University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

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

Fall 2013 Syllabus

Mondays
5:30-8 p.m., John and Mary Pappajohn Education Center, Room 228 (and online)

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Office hours: Monday 4:30-5:30 (office and online); Tuesday—Friday 9-10 a.m. (online)

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

The above office hour information reflects my classroom teaching assignment in Des Moines. I’m also available plenty of other times—just make an appointment. And I’m obsessive about monitoring email.

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. This is a required course on both tracks.

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).

As an example, given recent events and my own interests, I could easily see devoting the entire semester to the acquisition of the Washington Post by Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, and the seismic shift that I believe it portends. But we won’t (though we will certainly explore it as part of the course).

As the lines distinguishing journalism as a subset of media communication continue 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 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. These writing assignments will generally be made in class, rather than listed on the syllabus, as they will often reflect media developments that we couldn’t have anticipated. We will also engage in online discussions through ICON threads during times other than our weekly meetings.

We are living in an era of unprecedented media upheaval. Every fall, a conceptual course such as this seminar finds itself discussing developments (blog, podcast, Twitter, Netflix and Amazon as creators as well as distributors of content) 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. We will try to help some of you prepare for careers and help those already in the midst of their careers get better at their jobs (while thinking more deeply and analytically about them).

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 point presentations on my computer. 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:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: 40%
SHORTER RESPONSES: 20%
MIDTERM WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: 10%
FINAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: 30%

There will be no final exam.

All writing assignments are due in the ICON dropbox at the beginning of class on the due date. Those late will be docked a letter grade per day. (A paper due Monday that deserves an A will receive a B if I don’t get it until Tuesday, etc.)

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](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](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook)).

**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/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/) for more information.

**Academic Honesty**

All CLAS students have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook): "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](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/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**
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. I apologize for the cover on the new edition, which makes it look like it’s a kindergarten primer. It isn’t.

MS, as the syllabus will refer to the complementary text, is much more academic, summarizing and encapsulating the scholarly approach(es) to media studies. Those of you on the Strat Comm track—ardent capitalists, budding captains of industry—might be surprised by how pervasive the Marxist perspective remains in media studies. This should provide plenty of fodder for discussion and debate here (particularly with those who have embarked on a more scholarly/academic path).

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 should give you all a thorough grounding in the state (and flux) of contemporary media in general, 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 26:* Introduction and syllabus. How do you envision the world of media evolving over the next five years, and where will you fit? Before next class, write a short response (500-750 words) addressing these issues and put in the ICON dropbox by Sunday, 9/8.

**Week two**
*Sept 2:* No class, Labor Day

**Week three**
Sept 9: 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 assgn) and MS, Intro and Ch 1.

Week four
Sept 16: Read MC Ch 2 and MS Ch 2

Week five
Sept 23: Read MC Ch3 and MS Ch 3

Week six
Sept 30: Read MC Ch4, discuss and brainstorm midterm writing assgn

Week seven
Oct 7: Read MC Ch 5.

Week eight
Oct 14: Read MC Ch 6, Midterm writing assgn due (in ICON dropbox before class)

Week nine
Oct 21: Read MC Ch 7-8.

Week ten
Oct 28: Read MC Ch 9.

Week eleven
Nov 4: Read MC Ch 10

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

Week thirteen
Nov 18: Read MC Ch 13-14.

Week fourteen
Nov. 25: No class. HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Week fifteen
Dec 2: Read MC 15, MS 4-6

Week sixteen
Dec 9: 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). NO FINAL EXAM