SOCIOMETRY OF POPULAR CULTURE & THE MEDIA
SO 220 | IN 251

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Term: January Immersion (fully online; asynchronous course)
Dates/Time: January 1-14
Credit Hours: 3

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

My name is Ken Laundra and I am a Michigan native educated at Michigan State University (B.S. Psychology), Central Michigan University (M.A. Sociology) and Utah State University (Ph.D. Sociology), specializing in criminology, delinquency, deviance, social problems, and environmental sociology. I have been teaching sociology since 1995 and have taught a variety of courses in the discipline.

Instructor: Kenneth Laundra
Office: Shilling Hall, 411D
Phone: 217-424-6399
Email: klaundra@millikin.edu
Academic Bio: http://sites.google.com/site/kenlaundrasoc/ken-laundra---academic-bio
Office Hours: Mon/Wed 10-noon; or by apt.

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

"In the right light, study becomes insight"
-Rage Against the Machine

What is popular culture? When you think of popular culture, do you think of the hottest new movies, musicians and artists? Or do you think of the latest fashion or dance craze, the latest YouTube video or internet meme gone viral, your Facebook or Twitter account, or the latest slang? Although all of these are fine examples of pop culture, for sociologists, there is much more to be revealed by peeking behind the curtain. The lens of sociology is focused on the ever-changing media and technological environment that we are increasingly immersed in, and the consequences for society and for human relationships. Beyond these largely unseen impacts, we also critically examine the organization of contemporary media.

This course has been designed to introduce you to the media process, but also to media production and consumption, including a critical look at who controls the media and the current dynamic between private, multinational media conglomerates and non-profit, free speech media. Media messages are also examined from a social constructionist vantage point to better understand the exchange of attitudes, values and beliefs between media systems and the rest of society. What do various media messages say about us as a society? How is society shaped by these messages? We'll also examine how popular culture, expressed through media and other social institutions, actually reflects and perpetuates social inequality, including differing effects by class, race and gender. We will actively examine these impacts of popular culture by engaging in observational activities designed to reflect responsible democratic citizenship in the U.S. through this more critical sociological lens, the sociological imagination.

Course Learning Goals, Outcomes & Objectives

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Define basic terms and concepts in sociology related to culture.
- Analyze and discuss important theoretical perspectives associated with media studies and critical theory.
- Discuss the significance of cultural production through the mass media.
- Understand and identify consumerism and capitalistic ideology in the mass media.
• Identify and discuss contemporary ideology surrounding crime and justice in the mass media.
• Identify and discuss contemporary ideology surrounding race in the mass media.
• Identify and discuss contemporary ideology surrounding gender and sexual orientation in the mass media.

IN 251 Learning Goals:
1. Analyze social structures within the U.S. through the use of discipline-appropriate sources.
2. Reflect on ethical and social justice issues characteristic of a diverse democratic society.
3. Engage in activities essential to responsible democratic citizenship in the U.S.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
This course is a distance delivery course, which means the entire course and its contents, including all assignments, are delivered and submitted online (using Moodle). This course is asynchronous, which means there are no scheduled, live classroom meetings, or web conferencing, chat sessions etc. The entire course is designed around “modules” that cover each of the individual topics we will address in this course, which include all the course material and required assignments that are due by specific dates (see schedule below for due dates).

IMPORTANT NOTE: Because this class is fully online and asynchronous, you will need to schedule your time wisely and responsibly, making sure to allocate time to read the material for each module first, and then to engage the assignments that follow. You should know that many students fail online courses (more than fail traditional courses in the classroom), because they did not schedule their time wisely and allow for the ADDITIONAL study time you will need to engage the learning materials. Because there is no live class to attend, your reading and study time will be considerably greater than in a traditional class. Use a calendar to schedule time to READ and STUDY for this class, if you want to perform well!

Required Reading Materials:
Required readings for this class consist of one text/reader that you must purchase from either the bookstore or through an independent dealer (such as Amazon.com or half.com), and several online materials that are listed on the website and available for free viewing/download as Powerpoint or PDF files. You will need software to view both; Microsoft Powerpoint and Adobe Acrobat Reader (see “Course Requirements” below).

The text you need to purchase is:

Media & Society: Industries, Images and Audiences
5th edition
Authors: Croteau, Hoynes and Milan
Sage Publications
ISBN: 978-1452268378

*Other required readings will be made available to you online. See “Learning Materials” folder for links to these digital files, such as Powerpoints, PDF or Word docs, videos, websites, etc.

Course Requirements/Technical:
Students enrolled in this course must have a basic familiarity with computers (PC or mac), internet browsers (IE or Mozilla recommended), researching on the internet, saving and uploading files, and sending email (with attachments). Students must have access to a computer capable of high-speed internet access (for downloading large files), audio/video capability, with the following programs installed:

1. Access to the online learning website (Moodle)
2. Microsoft Word (*note: I cannot read MS Works files, must be .doc file)
3. Microsoft Powerpoint:
   a. You will need to view these (.ppt) files.
   b. Free Powerpoint viewer for PC/Windows (for MAC click here)
4. Adobe Acrobat for PDF files (click here if you need this)
5. Flash Player (click here if you need this)
6. Video viewing program for MPEG and AVI files (such as MS Windows Media Player)
COURSE ORGANIZATION

This class is offered as a January immersion or summer course, which means it is an accelerated course that is completed over a 2 week period of intensive learning (*summer schedule may differ). This course is organized around modules, which are folders containing some or all of the following assignments:

1. **Learning Materials** (not graded but necessary for graded assignments)
   a. Powerpoint and/or video lectures, required readings from textbook, video/audio clips and relevant websites.

2. **Learning Activities** (graded assignments)
   a. Required online/observational activities, discussion forums, exams and essays.

You will be required to complete each of the modules according to the course schedule. You may work at your own pace within each module but be sure to complete all the required work within the time allotted (see course calendar). While some of these assignments are not required (for grading purposes), completing all these learning assignments will be necessary to perform well on graded essays, learning activities/journals, and discussion posts.

**All weekly materials for this course are due by Sundays at midnight.** Because of the accelerated nature of this course, I cannot accept late work or offer any Incompletes without extenuating circumstances requiring documentation, so please do not ask me.

**Engagement Hours**

This class is completed entirely online, with no on-campus lectures, exams, or activities; however, you can expect to work on class materials and assignments according to the following timetable of engagement hours:

- **Pre-class assignments:**
  - Reviewing syllabus and Week 1 learning materials and assignments: 2 hours
  - Posting personal bio/introduction: .5 hour

- **Weeks 1-2 Regular class schedule:**
  - Required readings, audio/video material (12 hours per week @ 2 weeks): 24 hours
  - Exams & writing assignments (3.5 hour per week @ 2 weeks): 7 hours

**Total Engagement Hours:** 33.5 hours

**Accelerated Course Attendance Policy**

According to the accelerated attendance policy, students who miss more than 25% of scheduled time will be instructed to withdraw from the course. Failure to officially withdraw from the course will result in a grade of F.

Each week of an accelerated course is the equivalent of 4 hours of scheduled time, whether the student is in a live classroom or working independently in an online, hybrid, or individual engagement mode. Therefore, any portion of a missed live class (coming in late, leaving early, or taking excessive breaks) may be counted toward total hours missed. Additionally, any week of online/hybrid/individual engagement coursework that a student does not log into the course Moodle site at least once will accrue 4 hours toward the total allowed missed hours.

25% of a 7 week course (3 credit hours) allows the student to miss no more than 7 total hours.
25% of an 8 week course (3 credit hours) allows the student to miss no more than 8 total hours.
25% of a 9 week course (3 credit hours) allows the student to miss no more than 9 total hours.
25% of a 10 week course (3 credit hours) allows the student to miss no more than 10 total hours.

Instructors understand that emergencies and illnesses will occur. Students are responsible for informing instructors via phone or email of any issues regarding attendance, whether missing a full or partial class period. However, prior notification does not constitute an excused absence. Excused absences require *written* proof of why class was/will be missed. Written proof may include documentation from your employer that you were required to go out of town on business or copies of medical documents proving someone close to you had a major illness, emergency, hospitalization or death.

Students having pre-excused absences should plan to submit all assignments on time. For an emergency excused absence, the instructor will determine an acceptable period for assignments to be completed. Absences that cannot be documented are unexcused and will result in loss of points. Note: Written excuses related to the final class session must be submitted within one week.
HOW LEARNING WILL BE ASSESSED

Graded Assignments:
Your overall grade is based on timely completion of module assignments, including short essays/learning activities, discussion forum activities/posts, and exams. Although you are not graded specifically for certain activities (lectures, observational activities, video clips, etc.), you will need to complete them in order to adequately complete the graded assignments which are:

-3 Multiple Choice Exams
  (3 @ 25 pts each; 50% of your overall grade; not cumulative)  
  Points 75

-4 Short Essays/Learning Activities
  (4 @ 10 pts each; about 30% of your overall grade)  
  40

-6 Discussion Posts
  (6 @ 5 pts each; about 20% of your overall grade)  
  30

Total Points 145

Your overall grade will be based on the above assignments. Final grades will be based on the following scale:

94%-100% = A  
80%-83% = B-  
67%-69% = D+

90%-93% = A-  
77%-79% = C+  
60%-66% = D

87%-89% = B+  
74%-76% = C  
59% or less = F

84%-86% = B  
70%-73% = C-

Exam Requirements & Guidelines:
Once you have completed ALL other assignments, you are ready to take the exam. This exam is entirely Multiple Choice and True/False, consisting of 25 questions that are randomly generated (no two quizzes are alike), based on the lecture material, textbook readings, videos, and any other materials in the "Learning Materials" folders. Choose the best answer. You can review your answers and go back and change them, but you only have one attempt, so be prepared before you begin! You may have your notes and readings handy but keep in mind that you are only allowed 40 minutes to complete this quiz (so you will not have enough time to look up each answer). I suggest you prepare some notes ahead of time and have these notes handy as you take this exam.

If you experience technical difficulties (for example, if you get logged off accidentally), you may request to have the exam reset by emailing me. I will review your attempt to determine if your request is valid and respond with an answer and/or directions on how to take the quiz again. Remember, if your quiz is reset, you will have to start over (you cannot save any answers from a previous attempt).

Discussion Forum Requirements & Guidelines: The Required Post format requires users to post a top-level message before they can read and reply to messages posted by other users.

For each of the discussion posts you will be required to 1) post a response to a discussion question that I will pose and 2) respond to at least two other student's post (yes, actually three posts per discussion board). Although your opinion is welcome here, you will not receive full credit unless you make reference to a specific concept or idea from class (Powerpoint lecture, video or reading assignments) for your original response. Although there is no specific requirement here, most posts will require you to write approximately the equivalent of a one page essay, double-spaced, normal fonts and margins. You will be graded on the quality of these responses, and in comparison to other posts.

Short Essay Requirements & Guidelines:
For each of the Short Essay questions in this class, make sure to follow the following guidelines:

1) Essay must be submitted using the submission area provided.
2) Be sure to keep a backup copy of all your written work!
3) Your entry must have a title: FULL NAME and ESSAY NUMBER (for example, you can title it, "Jane Doe/Short Essay 1".
3) Essays should be about three full paragraphs long (word count should be between 250-500 words).
4) To get full credit, you must cite, reference and discuss specific ideas from our learning materials! A full, formal citation/reference page is NOT necessary for this assignment, just tell me where you got your information when discussing it.
Late Assignments & Extra Credit:
Since most of the required work in this class allows you to complete (weekly) assignments according to your own schedule, there is little reason to allow submission of late work. If you feel you have a legitimate reason for missing work, you may request an opportunity to turn the assignment in late, provided this request is made in a timely manner, within the week it is due. Although I typically grant a first request, I may require you to provide documentation of a legitimate reason for failure to complete the assignment during the designated time. You can expect subsequent requests to be denied, regardless of the reason you provide. You may also request that late work be accepted in the event of technical difficulties, such as a corrupt/missing file or computer crash during a quiz. I will determine the legitimacy of these requests on a case-by-case basis.

There is one extra credit opportunity in this class, worth up to 10% of your overall grade. Look for this opportunity on our website. To receive these points you will be required to engage in a specific learning activity and then ruminant on this activity in journal/essay format.

Incompletes:
The instructor is under no obligation to grant an incomplete grade. It is the responsibility of the student to request an incomplete grade, as one will not be granted automatically. A grade of "Incomplete" may be given if:
   a. the student at the time of his/her request has a passing grade.
   b. the student can demonstrate extreme hardship, e.g. long hospitalization, etc..
   c. the request for an "Incomplete" is made two weeks prior to the beginning of finals week-- unless the student is physically unable to do so.
Disability Accommodation Policy
Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. If you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you should submit your documentation to the Office of Student Success at Millikin University, currently located in University Commons 312.

Distance Delivery Components
Millikin University is committed to providing support for students using technology resources in pursuit of academic success. The Department of Information Technology resides in Shilling Hall and offers walk-in support.

Please visit <http://millikin.libguides.com/ed-tech> for link, resources, and additional information that aid in the use of technology in distance/hybrid delivery and technology policies.

University Commitment to Student Success
Millikin University is committed to the success of all students. As such, the University provides a wealth of services devoted to academic support. The Office of Student Success serves as the hub for these services. The Office of Student Success is located on the lower level of Staley Library. Services include:

- Tutoring
- Supplemental Instruction
- Study Skill Assistance
- One on One Advising
- Major Change Assistance
- Development of Personalized Academic Growth and Success Plans
- Support of Exploratory Studies majors
- Support for students on Academic Probation or Progress Warning
- Accommodations for Students with special learning needs
- Online Resource Library

In addition to the Office of Student Success, the University Writing and Math Centers (both located in Staley Library) offer students intensive support in these subject areas.

Students who are in need of additional academic assistance are also assigned a Student Development Advisor. These advisors work with academic advisors to ensure students receive the attention they need in all aspects of their University experience.

Academic Integrity Standards
The intellectual and moral integrity of an academic community depends upon an uncompromising commitment to honesty which guides the actions of all its members. Any disregard for this threatens the unrestricted and honest exchange of knowledge. The Faculty has the right and the responsibility to hold students to high ethical standards in conduct and in works performed, as befits a scholar at the university. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating
- Collusion
- Electronic Dishonesty
- Grade Falsification
- Plagiarism

Faculty members have the responsibility to investigate all suspected breaches of academic integrity that arise in their courses and shall have the authority to decide whether the student(s) has violated the Academic Integrity Policy. If it is determined that the violation occurred, the faculty member will decide the consequences, taking into account the severity and circumstances surrounding the violation, and will inform the student in writing, forwarding a copy of the letter to the Registrar and to the Dean of Student Development.
Consequences to an academic integrity violation include, but are not limited to:

- A letter in the student’s academic file
- Failure on assignment(s)
- Failure in the course
- Issuance of an XF for the course
- Conduct hearing with Student Development

If a student received an XF, this remains as a permanent grade and cannot be removed from the official transcript. Some programs and majors have more explicit ethical standards, which supersede this Policy, and violation of which may result in dismissal from some programs or majors within the University.

The complete policy may be found at <http://www.millikin.edu/handbook>.

**What is plagiarism?** Plagiarism is the use of another author's language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions, and the representation of them as your own. As a general rule, never copy or paraphrase text without crediting the author, including web-based information. Examples of plagiarism include 1) copying material directly without placing it inside quotation marks or acknowledging the source 2) paraphrasing material without changing the text substantially and 3) using an idea from a text without acknowledging its source.

**Cheating Online**

Although all courses present students with opportunities to cheat, online courses have certain security issues that I have to pay special attention to. In an effort to discourage cheating online (for instance, by having someone else take the online quizzes for you, browsing the web for answers during an online quiz, or copying/pasting information from quizzes or other required assignments), please be aware that I am aware of these possible cheating strategies, and that I often review assignments for evidence of these forms of cheating by using plagiarism software (Turn it In.com) that compares text answers with online text or text from previous courses, and using browser security software (Safe Assign) for quizzes that reports IP addresses and other digital information to help determine authenticity of student submissions. However, the best reason for not cheating is because the consequences of being caught are too great (see Millikin’s Academic Honest Policy below), and because you are an ethical person who values your education and intellectual growth.

**Course Content**

Please be aware that sociological study may sometimes offend your personal convictions and values. The sociological perspective is a critical one and we seek to examine the nature of both conventional and non-conventional people, groups, and institutions. Thus, you will eventually be exposed to specific groups and ideas that may personally offend you, such as gun control, gay rights, net neutrality, curse words, Catholics, cat lovers and capitalists. Clearly, we are not all offended by the same groups! To limit our study to non-controversial groups, attitudes, values and beliefs would limit your knowledge and understanding of the world around you. It would also be impossible!

While you may not agree with some of the perspectives you will be exposed to in this class, either by your instructor, fellow students, readings, or other materials presented, I encourage you to be tolerant of those perspectives. People have opinions and I am no exception. Although we will value the entire array of opinions put forth in this class during regular class discussions, I insist that these opinions be expressed with mutual respect, be tied to specific course content, and be within the boundaries of the subject matter for this course. I will endeavor to foster such an atmosphere of respect for these diverse ideas, but will also insist that no idea is censored from this course simply because it may offend someone.

**Netiquette**

The following communication etiquette guidelines ("netiquette") apply to all discussion posts, chats, emails and any other communication between you, the instructor, and/or other students. Although your opinions are welcome, be sure to tie your opinion to class content and be sure to explain where your views come from and how your views are relevant to the subject matter of the course. Personal attacks on other people’s views will not be tolerated and I urge you to be respectful of differing opinions and views on social matters. Remember, higher education, in its purest form, is the unrestricted pursuit of truth and knowledge. Your honest effort to understand a viewpoint that you may initially disagree with is a fundamental imperative in any sociology course, and epitomizes the most basic role of the university, which is to promote an intellectually vibrant mind. Hence, I urge you to keep an open mind and to avoid the temptation to look no further than what you already believe to be true about the social world around you.
Disruptive Behavior Policy
Students who exhibit behaviors that are considered to obstruct or disrupt the course goals or learning environment are subject to student conduct action per the University Standards of Conduct. Behaviors that are considered disruptive include, but are not limited to: tardiness, sleeping, inappropriate use of mobile or electronic devices, use of language that is offensive or discriminatory, excessive interruption, and/or repeated violation of faculty or classroom expectations which are stated in the course syllabus. Students who exhibit such behavior may be dismissed from the class on a temporary basis and referred to Student Development.

Dropping a Course and the University Withdrawal Policy
There is an add/drop deadline for each academic term. During the allowed period, students may elect to add or drop courses by completing the proper form and requesting signature from the instructor or department chair as required. (Forms are available in Registrar's Office). Faculty members reserve the right to permit dropping or adding courses after the set deadline. Courses dropped during the appropriate period result in a W on the student transcript. Courses dropped after this period will result in the earned grade at the time of drop.

Students who leave the University during or at the end of the semester must report to the Registrar’s Office to complete the necessary procedures and forms. Students who withdraw from the University will receive a refund of charges assessed by the University through the refund schedule posted in the Academic Bulletin. After week six of any given semester, there is no refund. Students may also be involuntarily withdrawn if they engage or threaten to engage in behavior which poses a danger of causing physical harm to self or others. The Involuntary Withdrawal Policy may be found in the Student Handbook.

Course Evaluations
Millikin University utilizes online course evaluations which are available beginning in the last week of each course term. Students may log into their MyMillikin portal to complete course evaluations. Evaluations are considered an important part of the teaching environment and students should feel comfortable giving thoughtful, honest feedback without fear of retaliation.
Course Outline

Module 1: The Sociological Perspective | Student Bios | What is Popular Culture?

In this module you will:

1. View introductory Powerpoint lectures
2. Post a bio of yourself and read other student bios
3. Complete Discussion Board/Module 1: What is "popular culture?"
4. Begin required text readings

Learning Objectives/Module 1:

- Introduce yourself to the rest of the class and familiarize yourself with other students.
- Understand the nature of sociology, including the "sociological imagination."
- Contemplate the meaning of "popular culture" and why it is important to study.
- Understand introductory concepts in media studies from our textbook, Chapter 1.

Learning Materials

Powerpoints/Lectures:
- The Sociological Perspective – Intro to Pop Culture (Laundra)

Required Readings:
- OUR TEXT: Chapter 1 (Media & the Social World; Croteau et.al., 4th ed.)

Learning Activities (graded assignments)

Discussion Forum: What is “popular culture” and why is it important to study?

Discussion Forum:
For this first discussion activity, I'd like you to simply define "popular culture". Don't check Wikipedia and don't browse for any legitimate or official definitions from any source (you won't find a consistent answer from these sources anyway). Instead, I'd like to hear your "off the cuff" definition, just what comes to mind when I ask you this question. Also, though, discuss why you think it is interesting or important to study as a matter of sociology. You should provide some examples of pop culture to emphasize your point here. This first discussion forum does not require you to make specific reference to the readings, or to cite your sources. Future discussion forums do require this reference/citation for full credit.

Module 2: Elements of Culture | Seeing South Park

In this module you will:

1. Read sociological and media theory, classic and contemporary.
2. View a Powerpoint presentation on basic sociological terms and concepts.
3. Post to the discussion room your observations on popular culture as evidenced in South Park.

Learning Objectives/Module 2:

- Identify and explain basic terms and concepts in sociology.
- Read and analyze sociological and media theories.
- Discuss popular culture as witnessed on comedy television, comparing observations with other students in a discussion forum.

Learning Materials

Powerpoints/Lectures:
- Elements of Culture: What is Popular Culture? (Laundra)

Required Readings (from our textbook):
- TEXT: Chapter 5 (Media and Ideology)
- Sociological Theory & the Media (Ryan and Wentworth, online reading)

Learning Activities (graded assignments)
Discussion Forum: Seeing South Park

Discussion Forum:
A few years back, I had an opportunity to devote an entire Popular Culture class to the Comedy Central show, South Park. This show, it turns out, is chock full of sociology, and is particularly useful in illustrating various norms, values and beliefs in our society (that's why it is so funny). Although South Park is often vulgar in its depiction of American culture, this fact turn out to be one of the more fascinating things about the show, from a sociological perspective. South Park forces you to consider your own values (by way of pushing your "I am offended" buttons), making it a valuable learning opportunity, on both a social and more personal level. As strange as this activity/discussion might seem, you should know that I was not the first to offer an entire course to this show (it was first done by a Berkeley sociologist), but it was a major reason why I had to leave Utah (I was teaching at a Utah university and the mostly Mormon administration did not appreciate my use of such "lowbrow culture" to foster the sociological imagination. And they told me so! Please understand that my goal is not to simply offend you by requiring you to watch an episode of South Park. Instead, my aim is to help you appreciate that media and culture studies require us to acknowledge our own personal biases and values, and to look beyond them in order to understand the larger cultural arena we are all living in. In this way, examining Shakespeare is inferior to South Park in exposing elements of our culture as it actually presents itself. We need not distinguish between "high culture" and "low culture" in our lesson plan, it is all culture!

With this in mind, this discussion forum requires you to watch an episode of South Park, looking for examples of cultural attitudes, values, beliefs and ideologies in our contemporary society. Using the link provided HERE, answer the following questions in the discussion forum provided. After posting your thoughts, read and respond to at least two other student posts, according to the content and "netiquette" guidelines set forth in the syllabus.

Seeing South Park

1. In a few sentences, briefly summarize the episode's main plot(s). What happened? What characters were involved? What was the outcome?
2. Does the plot (or one main theme presented) seem to be poking fun at a political or social event that actually happened? What does the show make you think about, in terms of how our culture is represented in a main theme or plot of this episode? What ethical issues are raised for American society?
3. What is one obvious ideology (system of beliefs) represented in this episode? After describing a typical, American ideology that is represented in the show, provide a couple examples of how it was cartoonishly portrayed.

Module 3: Crash Course in Cultural Studies

In this module you will:
1. Read about culture studies and culture studies theorists.
2. Post to the discussion room your thoughts about the readings for this week.
3. Submit a short essay about the readings for this week.
4. Take a multiple-choice exam on learning material from modules 1-3.

Learning Objectives/Module 3:
- Identify the basic principles of culture studies as a discipline.
- Analyze theoretical notions regarding the media from specific cultural theorists.
- Compare your understanding of media theory and specific media theorists in a short essay assignment.
- Demonstrate knowledge of required reading materials on cultural theory and media studies.

Learning Materials
Powerpoints/Lectures:
-Introducing Cultural Studies
-Cultural Studies Theorists

Video/Audio Files:
- Terrance McKenna on Marshall McLuhan
- Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message
- Marshall McLuhan and Normal Mailer Debate

Required Readings:
- TEXT: Chapter 9

Learning Activities (graded assignments)
Multiple-Choice Exam: EXAM I

Observational Activities/Short Essays:

Short Essay Questions:
1. What do each of the culture theorists from this week's readings seem to be suggesting about the role of media in society? Specifically, what do Hall, Gramsci and McLuhan say about it? Discuss the major ideas of EACH of these theorists in some detail here.

2. In what way(s) do these ideas help you to better understand the role that media plays in your own life, in terms of how your own attitudes, values and beliefs have been transformed by media? Give a tangible example in your answer here.

Module 4: The Economics of the Media Industry

In this module you will:
1. Read about the role that economic structures play in the production of mass media, including effects of conglomeration, concentration of ownership and impacts of advertising.
2. View video clips of media experts discussing the interactive effects of economic systems on our mass media, including corporate media and the concentration of ownership.
3. Discuss economic considerations about concentrated media, competition and advertising and the mass media, as well as other issues pertaining to economics and the media in a short essay assignment.

Learning Objectives/Module 4:
• Analyze scholarly ideas regarding conglomeration, concentration of ownership, for-profit vs. public media, and the impact of advertising on culture.
• Compare and contrast scholarly ideas about the role of economics in mass media production.

Learning Materials
Video/Audio Files:
- Media Control: Orwell Rolls in His Grave
- Bob McChesney on the Limitations of American Media
- Amy Goodman on Why the U.S. Needs an Independent Media

Required Readings:
- TEXT: Chapter 2

Learning Activities (graded assignments)
Observational Activities/Short Essays:

Short Essay Questions:
1. What does Marshall McLuhan mean when he says, "the medium is the message?" Give an example and discuss how it has affected American values or beliefs in some way.
2. Based on the video, Media Control - Orwell Rolls in His Grave, what are a couple consequences of corporate media control? Cite specific experts' names and basic arguments in your response.
3. Discuss one specific reason given by Bob Chesney for the decline in the quality of media journalism since the 1970's.
4. According to Amy Goodman, why do we need more independent media? Explain.

Module 5: Media & Politics

In this module you will:

1. Read our required text on the subject of political influence in media and media regulation, net neutrality, political communication, politics and the internet, and social movements and the effects of social media.
2. Watch videos related to the political influence in media, media regulation, free speech, and the effects of social media on society.
3. Engage other students in a discussion forum about the ethical consequences of political influence on media systems, and the changing American landscape of communications, such as social media sites and access to free speech and public media outlets.
4. Take a multiple-choice exam on learning material from modules 4 and 5.

Learning Objectives/Module 5:

- To demonstrate knowledge about political influence in media and media regulation, net neutrality, political communication, politics and the internet, and social movements and the effects of social media.
- To consider the social and ethical consequences of political influence on media systems, and the changing American landscape of communications, such as social media sites and access to free speech and public media outlets.

Learning Materials

Video/Audio Files:
- Rich Media, Poor Democracy
- Noam Chomsky on The Myth of the Liberal Media

Required Readings:
- TEXT: Chapters 3 & 7

Learning Activities (graded assignments)

Multiple-Choice Exam: EXAM II

Discussion Forum: Watching the News

Discussion Forum:
This discussion post requires you to first WATCH THE NEWS, paying special attention to one specific story, to compare media claims among competing news sources, and to consider this comparison in light of the required learning material.

Using the debate over CLIMATE CHANGE as a case study, examine and compare claims about climate change/global warming from a public, for-profit media source (Fox News) versus information provided from a publicly funded source (Democracy Now!) Specifically, do this:

1) List two claims from two news sources about this event, using Fox News and Democracy Now as your two news sources. You will need to search both sites for information on climate change/global warming.

Fox News is at www.foxnews.com

Democracy Now! is at: http://www.democracynow.org/
2) Compare/contrast these claims. How do the different (media) claims create a different perception of the reality of this issue? What specific ideas are supported, dismissed or IGNORED completely?

3) Drawing from the video, "Rich Media, Poor Democracy", how might you explain these competing claims? According to our readings and videos, what larger social or political forces are operating to create such opposing claims from various mainstream news sources? Why? Be sure to identify the specific institutional forces at work and how they interact with one another in shaping our news content.

4) After comparing these news sources, what evidence did you see for any of Chris Mooney's claims in "The Republican Brain?" Explain at least one of Mooney's ideas and then give an example from your observational activity (comparing news stories) that either confirms or refutes it.

5) [Ethical Reasoning] Given what you’ve learned about the claims-making process in the news media and the specific biases present in our modern-day media systems, discuss how you should approach your own exposure to news media related to current events. Specifically, what strategy should you employ to best understand the world around you, with respect to current events? What ethical considerations are most prominent in your opinion, and why?

Module 6: Media & Class

In this module you will:
1. Read a selection of writings about popular culture and modern consumerism.
2. Engage in a learning activity (a trip to the mall).
3. Reflect on the learning activity (rich people on TV) with other students in a discussion forum.
4. Submit an essay on a learning activity (mall observations).

Learning Objectives/Module 6:
- Read and analyze ideas about popular culture and consumerism, representations of class and inequality in America.
- Conduct an observational field activity on consumerism in America.
- Identify various elements of popular culture, consumerism, and representations of class through the lens of media theory and culture studies.
- Compare field observations with other students in a discussion forum.
- Synthesize popular culture writings on consumerism with field observations in a short essay.

Learning Materials

Video/Audio Files:
- Class Dismissed

Required Readings:
- TEXT: Chapter 6

Learning Activities (graded assignments)

Discussion Forum: Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous

Discussion Forum:
This discussion forum first requires you to watch a popular television series that glorifies the wealthy class and their lifestyles. I have provided one particularly useful site (Bravo TV) and I would suggest, if you have no idea what to choose, any of the Real Housewives of ....County programs. While watching, consider the following questions and then post your reply to the discussion forum. Then, respond to at least two other posts for full credit on this assignment. As an alternative, you may also choose a different program, or media entirely, such as a newspaper, popular movie/film, radio show or news program but do NOT choose a website for this activity. Again, I strongly recommend any of the pretentious, annoying shows on Bravo TV, the link is HERE.

Discussion Questions:
1. What did you watch? What happened in this particular episode? Describe the main plot(s) or theme(s) of this program.
2. How are the lifestyles of the rich and famous glorified? Give some specific examples.
3. What ideas about class, inequality, and/or stratification are presented in this program? What kinds of attitudes, values and beliefs prevail with respect to income, status and respect?
4. Here's the really interesting question: What working class ideas, values, attitudes or beliefs are NOT represented, or misrepresented, in this program?
5. Discuss how these questions relate to our text/chapter on social inequality (Chapter 6, pp 207-212, 4th edition).

Observational Activities/Short Essays:

Short Essay Question:

For this assignment, I’d like you to take a trip to the nearest mall and observe how popular culture is consumed by the people who roam here. First, plan a time when you can visit the mall, preferably alone and with no intent on shopping for yourself. You are a sociologist this day, so don’t fall prey to the lures of fashion and trendiness like you normally would – you are an observer not a shopper! Pick a strategic spot for observing people, a vantage point overlooking those below would be a good choice. Spend about ½ hour people-watching but do so with the following questions in mind (*Note: be sure to bring a pen and notepad along with these specific questions and take field notes). What material culture is being consumed (the actual products)? What non-material culture is being consumed; that is, what ideas are being consumed, symbolized in the products purchased? Do you notice any demographic differences in consumption patterns (e.g. men vs. women? age groups? Racial/ethnic groups?). What capitalistic values are inherent in your observations? What does the mall experience say about American (popular) culture?

[EThICAL REASONING] Discuss two subtle ways in which popular culture is consumed at the mall, based on your observations. What is being consumed, other than the tangible items (e.g. ideas, status, happiness, etc.)? What demographic differences did you notice? Employ specific ideas from the readings, videos and other class materials found in the "learning materials" folder, and make sure to cite those sources as you discuss them. Finally, how does this observational activity inform your own consumer-based decisions? In what specific way(s) might these observations help you to make more responsible decisions in your own consumer lifestyle, in the larger context of your participation in a democratic society.
Module 7: Media & Race

In this module you will:
1. Read a selection of writings about popular culture and race.
2. Engage in an observational learning activity involving crime and race on prime time television.
3. Reflect on the learning activity (crime and race on TV) with other students in a discussion forum.
4. Submit an essay on the learning activity (crime and race on TV).

Learning Objectives/Module 7:
- Analyze ideas about popular culture, crime and race.
- Consider ideas about popular culture, crime and race in the media.
- Identify various elements of popular culture and race through the lens of media theory and culture studies, involving perceptions of crime.
- Compare and contrast field observations on crime and race on TV with other students.
- Synthesize popular culture writings on race, crime and the media with field observations.

Learning Materials
Powerpoints/Lectures:
- Pop Culture & Race: Cultural Studies

Video/Audio Files:
- What Would You Do?
- Islamophobia: A Vanguard Special

Required Readings:
- Read/Review Chapter 6
- Abramsky – Crime as America’s Pop Culture

Learning Activities (graded assignments)
Discussion Forum: Race & Crime

Discussion Forum
For this discussion, you need to first choose a television program to watch, remembering to engage this medium academically by watching alone (if at all possible) and taking notes about what you see. Again, you are not watching TV to be entertained, you are observing as a sociologist! Choose a program that readily portrays both race and crime. I suggest choosing one of those popular crime dramas that are so prevalent on network television today (such as CSI Miami or The Wire) or reality programs (like Cops or America's Most Wanted) or even the nightly news. Just be sure the program offers a perspective of how Americans see and react to race and crime. Watch for at least 1/2 hour, writing down examples of how the media both portrays and reflects race and crime. That is, you are looking for representations of race that both shape and reflect our perceptions of crime in America. You should integrate your observations with the readings and other class materials found in the "Learning Materials" folder for this module in some specific way, answering the following questions:

Discussion Question:

1. Based on the program you watched, and in light of the text readings, what claims are being made about crime in America? What crimes are shown to be the most dangerous? What kinds of crime are NOT being dramatized on television?
2. What kinds of people are associated with those crimes? Did you notice any particular race being portrayed as typically criminal (or non-criminal) in some way?
3. Do all races appear to have the same amount of diversity of character roles, or are some races more typically cast as certain kinds of people? Give an example or two to make your point.
4. How might these crime programs on TV shape common perceptions about real crime in America? Do you think these perceptions are an accurate picture of reality?

Observational Activities/Short Essays:
Short Essay Question:

First, spend about 1/2 hour researching race and crime data in the U.S., using the FBI's website for crime statistics ([HERE](#)). Look for data on:

- Which racial group committed the most crimes this past year (look at both raw numbers and percentages among different kinds of crimes)?
- What kinds of crime are both whites and African-Americans most likely to be arrested for, as a percentage of the population?
- How many "hate crimes" were reported this past year? What kinds of hate crimes are most common? By whom? Against whom?

After you have done this, read (or re-read) the Abramsky article (in the lesson materials folder) and then answer the question below in your short essay:

Question: How would you explain these arrest statistics, in light of the Abramsky article and any other material from our lesson materials for this module? Cite specific information or ideas (quoting with a page number is preferred here) from these sources when answering this question.
Module 8: Media & Gender/Sexual Orientation; Wrapping Up

In this module you will:
1. Read a selection of writings about popular culture, gender and sexual orientation.
2. Engage in a learning activity (sports and gender).
3. Submit an essay on learning activity (sports and gender).

**Learning Objectives/Module 8:**
- Read and analyze ideas about popular culture, gender and sexual orientation.
- Conduct an observational field activity on gender in the media.
- Identify various elements of popular culture, gender and sexual orientation through the lens of media theory and culture studies.
- Synthesize popular culture writings on gender with field observations in a short essay.

**Learning Materials**
- **Powerpoints/Lectures:**
  - Gender: Cultural Studies
  - Sexual Orientation: Cultural Studies
- **Required Readings:**
  - TEXT: Read/Review Chapter 6
  - Davis and Duncan: Sports Knowledge is Power
  - Ward: Breasts are for Men

**Learning Activities (graded assignments)**
- **Multiple-Choice Exam:** EXAM III
- **Discussion Forum:** Popular Culture & Sports

**Discussion Forum:**
This learning activity first requires you to engage in an observational activity, before posting your discussion answer. This time, instead of viewing the media, I’d like you to find a public sports event to observe perceptions and attitudes surrounding sexuality, such as a local ball game or similar athletic performance (you may also attend a play or recital, if no sports event is available). Just like previous observations, go alone and take notes, looking for examples of how people’s behavior, or reactions to others, reflects ideas about sexuality. Specifically, look for behaviors that illustrate rigid gender roles, or which represent ideas about masculinity, femininity and/or homosexuality.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What did you attend and what did you see? Describe some of the gendered interactions you observed (between or among the players and audience).
2. In what way(s) did you observe some of the major points regarding presentations of gender, sexual orientation and sex in the Ward/Caruthers and Davis/Duncan articles, and the video "Not Just a Game" (parts 1 and 2)? Be sure to explain these ideas clearly (citing your source) when illustrating with your observations here.
3. Based on your activity for this week, do you agree or disagree with the learning material; specifically, with ideas about how sports culture has shaped cultural norms about femininity, masculinity, and sexual orientation over time? Why or why not?