

SOC 255: Media and the Public Mind

Block 1 September 2014
South Hall 10

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Course Hours: Generally, **Monday – Thursday, 12:30-3, Friday 9-11:30** however, there are several days that deviate from this pattern. See the course schedule for details.

Office Hours: Monday 3-4 and by appt.

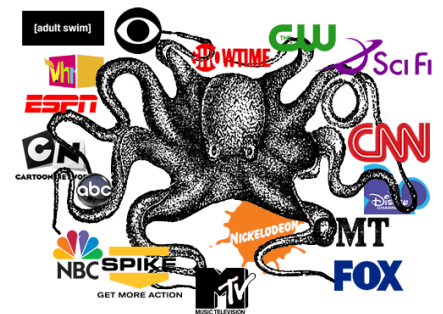


COURSE DESCRIPTION

To say that Americans spend an enormous amount of time consuming mass media -- television, newspapers and magazines, movies, and 'new' media like -- is an understatement. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2012) describes our current state of media exposure as one of *saturation*: . Nearly every young person lives in a home with a TV, VCR, CD player or radio; about 80% have video game consoles, cable/satellite TV, and/or personal computers, nearly half have internet connections and about 39% have their own cell phones. Statistics on the use of the media support this saturation theory. The average American has the TV on for over eight hours every day and watches it for more than 5 hours a day, that's 76 full days a year watching television (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014). TV takes up more than half of our free time; children, ages 8 to 18, spend about 6.5 hours a day *using media*, that's generally more time than any other activity in their lives except sleeping (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005, 2012). Given these brief statistics, it is evident that the mass media are recognized as some of the most important forces shaping our society and societies around the world.

This course is an examination of the underlying organization of the broadcast, print, and electronic media and their role in shaping perceptions, ideologies, and behavior. We will emphasize the news, advertising, media representations, and the political economy of the media as we think about the connections between the media and the social world. This course will take a critical approach to understanding the media and its role in shaping American's ways of knowing. We will also explore various developments in media as we attempt to understand the connections between the media and the public mind. It is important to understand that our focus is sociological, not journalistic. We will be exploring the ways that the media reflect and impact the social world and by extension social behaviors. We will address questions such as

- Who owns/controls the media and why does this matter?
- How do the media impact the social world?
- How do the media intersect with other social institutions such as the government?
- How do media representations shape our understanding of others?
- What alternatives are there to mainstream media?
- What options are there for media reform and a more democratic media?



As we engage these questions, you will continue to consume more and more media. Along the way you'll engage in some media research of your own. Our primary learning objective through this process is to think critically about the media we use and learn to understand that, like it or not, our

behaviors, attitudes, and ideologies are influenced by the media we consume. It is my hope that you will become more active, and less passive, in your media consumption patterns as you uncover the ways that media ownership and representations are linked to larger social inequalities.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

After completion of this course, students should be able to:

- ☆ Explain concepts and major perspectives relating to the economics of the media industry, the organization of media outlets, media representations, audience reception, and media technology (Knowledge).
- ☆ Analyze the relationship between media and democracy (Knowledge, Inquiry).
- ☆ Evaluate and analyze news as a social construction, one both reflecting and shaping society (Knowledge, Inquiry).
- ☆ Analyze media representations and develop a more nuanced media literacy (Knowledge, Inquiry, Reasoning, Intercultural Literacy)
- ☆ Articulate and analyze relationships between media content and the social world (Communication, Reasoning, Inquiry).
- ☆ Develop critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills which strengthen our ability to understand, integrate, analyze, and communicate complex ideas (Inquiry, Communication).
- ☆ Collaborate and share knowledge of media literacy (Reasoning, Communication, Citizenship)

This course supports the Educational Outcomes and Priorities of the College with an emphasis on Knowledge, Inquiry, Reasoning and Communication. Intercultural Literacy and Citizenship are also addressed.

COURSE INFORMATION:

This course involves a sociological exploration into the media. It requires stepping back from your own perspectives of the media and thinking critically and analytically about things you may enjoy. It has an average reading load of 55 pages per night and requires additional media consumption and research. As such, it will require time, patience, and commitment to grasp the depth and nuance of the debates surrounding the media. This means it is imperative for students to commit several hours a night to preparing for class so you are equipped and willing to contribute to the academic discussion.

As a student at a liberal arts college, you are responsible for your own engagement in the academic conversation. This means being a prepared and active participant. This includes reading the syllabus and all the assigned material, but as importantly, this means thinking critically, asking questions, coming to class having formulated your own ideas and responses to the course material, and engaging in dialogue with others. If you do not understand a topic of discussion, an assignment, a grade, or have any other questions or concerns, please come and talk with me. I will facilitate the discussion and lecture on concepts, but I also expect each student to develop, discuss, and express opinions and questions and actively listen as other students do so. You should not take this class if you feel that you are unable to (1) complete the required reading, (2) examine course material from an analytic, sociological perspective, and (3) engage in productive, challenging discussions in a non-combative manner.

Class Structure: This seminar class mixes lecture and discussion format and is designed to promote interaction and exchange. I expect everyone to contribute to discussion—which requires that you read carefully and think about the assigned material before every class. No one—neither professor nor student—can participate effectively without having completed and contemplated the course readings. Be an informed participant—your comments should be related to the course material and should add to the topic being discussed. I also expect people to listen to each other, which requires patience, empathy, and mutual respect. You should be willing to share your ideas and be open to opposing

perspectives. It is possible to disagree and still interact respectfully. Listening carefully, asking questions, and responding to what people have said demonstrates respectful engagement. On the other hand, arriving late, inattention, sleeping, talking to neighbors, texting, facebooking, and rude or disconnected responses all show a lack of respect for the members of this class and for your own intellect. I expect good attendance; excessive absence (more than 3 class periods) may result in a failing participation grade, regardless of the quality of your participation. I reserve the right to limit computer use if it is distracting or I feel that students are abusing this privilege.

There are no REQUIRED TEXTS for this course. All Required Articles are Available on Moodle I expect you to print these materials and bring them to class as we will frequently reference specific passages during discussion. Please let me know as soon as possible if you have any difficulty accessing the materials.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIONS: Unless noted, all assignments are due via MOODLE <https://moodle.cornellcollege.edu> and should be in WORD or a WORD compatible format. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure files are compatible. I cannot open .wpd documents. If I cannot open your document, your paper will be considered “late” until I have it in a readable format. Papers should be saved as your last name.assignmentname. For example, the first essay would be Barnesbrus.essay1. You should also include your name in the document of all assignments.

EVALUATION:

Constructive Participation & Analytic Reflection	15%
News Essay	15%
Essay Exam	30%
Media Representation Project (Video & Reflection)	<u>40%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grade Scale: I follow a traditional grading scale:

A = 93-99	A- = 90-92	B+ = 87-89	B = 83-86	B- = 80-82	C+ =77-79
C = 73-76	C- = 70-72	D+ = 67-69	D = 63-66	D- = 60-62	F 59 and below

Constructive Participation & Analytic Journals 15%: This course will operate predominantly as a discussion with some lecture. As such, each student must contribute to the academic conversation, and be *actively engaged* in the discussions taking place. I know talking in class can be difficult, but I expect each of you to set specific goals for contributing to the classroom learning community. You will be evaluated, in part, on the “quality” of your contributions in class. I will track students’ contributions to the class discussion as well as your responses and reactions to other students. Students may also be evaluated based on in-class group work or assignments. Being an engaged, vocal, and relevant contributor to the discussion is imperative for success in this course. *It is imperative that you discuss excessive absences with me immediately. Excessive absences (more than 3) may result in a failing course grade.* Additionally, I expect students to notify me of any college-sanctioned absences well in advance of the scheduled date

Analytic Journals: To assist you in actively participating in class and productively contributing to our collaborative effort, each of you will be required to blog about your thoughts on the readings. A guide to preparing for class, which should help you think about course readings, is posted on Moodle. Each blog entry should be submitted <http://blogs.cornellcollege.edu/soc255114/> and include:

- 3-4 bullet points that identify AND synthesize the main points of the readings **as a group**. These points must not summarize the material, but rather should demonstrate the authors’ key arguments. They should give an idea how the readings “hang together” or contribute to an academic dialogue about the issues of the day.

- 1-2 separate discussion questions that move beyond simply asking for classmates' opinions or summarizing the material. Discussion questions should push you to reflect critically about the readings and might address the social, personal, or intellectual context or the political or social ramifications of the arguments presented.
- A short paragraph reflecting on of your interpretation of the days' readings or responding to one of your proposed discussion questions.
- Journals are due one and a half hours prior to our first class of the day (generally 11 AM or 7:30 AM) via our class blog. *Be sure your blog user name lists your first and last name; categorize your blog entries appropriately, and mark each entry 'private.'* Late journals are not accepted.
- I will grade these journals intermittently throughout the block and average your scores as part of your overall participation grade. Doing fewer than 10 journals will negatively impact your grade.

NEWSREADING/WATCHING: In addition to your daily reading assignment, you are required to read or watch the news at least 3 times per week. Throughout the course of the block you should be sure to watch mainstream news such as CNN, MSNBC, and network news as well as alternatives like the BBC news hour, Democracy Now, Bill Moyers, and NPR. You should also read the NY Times, local papers, or other large regional papers like the Chicago Tribune or Washington Post and consume other news sources such as Slate.com, Salon.com, Twitter, etc. Basically, be sure you are consuming a VARIETY of news sources. **Three journals per week should reflect a brief discussion of the news you consumed including the source, time of day, and topics addressed.** I will randomly call on individuals to discuss their news viewing and apply it to class so you should come prepared to share your thoughts on the news you consume.



You should bring copies of your journals to class in order to help facilitate discussion.

News Essay 15%: Students will write a 2-3 page essay that both describes a current news topic using multiple news sources and evaluates the news coverage based on course readings. Due on Saturday, September 6th at Noon via Moodle.

Essay Exam 30%: There will be one take home essay exam due on Saturday, September 13 at Noon via Moodle. You will have Friday, September 12 to work on this.

Media Representation Project 40%: Your final project allows you to engage in some first-hand media research and media production. Individually or in small groups, students will create a 7-9 minute video that analyzes media representations. Students will write an individual reflection that and elaborates on their projects, offers further analysis, and explains the decisions and challenges of their project. This is a time-intensive project; some class time has been set aside for the project, but it will also require extensive out-of-class time. Videos must be uploaded to Google Drive by **4PM on Tuesday, September 24th**. Presentations of the videos will take place on the OC on **September 24th from 10:30-3** with SOC 101 and ENG 202 students. Reflections are due at **5 PM on September 24th**.

Missed/Late Work: You are responsible for all assignments and materials covered in class, whether or not you attend and regardless of the reasons for your absence. Without either prior approval or evidence of a serious emergency, late journals and make-up work for classroom assignments will not be accepted and other late work may be penalized. If an extension is needed, please consult with me prior to the assignment deadline. **Failure to turn in any of the assignments may result in a failing grade for the course, regardless of points.**

Additional Info:

Course Accommodations: College Policy regarding students with disabilities: Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see: cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml124. Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the disabilities services coordinator as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone in this class who has a particular need related to this course. If you would like to request course accommodations for any reason, see me after the first class or make alternative arrangements to meet with me within the first 3 days of the course. While I am reasonably sure we can work out whatever arrangement is necessary, course accommodations should be requested before there is a failure to meet course requirements.

Academic Honesty: College Policy--Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Compass, our student handbook, under the heading "Academic Policies – Honesty in Academic Work."

Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student in this course who is involved in academic dishonesty will not earn credit for the relevant assignments and may be formally charged with academic dishonesty.

Additional Resources: I encourage you to utilize the services of Meghan Yamanishi, Social Science Consulting Librarian, Laura Farmer in the Writing Studio, and Brooke Bergantzel in the Instructional Media Studio. These professionals and their departments can provide additional perspectives and guidance to help polish your research, writing and presentation skills.

15 Day Drop Policy: A 15 day drop is only available to those students who have made, in the opinion of the instructor, a determined effort to learn the material, complete the work, comply with the attendance policy, and participate in the class. If you are considering a 15-day drop, you must inform me no later than the **thirteenth day** so we can discuss the possibilities. Students relinquish their right to a 15-day drop if they do not keep up with daily journals, fail to turn in any assignments, or if have excessive absences.

