Course Description

The study of mass media and society can be approached through a variety of perspectives and methods. Each perspective permits us to look at mass media and their relation to society differently and raises particular questions and issues about the study of mediated forms of communication and their impact on society and how society influences the content and structure of media. This course will introduce you to some of the basic concepts used in the study of mass media and society and will give you an overview of some of the most significant theories. Our aim in this course is to explore the different perspectives on mass media in order to gain an understanding of their merits and limitations. Also important will be our attempt to compare the various perspectives to see their similarities and dissimilarities.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course the student should be able to:
1. develop skills in analysis and critical thinking by examining media and its relation to society;
2. understand the role of the media in development and perpetuation of ethnic/gender stereotypes and culture;
3. understand several ethical issues in mass communication;
4. understand the role of mass communication in the democratic process (e.g. as the 4th estate);
5. identify and explain several theories of propaganda and media effects and their relation to society;
6. analyze and critique the role of media ownership in the structure and content of mass media;
7. investigate the role of the audience in the function and structure of mass media.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (15 points) Participation refers to: (1) how often you participate in discussions in class; (2) how well you are prepared for class, i.e. how carefully you have thought about the readings, screenings, class lectures and discussions. I recognize several forms of participation: in-class participation, office visits and postings on the Canvas discussion board. IMPORTANT: You must arrange a meeting with me to talk about my evaluation of your participation by mid-semester. If you do not meet with me, your final participation grade CANNOT be contested.

2. Writing Exercises (30 points) There will be several writing exercises. Each exercise must be word processed and turned in the date they are due. Late papers will be penalized. Memos on the nature of the writing exercises will be handed out later in the semester.

3. Exams (35 points) The exams will cover the readings, class lectures and screenings. They will consist of true or false, multiple choice and short answer questions.

4. Presentation (20 points) A memo will be handed out later in the semester.

5. Regular and prompt class attendance I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. After three unexcused absences your grade will be lowered by 5 points. Relevant documentation explaining the necessity of the absence will be required. Please consider that any absence that is not due to an emergency or illness will be unexcused.
Required Reading

The readings will be available on Blackboard.

Topics, Readings, and Screenings

Class 1
Introduction to Course

Class 2
What Are We Studying?
Reading: R. Avery and T. McCain. "Interpersonal and Mediated Encounters"

Class 3
The Emergence of Mass Culture
Readings: Dwight MacDonald, A Theory of Mass Culture
Screenings: O Brother, Where Art Thou? 2000, Dir. Ethan and Joel Cohen
Romeo and Juliet 1996, Dir. Baz Luhrmann

Class 4
The Media Industry: Economics, Ownership and Society
Reading: Eric Boehlert. "One Big Happy Channel," Salon.com
Screening: Rich Media, Poor Democracy 2003, Dir. Robert McChesney

Class 5
Mass Media, Society and Ideology
Readings: Branston and Stafford "Ideologies"
Screening: Spin 1992, Dir. Brian Springer

Class 6
Administrative Assistants of the World Unite: Ideological Criticism, continued
Screening: Working Girl 1988, Dir. Mike Nichols

Class 7
Representation of Gender in Mass Media
Reading: Gaye Tuchman. "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women"
Screening: Thelma and Louise 1981, Dir. Ridley Scott

Class 8
Real Men Drink Beer: Representation of Gender in Mass Media, continued
Reading: Lance Strate "Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity"
Screenings: Various beer commercials

Class 9
Representations of Race and Ethnicity in the Media
Reading: Richard Dyer “Coloured White, Not Coloured”
Screening: Night of the Living Dead 1968 Dir. George Romero
selection from Teletubbies

Class 10
Mass Media and Propaganda: Magic Bullets and Master Symbols
Reading: Stanley Baran and D. Davis. "The Rise of Media Theory in the Age of
Propaganda"
Screening: TBA

Class 11
The Effects Tradition in Mass Media and Society
Reading: Stanley Baran and D. Davis. "Limited Effects Theory"
Screening: The Killing Screens 1997, Dir. George Gerbner

Class 12
A Big Pat on the Back: Professionalization, Conventions and Media Work
Readings: Handout
Screening: Illusions of News 1985, Dir Bill Moyers

Class 13
Fan Cultures and Mass Media: From Trekkers to Chris Hardwick
Reading: TBA
Screening: Trekkies, 1997, Dir Roger Nygard

Class 14
Media Ecology and Mass Media
Reading: TBA

Class 15
Wrap up

Evaluation Criteria

A = Excellent This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skillful use of source material, illuminating examples and illustrations, and fluent verbal and written expression. "A" work is coherent, thorough and shows some creative flair.

B = Good This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and broad level of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source material, along with examples and illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. "B" work is reasonable, clear, appropriate and complete.

C = Adequate/Fair This work demonstrates understanding that covers most or some of the basics but which remains incomplete, superficial or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or somewhat inappropriately. The work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations, and articulation/writing may be hard to follow or vague.

D = Unsatisfactory This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding, and fails to demonstrate the most rudimentary elements of the course assignments. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

Plus (+) or minus (-) grades indicate your range with the aforementioned grades. In other words, B+ means very good.
Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

Extreme weather, Emergencies

During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university’s Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet.

The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown’s honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Plagiarism

In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail.

If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student will receive a grade of F for the course.

Policy Accommodating Students' Religious Observances

The following is university policy:

Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.