

# SPC 185

## Mass Media and Society

Winter 2014. Tuesday-Thursday. 10-11:50 a.m.

Instructor: Dr. Steve Macek

Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 8:30-9:30 am,  
Wednesday 10 am to 1 pm and by appointment.

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### Course Description

The mass media are an inescapable feature of contemporary American society. Television, film, radio, video games and other forms of mass communication dominate our leisure time. The media's endless flow of stories, discourses and images shape our understanding of world events, our values, our politics, our desires, even our sense of self. This course provides a comprehensive survey of the history, structure, and social impact of the major media (newspapers, radio, film, television and the Internet). We will also consider the history and impact of media-dependent industries such as advertising. And we will pay special attention throughout to the media's central role in our democratic civic culture. The ultimate goal of the course is prepare students to think critically about the media and its enormous influence on our lives as citizens.

### Required Text

Richard Campbell. Media and Culture: Mass Communication in a Digital Age (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's). 2013 9<sup>th</sup> Edition.

In addition to our textbook, you'll be expected to read a few other articles and documents. One required reading—an excerpt from a book-- will be placed on blackboard. The other material is available online; the relevant links can be found on the syllabus below as well as on the webpage for this course:

<http://stephen.macek.faculty.noctrl.edu/Courses/SCT185.htm>

### Procedures, Requirements and Expectations

**Course Format.** This course combines lecture and discussion. I will give some prepared lectures and we will watch the occasional video but much of our class time will be devoted to group discussion of course readings and particular media texts. Please note that my lectures usually *supplement*, rather than *summarize*, the readings. Sometimes I will go over all the key points of the

assigned readings; sometime I won't even mention them. In either case, a significant portion of the information presented in the lectures will be new. So, if you miss class, please be sure to get the notes from a classmate. I will set aside time for structured group discussion every class meeting. For class discussion to flow well, you'll have to do the required reading, complete any required discussion-generating writing assignments and make an effort to participate. In class discussions, it will be my job to pose overarching questions, facilitate and keep the conversation flowing.

**Take-Home Writing Assignments.** In this course, you will be asked to complete two take-home writing assignments: a 4-6 page critical analysis of a film currently showing in theaters and a 4-6-page report on a media conglomerate. Assignment sheets will be passed out at least a week before the due date. All writing assignments should be typed or printed in 12 point Times or New York font, double-spaced, have one-inch margins and be stapled together. They should also be relatively free of mechanical and grammatical error. If you write on a computer, be sure to back-up your work. Put your name, the date and the name of the class on all assignments. See the attached Guidelines and Standards for Written Work for more details about my grading criteria and expectations for your writing.

**Exams.** In addition to the writing assignments listed above, there will also be an in-class midterm and a comprehensive final exam during finals week. The midterm will consist of fill-in-the blank, definition and short answer questions. The final exam will cover the readings and lectures for the entire course and will consist of two long essays as well as a number of fill-in-the-blank, definition questions.

**No Study Reading Quizzes.** Finally, to motivate you all to keep up with the reading, there will be four "no study" reading quizzes scattered over the course of the term. These will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and true-false questions about the readings, will be administered at the beginning of class and will take up no more than 10 minutes of class time. Missed quizzes **cannot** be made up. However, students who have a **legitimate excuse** (doctor-confirmed illness, college sports event or field trip for another class) for missing a quiz will be given the option of doing a short take home writing assignment to make up the missed points.

**Class Participation and Attendance.** It will be extremely difficult for you to do well in this course if you don't come to class. I expect you to attend class regularly, to participate in group activities, to be on time and to stay for the entire session. I also expect you to complete the short, non-graded discussion-generating writing assignments I give you. Your record of attendance, work on non-graded writing assignments and contributions to class discussion will determine 10% of your final grade. To receive a high score for your participation, you should not only do the reading for class but also come to class prepared to say something. It might help if you came equipped with a list of questions or a passage from the readings you'd like to discuss.

**Grades.** Your grade for the course will be based on the take-home writing assignments, the no study quizzes, the midterm, the final, and your attendance and class participation. The four quizzes are together worth 10% of your final grade (each individual quiz is worth 2.5%). The film review and conglomerate profile are each worth 20% of your final grade. The midterm will count for 20% and the final 20%. Class participation will count for 10% of your grade for the course. To make it easier for me to calculate final grades, each assignment or grade component will receive both a

letter grade and a corresponding point score. On my grading scale, an A is 93% to 100% of the possible points, 90 to 92% is an A-, 87% to 89% is a B+, 83% to 86% is a B, 80% to 82% is a B-, 77% to 79% is a C +, 73% to 76% is a C, 70% to 72% is a C-, 67% to 69% is a D+, 60% to 68% is a D and anything less than 59% is an F.

Below is a breakdown of the points for each assignment or final grade component:

4 no study quizzes @ 25 points=	100 points
1 film review @ 200 points=	200 points
1 midterm @ 200 points=	200 points
1 media conglomerate profile@ 200 points=	200 points
1 final exam @ 200 points=	200 points
Class attendance and participation	100 points
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	1000 total points possible

To figure out how you are doing in the course at any time during the term, simply divide the points you've earned so far by the number of points you could've earned.

**Extra Credit.** This term there will be a few opportunities for you to earn extra credit by attending special media-related events on campus and writing a short (1 page) reaction to them. You can earn 15 points for each event you attend and a total of 30 points of extra credit overall.

**Late Work.** The due dates for each of the writing assignments are clearly listed on the schedule below. Grades on late work will be lowered one letter grade for each week the assignment is overdue.

### Course Schedule

Below is a projected schedule of the readings and assignments for the course. We may fall behind schedule from time to time and if we do I'll make an effort to get us back on track. I encourage you to keep up with the reading even if we are behind schedule and to read ahead if your workload permits.

#### **Week 1.**

**Tuesday, January 7. Introductions: Why study the media?; Overview of the course.**

**Thursday, January 9. The first mass media: the golden age of the press.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 1, "Mass Communication: A Critical Approach" and Chapter 8, "Newspapers: The Rise and Decline of Modern Journalism."

#### **Week 2.**

**Tuesday, January 14. The history of the news continued; Col. Robert R. McCormick and *The Chicago Tribune***

**Thursday, January 16. The news media and the ideal of objectivity; Alternatives to objectivity: The underground press.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 14, “The Culture of Journalism: Values, Ethics and Democracy”; Alyssa Vincent and Steve Macek, “The Seed: Voice of a Community, Center of a Movement” (available online at <http://areachicago.org/the-chicago-seed>)

**Week 3.**

**Tuesday, January 21. Motion pictures and the origins of Hollywood.**

**Reading:** Chapter 7, “Movies and the Impact of Images”

**Thursday, January 23. The elements of Hollywood film: star, director, genre & narrative; The Hollywood formula in action: The case of *Titanic*;**

**Viewing Assignment:** Watch *Titanic*, James Cameron director, in preparation for today’s class.

There’s a tape available for viewing in the AV center at Oesterle library. You can also rent the DVD at a video store or on Netflix and watch the film in the privacy of your own room.

**Week 4.**

**Tuesday, January 28. Motion pictures concluded. Voices in the air: The radio industry and the birth of broadcasting; Orson Wells’ “War of the Worlds” broadcast**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 4, “Popular Radio and the Origin of Broadcasting”

**Thursday, January 30. FCC regulation. Radio Programming. Radio today: Getting worse or more diverse?; Talk Radio.**

**Film Review Due**

**Week 5.**

**Tuesday, February 4. Always On: An Introduction to Television.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 5, “Television and Cable: The Power of Visual Culture.”

**Thursday, February 6. How do TV executives decide which programs to air?; The economics of TV programming and distribution. Trends in TV today: Cable, DVRs, YouTube & Reality Programming.**

**Week 6.**

**Tuesday, February 11. In-class Midterm.**

**Thursday, February 13. Talking ‘Bout a Revolution: the rise of the Internet.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 2, “The Internet, Digital Media and Media Convergence”

**Week 7.**

**Tuesday, February 18. Internet continued. How gaming is transforming the media.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 3, “Digital Gaming and the Media Playground”

**Thursday, February 20. And now a word from our sponsor: Advertising and consumer culture**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 11, “Advertising and Commercial Culture”

**Week 8.**

**Tuesday, February 25. Advertising continued. Gender images in advertising. Screening: *Killing Us Softly 3***

**Thursday, February 27. The business of the media: corporate ownership, conglomeration, globalization, deregulation. The case of Disney.**

**Reading:** Chapter 13, “Media Economics and the Global Marketplace”.

**Week 9.**

**Tuesday, March 4. The case of Disney.**

**Reading:** “Letter to Shareholders” as well as the “Studio Entertainment,” “Media Networks,” “Parks and Resorts,” “Consumer Products,” and “Interactive Media” sections of the 2011 Annual Shareholders report (everything but the letter is in Part 1 under Item 1). The report is available online here:

<http://cdn.media.ir.thewaltdisneycompany.com/2011/annual/WDC-10kwrap-2011.pdf>

**Thursday, March 6. The First Amendment: The struggle for free speech; Sedition; Obscenity;**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 16, “Legal Controls and Freedom of Expression”

**Week 10.**

**Tuesday, March 11. The First Amendment continued; The debate over “indecentcy” in popular music and in broadcasting.**

**Media Conglomerate Report Due.**

**Thursday, March 13. Media effects.**

**Reading:** Campbell, Chapter 15, “Media Effects and Cultural Approaches to Research”

**Finals Week**

**Tuesday, March 18. 10am -12 pm, Final Exam.**

## Guidelines and Standards for Written Work

- All written work must be typed or printed in dark ink, double-spaced, stapled (not paper clipped) together, in 12 point Times or New York font with one inch margins and should have a title page. It must be responsive to all aspects of the assignment, including length, and should use the Modern Language Association (MLA) system of documentation and style.

- Written work should be relatively free of mechanical and grammatical error.
- Document every reference, including page numbers whenever possible. Refer to a writer's manual if you need guidance about how to do this.

- Support claims not common knowledge with evidence and conclusions with argument. Take time to plan your papers and devote some time to rewriting them. Always keep a second copy of your work.

- Assume your reader has not taken this course. Define all terms whose definitions are controversial or obscure. Take time to explain the theories you are using. Include as much detail as you need to support your argument. Illustrations (diagrams, storyboards, photographs, photos of still frames, etc.) are always welcome.

- Grades: Failure to follow any of the above guidelines will result in a lower grade.

Otherwise, here are my standards:

An "A" paper demonstrates that the writer has not only mastered the concepts of the course, but has applied them in an original, imaginative and incisive manner. The paper shows a command of the language that allows the writer to express ideas and observations clearly, effectively, in detail and with virtually no mechanical errors. The paper includes adequate documentation. "A"s are reserved for exceptional essays.

A "B" paper demonstrates that the writer has understood the concepts of the course and has applied them with some originality. The paper shows the writer can organize a coherent essay with few errors. The paper for the most part includes adequate documentation.

A "C" paper demonstrates that the writer has understood most of the concepts of the course but needs to pay more attention to reading or writing. Documentation is erratic.

A "D" paper demonstrates that the writer has only a minimal understanding of the concepts of the course. Significant gaps in the writer's comprehension indicate the need for more study. The paper shows the writer's basic compositional skills are below satisfactory. Documentation is unsatisfactory.

A "F" paper demonstrates that the writer has little, if any, understanding of the concepts of the course. Because of the writer's lack of skill or concern, the work includes gross errors as well as a lack of content. Documentation is negligible. The paper may also fail to address parts of the assignment.

A paper may combine characteristics of different levels of work. In that case, the grade will depend on the paper's overall demonstration of knowledge of the material and of college writing skills.

Please see me if you have questions about my standards or about any of your grades for the course.