

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

MCC-GE 2001 Seminar in Media, Culture, and Communication: Spring 2021

Instructor and Course Information

- Professor Rodney Benson
- Tuesdays, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm, Remote
- **On 3/9, 3/30, and 4/13 in-person+remote at 239 Greene St, Room #302**
- Office hours every Tuesday and Thursday, 2-3 pm: sign up on Google Calendar

Course Description

This course examines a broad range of theoretical approaches central to the study of media, culture, and communication. The course is organized around four broad and interrelated themes: (1) Power and Cultural Production; (2) Culture and Meaning; (3) Media and Technology; and (4) Globalization. We will seek to understand the complex linkages between the social structures of media industries (technological, political, economic), the meaningful cultural objects they produce and distribute (texts, sounds and images), and the interpretations and uses that various publics make of these objects (as well as the growing role they play in producing their own cultural objects). Students will learn the differences among the major theoretical and methodological approaches, be able to explain the virtues and limits of each, and put them into practice for their own analysis, research, and professional practice.

Readings/Texts

All the assigned book excerpts and articles listed on the course schedule will be made available through the New York University Classes system.

I may also occasionally upload online articles or audio or video links. These will also be found on the NYU Classes Site.

The syllabus is an outline for the course. I reserve the right to make modifications as needed.

MCC's Writing Program

MCC's Writing Coach, Dr. Kari Hensley, is here to support graduate students in the writing and revising process. You are encouraged to make an appointment with her whether you are interested in refining your voice or are struggling to find it. Through individual sessions, she can work with you on term papers, thesis/dissertations, conference papers, cover letters, and more.

For more information and to make an appointment, visit:

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/mcc/masters/writing>

Assignments and Evaluation

(1) Active Class Participation (15 %): Attendance is required and excessive absences will affect your grade. When you are in class, you are expected to be prepared to discuss readings and to actively engage in discussion with the professor and your classmates. Except in exceptional circumstances, please keep your camera on during Zoom sessions.

(2) Oral presentation (10 %) : At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up for a week for which you will be responsible for offering an opening quick synthesis and critique (10 minutes is plenty). Your opening remarks should NOT provide a detailed summary of the readings. Rather, you should identify a handful of key themes and questions that span the assigned readings and that can help orient the discussion.

(3) Discussion Forum Posts (20 %: 10% pass/fail for completion and 10% for quality): Each week, no later than 8 pm the night prior to class, you will post a 200-250 word (**MAXIMUM**) critical commentary on the readings. Focus on at least two readings – in some cases, I may specify which ones are most crucial -- and touch on as many of the readings as possible. [You are always responsible for reading and being prepared to discuss ALL assigned readings in class.] Make clear what you like or do not like about the readings. I encourage you to also respond directly to other students' comments, either with an additional post, or in class discussions.

Comments will be graded for participation and for quality. Comments posted by 8 pm the night before class will receive a 1 for participation; comments posted after 8 pm but before class meets will receive 0.5; comments posted after class meets or not posted will receive a 0. Comments will be graded for their quality based on breadth of engagement with multiple texts, depth and acuity of critical analysis, and systematic comparisons across texts (including previous weeks' readings).

Note: For the week when you are the assigned discussion prompter, do not post a regular discussion forum post.

(4) Short Paper I [Theory Application] (25%): DUE Friday, March 26, submitted to NYU Classes. In this 8 pp, 12 pt. type, double-spaced paper (2,000 words), you will apply a theory from one of the previous weeks to a contemporary media case study of your choice. The paper should consist of the following elements: 1) Introduction of the theory you will be using, 2) Introduction of your case study, 3) Discussion of how the theory can help describe, explain, and/or provide an important critique of what is taking place in your case study, 4) Discussion of ways in which the theory does not help you

describe, explain, or critique your case study [i.e., ways in which the "case study" doesn't "fit" the theory, and 5) Concluding discussion of limitations of your case study as a test and suggestions for further research to test the theory.

(5) Short Paper II [Comparative Essay] (30%): Due Monday after last class, 5/10, at 12 noon, on NYU Classes. This 8 pp., 12 pt. type, double-spaced paper (2,000 words) should offer a detailed comparison of at least 2 authors, and no more than 3, generally taken from two separate weeks' assigned readings. You may use the week of your oral presentation as one of your comparison weeks, but you do not have to. The paper should engage with a broad concept or problematic dealt with by both authors and trace the similarities and differences in their assumptions, definitions, methods, conclusions, etc. I encourage you to meet with me to discuss your selection of authors and framing of each paper before you turn it in.

EVALUATION SUMMARY

Oral Presentation	10 percent
Class Participation	15 percent
Weekly "NYU Classes" Forum Comments	20 percent
Paper I (Theory Application)	25 percent
Paper II (Comparative Essay)	30 percent

Evaluation Rubric

A = Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B = Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at a general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C = Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D = Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course

material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F = Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments.

A = 94-100

A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89

B = 84-86

B- = 80-83

C+ = 77-79

C = 74-76

C- = 70-73

D+ = 65-69

D = 60-64

F = 0-59

Course Policies

General Decorum and Policy on Electronic Devices

Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

Please print out and mark up a paper copy of the assigned readings. I strongly encourage active, annotated reading practices: in other words, please underline your text and write key phrases and critiques in the margins.

Absences and Lateness

More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling assignments. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

Format

Please double-space your (typed) written work. Please also number multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing. When sending a document electronically, please name the file in the following format Yourlastname MACore2021 Assignment#.doc

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism

http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; report from other's oral work; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
- Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
 - Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions

When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.

The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

Student Resources

- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting reasonable accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to register with the Moses Center for students with Disabilities. You can begin the registration process by completing [Moses Center Online Intake](#). Once completed, a Disability Specialist will be in contact with you. Students requiring services are strongly encouraged to register prior to the upcoming semester or as early as possible during the semester to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations.

- NYU Writing Center (Washington Square): 411 Lafayette, 4th Floor. Schedule an appointment online at <https://nyu.mywconline.com> or just walk-in.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Assignments

Important Dates

Friday, 3/26, 5 pm.: Paper I DUE

Monday, 5/10, 12 noon: Paper II DUE

Class 1: Overview and Introductions [2.2]

Class 2: What's At Stake: Civic and Ethical Ideals [2.9]

Myra Marx Ferree, William A. Gamson, Jurgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht.

2002. "Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies."

Bruce Williams and Michael X. Delli Carpini. 2011. *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment*. Ch. 8.

Class 3: Culture, Solidarity, Ritual, Performance [2.16]

James Carey. 2009. "A Cultural Approach to Communication."

Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on The Balinese Cockfight."

Jeffrey Alexander. 2017. "A New Theory of Modernity from Ritual to Performance" and "Seizing the Stage: Mao, MLK, and Black Lives Matter Today."

Class 4: Ideology and Cultural Hegemony [2.23]

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas."

Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press; New Ed., 2001.

Stuart Hall. "Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 2*: 91-114.

Stuart Hall. 1981. "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media." Excerpted from *Silver Linings*, edited by G. Bridges and R. Brunt (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd.).

Reece Peck. 2019. "'The Makers and the Takers': How Fox News Forges a Working-Class/Business-Class Political Alliance." Pp. 155-184 in *Fox Populism*.

Class 5: Political Economy of Media [3.2]

Victor Pickard, "How Commercialism Degrades Journalism," in *Democracy without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society* (Oxford, 2019).

Joshua Gamson and Pearl Latteier. 2004. "Do Media Monsters Devour Diversity?"

Sarah Banet-Weiser. 2012. "Branding Consumer Citizens: Gender and the Emergence of Brand Culture." In *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU Press.

Yochai Benkler et al. 2018. *Network Propaganda*.

Class 6: Autonomy and Counter-Power in Cultural Production [3.9]

Pierre Bourdieu. 1998. *On Television*. Selections.

Ya-Wen Lei. 2016. "Freeing the Press: How Field Environment Explains Critical News Reporting in China."

Manuel Castells. 2007. "Communication, Power, and Counter-Power in the Network Society."

Sarah Florini. 2015. "This Week in Blackness, the George Zimmerman acquittal, and the production of a networked collective identity." *New Media & Society*.

Class 7: Modernity and Power [3.16]

Max Weber. 1958 [1904-5]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 13-31 (Introduction) and pp. 155-183 (Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism)

Theodor Adorno. "The Culture Industry Revisited."

Christian Sandvig. 2015. "The Social Industry."

Gilles Deleuze. 1992. "Postscript on the Societies of Control."

Class 8: Theory Application Paper Presentations [3.23]

PAPER 1 [THEORY APPLICATION] DUE: Friday, March 26

Class 9: Producers and their Audiences [3.30]

John Fiske. 1989. "Moments of television: Neither the text nor the audience."

Stuart Hall. 1980. "Encoding / Decoding."

Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction*. Selections.

Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd. 2010. "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience."

Class 10: Cultural Globalization and Postcolonial Theory [4.6]

Arjun Appadurai. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy."

Marwan Kraidy. 2002. "Hybridity in Cultural Globalization." *Communication Theory*.

Joseph Straubhaar. 1997. "Distinguishing the global, regional and national levels of world television." In *Media in global context: a reader* (London: Arnold), pp. 284-98.

Giselinde Kuipers. 2011. "Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55 (5): 541-557.

R. Shome and R.S. Hegde. 2002. "Postcolonial Approaches to Communication." *Communication Theory*.

Class 11: Medium/Media Theories [4.13]

Marshall McLuhan. 1994 [1964]. *Understanding Media*. Selections.

Marshall McLuhan. 1995. Pp. 233-69 in E. McLuhan and F. Zingrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan*.

Erica Robles-Anderson and Patrick Svensson. 2016. "'One Damn Slide After Another': Powerpoint at Every Occasion for Speech."

<http://computationalculture.net/one-damn-slide-after-another-powerpoint-at-every-occasion-for-speech/>

Class 12: Interplay of the Technological and the Social I [4.20]

Claude S. Fischer. "Technology and Modern Life."

Langdon Winner. "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

Bruno Latour. "Technology is society made durable."

Class 13: Interplay of the Technological and the Social II [4.27]

Whitney Pow. 2018. "Reaching toward home: Software Interface as Queer Orientation in the Video Game Curtain." *Velvet Light Trap* 81: 43-56.

Safiya Umoja Noble. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression*. Selections.

Simone Browne. 2010. "Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity, and Biometrics." *Critical Sociology* 36(1): 131-150.

Class 14: Infrastructures and Platforms [5.4]

Lisa Parks. 2015. "'Stuff You Can Kick': Toward a Theory of Media Infrastructures."

Ramon Laboto. 2019. "The Infrastructures of Streaming." In *Netflix Nations* (New York: NYU Press), pp. 73-106.

Jean-Christophe Plantin, Carl Lagoze, Paul N. Edwards, and Christian Sandvig. 2018. "Infrastructure studies meet platform studies in the age of Google and Facebook."

Tarleton Gillespie. 2010. "The Politics of platforms."

PAPER 2 [COMPARATIVE ESSAY] DUE: MONDAY, 5.10, 12 NOON]