

**COMM 201 – MEDIA THEORY AND CRITICISM**  
**Loyola University – Winter 2016**

Mondays 4:15 – 6:45pm in SOC 010

Instructor: Nathan Holmes, PhD  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We live in environments composed of multiple forms of electronic and audio-visual media. Everyday we interact with images and sounds that communicate information, produce sensation and feeling, and shape our understanding of the world. How do media work on us as individuals and as a culture? What are their social, political, and aesthetic effects? Do emergent media technologies empower us, or do they simply serve those in power? What can the history of media forms tell us about our present? To answer these questions, and to be able to pose new ones for emergent media phenomena, we require theory and critique.

Media theory and criticism is a body of knowledge that offers ways to understand and describe our mediated environment. Theory accounts for what media are and how they work. Critical approaches to media analyze and evaluate media phenomena and identify how our media might function in more ethical, socially productive ways.

**Course Goals:** The aims of this class are: (1) to normalize engagement with theoretical and critical concepts so that students can integrate them into their everyday life and creative/professional practice; and (2) to demonstrate the value of written expression as a mode of reflection and inquiry into media culture.

**Course Organization:** The course consists of one 2h30m class per week. Class time will consist of lectures mixed with discussion and group activities.

**Readings and Other Materials**

Readings for this class are extremely important as they will be discussed in every class. You must come to each class having read the readings listed in the schedule for that week. There is no assigned textbook for this class. Weekly readings are posted in SAKAI. You are responsible for printing out all the readings and bringing them with you to class (see Class Policies section).

Screenings: We will occasionally screen films or short videos in class. Alternately, I may assign screenings for you to watch outside of class.

**Participation**

Participation involves responding to questions in class and creating dialogue about relevant topics in class discussions – I encourage you to address one another as well as me with your comments or questions. Participation also includes arriving to class on-time and being prepared. Looking attentive, taking notes, and corresponding via email are all minor but significant modes of participation that may give you an edge. Group activity and (cont'd)

small homework assignments (in addition to the assignments listed) may be assigned throughout the semester—these will also count toward your participation grade.

## **GRADING AND EVALUATION**

Your final grade for the class will be based on your participation in class and your performance on the assignments.

### **Evaluation**

Participation		15%
Response Questions	[Due every week, by Sunday 9pm]	20%
Paper 1	[1page - Due February 15]	10%
Paper 2	[2-3 pages- Due March 21]	15%
Paper 3	[5-7 pages -Due April 14]	20%
Final Exam	[Due May 2]	20%

### **Grading Scale (letter grade, percentile, grade point)**

	A = 94-100 = 4.0	A- = 90-93 = 3.67
B+ = 87-89 = 3.33	B = 84-86 = 3.0	B- = 80-83 = 2.67
C+ = 77-79 = 2.33	C = 74-76 = 2.0	C- = 70-73 = 1.67
D+ = 67-69 = 1.33	D = 60-66 = 1.0	F = 0

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

### **UNIT 1 – Images, Industries, and Technology**

1/18 – MLK Day, no class.

1/25 – Introduction – What is media, theory, and criticism?

Reading: Susan J. Douglas, “The Turn Within: The Irony of Technology in a Globalized World”

2/1 – Film, Photography, and Medium Specificity

Reading: André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” John Berger “Ways of Seeing”

In class screening: *Man With A Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 68m)

2/8 – Distraction, Spectacle and the Culture Industries | Superbowl Roundup

Readings: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”; Herbert Schiller “The Corporation and the Production of Culture.”

Homework screening: Superbowl 50 (Feb. 7)

2/15 – Flowing and Streaming TV– **Paper #1 Due (before class)**

Reading: Raymond Williams, “Television and Flow” (86-96); Ethan Thompson, “IFC / Onion News Network”

In-class screening: Network-based TV flow

2/22 – Signs, Images, Advertising  
Reading: Roland Barthes “The Advertising Message,” Jia Tolentino “The Beauty Bridge”  
In class screening: *Black Mirror* - “Fifteen Million Merits” (Season 1, Episode 2)

2/29 – Representation | What is Ideology?  
Reading: Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” Sara Banet-Weiser “What’s Your Flava: Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture”

## MARCH BREAK – NO CLASSES

### UNIT 2 – Emerging and Evolving Media Environments

3/14 New Media and Old Media | Guidelines for Paper 3  
Reading: André Bazin “The Evolution of the Language of the Cinema,” Lev Manovich “What is new media?”  
Screening: *Side by Side* (Chris Kenneally, 2012, 99m)

3/21 Convergence and Remediation **Paper #2 Due**  
Reading: Richard Grusin & Jay David Bolter “Introduction,” “Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation, ““Convergence”

3/28 Liveness and Mobility  
Reading: Tara McPherson, “Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web”  
In-class screening: *Black Mirror* - “The Entire History of You”

### UNIT 3 – What Now?

4/4 Networks and “Selfiness” | Group Activity: Ethics, Etiquette, and Obsession  
Reading: Mark Andrejevic “The Work of Being Watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-Disclosure”; possible additional reading TBA  
Homework listening: This American Life #573, “Status Update”

4/11 – Politics and Labor of the Contemporary Media Environment | Preparation for next week  
Reading: Astra Taylor, *The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*; additional reading TBA

**Paper #3 due 4/14 at 4pm – Please submit to Michelle Bukowski or Doretha Tyler-Gant – SOC Building, second floor.**

4/18 – What remains to be theorized and critiqued? Class-mapped readings and discussion

4/25 – Media Optimism vs. Media Pessimism | Final Class / Exam

**\* Adjustments to readings and course schedule:** As the course instructor, I reserve the right to alter or add to the readings and make small changes to the schedule. If I plan to make changes I will provide advance notice in class and via email.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### **Response Questions 20%**

You are responsible for submitting 10 response questions throughout the semester (one each week starting February 1. Part of each week's class will be devoted to discussing a selection of the questions received.

Your response questions must address an aspect of the reading for the week. Think of these as questions that could open up to discussion – either something you think deserves more explication, or an idea you're fuzzy on. Your response questions must be logical, well-crafted, and demonstrate that you have reflected on, thought through, and puzzled over the issues or topic raised by the reading. There IS such a thing as a **bad** response question.

- As a general rule, response questions should be around a paragraph, or 3-5 sentences in length.
- Your submission for the week must be uploaded to the appropriate drop box in SAKAI by Sunday at 9pm for that week's class. E.g.: If you would like to address Ethan Thompson's essay, you must submit your response question by February 14 at 9pm.

### **Paper #1: Précis Assignment: 10%**

"Précis" is a fancy French word for a summary. In this straightforward writing assignment you will summarize the salient points of a reading already completed for the class. The selection of eligible readings will be announced in class.

- For this assignment you are required to quote from the reading and properly cite your reference at the end of the paper.

Length: 1 page (see General Assignment Guidelines below for additional instructions on format).

**Due date: 2/15, 4pm. Please submit paper as .doc or .docx file via SAKAI**

### **Paper #2: Theory Ambassadors, or:**

### **"What did you just say? Medium speci-what??" : 15%**

- Scenario: A friend, co-worker, roommate, or family member is doubtful that concepts from media theory are a helpful way to understand the media around us.
- Problem in a nutshell: Using theoretical terms in everyday conversation can make other people uncomfortable. Sometimes people react negatively to fancy five-dollar words.
- Solution: Pick a concept covered in class\* and explain it to them in your own words in the form of a letter. To be convincing, describe the concept in relation to a medium (film, television, a website) or media phenomenon (Donald Trump, *Star Wars*, kitten videos) that is familiar to your reader.

Although you are writing to someone familiar to you, avoid writing too conversationally—if the letter is good, we might be able to use it to convince others as well (cont'd).

\*A list of concepts will be distributed in class prior to the due date.

Length and format: 2-3 pages (please see General Assignment Guidelines below for further instructions on format).

**Due date: 3/21 at the beginning of class.**

**Paper #3– Media Critique: 20%**

For this paper you will identify a media phenomenon or text that you think requires critical attention. Specific guidelines for this assignment will be distributed in class after March break.

Length and format: 5-7 pages. (please see General Assignment Guidelines below for further instructions on format).

**Due date: Thursday, April 7 before 4pm.** Please submit assignment in hard copy to either Michelle Bukowski or Doretha Tyler-Gant (their offices/desks are on the second floor of the SOC building)

**Final Exam**

In the last class meeting of the semester (April 25) you will be given the question (or questions) for the final exam. The final exam may involve viewing media content of some sort, which will happen in the last class meeting.

**Due date: May 2 before 4pm.** Submit in hard copy to either Michelle Bukowski or Doretha Tyler-Gant.

**GENERAL ASSSIGNMENT GUIDELINES**

**Format of Paper Assignments**

- All assignments must be type-written, double-spaced, and in 12 pt font. Use the default margins in Microsoft Word or roughly match the margins used on this syllabus.
- All the pages in the assignment should be numbered. Include your name, the date, and the class code (“COMM 201”) on the first page. A separate title page is not required.
- The assignment pages should be stapled – do not submit assignments in special binders or folders.
- If the paper length is specified 2-3 pages, this means that you must write at least two *full* pages. Writing one full page and two paragraphs on a second page does not count as two pages.
- Except for Paper 1, all assignments should be submitted in hard-copy, not electronically.

### **Late Assignments**

Late assignments will be deducted 5% per day (starting immediately after the deadline). Technological mishaps, although understandable, are not acceptable excuses for late submission.

### **Grading of Paper Assignments**

Your papers will be graded not only on the quality of your analysis, but also on the strength of your writing. Pay close attention to structure, grammar, and organization. Be sure to **proofread** (a good habit to get into is reading it out loud to yourself) your work before you submit it – word processing programs are unable to catch every mistake that you make.

All written work for the class will be graded according to the following criteria:

- The coherence and persuasiveness of your overall argument and its fidelity to the topic at hand.
- The degree to which you display knowledge of and critical engagement with the relevant texts, concepts, films, and vocabulary introduced by the course.
- The formal and rhetorical quality of the paper: your success or failure to organize and present your arguments and ideas in a coherent way.

**NOTE:** If you require help or feedback with any aspect of the writing process you are encouraged to visit or make an appointment at one of Loyola's Writing Centers:

<http://www.luc.edu/writing/>

### **GENERAL CLASSROOM POLICIES**

- In general, there is an expectation that you will treat others in the class with respect. This means listening to their words and choosing your own with care.
- Laptops, phones, or tablets are not to be used once class has begun. At the beginning of class, please remove them from your desks and stow them in your bags. (We will discuss my reasoning for this rule).
- Because laptops and tablets are not permitted, you must bring pens/pencils and notepads to take notes in class. You must also print out readings and bring them to class.
- I know that phones are irresistible. Why is this? Perhaps, this could be a topic of theorization or criticism. Nonetheless, I tend to notice you when you very secretly use your phone below your desk. If I spot this, I may ask you to put your phone away in front of the class, which can be embarrassing. If you are using your phone repeatedly in class, I will silently make a note of it and it will affect your participation grade.
- No food is to be consumed during class time. As this is an evening class, you should make sure you grab a quick bite before class. You may consume beverages to caffeinate or hydrate yourself (I'm not a monster).
- An attendance sheet will be passed out at the beginning of each class. If you miss or are late to class, it will be noted. Recurrent absences or tardiness will have an adverse effect on your participation grade.

## **School of Communication Statement on Academic Integrity**

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate the truth, as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher
- Providing information to another student during an examination
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts.

Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as print, Internet, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty; any failure to do

so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at:

<http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source>

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes without the expressed prior permission of all instructors. A student who submits the same work for credit in two or more classes without the expressed prior permission of all instructors will be judged guilty of academic dishonesty, and will be subject to sanctions described below. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the chairperson of the department involved, and to the Dean of the School of Communication.

The office of the Dean of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances. The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans.

Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at:

[http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg\\_academicgrievance.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.shtml) .

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations.

\*The School of Communication policy is based entirely on and is consistent with the Academic Integrity Policy of the College of Arts & Sciences.