

Sociology of Mass Media: Spring 2019
Sociology 317: 35261
Mondays and Wednesdays: 4:00 – 5:20
Gerlinger Hall: 302

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Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to the sociological understanding of multiple media platforms. By engaging in this material students will better understand the role media plays in everyday life socially and individually. This class covers social theories of media regarding production, distribution, and consumption. Throughout the course, particular emphasis is placed on power. Both the power media have in our lives, and what power people have in the manufacture and creation of media. In every instance we will ask: How does the medium (movies, newspaper, music, the Internet, etc.) structure the way audiences receive messages? Who make these media, and for what purpose? Who consume these media, and what do they receive from their consumption? These questions will help students understand how social identities like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are represented in media. Additionally, students will examine the persistence of unequal representations in media and how representations reflect structural inequalities present in American society.

This course is structured in such a way as to demand active participation and foster critical thinking skills. Active participation is assessed primarily through written assignments and activities.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to identify major sociological theories and concepts within sociological media studies.

Students will be able to sociologically analyze a variety of media forms in order to understand their reach and impact on society.

Students will be able to identify key issues in contemporary Western society regarding media literacy, representation, and reliability.

Students will reflect on their own social location relative to media in their own lives.

Course Materials:

Many of the articles, book chapters, and other materials that you are ***REQUIRED*** to read are posted on Canvas. However, **there are also other media you must engage with that I provide links for on Canvas.**

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Grazian, David. 2017. *Mix it Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. 2nd edition. ISBN: 978-0-393-60279-1

VERY IMPORTANT: By far one of the most crucial aspects of this class is the required reading. Students are expected to have read the assigned text before coming to class.

Statement of Purpose:

The past few years have been contentious in the United States. Not only the election of President Donald Trump, but the political and social conversations that are a noxious mix of false reporting, hyperbole, and bias, with the players constantly changing where they draw the line in the sand. Popular culture is not immune – celebrities are voicing concerns of representation as award recipients, speaking out against harassment, and themselves increasingly embroiled in political debate. This class is designed to help us, nay, to help you, cut through the noise and critically analyze what is going on in the world today. This is no easy task, as each and every day there is “breaking news,” sprinkled over *another* disaster, outrage, or medical breakthrough that you should “consult your doctor to see if its right for you.” Plus, constant technological advancement, iTunes updates, and social media make our analyses akin to hitting a moving target. Not to mention that many of the issues we cover in this class are sensitive topics: poverty, race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, violence, political ideology, etc. Therefore, I would like to say that this class is hard, not just in terms of requirements, but in terms of commitment. In a world that privileges expedience, I demand excellence.

Technology:

Considerable scientific evidence has accrued over the years, which shows that taking notes with a computer is not as effective as taking notes by hand. “But wait,” you say, “I’ve always taken notes with my computer and I do just fine!” I encourage you to try taking handwritten notes, because if you “always” use your computer, you have nothing to compare your past experiences to. If you still elect to use a computer I will permit it; however, I do request that computer users sit towards the rear of the classroom so as to not distract people taking notes by hand.

Regarding cellphones, I know how demanding these devices are. Indeed, the beeping, vibrating, and flashing are alluring. Given that many people in our world today look at their phone every couple of minutes I would hope that class would be a welcome refuge from the near-constant requisite of peering onto those tiny screens. I am allowing cellphones in class *despite* my personal feelings, as I understand that many students use their phones to take pictures of class notes. *HOWEVER*, let me make it perfectly clear that I take personal offense when students use their phones for non-academic reasons. It is disrespectful of me and my time, it is disrespectful towards your colleagues who are distracted by your phone use, it is disrespectful to the people who fund your education through taxes, scholarships, or cash payments, and finally, it reflects an inability to take seriously what you are here to do. Use them wisely.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

Obviously cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable. As per the University of Oregon's guidelines, I consider each instance on a case-by-case basis. When I suspect you of cheating and/or plagiarizing you will have the opportunity to meet with me to explain the circumstances. The consequences will match the egregiousness of the misconduct, but generally expect to either fail the assignment or the course entirely. In the event that I fail you for the course, or that you fail to respond to my request to meet, I will send my suspicion of misconduct to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Missed Assignments:

As a rule of thumb, I only accept late work when requests are *reasonable* and *prior* to the date assignments are due. I am willing to work with people for a variety of concerns: healthcare; childcare; career building appointments; family matters; personal matters; jury duty; etc. I do **NOT** accept assignments submitted late that you assume I will take. You *must* obtain permission from me or our GE prior. Extensions are also given on a limited basis, as I strongly feel that when multiple assignments stack up students fall behind to their demise. And as instructor, I do reserve the right to say "No."

Accessibility:

There is a specific University of Oregon policy that regards student accessibility that I both adhere to and strongly believe as necessary for education. The specific text can be found on the website of the accessible education center. But for our purposes, my statement is the following:

It is important and necessary that my class be an inclusive learning environment for everyone. However, I cannot work towards that goal without knowing how to help you. Please tell me if there are specific aspects of the course, in terms of instruction, design, or assessment, that result in a disability-related challenge for your full and earnest participation. Additionally, the Accessible Education Center has resources to help you. They are located in 164 Oregon Hall, can be called at (541) 346-1155 or emailed at uoaec@uoregon.edu

Further Accessibility:

While the current University of Oregon policy is useful for students who work with the AEC office, I also feel it is important to make my classroom accessible to marginalized people not included in the AEC criteria. This means that I consider my classroom an open environment for students from all walks of life: class background, racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, political ideologies, marital/parent status, homelessness, age, employment, citizenship status, and more. In creating this environment, I ask that students *help me* in creating an environment that is welcoming.

Respect – people have different experiences and ideas

Reflexively – engage with your own ideas; we are wrong more often than we like to admit

Understand – expertise comes in a variety of forms

Listen – when others speak

For parents – if you need to bring a child to class because of a lapse in childcare and/or you're a new parent (congratulations) you are welcome to bring your child to class, but I do ask that you not abuse this privilege. Please let me know in advance that you are bringing a child (as some course content may not be suitable for children based on your personal beliefs) and also sit towards the edge so you may excuse yourself as needed.

Trigger Warnings:

In past iterations of this course students have brought to my attention that some of the material that is covered in this course may trigger past traumas, or at a minimum, is shocking. This is true, and try as I might, I seriously doubt that I could give everyone a complete list of all possible triggers in this course. I also think the general philosophy of trigger warnings is sight privileged, as many sounds and smells that can also trigger people with PTSD go unlisted. It is likely impossible that I could fairly list all potential triggers. Thus, for this class ***I do not provide trigger warnings.*** However, I will **REFERENCE** what I consider to be some of the most triggering topics this class covers directly or indirectly. ***If you have personal concerns please contact me directly so I may advise you appropriately.***

Racism (Explicit and implicit)

Sex work (inequalities, prejudices, and assumptions)

Inequality (gender based, class based, and others)

Political bias (liberal, conservative, and conspiratorial)

Police brutality

Sexual violence, including rape

Revenge pornography, child pornography (by definition – teenage sexting)

Cursing

Cultural appropriation

Grading:

Rather than grading on a “point system” as many students are used to, this course utilizes a contract grading system that roughly translates the *amount* of work to what grade you receive. While this system is open, it is best to complete the number of assignments you’d like to complete early rather than bank on assignments not being marked “incomplete” at the end of class. You need to decide which track you will pursue and plan accordingly.

There are three criteria your grade depends on: attendance, assessments, and CKs (Connected Knowers).

Attendance is a raw score and is collected each and every day (except syllabus day). You are either here, or you are not. Since even the A Contract allows four missed days, I do not allow students to make up attendance. These are free missed days, to *be used for important purposes, hopefully*, but are ultimately yours to do with as you will. Choose wisely.

Assessments and CKs, while different in nature, are graded on the same scale. Assessments and CKs are graded as either $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, $\sqrt{-}$, or “incomplete.”

The three “check” levels mean the assignment is complete, and you receive credit for the assignment; however, the number of plusses, or negatives you receive, impacts whether your overall grade is a plus or minus at the end of the term. A rubric for what makes an assignment plus, neutral, or minus is posted on Canvas.

Incomplete assignments are either not turned in, or sustainably fail to meet the assignment requirements. ***Simply turning in an assignment does not guarantee a check.***

A Contract

- 1) In order to receive an A, students will complete two of three CK assessments.
- 2) Additionally, students will complete any three other assessments: Media Journal, NEED, Option A/ Option B, Media Visionary, and the Media Analysis Paper.
- 3) Finally, to receive an A students will have attended 14 or more (of 18) class sessions. Syllabus day does not count.

B Contract

- 1) In order to receive a B, students will complete all two of three CK assessments.
- 2) Additionally, students will complete any two other assessments: Media Journal, NEED, Option A/ Option B, Media Visionary, and the Media Analysis Paper.
- 3) Finally, to receive a B students will have attended 12 or more (of 18) class sessions. Syllabus day does not count.

C Contract (if you decide to take the class Pass/No Pass, this is also the Pass Contract)

- 1) In order to receive a C, students will complete one CP assessments.
- 2) Additionally, students will complete any two other assessments: Media Journal, NEED, Option A/ Option B, Media Visionary, and the Media Analysis Paper.
- 3) Finally, to receive a C students will have attended 9 or more (of 18) class sessions. Syllabus day does not count.

D Contract

- 1) In order to receive a D, students will complete one CP assessments.
- 2) Additionally, students will complete one other assessment: Media Journal, NEED, Option A/ Option B, Media Visionary, and the Media Analysis Paper.
- 3) Finally, to receive a D students will have attended 6 or more (or 18) class sessions. Syllabus day does not count.

F Contract

Students failing to meet the requirements for a D grade will receive an F in the course.

For pluses and minuses, the *preponderance* of scores determines your grade and all assignments are considered "equal" in weight.

Assignments are not able to be substituted across category (for example, extra attendance does not make up for a missed assessment).

Example Students:

Since this is a relatively unused grading system, I offer here two example students and the grades they would receive in this class. **It is important to note that Canvas scores do NOT reflect the grade you may have, as Canvas uses points rather than complete/incomplete.**

Student A:

Media Journal = $\checkmark+$

Option B = \checkmark

Media Visionary = $\checkmark+$

Media Analysis Paper = "incomplete"

Oral Exam = \checkmark

Attendance = 15

CK #1 = $\checkmark+$

CK #2 = "incomplete"

CK #3 = $\checkmark-$

Final Grade: A+

Student A completed 4/5 assessments, 15/18 attendance days, and 2/3 CKs. This places the student firmly in the "A" grade range, but now the determination is whether their grade is +, neutral, or negative. Since the student only needed 3 assessments to get an A, I dropped their "lowest" score, which was neutral. Overall, they now have a $\checkmark+$, $\checkmark+$, $\checkmark+$, \checkmark , and $\checkmark-$. The *preponderance* is plusses, thus they get an A+ for the course. Well done Student A.

Student B:

Media Journal = $\checkmark-$

Option B = $\checkmark-$

Media Visionary = $\checkmark+$

Media Analysis Paper = \checkmark

Oral Exam = $\checkmark-$

Attendance = 13

CK #1 = \checkmark

CK #2 = $\checkmark-$

CK #3 = \checkmark

Final Grade: B

Student B completed 5/5 assessments, and 3/3 CKs, which is above and beyond the requirements for an A. However, student B only attended 13 classes, which means the highest grade they can receive is a B. Since they are in the B range, I take the highest scores from the categories. From their assessments, I'll take the Media Visionary and the Media Analysis Paper, and from CKs I'll take 1 and 3. This gives student B $\checkmark+$, \checkmark , \checkmark , and \checkmark . Even though student B did a lot of work for a B, if they had chosen not to do the third CK or the Media Analysis Paper, they would have been left with $\checkmark+$, \checkmark , $\checkmark-$, and $\checkmark-$ meaning the preponderance of their scores would give them a B-. While Student B wasn't the most efficient, they managed to pull their grade up in the end. Good job Student B.

I HIGHLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTACT ME OR THE GE AT ANY POINT IN THE TERM IF YOU ARE UNSURE HOW YOUR GRADE CONTRACT IS PROGRESSING SO WE CAN HELP YOU. PART OF DOING WELL IN THIS SYSTEM IS PLAYING BY THE RULES.

Assessments:

Assessment 1: Media Journal

Your first take-home assessment is to write a media journal where you meticulously document all the media you encounter from one class meeting until the next (Monday to Wednesday – 48 hours). You must document the type of media (newspaper, music, TV show, etc.) and the length of time you engage with this media. However, the specific artist or producer is not necessary. In addition to the entries, you must type a one to two-page response. A prompt and rubric will be posted on Canvas. **April 15th**

Assessment 2: Option A / Option B

This assignment will begin in class and be carried out over three days. There are two options, and you may do *either*. However, for pedagogical reasons, I do not reveal the nature of these assessments until the day we begin them in class. **May 6th**

Assessment 3: Media Visionary

For this assignment you are to envision that you are a media producer (for whatever media you like) and write your pitch for an idea. This can be a movie, a song, a television show, or many others. Be creative! In order to receive a good grade you should take into consideration the issues we have discussed in class up to this point. A prompt and rubric will be posted on Canvas. **May 22nd**

Assessment 4: Oral Examination

For this assignment you will be given a few questions in well in advance to study and prepare for. Closer to the date, we will create a schedule for students to come and answer one question. Once I ask the question, you have no more than two minutes to answer as best you can. Most of the students will be scheduled during the final day of class, but I will also set up meetings as needed to accommodate students' needs as well as in anticipation of the class size needing more time. **June 5th**

Assessment 5: Media Analysis Paper

For this assignment you are to write a paper (3-4 pages) that analyzes a medium of your choice. For example, protest music or stand-up comedy (there are many, many others). Your paper must incorporate material from in-class lectures as well as the assigned materials (textbooks, PDFs, videos, etc.) in order to make your argument. Further instructions will be given after the midterm with greater detail. **June 13th**

Connected Knowers (CKs)

There are three CK's due throughout the quarter. Each CK uses the *same* template and covers all material up to and including the lecture **before** they are due. No material from before a previous CK may be used on the next CK. For example, material from Week 2 could be used for CK #1. But material from Week 2 (even if you didn't use it) cannot be used on CK #2. So what is a CK? Essentially, a CK is a worksheet that makes you select readings and lectures from the course, articulate their main ideas in your own words, and then synthesize the main ideas into a coherent essay that demonstrates you "get" what that part of the class was about. Next, you write a brief essay on how you apply the main themes to your own life. Finally, you wrap up with some questions that *extend* the week's concepts into realms that interest you. **The template for CK is on Canvas. We only accept typed responses, no handwritten CKs will be accepted.** More detail will be provided in class.

CK #1 Due **April 24th**

CK #2 Due **May 15th**

CK #3 Due **June 5th**

Attendance and Participation:

As stated in my contract system, attendance is graded and participation is highly encouraged. Time and time again, attendance has shown to boost retention and grades. And you're paying for it!

Course Outline*:

*Subject to change.

Week 1: Welcome to Sociology of Mass Media

Monday April 1st

Readings: None

Class Content: Introductions; Syllabus; Expectations; What is sociology of mass media?

Wednesday April 3rd

Readings: Grazian Chapter 1 pp. 4-21

Class Content: How do sociologists understand media, leisure, and popular culture?

Week 2: How can we analyze media? – Social theories of media

Monday April 8th

Readings: Grazian Chapters 2, 3 & 6 pp. 22-71 and pp. 118-141; Facebook Media Conglomerate PDF

Class Content: **MEDIA JOURNAL BEGINS**; Media for a reason, profit, and control

Wednesday April 10th

Readings: Grazian Chapter 4 pp. 73-95. Chun = Steubenville pp. 97-102

Class Content: **MEDIA JOURNAL ENDS**; Succeed together, fail together

Week 3: Is Quentin Tarantino Racist? – The role of race in American movies from The Birth of a Nation to Pulp Fiction and beyond

Monday April 15th

Readings: Griffin - "The Sword Became a Flashing Vision:" D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation pp. 190-201 and 213-229; Hall – The Whites of Their Eyes

Class Content: **MEDIA JOURNAL DUE**; Race in American film

Wednesday April 17th

WATCH: (pick one)

Pulp Fiction; Django Unchained; Kill Bill Vol. I; Kill Bill Vol. II; Jackie Brown

Class Content: Is Quentin Tarantino racist?

Readings: "Samuel L. Jackson: Tarantino, racism, and the N word."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/samuel-l-jackson-tarantino-racism-and-the-n-word-8452821.html>

Spike Lee accuses Quentin Tarantino of Blaxploitation

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/quentin-tarantino-accused-of-blaxploitation-by-spike-lee-again-8431183.html>

Quentin Tarantino on artistic license

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/oct/13/quentin-tarantino-on-race-and-black-critics-the-hateful-eight>

Week 4: What's a white Jewish kid from the suburbs know about hip-hop anyways? – Music and censorship

Monday April 22nd

Readings: Grazian Chapter 5 pp. 97-117; Carroll "My Skin is it Starting' to Work to my Benefit Now? – Eminem's White Trash Aesthetic

LISTEN: Straight Outta Chevy Chase – Radiolab Podcast: "From boom bap to EDM, we look at the line between hip-hop and not, and meet a defender of the genre that makes you question...who's in and who's out." (Approx. 35 minutes)

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/straight-outta-chevy-chase/>

Class Content: Race and music in America

Wednesday April 24th

Readings: Grazian Chapter 8 pp. 161-181; Binder – "Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music."

WATCH: Billie Holiday "Strange Fruit"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Web007rzSOI>

N.W.A. "Fuck tha Police"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jOqOIEtcRU>

2 Live Crew "C-mon Babe (Nasty as they wanna be)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3YevE4pI0k>

Class Content: Censorship and social change, **CK #1 Due**

Week 5: How different is a music video from pornography, really? – The objectification of women in music videos.

Monday April 29th

Readings: Chapkiss – Live Sex Acts; Miller-Young – Putting Hypersexuality to Work

WATCH: Dreamworlds Episode 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmgD4S2_gyA

Dreamworlds Episode 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDMo5clJN3A>

Kanye West – Monster Music Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zo24Ua3Bpw>

Class Content: Sex work and music videos, **Option A/B BEGINS**

Wednesday May 1st

Readings: Hasinoff – Sexting Panic; Flood – Exposure to Pornography

Class Content: Save the Children; **Option A/B ENDS**

Week 6: Television and Celebrity

Monday May 6th

Readings: Couldry – Reality TV, or the Secret of Neoliberalism; Nederman and Goulding – Popular Occultism and Critical Social Theory

Class Content: How Neoliberalism Works its Way into You; **Option A/B Due**

Wednesday May 8th

Readings: Turner – The Mass Production of Celebrity

Class Content: Celebrities are...Important?

Week 7: Why does Nike **still** advertise? – The explosion of advertising in a consumer society.

Monday May 13th

Readings: Grazian Chapters 7 and 10 pp. 143-159 and pp. 205-225; Ideology and Advertising <https://mediarevision.wordpress.com/audience/audience-theories/>

Class Content: Lecture: The media are everywhere

Wednesday May 15th

Readings: Grazian Chapter 9 pp. 184-203; Klein - The Brand Expands

Class Content: Media on the world stage, **CK #2 Due**

Week 8: Did the Internet change everything? – What the Internet did, and didn't change.

Monday May 20th

Readings: Baudrillard – “Mass Media, Sex and Leisure: Mass-Media Culture;”

Class Content: Disneyland, simulations, and absurdity

Wednesday May 22nd

Readings: Tufekci – Censorship and Attention; Nordenson – Overload!

https://archives.cjr.org/feature/overload_1.php

Class Content: **MEDIA VISIONARY DUE**; Information proliferation

Week 9: Political Economy of Artificial Intelligence

Monday May 27th

NO CLASS – MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVED

Wednesday May 29th

Readings: Crawford and Joler – Anatomy of an AI System

<https://anatomyof.ai>

Class Content: A. I. versus the environment

Week 10: What is fake news? – Understanding news media as a spectrum of fiction and reality to build media literacy.

Monday June 3rd

Readings: Phillips – “The House That Fox Built: Anonymous, Spectacle, and Cycles of Amplification”

WATCH: Scientific Studies: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (Approx. 20 minutes)

Class Content: Fake news and final thoughts

Wednesday June 5th

Readings: None

Class Content:

Oral Examinations Scheduled (Alternative Times Offered As Well)

CK #3 Due in-class, hardcopies only.

Scheduled Final Time

Thursday June 13th at 2:45 p.m.

MEDIA ANALYSIS PAPER DUE