University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Media Principles Problems and Challenges
19:225:001 EXA/EXW (3 semester hours)

Fall 2012 Syllabus

Tuesdays
5:30-8 p.m., John and Mary Pappajohn Education Center, Room 218 (and online)

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Monday, Wednesday 4:30-5:30 (online)

Or by appointment (email is generally the most efficient way to reach me).

The above office hour information reflects my classroom teaching assignment this semester (and beyond) in Des Moines. I’ll send those students in Iowa City an APB any time my schedule has me on campus, and I’ll be happy to meet with students then. (I’ll have to be there at least once a month for faculty meetings and will likely be there more often for other commitments.) Or we can meet halfway—lunch in Grinnell?

I’ll also be happy to meet with any of you who happen to be in Des Moines, for whatever reason, at whatever time and day (other than when I’m teaching).

COURSE OVERVIEW (And a bit of background)
Welcome to *le grande experiment*. But first, let me tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a graduate program at the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication devoted to those who wanted to practice journalism (broadly defined) as opposed to teaching and researching journalism. It was known as the master’s professional program (or MAP), and the degree was considered terminal (no, you would not die from it, but you weren’t expected to continue to earn a PhD.).

I was the faculty member most heavily involved with and invested in MAP. Then my duties shifted, as we launched a pilot program to propose an online/distance master’s degree in strategic communication. This pilot program has been based in Des Moines, and I became the point person for this, because of a combination of professional experience and logistical convenience (I live in West Des Moines and previously spent half the week in Iowa City).

MAP is no more (ask me about it when you have a free month), but our MA program still hopes to attract professionally oriented students (and mid-career professionals), along with those whose career track is more specifically academic. The latter group will likely progress to a PhD. program. The former may or may not.

The conceptual cornerstone of the MAP program was a course numbered the same as this one (019:225), with the formal title of “Contemporary Problems in Journalism,” and the more widely used, informal title of “Master’s Seminar.” Whatever the formal title of this iteration—broadened to encompass much more than journalism—I will still think of this as Master’s Seminar and expect the dynamics to be similar.

Then and now, this is a discussion-heavy, student-driven course, one that employs textbooks as a springboard for inquiry and debate rather than a body of knowledge to be absorbed (and regurgitated in some testing form). Given my journalism background and preference for teaching in “real time,” we will also be responding to current and emerging developments in media, through news stories, think pieces and even episodes from your various lives and work that we can share for general illumination (and occasional amusement).

Ultimately, in years after this, 225 will likely have two separate sections, one comprising students on the MA-J track in Iowa City, the other for students in the proposed MA-SC program in Des Moines, online and in galaxies far, far away. In each case, the course will serve as the gateway to the respective programs and will provide a conceptual foundation. But the two sections will be, in essence, two different courses, with different syllabi, reading assignments and professors.

In this transitional year, we decided to combine the two sections, and I’m excited by the challenge. I’ve always felt that diversity enhances the educational experience, and the diversity we will likely have here extends beyond educational and/or pre-professional focus (i.e. journalism or strat comm) to matters of geography, generation, work and life experience, etc.
As the lines distinguishing journalism as a subset of media communication continues to shift (or blur or dissolve), one of the issues underlying this course is whether journalism and strategic communication have a relationship that is complementary (even symbiotic) or whether it is adversarial. For those of you in different academic/professional camps, those relationships will extend beyond the classroom to the working world at large.

The more different you are, the more you can learn from each other, and my aim in such seminars is that students learn more from each other than they do from the professor. Most class periods will involve discussion on pre-assigned reading topics, as well as issues raised by the professor and other students. Many sessions will include in-class reading of links or handouts, even multiples. Many will have writing assignments, to be completed either in class or (more often) before the next class session.

We are living in a media era of unprecedented media upheaval. Every fall, a conceptual course such as this seminar finds itself discussing developments (blog, podcast, Twitter, Pinterest) that were unknown and unanticipated a couple of years earlier but have become common parlance in communications circles. Something new and significant will emerge during the course of this semester, but I don’t yet know what it is. Maybe you do.

In the past, I’ve told students that this seminar should be considered part think tank, part boot camp—and perhaps part group therapy. On the theoretical level, we will be exploring (and debating) all sorts of issues, concerns and complexities inherent within the ever-changing world of contemporary media.

And we will provide a bridge from that conceptual, theoretical domain into the professional world in which you likely hope to advance (even if some of you have yet to enter it). Down in the professional trenches, we will be preparing for careers in communications and academe alike: how to get work, how to network, how to monitor opportunities for advancement, how to distinguish oneself from countless other candidates with comparable academic qualifications, how to find the satisfaction that elevates a job into a vocation.

The course should find the students generating plenty of discussion on topics that interest you (though the instructor will always be able to fill the void when students aren’t responsive). The course will raise more questions than we can possibly resolve.

*This is your course and your education. It can be as rich and rewarding as you make it.*

And though I don’t make such threats often or idly, if the interaction flags, I have power points at my disposal. And, if I must, I will use them. The choice is yours.
GRADING
Students will be graded on written work and class participation, with the final grade to be determined as follows:

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- **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** 40%
- **SHORTER RESPONSES:** 20%
- **MIDTERM WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT:** 20%
- **FINAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT:** 20%

There will be no final exam.

Attendance (whether in the classroom or online) is MANDATORY, as the course will be much more interactive than lecture oriented, with written assignments as well as discussion part of the class sessions. Particularly with once-a-week classes, each week represents a significant portion of the course. If you can’t attend and have a good reason, please let me know as soon as you can (before the class you miss rather than after).

Full attention is common courtesy. Class time and class equipment should be devoted to class activity (not surfing the Net, unless assigned research requires it, or checking your email). Cell phones should be off and away.
Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced around the fifth week of the semester by the Registrar. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI
through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the dates and times of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar’s web site.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

*These CLAS policy and procedural statements have been summarized from the web pages of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and The University of Iowa Operations Manual.

TEXTBOOKS

Hanson, Ralph E. Mass Communication: 3rd Edition (CQ Press)


These two are available from the publisher (and likely elsewhere, including IMU Bookstore, as a discounted bundle when ordered together).


McDougall, Julian. Media Studies: The Basics (Routledge)
MC, as the syllabus will refer to the main text, is your basic, lay-of-the-land survey (though livelier and less expensive than most such textbooks). With the different backgrounds, experiences and educational aspirations that students bring to the course, this text ensures that we, are all on the same page, have a level playing field, or whatever other cliché you’d prefer.

IM is an issues-oriented collection much like the one I long used in the “Contemporary Problems” version of 225. It provides more of a journalistic emphasis to this course, though the challenges it confronts should concern anyone who uses or consumes media (i.e. all of you).

MS balances IM, with an approach that is more generally media-oriented rather than journalistic and more academically oriented than professional.

The class dynamic and the experience and knowledge that you bring, individually and collectively, will determine how much and in what ways we will use the textbooks in class sessions, but the combination of the three should give you all a thorough grounding in the state (and flux) of contemporary media in general, journalism and communication in particular, and of the ways that lines that were once fixed and absolute dividing journalism, professional communication, social networking, etc., have blurred or even dissolved.

(How many of you receive most of your news alerts from Facebook or Twitter? I do. What is Google: search engine, content provider, news service, or all of the preceding and more?)

COURSE CALENDAR

Week one
Aug 21: Introduction and syllabus. How do you envision the world of media evolving over the next five years, and where will you fit? For next week, write a short response (500-750 words) addressing these issues and put in the ICON dropbox by Monday.

Week two
Aug 28: Discuss responses on the changes we anticipate in the world of media and communications. Read MC, Preface and Ch 1 (which might spur some ideas for your writing assign)

Week three
Sept 4: Read MC Ch 2 and MS Intro and Ch 1-2

(You may also have options of purchasing/renting the first two, or all three, in electronic editions. Feel free to explore whatever options you’d like).
**Week four**
Sept 11: Read MC Ch3, IM Ch 2 and MS Ch 3-4

**Week five**
Sept 18: Read MC Ch4 and IM Ch 3

**Week six**
Sept 25: Read MC Ch 5. Discuss and brainstorm midterm writing assignment.

**Week seven**
Oct 2: Read MC Ch 6, IM Ch 1

**Week eight**
Oct 9: Read MC Ch 7-8.

**Week nine**
Oct 16: Read MC Ch 9. **Midterm writing assignment due** (ICON dropbox, by Monday 10/15) and discussed.

**Week ten**
Oct 23: Read MC Ch 10, MS Ch 5

**Week eleven**
Oct 30: Read IM Ch 4-5, MS Ch 6

**Week twelve**
Nov 6: Read MC Ch 11-12. Brainstorm and discuss final writing assignment.

**Week thirteen**
Nov 13: Read MC Ch 13-14

**Week fourteen**
No class. **HAPPY THANKSGIVING**

**Week fifteen**
Nov. 27: Read MC 15, IM 6

**Week sixteen**
Dec. 4: Semester debriefing. Final writing assignment due and discussed. Where do we go from here?

**Have a great break (or life or career or wherever you go from here)!**