

JOUR 506 - Mass Media Criticism
Fall 2011
T-Th 3:30 – 4:45 p.m.
Coliseum 2006
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Course Description: This course will help you develop the critical thinking skills needed to successfully analyze mass media messages.

Goal: To lay the foundation for the successful interpretation of information received through various channels of mass communication.

Objectives: To understand the process of mass communication, to develop awareness of the impact of the mass media on the individual and society, to develop strategies with which to analyze and discuss mass media messages, to build an awareness of mass media content as a “text” that provides insight into our contemporary culture and ourselves.

Prerequisites: JOUR 201, Survey of Mass Communications

Required Text: Silverblatt, “Media Literacy: Keys to Interpreting Media Messages,” 3rd Edition, and other appropriate texts distributed or viewed in class.

Attendance: It is important that you come to all of the scheduled class meetings. Unexcused absences from more than 10 percent of scheduled classes will result in a reduction of your final mark by as much as 20 percent. Unexcused absences from 20 percent or more of scheduled classes will result in final marks being reduced by as much as 50 percent. Excused absences are approved university sponsored activities and other mitigating medical incidents and religious events. Doctor’s excuses must be on the physician’s letterhead and bear the physician’s signature. No e-mailed excuses will be accepted.

Approved university sponsored activities include:

~ participation in an authorized University activity (such as musical performances, academic competitions, or varsity athletic events in which the student plays a formal role in a University sanctioned event)

~ required participation in military duties

~ mandatory admission interviews for professional or graduate school which cannot be rescheduled

~ participation in legal proceedings or administrative duties that require a student’s presence.

In addition, it is suggested that faculty give due consideration to absences relating to the following events as possible cases of approved absences:

~ death or major illness in a student’s immediate family

~ illness of a dependent family member

~ religious holy day

~ illness that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class.

Method of Evaluation:

You must complete at least 8 of the 10 weekly response papers of between 250 and 400 words based on the prompts listed on the syllabus below. **YOU MUST COMPLETE 8 OF THE 10 PAPERS TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE THIS COURSE.** Your average mark on those papers will constitute 75 percent of your grade for the course. A final comprehensive issues / answers essay using the keys to interpreting media messages (Silverblatt, pg. 203-210) will constitute the other 25 percent. That essay will be due on or before Wednesday, April 25.

Guidelines for writing weekly responses papers for Journalism 506

1. Your papers should be formatted in this way:

(Upper Left-hand corner)

Your name

Date

Professor Wiggins

Journalism 506 – Mass Media Criticism

2. The prompts are taken from Silverblatt's text. To successfully respond to the prompt you must understand its context, which often means understanding the larger point under which the prompt is located. I recommend jotting down contextual notes before writing your response.
3. The prompts ask you to respond. In some instances, they are pulled from the Silverblatt's arguments. I am not looking for restatements of his positions. I am looking for a thoughtful presentation of your own ideas. If you disagree with Silverblatt's position, you may briefly summarize it before then moving on to the presentation of your thoughts.
4. State your position clearly and concisely (thesis statement) in the first paragraph and then develop your ideas using commonly accepted rules of expository writing. Some of your essays will be more argumentative. Some will be more descriptive. Others will be more expositive. In any case, your essays should be structured the similarly.
5. Your papers will be marked based on content (what you say) and construction (how you say it). Read and re-read your essays before delivering them to me. Marks will be distributed as follows:

A – Superior performance in both content and construction. Essay addresses the prompt clearly and maturely. The paper is free of errors in **grammar, punctuation and sentence structure**.

B – Above-average performance in both content and construction. Solid but not exceptional exposition and/or argumentation. No major errors in construction.

C -- Average performance in content and/or construction. Meets minimum expectation in exposition and/or argumentation. A few errors in grammar, punctuation and/or sentence structure.

D – Below-average performance in either content or construction.

F – Failure to perform.

Schedule of Instruction:

Week 1 – The Elements of Communication / Communication Models (Silverblatt, Chapter 2)

Week 2 – The Process (Silverblatt, Chapters 3 and 4)

“What are the advantages and disadvantages of immediate feedback from receivers of mass media messages? Due Jan. 26.

Week 3 – Historical Context (Silverblatt, Chapter 5)

Silverblatt states that “current novels are written in a very visual, plot-oriented style, which can easily be adapted into film and television scripts.” If this is true, how might this affect the publishing industry as a whole? Due Feb. 2.

Week 4 – Cultural Context (Silverblatt, Chapter 6)

Describe a recent media message or presentation that challenged conventional stereotypes. What do you think was the purpose of the challenge, that is, what do you think the creator's intention was? Do you think the challenge was successful, that is, did the message achieve its purpose? Due Feb. 9

Week 5 – Structure (Silverblatt, Chapter 7)

Many media scholars have described the world as a global village connected by the mass media. This description suggests mass media have made the world smaller. Render an argument that the mass media have actually made the world bigger. Due Feb. 16.

Week 6 – Production Elements (Silverblatt, Chapter 10)

“Because the circle is smooth, round, and has no edges, it has a friendly, non-threatening quality. Media presentations reflect this sensibility.” Find exceptions to this general rule for the circle. Due Feb. 23.

Week 7 – Production Elements (Silverblatt, Chapter 11)

The marketplace of ideas is a familiar description of the vibrant exchange of ideas in public forums. In conventional marketplaces, however, not all products get equal exposure. Is this true for the marketplace of ideas, as well? If so, is society harmed by this? Due March 1.

Week 8 – Media Formats / Journalism (Silverblatt, Chapter 12)

“The typical newsroom is predominantly young, male and white. This lack of diversity can influence the selection of stories that appear in the newspaper, overlooking stories of interest to members of subcultures.” Deconstruct (describe) the phenomenon that is being suggested by this statement. Due March 8.

Week 9 – Media Formats / Advertising (Silverblatt, Chapter 13)

“Advertisers try to convince us that we don’t merely want a product but, in fact, need it. Indeed, advertising copy is often presented in the form of an imperative, or command (e.g., Buy it today!)” What might be the unintended consequences of this practice? Due March 22.

Week 10 – Media Formats / Political Communication (Silverblatt, Chapter 14)

Silverblatt writes that “media consultants coach politicians on phrasing, intonations, facial expressions, eye contact, and body language, often relying on ‘electronic response’ mechanisms to measure viewers’ reactions to politicians’ nonverbal cues. What might be the unintended consequences of this kind of coaching on the political process? Due March 29.

Week 11 – Issues and Answers / The Digital World (Silverblatt, Chapter 15)

“Cellphones and BlackBerrys keep people in perpetual contact with one another, so that they never have ‘downtime’ from work or personal relationships. Psychologists have found that this can lead to an unhealthy ‘wireless co-dependency’ on others. ...

Psychologist Robert Bornstein elaborates: ‘The superconnected may develop a dual-dependency. They’re not only counting on other people too much, they’re also hooked on the devices themselves, sometimes to the point where they feel utterly disconnected, isolated and detached without them.’” Do journalism and advertising contribute to this dual-dependency? If so, how so? Due April 5.

Week 12 – Issues (Supplemental text / Ace in the Hole)

Week 13 – Issues (Supplemental text / Marty)

Week 14 – Issues (Supplemental text / Running on Empty)