(JMC: 3185) Social & Cultural Meanings of News

Overview: Much of the mass communication literature suggests that news is not the objective presentation of what is "out there," but instead the product of many social and cultural forces. Some of these forces are unrelated to journalism, and stem from the process of doing work, from running a profit-making organization, and from the interface of an organization with society and its embedded meanings.

This course therefore focuses on news content and its creation by media workers and media organizations from a social/cultural construction perspective. In all, there are four parts to the course:

- The first part offers a conceptual overview of news and newsmaking.
- The second part places that overview into its social and cultural contexts.
- The third part looks at specific studies about news from several perspectives.
- The fourth part provides the opportunity to apply what we have learned about news.

Class sessions: Most class sessions involve discussion of the week’s readings. Students are expected to complete readings by the assigned class session. Class discussions should summarize key ideas and consider linkages with other readings. In general (and depending on class size), students should expect to lead an introduction and discussion of a reading every other week.

Try not to limit your ideas by the label that an author used for a particular concept. As you read articles, think about the key concepts, and how these concepts relate to each other, as well as to other readings. Consider how the research questions framed by the author or authors shaped the conclusions. Think about how well the conclusions were supported by the data or the argument that was made. Overall, try to learn from the readings rather than just critiquing and rejecting them.

This course has four learning objectives:

1. Exploring media institutions and practices, through critical examination of news based on a conceptual framework of levels of analysis and theoretical paradigms.
2. Exploring the role of media in shaping cultures, though a consideration of how news both reflects and is reflected by cultural values and diverse perspectives.
3. Learning to conduct research and gather information responsibly, through carefully informed research papers and class discussions.
Understanding the usefulness of applied mass communication theories and concepts, through readings, class discussions, and assignments.

Readings: Most readings are drawn from three books, all available at the IMU Book Store:


Assignments and Examination: Your grade is made up of 4 components: (1) Exams on each book (3 exams total), (2) Online Monitoring Reports, (3) Key Issue Paper/Discussion and (4) Attendance/Participation. More details will be provided on the class ICON web site, but the basics of each component include:

- **Examinations** will require a full class session on February 20 (Shoemaker & Reese book), April 3 (Schudson book), and April 24 (Berkowitz book). The format for exams will be announced before each exam; a review session will be held before each exam. Students are allowed one page of notes for each exam.

- **Key Issues Paper/Discussion** involves writing a 3-page paper on an assigned topic. The paper will consist of (1) an introduction with a statement of your position to the topic, (2) two pages of bullet points addressing the topic, (3) a one paragraph conclusion, and (4) a list of at least 8 references you have researched and read on the topic, not including the assigned class readings.

- **Online Monitoring Reports** involve keeping up with current issues in fake news, late-night news monologues and applications of the peace journalism concept. Students should regularly follow (a) The Onion, (b) Snopes, (c) Politifact, and (d) a Google Alert set for the current topic we are following. For each class session, a student will be assigned to present a brief oral report on an article they have read, connecting the article to class concepts. A one-page paper should be uploaded to ICON at least one day before the article will be presented.

- **Attendance/Participation** is expected of each student. Attendance will be taken randomly throughout the semester at the start of class. Excused absences will not be given except for serious illness, death in the family, mandatory religious obligations or occasions where I have approved the absence in advance. Please contact me by email if one of these situations arises. Students are expected to participate in each day’s class discussion, and to offer thoughtful, informed comments. I will bring a chart of student photos to class and will call on students by name on occasion. Students who are usually silent in class or whose comments do not reflect understanding of class concepts, will not receive full credit for this component.

Students unable to turn in a written assignment or make their assigned presentation because of
serious, unavoidable circumstances should let me know beforehand. (My phone is on a voice mail system and I check e-mail regularly.) Without prior arrangements, written assignments will not be accepted after the day they are due. Incompletes will be given only in accordance with University policy (that is, where work remaining is small and reasons are acceptable to the instructor). No late papers will be accepted without a very good reason.

Grades will be assigned according to the following percentages:

- Examinations (1 & 2 at 25%, 3 at 15%) ................. 65%
- Key Issues Paper/Discussion .................................. 10%
- Online Monitoring Reports .................................. 5%
- Article Introduction ...................................... 5%
- Attendance/Participation .................................. 15%
- TOTAL .......................................................... 100%

Points for Extra Credit assignments will be added in after your grades are totaled.

Class Policies:

I would like to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating, testing or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

If you have a complaint regarding any part of this class, please try resolving the issue with me first. If the problem cannot be resolved within the structure of the course, you may contact the director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, W615SSH, 335-3482. Please consult the Liberal Arts Bulletin for a full discussion of grievance procedures.

Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language defines PLAGIARIZE: “to take ideas, writings, etc. from another and pass them off as one’s own.” The University provides penalties for plagiarism ranging from grade reduction to dismissal from the University. Please consult the Liberal Arts Bulletin for a full discussion of this offense.

OFFICIAL STUFF FROM CLAS

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.

Office Hours: My office is located in W309 Adler Journalism Building. Office hours are Monday 10-12 and Thursday, 2-4. Other hours by appointment. E-mail is:

    dan-berkowitz@uiowa.edu

The office phone is 335-3477 and voice mail will pick up after about four rings, or if the line is busy.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1

Tuesday, January 16
   Course introduction

Part 1, Media Sociology: An Overview and Foundation

Thursday, January 18 (these readings are available on ICON)
   SMON, Overview: Why a “Social Meanings of News” Perspective?
   CMON, Introduction
   Schudson, Introduction: Making News
   Schudson, Ch. 1: Defining Journalism

WEEK 2

Tuesday, January 23
   Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 1: Media content & theory
   Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 2: Beyond processes and effects

Thursday, January 25
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 3: Mediating reality

WEEK 3

Tuesday, January 30
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 4: Social systems

Thursday, February 1
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 5: Social institutions

WEEK 4

Tuesday, February 6
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 6: Organizations

Thursday, February 8
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 7: Routines

WEEK 5

Tuesday, February 13
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 8: Individuals

Thursday, February 15
Shoemaker & Reese, Ch. 9: Studying the hierarchical model
Review session for Exam 1

WEEK 6

Tuesday, February 20
Exam 1

Part 2, Sociology of News: Placing the Foundation into Context

Thursday, February 22
Schudson, Ch. 2: Does news matter?

WEEK 7

Tuesday, February 27
Schudson, Ch. 3: Media bias

Thursday, March 1
Schudson, Ch. 4: Where news came from

WEEK 8

Tuesday, March 6
Schudson, Ch. 5: In recent memory

**Thursday, March 8**
- Schudson, Ch. 6: News in the marketplace
  *Term Paper Proposal Due*

**WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK**

**Tuesday, March 13:** No class meeting

**Thursday, March 15:** No class meeting

**WEEK 10**

**Tuesday, March 20**
- Schudson, Ch. 7: News sources

**Thursday, March 22**
- Schudson, Ch. 8: The political culture of news
- Schudson, Ch. 9: The audience for news

**Tuesday, March 27**
- Schudson, Ch. 10: News as literature and narrative
- Schudson, Ch. 11: Law, democracy and news

**Thursday, March 29**
- Schudson, Ch. 12: The first news revolution of the twenty-first century
  *Review for Exam 2*

**WEEK 12**

**Tuesday, April 3**
- Exam 2 on Schudson

*Part 3, Applying Concepts to Research*

**Thursday, April 5**
- SMON, Ch. 5: “The gate keeper”: A case study in the selection of news
- SMON, Ch. 6: Ms. Gates takes over: An updated version of a 1949 case study

**WEEK 13**

**Tuesday, April 10**
- SMON, Ch. 9: Social control in the newsroom: A functional analysis
- SMON, Ch. 11: News reporting and professionalism: Some constraints on the reporting of news
- SMON, Ch. 13: Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected
Thursday, April 12
SMON, Ch. 15: News and nonevents: Making the visible invisible
SMON, Ch. 16: Routines and the making of oppositional news
SMON, Ch. 18: The news factory

WEEK 14
Tuesday, April 17
SMON, Ch. 20: The competitive ethos in television newswork
SMON, Ch. 23: When technology fails: The drama of airline crashes in network television news
SMON, Ch. 24: Non-Routine news and newswork: Exploring a what-a-story

Thursday, April 19
SMON, Ch. 25: The rape of Mike Tyson: Race, the press and symbolic types
SMON, Ch. 28: News of battering
Review for SMON exam

WEEK 15

Tuesday, April 24
Exam 3 on SMON

Thursday, April 26
Open time for preparing Key Topic papers/presentations
Prof. Berkowitz available in office

WEEK 16
Tuesday, May 1
Key Topics Papers/Discussions

Thursday, May 3
Key Topics Papers/Discussions

FINALS WEEK
May 7 – 11
No final exam