

JCOM 2010 – MEDIA SMARTS: Making Sense of the Information Age
Spring 2009 • T/TH Noon-1:15 & W, 2:30-5:20
• Pre-requisites: ENGL 1010

“Whoever controls the media—the images—controls the culture.”
 —Allen Ginsberg, Poet & Author

PROFESSOR: Dr. Brenda Cooper, 319C Animal Science; 797-3253; brenda.cooper@usu.edu
<http://www.usu.edu/journalism/faculty/cooper/index.htm>

OFFICE HOURS: T/TH, 1:30-2:45, W, 1:00-2:15, & by appointment

UNDERGRAD TA: Kate Reeves, 319D Animal Science; Kate.Reeves@aggiemail.usu.edu
 Katie Jo Matekovic, 319D Animal Science;
katie_jo.matekovic@aggiemail.usu.edu

JCOM OFFICE: 310 Animal Science; 797-3292; jcom@cc.usu.edu;
<http://www.usu.edu/communic>

INTRODUCTION

This course, which is required for Journalism & Communication majors and fulfills Social Science Breadth requirements in University Studies for other students, is intended to shake you up a bit as we challenge what we think we know about the world and how we “know” it. In the information age, most of what Americans think they know about the world comes from strangers through mass media messages and images. How trustworthy are these messages? Who is creating them, and what are their goals? How much should we trust them?

Media Smarts is a primer, a “media civics” lesson designed to expand your critical understanding of the role of media in society, and to help you develop the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate more knowledgeably the motivations, techniques, attitudes, underlying themes, structures and realities of media messages and the multi-trillion-dollar industries that create them. The goal is to sharpen the understanding and critical thinking skills of students who take part in media—as either producers or consumers—to make you “smarter” (or at least more savvy) in understanding connections between media practice and the society’s legitimate expectations of journalism and mass media. Who gets covered? Why? What kinds of stories slip through the cracks? What kinds of distortions—either intentional or inadvertent—appear in news and entertainment media, and why? How will new technologies alter the way we “see” the world? What are the impacts of media content on people who use it? What do those of us who watch TV, listen to radio, see movies, read newspapers, and surf the Internet need to know about what we’re watching/hearing/reading? What have we missed in the age of (mis)information?

REQUIRED RESOURCES

- Weekly readings are online articles. URLS for readings are posted every Friday on the class blog: <http://getmediasmarts.blogspot.com>. You’re responsible for printing and reading all assigned articles by the first class meeting of the week they are assigned.
- **E-mail:** Every student is required to open and regularly use a USU e-mail account. Class assignments and information will be posted to you via e-mail, and it is your responsibility to check e-mail daily.

USU Disability Accommodations: If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (7-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any requests for special considerations relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of exams, etc. must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in alternative formats, large print, audio, diskette, or Braille.

COURSE OBJECTIVES—What you’ll learn

- To become more “savvy” and more critical consumers of mass media products.
- To appreciate the mass media’s impact on and interaction with individuals, institutions, society & culture.
- To think critically about the ways you respond to and use media products.
- To develop perspectives on how better to interpret popular culture & media messages.
- To learn how the mass media work in a democratic society and how to knowledgeably question the media’s authority and to double-check what you think you “know” in the Information Age.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This is a **media criticism** course. That is not to be misunderstood to mean a *media-bashing* course, because there is a very important difference between judgmental criticism (“I HATE this!”) and critical judgment (“There’s more to this story than that.”). This course is designed to help give you the broader context and understanding of how the mass media work, in the process becoming more discerning consumers of the mass media in this information age.

In a sense, you already are experts on the subject of the mass media, because you’ve been “mediated” since you were babies—by what you hear and see on television and radio, by what you see and read in newspapers and magazines, by advertising, sitcoms, music, news headlines, movies and the new interactive media. For most Americans, what we “know” about the rest of the world beyond our immediate horizons comes to us through someone else’s eyes, told to us by people we don’t know from places we’ve never been, about topics we usually don’t know much about. From *CSI* to CNN and FOX News to *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart to the *Simpsons*, so much of what we “know” about the world comes to us from the mass media. Whether it’s news or advertising or entertainment, media messages strongly help form the world we “know” both in terms of news events (what we think about) and our cultural norms and mores (how we think). At the same time, however, most of us actually are much too accepting of the mass media that help create those realities.

In class discussions and in assigned readings, you will find a range of perspectives on the role and responsibilities of the media in a democratic society—some you’ll like, some not. The goal is to help you reflect on your own media use and tastes from a critical distance. I hope that this course will give you a few more tools to be more savvy consumers of the media, and will provide a stronger basis of understanding from which to form your assessments of media performance in the larger social context. I encourage you to challenge my preferences or those of your classmates and the authors found in your readings. But be smart—be prepared to back up your opinions with more critical analysis than just, “I don’t like this” or “I disagree with that.” What are the implications—political, social, economic, cultural—that lie behind media content, and what issues are raised (or omitted) in those message? I hope this course will represent a process of critical synthesis and understanding of information that begins this semester and continues as long as you live in a mediated society.

What Media Literacy/Criticism Is: A 21st century approach to education that provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create media messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

What Media Literacy/Criticism is NOT:

- “Media bashing” is NOT media literacy, however media literacy sometimes involves *criticizing the media*”
- “Looking at a media message or a mediated experience from just one perspective is NOT media literacy because media should be examined from *multiple positions*.”
- “Media Literacy does NOT mean ‘don’t watch;’ it means ‘*watch carefully, think critically*.’”

(see http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article380.html)

Class Format:

Our class is “student driven”—a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that encourages students’ ownership of their learning process. What this means is that your assignments are designed to provide you with the opportunities to take leadership roles in the class, including writing discussion questions and leading class discussions. As part of our class focus, my job is to provide you with the skills you need to think critically about media issues and to evaluate how media work to create reality on both individual and societal levels.

How To Demonstrate What You Learn & Earn Your Course Grade

1. Quizzes	20%
2. Critical essays/projects on assigned topics	20/20%
3. Journalism, History & Hollywood project & presentation	20%
4. In-class & team participation	10%
5. Final Exam	<u>10%</u>
	100%

• **Please note:** In order to receive a passing grade for JCOM 2010, you must complete **all** of the course assignments.

Quizzes: Daily short-answer questions on the readings, current news events, previous class discussions, lectures, etc. You may use your notes from your readings or from the material we cover in class, or the readings themselves. **No make-ups—Don't ask!** Occasional extra credit assignments may replace one missed quiz.

- **Please note:** The quiz answers will be provided in class, but quizzes will not be returned. You may check with the TAs for your cumulative quiz scores at any time during the semester. Questions about quizzes? See me or the TAs during our office hours— We do not answer any questions about quizzes by e-mail.

- **Critical Essays or Multi-media Projects:** Teams have the choice to write a critical essay or produce a multi-media presentation on topics. Regardless of which option the team selects, all teams will submit the required notebook including editorial cartoons, magazine covers and coding sheets, etc., as required for the specific assignment. Deadlines are ABSOLUTE and NON-NEGOTIABLE. Late work will receive an “F.”

- **Final Project & Presentation:** You will be working in teams to develop a 15-20 minute in-class presentation comparing how news and entertainment media depict the same events, issues and/or people. Films must relate to some aspect of journalism ethics.

- **Team Participation:** Each of you will be assigned to a team the second week of classes, and will work with the team on several assignments during the semester, including leading in-class discussions, writing essays, and preparing and presenting a media-related project to the class. The ultimate goal of these assignments is to demonstrate how “media smart” you become during the semester. Each team member should be responsible for an equal amount of work toward the essays and presentation (either behind the scenes or during the class presentation).

In addition to my evaluation of your in-class participation, at the end of each team assignment, team members will evaluate each other on their contributions to the teamwork for that project. This grade is based on your attendance and on how well your team members think you contributed to the team's work. The three evaluations will be averaged at the end of the semester and become part of my assessment of your engagement in the class.

- **Team coordinators:** Each team needs to designate a team coordinator who is responsible to organize the teams and report via e-mail to the instructors about team business. The team coordinator or another team member will also meet with me or one of the TAs to go over coding and charts for your two essays.

- **Final Exam:** A comprehensive essay exam on the material covered during the semester (readings, documentaries, handouts, lectures, etc.). **The final is optional**—if you are satisfied with your grade before the final exam, you may opt not to take the final. If you do not take the final exam, your quizzes will count for 30% of your final grade rather than 20%.

- **Attendance:** This course is about reading, thinking, viewing, listening and talking. Everyone is expected to attend every session of the class and to participate in discussions in class and in their teams. Please don't be late or leave early—either will count as an absence. No excused absences, including work conflicts, except for documented medical emergency, family emergency or required university-related absence. Inform me ahead of time if you must miss class.

If you miss a class for one of these reasons, you will need to provide me with the following documentation in order to make-up the missed quiz: (1) one page, typed & double-spaced, explaining why you missed class, and (2) support documentation (e.g. official note from physician). I must receive your written request for make-up quizzes or other missed assignments no later than one week after the due date or you will not be permitted to make-up the missed work.

Please do not ask me to send you notes or other materials if you miss a class. The documentaries and other media examples that I use in class must be reserved and I cannot make them available outside class. If you miss a documentary, it is your responsibility to track down the DVD, etc., and view it outside of class.

If you miss **ANY** of your team meetings you will receive a zero for that assignment (F). No excuses—period. For example, showing up at the wrong place for your team meeting is NOT an excuse. It's your responsibility to know where and when your team is meeting and then be there on time with your work for the meeting completed.

Grading Policies

- **Grade Negotiations:** In order to be fair to everyone in the class, I do not negotiate grades. Please don't ask to be an exception to this policy. I also do not give incomplete grades except for reasons stated in university policy. In other words, your grades are final. The grades you earn are based on your performance, not your effort. I recognize your efforts and commitment to the class through your participation grade for the course.

- **Grading Questions—The 48 Hour Policy:** I am happy to meet with you in my office to discuss any questions you have regarding a grade you earn for an assignment. I will not answer grading

questions by email. If you have a grading question, please schedule an appointment with me at least 48 hours after I return the assignment and bring the following to our meeting: (1) the original assignment (2) one page, typed & double-spaced, in which you explain your questions. This will help facilitate our meeting and help me to more effectively answer your questions.

Grade Criteria

• **Grade A: Outstanding** (A+=95% & above; A-=90-94). In addition to meeting the criteria for grades B & C:

1. Demonstrates superior skill and thought, skillful use of language to represent your ideas as a probable, believable and fair interpretation of the specific media issues.
2. Provides insights and demonstrates in-depth understanding of the topic, issues, etc.
3. Arguments and conclusions are exceptionally well developed, coherent, well-organized.

• **Grade B: Exceeds expectations (B+=88-89%; B=85-86%; B-=80-84%)**: In addition to meeting the criteria for grade C:

1. Exhibits a thoughtful and thorough understanding of the media issues being examined.
2. Shows some insight, critical reflection and creativity in the analysis
3. Arguments/conclusions are organized clearly & very well supported with examples and evidence.
4. Fine writing skills.

• **Grade C: Acceptable** (C+=78-79%, C=75-77%; C-=70-74%). Meets **all** of the **minimum** criteria for assignment.

1. Writing errors are minor and language is used correctly.
2. Arguments and conclusions are adequately supported with specific examples.
3. Work is completed by the deadlines and conforms to page requirements.
4. Sources (if required) are cited correctly.
5. Demonstrates some insight or critical reflection. Interpretation relies mostly on description. In other words, states the obvious or simply re-states points already made in class/texts/videos, etc.

• **Grade D+: Poor** (D+=68-69) OR **Grade D: Dreadful** (D=60-67%) & **Grade F: Troll** (59% & below): Does not fulfill minimum criteria for a grade of C. Overall, below average work that may have one or more of the following problems:

1. Excessive writing and/or language errors.
2. Work is based primarily on unsupported opinions; fails to use specific examples and evidence.
3. Misses the point of the assignment; lacks depth — demonstrates minimal effort.
4. Demonstrates minimal insight, interpretation or critical reflection.
5. Work is plagiarized.

COURSE POLICIES

• **Conferences**: Please make an appointment with me to discuss your progress and any problems or concerns you may be having in the course.

• **Decorum**: We're all in this together. That means that we will need each other to succeed. And that means that everyone is expected to treat everyone else with fairness, courtesy and honesty. Disruptive behavior will result in losing points toward your final grade; repeaters will be dropped from the class. Don't whisper in class. Don't bring your lunch. Don't sleep in class. Please apply the Golden Rule.

Your attitude toward the class and the material we cover is also an important part of the class. Every class has its expectations, and an important expectation in this class is a willingness to be open to and considerate of the thoughts and ideas of your classmates. If there are 100 people in class, there may be at least 100 different perspectives toward the material, based on our individual life experiences. Although you may disagree with the perspectives of others, including your professor, it is essential that we all respect each other's views and beliefs. All viewpoints are valid and important.

Other norms for JCOM 2000 are: consideration, respect, non-judgment, courtesy and attentiveness. In addition to regular attendance, your final grade will reflect how closely you choose to adhere to these norms. Finally, if your behavior is disruptive to the class, your final grade may be reduced. Final arbiter about these matters is the instructor.

• **Electronic stuff**: Please remember to **turn off** cell phones and laptops at the beginning of class. It is rude to me and to your classmates your cell phones are ringing, you are text-messaging friends, or answering emails during class. See Doonesbury — WiFi in class comic strip:

http://www.doonesbury.com/strip/dailydose/index.html?uc_full_date=20071111

• **Seating & Participation:** Please sit toward the front of the classroom. This is a large class and in order to facilitate a supportive environment for discussions, we all need to be able to hear each other. I encourage you to make comments and ask questions.

• **Deadlines:** Are final. That's why they call them *deadlines*. No make-ups, no exceptions

• **A Disclaimer:** I have no desire to offend anyone's personal or cultural beliefs, and apologize if I do so inadvertently. However, this class deals with the typical fare contained in standard mass media content—advertising, news, movies, TV and the Internet, etc. Some of that material may occasionally contain profanity, violence, sexuality or other stuff that may make some students uncomfortable. (FYI: Approximately 70-80% of Hollywood films are R-rated.)

• **Current Events:** This is a Journalism course, so you need to keep up with the news, especially info dealing specifically with the media, which will come up in class and on quizzes. Watch for articles about the mass media. You should watch the TV network news and listen to National Public Radio (KUSU, 89.5 FM: "Morning Edition," 5-9 a.m. and "All Things Considered," 4-6:00 p.m.). Students are urged to read a daily newspaper, read a national or international weekly newsmagazine, view TV news daily. The *New York Times* and *Salt Lake Tribune* are available free around campus.

Academic Honesty Policies

• **USU:** The University expects students and faculty alike to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty (for a complete definition, see University Catalogue or the Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University, Article V, Section 3). The policy states: "[C]heating, falsification or plagiarism can result in warning, grade reduction, probation, suspension, expulsion, payment of damages, withholding of transcripts, withholding of degrees, removal a class, performance of community service, referral to appropriate counseling" or other penalties as the university judiciary may deem appropriate."

• **JCOM:** Because public trust and personal credibility are essential to journalists and other professional communicators, the JCOM department observes a zero-tolerance policy regarding academic dishonesty: As per USU Student Code, any documented form of academic dishonesty— including plagiarism—will result in an automatic F in the course and a report to the department head, the dean of the college and the USU vice president for student services. JCOM students who engage in documented academic dishonesty may be dropped from the major, upon a hearing with the student, the instructor, and the department head. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database.

If you have any questions about what's acceptable work under strict codes of academic honesty, see the USU Code of Policies and Procedures for Students, or consult your professor. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database. FYI: Plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Other JCOM Information

• **JCOM advising:** In order to ensure that JCOM students progress through the major efficiently, the JCOM Department requires that all students meet with the department's Adviser (Reid Furniss), Peer Adviser or with a faculty adviser each semester prior to pre-registration. An academic hold will be placed on all JCOM majors and pre-majors each semester until students have obtained advising, either individually with an adviser or in one of several group advising sessions that will take place prior to the pre-registration period. Academic holds on student records will be lifted upon presentation of a signed advising form to the JCOM office. Questions—see JCOM adviser.

• **JCOM course repeat policy:** Students may take JCOM classes a maximum of two times, with department permission; failure to achieve minimum grades will result in students being dropped from the major.

GUIDELINES FOR CRITICAL ESSAYS

1. Typed, double-spaced papers (APA or MLA style)
2. Grades are based on thoroughness, clarity and insight. Use specific examples to support your ideas and conclusions.
3. Avoid extended quotations. Most can be cut down and paraphrased. We're looking for your original thought and synthesis of information/data, not just regurgitation of what others have said.
4. Do not use Wikipedia as a source for **anything**. This online dictionary is unreliable and prone to errors.

5. Spelling/syntax/grammar/punctuation/style errors will lower your score. Errors of fact result in failure for the assignment. So proofread carefully. And then proofread a second time! FYI: Proofreading tips for common writing errors: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets.shtml> AND <http://jdwritingctr.iweb.bsu.edu/>.
6. English Department Writing Center: You may schedule an appointment with the Writing Center by phone (797-2712) or on-line (<http://writingcenter.usu.edu/>). The Writing Center is located at RBWest 104. There is a small fee.
7. Information/data or quotation or opinion or statement of fact taken from any other source must be attributed using APA or MLA style. You may paraphrase statements of others, but must cite the source; if the material is quoted it must be placed in quotes, reproduced with complete accuracy, and cited completely. Failure to give full credit to your sources of information may be considered plagiarism FYI: See this URL on plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>.
8. Teams must also email me and attach their essays as a WORD file attachment. I maintain a database of student essays from previous and current classes. Unless I receive your essay via email as a file attachment, I will be unable to give your team's paper a final grade.