1 presentation*

**Week 5, Sept. 28:** Limited effects of media  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 5 & 6  
*Group 2 presentation*

**Week 6, Oct. 5:** Middle-range theories  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 7; Lull, Chapters 2 & 4  
*Group 3 presentation*

**Due: Study proposal***

**Week 7, Oct. 12:** Critical and cultural studies  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 8; Lull, Chapters 3 & 6  
*Group 4 presentation*

**Week 8, Oct. 19:** MIDTERM EXAM

**Week 9, Oct. 26:** Media and Audiences  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 9; Lull, Chapter 7  
*Group 5 presentation*

**Week 10, Nov. 2:** Media and society  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 10; Lull, Chapters 8 & 9  
*Group 6 presentation*

**Week 11, Nov. 9:** Media and culture  
READINGS: Baran and Davis, Chapter 11 & 12; Lull, Chapter 10  
*Group 7 presentation*

**Week 12, Nov. 16:** Media effects: news media  
READINGS: Handouts

**Week 13, Nov. 23:** Media effects: sex, violence, race, gender  
READINGS: Handouts

*** Thanksgiving***

**Week 14, Nov. 30:** Wrap-up and prep for final exam. What does this all mean and how can we use it to analyze media?
Week 15, Dec. 7: FINAL EXAM
FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 14.

*Thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Koehler and Dr. Tom Johnson for their outlines, assignments and grading systems, which contributed a great deal to this syllabus.*