

Syllabus Spring Semester 2020-2021

JOUR 5305 — Media Theories

Room: UL 283

Zoom Class: <https://smu.zoom.us/j/95136909927>

Day/Time: MWF 9-8950a

Instructor: Dr. Myles Ethan Lascity

Office: UL 275

Office Hours: 10-11a MF (In-person); 4-5p W (Zoom); and by appointment

Zoom Office: <https://smu.zoom.us/my/elascity>

Email: mlascity@smu.edu

About This Course

Required Readings

Postman, Neil. (2005)
Amusing Ourselves to Death. Penguin.

Other readings as
assigned and posted to
Canvas.



Course Description

This is a special topics course intended to examine theories of the media as they relate to the news and popular culture.

Purpose of this Course

This seminar is intended to introduce students to well-known theories of the mass media including media effects, critical/cultural theories and media ecology. The goal is for students to understand the role of media in everyday life and reflect upon how media actively shapes our understanding of the world.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will

- (1) Understand, reflect on and discuss the role of media within our lives;
- (2) Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically discuss the role of the media;
- (3) Demonstrate an understanding of news frames;

- (4) Demonstrate an understanding of convergence culture;
- (5) Conduct an ideological critique; and,
- (6) Critically engage with, apply and write about various media theories.

Methods of Evaluation

Your grade will be calculated out of 600 points.

Discussion Questions (3 pts each/60 pts total)

— Objectives 1 & 6

For each class, students should question three **thoughtful** discussion questions prior to the start of class. For full credit, questions should be posted the day before. Questions posted between midnight and 9a will receive partial credit. **No credit will be given for questions posted after the start of class.**

Online Discussion Boards (20 pts each/140 pts total)

— Objective 1, 2 & 6

For the four of the “Zoom” weeks when students can complete asynchronous assignments, students will board thoughts to a discussion board on Canvas. Two students will be designated as discussion leaders each module and should post questions for everyone else to respond to.

Media Diary (50 points)

— Objective 1

News Re-framing (100 points)

— Objective 1 & 3

Bricolage Project (100 points)

— Objective 1 & 4

Television Film Analysis (100 points)

— Objective 1 & 5

Final (50 points)

— Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6

Written assignments are due via on the assigned due date. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. No exceptions.

Late assignments will not be accepted. Deadlines must be made in the professional world and they must be made in the class.

If you are having an issue or need an extension for any reason, please discuss it with the instructor as soon as possible. Accommodations can be made but they will not be made if you wait until the due date.

Plagiarism and story fabrication is a serious issue within the journalism field. As such any instances of plagiarism or fabrication will result in a failing grade for the assignment and failing grade in the course. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Division of Journalism Policies

Reporting standards for all media projects

Your story will be graded on content: is it fair, is it newsworthy, is it well sourced? Is the story organized, are all questions answered, and is all relevant information properly attributed? Are direct quotes preceded by strong transitions in print stories? At least 5 points may be taken off for problems like these. For errors of fact, expect 10 or more points off.

You are required in all cases to fully disclose your identity and purpose to sources, and any promises of anonymity or other special arrangements with sources must be discussed with your professor before such agreements are made. Under no circumstances should you grant a source the right to review or approve your story (though you may agree to check quotes for accuracy).

You must always tell all of your sources that the story you are reporting could be published or aired on multiple platforms. Your work could appear on news sites both on and off campus. Your stories, in other words, are for public consumption and your sources must know that.

Friends, colleagues, and family members are not acceptable sources. Unless you have cleared the source with your editor, expect at least 5 points to be taken off for each unacceptable source.

Grants of Anonymity*

Students should avoid using unidentified sources whenever possible. There are times, however, when the only way to get a story is to offer anonymity; such offers should be a last resort after repeated attempts to go on the record have failed and the student has received permission from the instructor.

Information may be on the record, on background, not for attribution or off the record. These are prearranged agreements between a reporter and a source, which govern how specific information can be used. These deals must be agreed to beforehand, never after. A source can't say something then claim it was "off the record." That's too late.

Most sources—and even many journalists—do not understand what these terms mean. If a source requests some degree of anonymity, the journalist should make sure the terms are clear, as follows.

On the Record

Anything the source says can be reported, published, or aired. All conversations are assumed to be on the record unless the source expressly requests -- and the reporter explicitly agrees -- to go off the record beforehand. The reporter should be sure to mark notes clearly so that it's possible to see what's on the record and what is not at a later date. Never rely on memory and always try to get back "on the record" as quickly as possible.

On Background

This means you may use what the source gives you without using the source's name. In effect it confers anonymity on your source, but allows you to work with the information the source has provided.

Not for Attribution

This means that a reporter agrees not to identify a source by name. Identification is provided only by reference to the source's job or position. That identification must be agreed upon by the reporter and the source, and is almost always given in a way that prevents readers from discovering the source's specific identity. The reporter should make sure the attribution is accurate and should press the source to allow the attribution to be as specific as possible. For example, a reporter would want to attribute information to "a high-ranking official in the Justice Department," rather than "a high-ranking law enforcement official," if the source agrees beforehand.

Off the Record

You may not use the information unless you can confirm it with another source who doesn't insist on speaking off the record. The information is offered to explain or further a reporter's understanding of a particular issue or event. In general, it is best to avoid off the record conversations; another option might be to converse off the record and then try to convince the source to agree to waive the agreement.

*with thanks to the NYU Journalism Handbook for Students

Mechanical standards for writing

- Associated Press style and grammar errors: 2 or more points
- Punctuation errors: 2 or more points
- Spelling: 10 or more points for misspelled names or other proper nouns; 2 or more points for all other spelling errors
- Awkward or unclear phrasing: 2 or more points

How to earn an "F" on any media project

Miss a deadline. Misquote or misrepresent someone. Rewrite or submit a story or package that was produced for any reason other than this class.

Plagiarism and Fabrication

Plagiarism is stealing someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. Fabrication is making stuff up. Both strike at the heart of the journalistic process, where proper attribution and fact checking are paramount. We will deal with plagiarism and fabrication in the harshest manner possible, including referral to the honors council.

Library resources

Megan Heuer is the librarian assigned to assist journalism students in their research. You can find help online at guides.smu.edu/journalism. Email Megan at mheuer@smu.edu. To set up a one-on-one appointment for help: libcal.smu.edu/appointment/12037.

Additional grading information

1. "A"s are rare. They are awarded for truly excellent work. Very good work receives a "B"; average work a "C"; below average a "D." This is in accordance with university regulations.
2. Letter grades are based on a 10-point scale. For example, the "B" range is as follows: 80-82 B-; 83-86 B; 87-89 B+. The same spread applies to all letter grades; however, there is no A+.
3. Your teachers will be happy to discuss the content of your papers. If you wish to protest a grade, a formal process is available.

Grade	Average	Class Points
A	93-100	558-600
A-	90-92	540-552
B+	87-89	522-534
B	83-86	498-516
B-	80-82	480-492
C+	77-79	462-474
C	73-76	438-456
C-	70-72	420-432
D+	67-69	402-414
D	63-66	378-396
D-	60-62	360-372
F	59 and below	Less than 354

University Policies

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/SASP/DASS> to begin the process. Once approved and registered, students will submit a DASS Accommodation letter to faculty through the electronic portal *DASS Link* and then communicate directly with each instructor to make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.
(<https://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/ChaplainandReligiousLife/ReligiousHolidays>).

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (See [2020-2021 SMU Undergraduate Catalog](#) under “Enrollment and Academic Records/Enrollment Policies/Excused Absences.”)

Student Academic Success Programs: Students needing assistance with writing assignments for SMU courses may schedule an appointment with the Writing Center through Canvas. Students wanting support with subject-specific tutoring or success strategies should contact SASP, Loyd All Sports Center, Suite 202; 214-768-3648; <https://www.smu.edu/sasp>.

Caring Community Connections (CCC) program: This is a resource for anyone in the SMU community to refer students of concern to the Office of the Dean of Students. Faculty play a critical role in identifying students who are experiencing challenges, as you may be the first to notice a change in behavior such as class attendance or performance. The online referral form can be found at smu.edu/deanofstudentsccc. After a referral is submitted, students will be contacted to discuss the concern, strategize options, and be connected to appropriate resources. Additionally, should you have concerns about students and are unclear about what to do, please see the [CCC Reference Guide](#), or contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 214-768-4564.

Pregnant and Parenting Students: Accommodations for pregnant and parenting students: Under Title IX students who are pregnant or parenting may request academic adjustments by contacting Elsie Johnson (elsiej@smu.edu) in the Office of the Dean of Students, or by calling 214-768-4564. Students seeking assistance must schedule an appointment with their professors as early as possible, present a letter from the Office of the Dean of Students, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that academic adjustments are not retroactive and, when feasible, require advance notice to implement.

Covid-19 Attendance Statement: Students who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who have been notified through contact tracing of potential exposure and need to self-quarantine or isolate must follow the protocols laid out in [SMU's Contact Tracing Protocol](#). To ensure academic continuity, students in these situations will not be penalized and will be provided appropriate modifications to assignments, deadlines, and testing. Please also note that SMUFlex classes might, in rare circumstances, go remote for two week periods to accommodate COVID-related issues. To ensure these necessary accommodations, affected students must:

- Provide as much advance notification as possible to the instructor about a change in circumstances. Students must notify their instructor about a potential absence as well as plans for a return to class. For cases in which students test positive for COVID-19, they should fill out a [CCC form at this link](#)
- Communicate promptly with the instructor to establish, as necessary, alternative assignments and/or changes to deadlines and exams. Students are then responsible for meeting the expectations laid out in these alternative arrangements.
- Continue participation in class via Zoom, as health circumstances permit. Attend class regularly, when not in a situation outlined above, in accordance with safety measures laid out by SMU CAN in the [Pledge to Protect](#) (including wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and cleaning personal space after class). In-person participation in SMUFlex classes is required on students' assigned red/blue rotation days except in cases when students are experiencing illness, are in self-quarantine or in isolation.
- Students facing multiple or extended COVID-19-related absences or illness can work with the Office of the Dean of Students to consider options such as fully remote learning or medical withdrawal.
- This policy, aligned with the [SMU Honor Code](#) and the SMU [Pledge to Protect](#) relies on mutual trust and respect between students and faculty to ensure safety, academic integrity, and instructional continuity.

Sexual Harassment: All forms of sexual harassment including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking are violations of SMU's Title IX

Sexual Harassment Policy and may also violate Texas law. Students who wish to file a complaint or receive more information about the grievance process may contact Samantha Thomas, SMU's Title IX Coordinator, at accessequity@smu.edu or 214-768-3601. Please note that faculty are mandatory reporters. If students notify faculty of sexual harassment, they must report it to the Title IX Coordinator. For more information about sexual harassment including resources available to assist students, please visit www.smu.edu/sexualmisconduct.

Campus Carry: In accordance with Texas Senate Bill 11, also known as the "campus carry" law, following consultation with entire University community SMU determined to remain a weapons-free campus. Specifically, SMU prohibits possession of weapons (either openly or in a concealed manner) on campus. (See http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons_Policy)

Class Schedule

This is a working schedule. Any changes will be made between the instructor and the class. You are responsible for knowing about any alterations to the syllabus if you are not in class when the changes are discussed.

Module 1 — Getting Set up (Jan. 25-Feb. 7)		
Class Plans	Jan. 25 / Feb. 1 Jan. 27 / Feb. 3 Jan. 29 / Feb. 5	In-class Introduction Hanson, "Living in a Media World" Hanson, "Mass Communication Effects"
Canvas Assignments	Online Introduction Discuss: Current Media articles as posted Write: Media Diary (Due Feb. 7)	
Module 2 — Impacts of the Media (Feb. 8-21)		
Class Plans	Feb. 8 / Feb. 15 Feb. 10 / Feb. 17 Feb. 12 / Feb. 19	Anderson, "Cultural Roots" Anderson, "The Origins of National ..." Couldry and Hepp, "The Social World ..." Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent"
Canvas Assignments	Watch: <i>The Christmas Edition</i> Read: Lauterer, "Community Journalism" Discuss: News & Communities	
Module 3 — Framing and Agenda Setting (Feb. 22-March 7)		
Class Plans	Feb. 22 / March 1 Feb. 24 / March 3 Feb. 26 / March 5	Lowery & DeFleur, "The Agenda-Setting ..." Entman, "Framing" Reese, "Framing Public Life" TK
Canvas Assignments	Case Study: Armie Hammer is a Cannibal! Case Study: Race and Cast Case Study: If It Happened There Listen: Networked News, Racial Divides https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/networked-news-racial-divides-how-power-and-privilege-shape-public-discourse Discuss: Case Studies Write: Re-Framing News Story (Due March 7)	
Module 4 — Cultural Communication (March 8-21)		
Class Plans	March 8 / March 15 March 10 / March 17 March 12 / March 19	Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Comm ..." Carey, "Mass Communication and ..." Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" Hall, "The Work of Representation"
Canvas Assignments	Read: Jenkins, "Convergence Culture" Read: Fiske, "The Jeaning of America" Read: Luvaas, "Cut 'n' Paste" Discuss: Convergence Culture Make: Bricolage Media Product (Due March 21)	

Module 5 — A Critical Take (March 22-April 4)		
Class Plans	March 22 / March 29 March 24 / March 31 March 26	Adorno & Horkheimer, "The Culture ..." Moore, "The Work of Rock in the Age..." Hebdige, <i>Subculture</i>
Canvas Assignments	Read: Ross, "The Naysayers" Discuss: Pop Culture and Ideology Write: Film/Television Analysis (Due April 4)	
Module 6 — Media Ecology (April 5-18)		
Class Plans	April 12 April 7 / April 14 April 9 / April 16	Hebdige, <i>Subculture</i> McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message" McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold" Bolter & Grusin, "Remediation"
Canvas Assignments	Read: Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" Read: Miller, "The 2010s Broke Our Sense of Time" Read: Nichols, "The Death of Expertise" Discuss: Social Media Bubbles	
Module 7 — Postman (April 19-May 2)		
Class Plans	April 19 / April 26 April 21 / April 28 April 23 / April 30	Postman, <i>Amusing Ourselves to Death</i> Postman, <i>Amusing Ourselves to Death</i> Postman, <i>Amusing Ourselves to Death</i>
Canvas Assignments	Watch: <i>John Oliver</i> Watch: <i>The Daily Show</i> Watch: Evening news Discuss: Infotainment as News	
Module 8 — Class Wrap up (May 3-12)		
Class Plans	May 3	Class Wrapup
Final	TBD	TBA