THE COURSE

As resistant as I am to set-in-stone syllabi (preferring to keep you in a state of suspended animation and edgy anticipation that is journalism’s natural habitat), I feel that it is even less appropriate for this course than for others. We are focusing on a field where change is the only constant, where the technological revolution continues unabated and where yesterday’s radical disruption is tomorrow’s business as usual. Until the next radical disruption.

Within the current flux of entertainment media, principles that hold true today—and have for decades, even centuries—might be anachronisms by the end of the semester. Or the end of next week. I can’t predict what might dominate next month’s discussion the way Spotify (and streaming) became such a dominant topic in music circles a couple of years ago. Because a month or two before that, I had never heard of Spotify (and now stream about 95% of my new music).

After Apple entered the streaming wars (and cannibalized its iTunes downloading profits in the process), a new front has opened. Google (which owns YouTube) and Amazon are competing as well. How will these heavyweights compete against Spotify? Whatever happened to Pandora? Who is going to pay for the music and how? We’ll be asking these questions, and maybe even finding some answers.

In every field of media, as all continue to converge, the identification of the major players changes constantly, as does the very nature of the games they are playing. Disney recently swallowed Fox (isn’t the fox supposed to do the swallowing?) with an eye toward streaming. A few years ago that sentence would have seemed senseless. What does it mean now?
I have former students who have real jobs with “social networking” in their titles, and earn real paychecks in that field, who started their educations before that term was widespread. I have seen blogs go from introductory puzzlement (“short for web log,” as if that says anything) to near ubiquity to borderline anachronism—killed by Twitter and Tumblr, both of which arrived (and departed?) in an eye’s blink. I know that there’s been a rise of interest in Pinterest, but I have no idea why. (Women like it more than men, right? Let’s discuss.) You probably use Instagram and Snapchat; I don’t.

Does entertainment media include social media? Is there anything that doesn’t include social media? And a smartphone? Though some predict the smartphone is already on its way out, a little more than a decade after Apple revolutionized media culture by introducing the iPhone.

Easy come; easy go. Blink, and the whole world has changed. Let’s discuss. We will throughout the semester.

Believe it or not, I remember a world before YouTube. I remember when Facebook was the exclusive province of young people. Now it is dominated by old people (much to the embarrassment of their offspring who have yet to close their accounts). I still send emails when everybody else texts (though, for all I know, you all now communicate telepathically). I remember when phones were used not just primarily, but exclusively, for phone calls.

Do any of you still make phone calls on your phones?

Enough. I don’t need to convince you that I am old. And I don’t need to convince you that things are changing—continually, rapidly, dramatically. For my generation and some codgers even a generation or two younger, such constant, dramatic change induces cultural whiplash. For many of you, constant change is the way of the world; it is all you’ve ever known. I may get nervous if the entire digital landscape seems to transform itself every couple of months; you may get nervous if it doesn’t. You’re already anticipating the next big thing, while I fear that it will make obsolete something that just cost me a few hundred bucks.

Together, we will analyze what has been and anticipate what is coming. There is no discrete body of knowledge that I expect you to master over the course of the semester. We will be illuminating what is happening as it is happening, and we can’t know now what that will be two weeks from now.

I will actually be pleased if we know less at the end than we think we do at the start, and if we leave this course with more questions than answers (as long as they are the right questions).

Yet, in my usual spirit of self-contradiction, let’s start with one postulate, which this course may well reaffirm (or refute as anachronistic): The emergence of new media always threatens old media, which then have two options—adapt or die. (You might have heard this in conjunction with Darwinism, or Social Darwinism.)
And as we scattershoot our way through the semester, we will see that every new medium has been widely perceived as the murderer of the old. Yet the old have generally adapted and survived. Over and over again.

Until now?

Consider: Movies were supposed to kill live theater. Radio was supposed to kill commercial music, both live and recorded. TV was supposed to kill both radio and movies. And now digital technology is supposed to obliterate western culture as we know it, littering the media landscape with the corpses of the newspaper, music, film, publishing, cable TV and other industries. Will print on paper somehow adapt? Is there any value in paying for the cow of recorded music when you can get the milk streamed for free? Is it better to own (even digitally) than to subscribe?

And why has vinyl, considered dead with the advent of the CD, made such a comeback? (And is it the CD that is now dead?) Can print newspapers similarly rise from the ashes of anachronism?

So many questions.

Collectively, we will progress toward responses to such pressing issues of entertainment media and even venture a few predictions. Here is what I know for sure—you as the consumer will dictate where entertainment media are headed and why, just as you (or your older siblings) have dictated every technological transformation in the field, as large corporations try not only to meet but anticipate your every desire.

And what do you want? You want it free (or very cheap). You want it convenient (mobile). You want it all. And you want it now. So let’s so how all this plays out in the real world of commerce, where, I can assure you, nothing is free. Somebody always pays.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is committed to your academic and professional success. In line with this commitment, we have identified particular learning outcomes that every student should obtain by the time they earn a JMC degree. You can find more information about these learning outcomes here: http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/undergraduate-programs/assessment. We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. This course contributes to the following learning outcomes:

3. Writing and Storytelling Learning Goal

Understand that clear, concise, correct writing is at the heart of journalistic expression and
that reporting and communicating it effectively requires a knowledge and achievement of
the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work.

**Learning Objective 1:** Students will demonstrate the ability to gather factual story
elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple
media and audiences.

**Learning Objective 2:** Students will display the ability to access and analyze data, report
facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner
commensurate with professional standards.

**Learning Objective 3:** Students will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a
manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media.

4. Multiculturalism Learning Goal

To demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups (including communities
defined by gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion and sexual orientation) in a global society in
relationship to communications.

**Learning Objective 1:** Students will demonstrate an ability to produce media that serve
the needs and interests of diverse communities and reflect their voices and
experiences.

**Learning Objective 2:** Students will demonstrate sensitivity to and understanding of the
cultures, histories, perspectives, and socio-economic and political situations of
diverse groups.

**Learning Objective 3:** Students will demonstrate an ability to work with members of
diverse groups to engage publicly over issues of community interest.

This class has other, course specific outcomes as well...

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

*To understand the seismic revolutions that continue to transform entertainment media, and
media and society in general.*

*To get a sense of where things are heading in this area through an illumination of how these
fields have progressed and changed, even before the computer and the Internet changed
everything.*
*To recognize the common challenges facing digitized media—music, movies, TV, books, games et al.—as well as the specific problems and opportunities for each.

*To understand the personal implications of these profound changes. As one cliché asks, Are you playing the music, or is the music playing you?

*To learn how research and analyze the shifts and upheavals of entertainment media through a series of short responses and longer papers at the middle and end of this course.

ATTENDANCE, ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Because of both the experimental nature of the course and the volatility of the subject matter, attendance is MANDATORY. Every course I offer is primarily interactive, though the form that interaction might best take will reveal itself over the course of the semester. Until a year ago, I had never taught this course in a classroom (it was previously online), and I had never had more than 20 students in the class. We have twice that many. The capacity will affect the kinds of assignments I give you, and the way you are evaluated.

How much it will affect the classroom give-and-take remains to be determined. I am not much for delivering prepared lectures, reading from a script, and I have a Power Point-phobia. The livelier the discussion we generate in here, and the more questions we ask and ponder, the richer the learning experience. (We will also extend the discussion beyond the classroom, through discussion boards on the course’s ICON/CANVAS site.) I might split you into smaller discussion groups. (I might not.)

I’ll have all sorts of other tricks at my disposal to help hook and keep your attention, but discussion remains the lifeblood of my educational method (or madness?).

Don’t worry know about how all this will play out. I’m not worried. I am a trained professional. I will adapt. So will you. And such adaptation is at the heart of what we will be studying in here all semester.

There is no assigned textbook, for reasons that this class should make clear (if this syllabus hasn’t already). As things change faster and faster, books are too slow to keep pace. I submitted my most recent book manuscript to a publisher that insisted production takes a full year—so if what I wrote didn’t sound fresh and new a year or so later, it would be obsolete on the day of publication. (Good luck with that.)

I will be updating modules on the ICON course site pretty much daily, with reading assignments, video links, discussion questions, whatever. I would urge you to monitor the New York Times in particular, where the Monday business section focuses on media matters and the Arts section
often addresses industry developments that impact entertainment media as a whole. And we’ll be monitoring websites, blogs, videos, social-networking chatter and anything else that has bearing on the topic at hand (which, in chicken-or-the-egg fashion, might be largely dependent on developments that we can’t predict and topics in the news).

So, if you’re not attending, you’ll have trouble keeping pace and participating on the level that this course demands. I will be taking attendance, as often as I consider necessary and feasible.

**Final grades will be determined as follows:**

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 20%

MIDTERM WRITING ASSIGNMENT: 20%

OTHER WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR QUIZZES: 30%

FINAL EXAM: 30%

There will be additional requirements and assignments for anyone registered in this course for graduate credit, which will be adapted to these percentages.

Most assignments will be due in the (virtual online) dropbox before class. Those late will be docked a letter grade per day. (A paper due Tuesday that deserves an A will receive a B if I don’t get it until Wednesday, etc. If you turn it in on the deadline day but after the beginning of class, it will be docked a half-grade—an A paper would receive a B+ if turned in after class.) Any exceptions will require a really, really good reason, and extensions will rarely be granted (in accordance with the importance of deadlines in journalism). I don’t want to hear about how sick you were the day after the assignment was due. Working journalists meet their deadlines. If they don’t, they won’t be working for long.

I don’t deal in points, numbers, percentiles, rubrics. I see a crucial part of my educational mission as helping you prepare for the working world. Within that world, if you show up, do your best, ask questions when you don’t understand, complete all assignments on time, you will be fine—and you will continue to earn your paycheck and eventually even a raise or a promotion. And if you don’t (show up, do your work well and on time, etc.) you will be fired. There won’t be any matter of how many points you can earn or lose.

I use letter grades, based on the quality of your work (which includes spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.—in other words, clean copy, which is a baseline requirement of this profession of journalism). If you don’t understand why you’ve been given a grade, let’s talk about it. I won’t likely change my mind, but perhaps I can open yours. If you concern yourself with how much you can learn rather than which hoops you need to jump through to earn whatever grade, you’ll do fine.
Any ungraded assignments (like the media diary that is your first) will be included within the ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION portion of the grade, as will contributing to discussion boards outside class.

There will be an extra credit writing assignment toward the end of the semester. Those who complete it, and do it well, will have the opportunity to nudge your final grade the next half-grade higher. In other words, if you are between a B and a B+, and you do the extra credit assignment, you will receive a B+. (But if you are on the lower end of the B spectrum, closer to the B-, extra credit won’t earn you that B+.) I’d like all of you to do the extra credit assignment, just to show me what you’ve learned and because you find it interesting, but I won’t make any of you do it.

Teaching Policies & Resources — Syllabus Insert

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 https://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).

Accommodations for Disabilities
The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which includes but is not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for information.

Nondiscrimination in the Classroom
The University of Iowa is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for all people irrespective of their gender, sexual, racial, religious or other identities. Toward this
goal, students are invited to optionally share their preferred names and pronouns with their instructors and classmates. The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and other identity categories set forth in the University’s Human Rights policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, diversity@uiowa.edu, or visit diversity.uiowa.edu.

**Academic Honesty**
All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS 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 by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. 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 date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

**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 Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator 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.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week one
Jan 16-18
Preparing for take-off: Fasten your seatbelts. Technological troubleshooting, syllabus, getting to know you, lay of the land. Where are we now and where are we going. What is a book? A record? What is the difference between a TV show and a movie? How do you consume media and how has this changed? And we’ll start with the music industry and streaming.

Assign: Media diary due Tuesday

Week two
Jan 23-25
Course origins, media parallels, disruptions and paradigm shifts. Continue the discussion of streaming and its implications.

Week three
Jan 30-Feb 1
Movies (or films, for the higher-brow among you) and how a medium that threatened others has itself become threatened (or at least challenged). As movie becomes more of a larger-than-life spectacle—3-D, Imax—has subtler, more mature entertainment become the province of HBO and AMC?
**Week four**

Feb 6-8

More movies and transition to TV

**Week five**

Feb 13-15

Television, time shifting, multi-platforms. How long until your TV screen is also your computer’s? And all programming is “on demand.” What is “bundling” and how long will it last? We’ll also work in some contextual history on what TV used to be like (three networks, rabbit ear antennas) and what has changed. And what hasn’t.

**Week six**

Feb 20-22

Video games—art, entertainment, cultural menace. Or all of the above? Discuss midterm writing assignment

**Week seven**

Feb 27-Mar 1

Video games continued, and the dissolving lines distinguishing video games and special-effects action movies.

**Week eight**

March 6-8

Recap the first half of the semester's focus on visual entertainment on screens

Midterm writing assignment due Thursday

**Week nine: SPRING BREAK**

**Week ten**

March 20-22
Radio and network TV: How the latter failed to kill the former (as widely predicted), and how the former has continued to change with the times. Can this precedent apply to the digital age, or are we now in the midst of a brand new media ballgame? Will people really pay for satellite radio? (Why would they pay for TV? Or water?)

**Week eleven**

March 27-29

How HBO and premium cable figure into this. How one streaming source (Amazon, Netflix, Spotify, et al.) Continuing discussing the broadcast paradigm shift. Is Pandora radio?

**Week twelve**

April 3-5

Popular music—Who is consuming what, where, why? The place of music is popular culture—the more pervasive, the increasingly irrelevant? What is the product, what is the promotion, where is the money?

**Week thirteen**

April 10-12

Read and discuss McLeese PMS pdf. We’ll decide how prescient (or how wrong) this article written eons ago might be, and what we can draw from how the parallels illuminated within the pop music industry and print journalism might extend to other entertainment media.

**Week fourteen**

April 17-19

The publishing industry. Will books survive? (Has vinyl?) How has the digital age effected creation, consumption, distribution, promotion. Is the indie bookstore on the verge of becoming the blacksmith shop? Is book criticism less significant than ever or more significant? Does it pay? Should it?

Discuss optional extra credit assignment

**Week fifteen**
April 24-6

More on Apple, Amazon on paradigm shifts. How did a computer maker and an online bookseller find themselves as chief competitors battling for world media domination? And where does Facebook fit in this battle? We’ll examine some business models and discuss different means to similar end.

**Week sixteen**

May 1-3

Putting it all together—the big, shifting map of entertainment media. What do the different forms have in common and where do they differ? Which are the most threatened and which have the greatest promise? Where is it all going? Final paper due.