

COMRT 120: Syllabus



Office: VCCA 310 **Classroom:** VCCA 111 **Class-Time:** Tue/Thu 9.30-10.45 am

Office Hours: Tue/Thu: 3.30-6.00pm. Wed: 10.00am-12.00pm.

Other times by appointment.

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The sign-up sheet for an office hour appointment is posted on a weekly basis (every Wednesday) on my office door. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please notify me 24 hours in advance, or call me so I can accommodate someone else during that time. If you cannot meet with me during my regular office hours, please arrange for an alternate appointment with me.

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the ways in which we historically and culturally have redefined the term 'media,' in part because of new technology, the forces of corporate conglomeration, and political & social influences. Some of the questions we will examine are:

- What is media literacy and how does it shape civic participation, democratic values, and social change?
- What makes something newsworthy and therefore of media 'value' to us?
- Who are the decision makers behind the media, and do they necessarily serve the public interest?

As we explore the history & theories of media, current events in news media, and developments in the media world, we will also be discussing how people use media to make sense of their environment, inform their identity, and establish normative guidelines that ideologically bind them as a community.

Required Reading:

1. W. James Potter, Media Literacy (4th ed.), Los Angeles, CA: Sage. 2008.

2. Supplementary readings may be provided as handouts or posted on sakai (electronic course reserves on the library webpage).

- I will also be screening films for some of the assignments. Most of these will not be available for viewing outside of the allotted class time, so please make sure you are present. Please do not ask me to provide you with the films after the class screening.
- You should also have access to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition (NOT the Dianne Hacker reference book), which will come in handy when you are writing assignments. Copies are available for consultation in the reference library and in the Learning Commons.

Since this is a media class, it is expected that you will be keeping up with current affairs and news across various media. This is not a textbook driven class so please start developing the habit of reading the *The New York Times*, BBC online, truthdig.com, and any other fact-based news sources that give you updates regarding national and international events.

Class Etiquette

- Please plan to be in class within the first seven minutes of the lecture period. You will be marked absent on my attendance roster once this grace period is done. You could not be late at a business meeting, and developing that consciousness in college is a good start. If you find the door locked, please do not knock or try to get in.
- Cell phones must be turned off before we begin class. Please do not think that you can silently text while in class. If I detect cell phone use in my class, I will take that breach very seriously.
- I do not encourage the use of laptops in class. Please be prepared to take notes the old-fashioned way so you develop the habit of listening and putting down content in your own words, rather than blindly typing in information as data.
- Your participation grade counts for an entire letter grade. Please therefore make an attempt to contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions. Since this is an academic environment, please be respectful of others' feelings in expressing your point-of-view. Freedom of expression comes with responsibility in exercising it.
- If you require any accommodation for taking notes or during exams, please provide documentation through the Learning Commons (332-2898) ASAP.

Class E-mail Etiquette:

- I will e-mail the class the class plan for the following week, the previous Friday. Please make sure to check your Allegheny College account regularly, since important class announcements may also be communicated to you electronically.

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- Please note that I do not check e-mail over the weekend. Therefore, kindly plan your consultations in a timely manner so you can contact me during office hours, or e-mail me during the week. Please also keep in mind that I may not be able to answer your e-mail immediately.
 - When you email me, please do not use ornate backgrounds or icons in the body of your email. This is a formal document, and therefore the tone and content should be appropriate. Please also put the course name and number in the subject header of the email (e.g. CA 120, followed by a topic line).
 - Email is a legal document so please keep this in mind when communicating with your peers or the rest of the campus community.
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Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory since you can only perform well if you keep up with what's happening in class. You are allowed three absences without explanation, after which there is a deduction of half a grade off the final grade for each unexcused absence. Absences taken to complete assignments for other courses, unless previously approved by me, will result in a significant reduction of your participation grade.

Course Assignments: The grade percentage allotments for the assignments are given below:

Short Papers, Presentations & Creative Projects	30% of final course grade
Midterm Exam	20% of final grade (in class on Oct. 22, 2009)
Final Project	30% of final grade (details TBA)
Class Participation and Attendance	20% of final grade

You will receive details about each assignment separately. All assignments must be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with me in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.

Please DO NOT leave assignments/exams in my mailbox or under my office door. Please hand all assignments to me in person on the due date. The only exceptions are if I give you WRITTEN (e-mail) permission to do so, or to hand in an assignment on a different date than the assigned due date

Plagiarism Policy:

Please review the section on Plagiarism and the Honor Code outlined in the Allegheny Student handbook (The Compass). The Department of Communication Arts & Theater has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism cases. Any student suspected of plagiarism will automatically be referred to the Academic Standards Committee for further review and sanctions. Please note that having a friend or family member help you write or rewrite an assignment constitutes plagiarism. If you take material from any source (whether you

quote this directly, or put it in your own words) and do not cite the source, this is plagiarism. If you require any help with the structure and organization of your papers, please take the help of the Learning Commons tutors.

Failure to cite direct or indirect references from other sources, or lecture material, as per the MLA guidelines, also constitutes plagiarism. **Assignments that do not follow the MLA guidelines will automatically receive a failing grade.** If you have any questions regarding citations, please present your questions to me well IN ADVANCE of when your assignments are due. This means at least four working days before the assignment is due.

Course Grading Policy:

Your total on all assignments will be converted to a percentage score, which will be translated to a letter grade as per the scale shown below:

A = 100 - 96	C+ = 79 - 76
A- = 95 - 90	C = 75 - 73
B+ = 89 - 86	C- = 72 - 70
B = 85 - 83	D = 69 - 66
B- = 82 - 80	F = 65 and less

Criteria for Class Participation Grade:

Keep in mind that we are in an academic environment. Therefore, discussions need to be respectful of others, and fact driven rather than emotion centered. The use of profanity or hate speech should not enter such conversations. We are all adults and we can respectfully agree to disagree but the focus of debates should be the topics being discussed and not the people attached to the ideas. Please also be mindful that religious views are faith-based and not fact-based, and therefore should not be used as evidence in discussions and papers.

A for class participation is awarded when students regularly initiate discussion. This means coming to class thoroughly familiar with the assigned reading and, therefore, prepared to raise questions, to open discussion, to identify topics of interest in the reading, and actively engage other students in the discussion. (This does not mean monopolizing a discussion, or shutting others out, or talking for its own sake rather than to make a point about the topic). [20 - 18 points]

B for class participation is awarded to students who participate regularly and productively in class discussion, who are prepared, and who are willing to engage. **B** discussants differ from **A** students in that the latter are self-starters who do not rely on the instructor's questions to set the agenda for discussion. [17- 15 points]

C for class participation is awarded to those who participate on a regular, but less frequent basis than the **B** student. **C** discussants are prepared for class, but their contributions indicate that less thought has been given to assigned materials. [14 - 12 points]

D for class participation is given to those who contribute infrequently to the discussion and whose contributions do not appear to arise from thoughtful consideration of the assignments. [11 - 09 points]

F for non-participation in class discussion. Of course, participation is impossible if you don't attend class. Frequent absences mandate **F** grades. [08-00 points]

Grade Appeals:

A grade appeal must be submitted within 48 hrs. of receiving the grade for the specific assignment. It must be in writing (e-mail) and should include clear reasons that are fact-based (not emotional) as to why the student feels that s/he deserves a higher grade. No late appeals will be considered. In the case of the final exam/project, you may appeal the grade by the end of the first week of the following semester.

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

(This schedule will change according to class pace and other exigencies)

Thu 8/27	Introduction; Syllabus; Lecture: "Creative Education & Media Literacy" Assign Ch 1 and 2 for the next week ("Living in the Message Saturated World"; "Media Literacy Approach").
Tue 9/1	Lecture: <i>What is Media Literacy? Ways of Looking at Images & Text</i>
The 9/3	<i>What is Media Literacy? Ways of Looking at Images & Text</i> (contd.) Assignment 1 Due in class: Tue 9/8. Assign Ch 3 and 4 for following week ("Individuals' Perspective"; "Industry Perspective on Audience").
Tue 9/8	Assignment 1 due. Discuss Ch 1 and 2 (power point lecture)
Thu 9/10	Ch 1 and 2 contd. (powerpoint posted on sakai)
Tue 9/15	How to Read Images (powerpoint lecture posted on sakai) Announce Kathy Eldon Creative Activism workshop on 9/25 (12.30-2pm; Tillotson Room; main event in Shafer at 7pm) Discuss Myth of the Liberal Media; Media Ownership chart (transcript + AdAge chart on sakai)
Thu 9/17	Discuss boundary between editorial and business (agenda setting; gatekeeping; elite Press; Staples Center and LA Times case)

Tue 9/22	Lecture on Ch 3 and 4: Individual and Industry Perspectives on Audience (posted on sakai)
Thu: 9/24	<p><i>How Audiences are Constructed</i> (Ch 4) – mass to niche; diversity in representation (All in the Family; Bamboozled)</p> <p>Required: attend Kathy Eldon (<i>Dying to Tell the Story</i>. 9/25 from 7-9pm in Shafer Auditorium)</p>
Tue 9/29	<p>Discussion of documentary and journalism (based on 9/25 talk). Finish Ch 3 and 4</p> <p>Assignment 2: Storytelling Assignment. Due in class on 10/8</p>
Thu 10/1	<p>Homework: Sakai Readings from Robert McChesney, Russell Newman, and Ben Scott (eds.). <i>The Future of Media: Resistance & Reform in the 21st Century</i>. New York: Seven Stories Press. 2005:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert W. McChesney. “The Emerging Struggle for a Free Press”: 9-20. • Russell Newman & Ben Scott. “The Fight for the Future of the Media”: 21-40. • John Dunbar. “Who is Watching the Watchdog?” 127-140.
	For 10/06 read: Read Ch 12 “News” and Ch 16 “Who owns & Controls the Media”
Tue 10/6	<p>Ch 12 and Ch 16 + sakai readings discussion Announce Greg Mortenson event (10/7; Shafer; 7.30-8.30pm)</p>
Thu 10/8	<p>Ch 12 and Ch 16 + sakai readings discussion Asst. 2 due by 4pm in drop box.</p> <p>For 10/15: watch PBS Frontline documentary, “Growing Up Online” (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/)</p> <p>Read Ch 13: “Entertainment” and Ch 19 “Violence”</p>
	FALL BREAK: OCTOBER 10-13, 2009
Thu 10/15	<p>Ch 13: “Entertainment” and Ch 19 “Violence” Discuss with clips – TV censorship; Milgram/Zimbardo; web bullying</p>
Tue 10/20	Ch 13, 19 (contd.)
Thu 10/22	In class midterm (Ch 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 16, 19 and sakai readings and powerpoints + lecture notes. There will be a question on the Kathy Eldon event on the midterm exam)

Tue 10/27	Ch 17 “Privacy” (Discussion of internet regulation)
Thu 10/29	Ch 14 “Advertising” & Ch 9 “The Economic Game” Decoding consumerism; consumer democracy; information as product; embedded ideologies (Assign sakai readings – <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Robert Goldman, from <i>Reading Ads Socially</i>,• Naomi Klein from <i>No Logo</i>;• Steven Heller interview and• Kelle Lasn from <i>Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge—And Why We Must</i>
Tue 11/3	Ch 14 “Advertising” & Ch 9 “The Economic Game” Decoding consumerism; consumer democracy; information as product; embedded ideologies; culture jamming Assignment 3: culture jam postcards + written piece. Due 11/12
Thu 11/5	From Television to the Internet: Historical mapping (handouts)
Tue 11/10	From Television to the Internet: Historical mapping
Thu 11/12	Ch 21 (Personal Strategy for Increasing Media Literacy) and 22 (Helping Others Increase Media Literacy) Assignment 3 due in class
Tue 11/17	Ch 21 (Personal Strategy for Increasing Media Literacy) and 22 (Helping Others Increase Media Literacy) Assign Final Media Literacy Project. Team Presentations in CC lobby on 12/8 from 12.30-1.30pm
Thu 11/19	Ch 21 (Personal Strategy for Increasing Media Literacy) and 22 (Helping Others Increase Media Literacy)
Tue 11/24	Meetings with teams to discuss project
THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOVEMBER 25-29	
Tue 12/1	Media & Globalization
Thu 12/3	New Media Future Directions
Tue 12/8	Final project display in CC lobby 12.30-1.30pm.

Please note that there is no final exam for this class. You will be evaluated instead on classroom discussions of assigned readings/screenings and in class assignments on the same.