

CA 352: Media Literacy in the Information Age
Dr. Brett Lunceford
T/R: 11.00-12.15
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Course Description

Because media has become ubiquitous, we hardly even notice it anymore until it is absent. Several scholars have likened our place in this media environment to that of a fish, which knows nothing about water until it is beached. In this course, we will consider how this mediated environment influences our perceptions. Becoming more aware of the nature of our media landscape can help us to become more careful consumers and creators of media.

This course is predicated on a somewhat literal conception of media literacy: one cannot be considered literate unless he or she can both interpret and create. Simply consuming is not enough. To that end, this course has three primary goals:

- Students will be able to critically analyze mediated messages.
- Students will be able to create messages using the language of media.
- Students will be able to evaluate mediated messages.

These goals will be assessed through three major assignments. First, students will analyze a media artifact that they find compelling in some way. Second, they will create a parody in the medium of their choice. Finally, throughout the semester students will write short response papers that explore specific aspects of media literacy.

I expect that each student will come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the day. According to the University of South Alabama's Academic Policies and Procedures, "Each hour of lecture usually requires two hours of outside preparation. Thus, a student carrying sixteen semester hours should be prepared to spend at least 48 hours in class and study per week."

Required Texts

McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel. *The Medium Is the Massage*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1967.

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

All other readings will be available through the library's online course reserves.

Class Climate

The questions that we will grapple with have no easy answers. There will be points where you may disagree with someone else. This is appropriate and, to some degree, desirable. However, respect for others in the class is an essential component of this class. Arguments should be made in a spirit of inquiry rather than as personal attacks.

Attendance Policy

This is an upper division course, so I assume that by now you recognize the value of regular class attendance. This course relies heavily on in-class discussion. Excessive absences will negatively impact your participation grade in this course. If you are not present, you are not able to participate and it is impossible to make up the discussion. You get three absences free—no questions asked. However, after these absences, each absence will decrease your final grade by 5 points (half a letter grade), so use them wisely. In addition, there may be in-class activities, such as the opportunity to lead the discussion, that are impossible to make up. If you are absent, please do not email me asking, “What did I miss?” You missed 75 minutes of discussion and perhaps an assignment. Make friends with your classmates and get the notes from them and/or come to my office hours.

Academic Honesty

From the Student Academic Conduct Policies: “Any dishonesty related to academic work or records constitutes academic misconduct including, but not limited to, activities such as giving or receiving unauthorized aid in tests and examinations, improperly obtaining a copy of an examination, plagiarism, misrepresentation of information, or altering transcripts or university records. . . . Penalties may range from the loss of credit for a particular assignment to dismissal from the University” (*The Lowdown*, p. 249). In short, don’t do it. I don’t like to bust students for plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty but I will. It isn’t fair to others and it isn’t fair to yourself.

Here is the policy set forth by the Department of Communication:

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the Student Academic Conduct Policy. By registering at the university, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Conduct Policy, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the code. Please see *The Lowdown* for the complete **Student Academic Conduct Policy**.

Each instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the chair of the department. The student involved will receive written notification describing the alleged violation and the recommended penalty, along with a copy of the policy. The written notification will inform the student that if it is determined that previous incident(s) of Academic Misconduct have occurred, an additional or higher level charge may be brought.

The student involved has ten (10) Class days from receipt of the written notification to submit a written response to the instructor and request a conference with the department chair and the instructor.

Assignments

Response Papers: During the course, students will be asked to write about various aspects of their mediated environment. These papers will be 2-3 pages, double spaced, Times New Roman font with standard margins. Students should apply the readings to their own experience. Late assignments will receive half credit at the most and will only be accepted by the next scheduled class. No assignments will be accepted one week past the original due date. If you know that you will be absent when a response paper is due, have a classmate bring it to class or bring it to my office before the class period on which it is due. I will not accept assignments by email.

Demotivator: Many of us are familiar with the motivational posters that hang in offices all over the country. There are parodies of these posters, such as those found at despair.com. You will make an *original* demotivator poster. This assignment will be due September 23.

Media Analysis: A key element of media literacy is the ability to critically analyze and assess mediated messages. You will select some mediated message, whether that be a song, television show, movie, advertisement, etc., and consider the message that is being disseminated. Consider how this message fits into the larger media environment and how the medium shapes the message (McLuhan). Also consider Black's suggestion that rhetorical messages entice us not only to believe something, but also to become something—what is this message asking you to become? **This paper is due September 30.**

Parody Creation Project: Another, often neglected facet of media literacy is the ability to create mediated messages. Thus, the final project will be the creation of a mediated message that makes a statement through parody. The medium is up to you (with the exception of straight print, in which I sincerely hope you have gained fluency), but I want you to think carefully about the message you are trying to send and how the medium you choose to use will shape it. **These projects will be presented December 7 and 9.** You will also be asked to explain your rationale for creating your parody. I will be less interested in the actual process of creation than I am in the mental processes that lead you to create it in that way. Talk about the constraints and benefits of your chosen medium and the choices you made in its creation. I expect that you will apply the readings as you are creating this work; the documentation should not be an afterthought. **The documentation is due on December 9.** No late documentation will be accepted.

Participation: This class relies heavily on discussion. I assume that you will come to class prepared to discuss the readings. The readings are quite manageable even for those with the busiest schedules so there is really no excuse for not reading the material. If I get the sense that people are not coming to class prepared, I will simply use quizzes on the readings to assess participation points.

There will be no final exam in this course; the media analysis and the parody creation project will serve that purpose.

Grading Scale

There are a total of 100 points available in this course:

Response Papers: 25
Media Analysis: 20
Demotivator: 5
Parody Creation: 30
Participation: 20

A=90-100; B=80-89.99; C=70-79.99; D=60-69.99; F=below 60

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. The Office of Special Student Services will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations.

If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please notify the instructor/professor and provide certification from Special Student Services. (OSSS is located in Room 270 of the Student Center (460-7212)).

Keep in mind that OSSS prohibits me from making any retroactive accommodations, so if you will need special accommodations please talk to me as soon as possible. Moreover, I can make no accommodations unless you are registered with OSSS.

A Note on my Teaching Philosophy

I believe that every student in my class has the ability to succeed in this course. My goal is to create a comfortable environment in which you can explore and improve your ability to think critically and skillfully present your ideas to an audience. I do not “give” grades; students earn grades—no one is entitled to get an “A” in a class unless they earn it. I cannot grade on effort—I must grade what you actually do. My job is to push students to do their best and to then exceed that standard. I recognize that this is futile unless I also provide the support and assistance that each student needs to excel. Therefore, I provide office hours and expect students to use them and am generally available through email. I assume that attaining a university degree is your first priority. If this is not the case, it is less likely that you will excel. Some of you are here because you want to get a better job. I believe that education should do much more than job training, but if you see it as job training, at least take it seriously. Recognize that you will probably be required to work 40 hours a week (or more) from 8am until 5pm. If you are chronically late, they fire you. If you do not do your work, they fire you. If you drop the ball, you probably will not get a raise, they may fire you, and in some cases legal action may be taken against you. Bottom line—you do your part to excel and I will be there to help you reach that goal.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1 What is Media Literacy?

8/24 Overview of course

8/26 Considine, David M. "From Gutenberg to Gates: Media Matters." *Social Studies* 100, no. 2 (2009): 63-74.

Kellner, Douglas, and Jeff Share. "Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core Concepts, Debates, Organizations, and Policy." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26, no. 3 (2005): 369-86.

Week 2 Considering Media in Detail: Images

8/31 Lesy, Michael. "Visual Literacy." *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (2007): 143-53.

McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel. *The Medium Is the Massage*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1967.

9/2 Benson, Thomas W. "Another Shooting in Cowtown." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, no. 4 (1981): 347-406.

Week 3 Visual Rhetoric: Advertising

9/7 Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 109-19.

Bulmer, Sandy, and Margo Buchanan-Oliver. "Visual Rhetoric and Global Advertising Imagery." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 12, no. 1 (2006): 49-61.

9/9 Klein, Naomi. "Culture Jamming: Ads Under Attack." In *No Logo*, 278-309. New York: Picador, 2000.

Response Paper 1: Find an advertisement that takes particular advantages of the constraints of the genre, whether by calling attention to them (e.g., poking fun at them by exaggerating them) or transgressing them. Discuss this advertisement and explain how it either works or doesn't.

Week 4 Aesthetics as Argument

9/14 Baumann, Shyon. "The Moral Underpinnings of Beauty: A Meaning-Based Explanation for Light and Dark Complexions in Advertising." *Poetics* 36, no. 1 (2008): 2-23.

9/16 Goodman, J. Robyn, Jon D. Morris, and John C. Sutherland. "Is Beauty a Joy Forever? Young Women's Emotional Responses to Varying Types of Beautiful Advertising Models." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2008): 147-68.

Week 5 The Power of Parody

9/21 Speier, Hans. "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power." *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 5 (1998): 1352-401.

9/23 Love, Robert. "Before Jon Stewart: The Truth About Fake News. Believe It." *Columbia Journalism Review* 45, no. 6 (2007): 33-37.

Ragusa, Rand. "Using Humor in Online Attack Ads." *Campaigns & Elections* 25, no. 7 (2004): 32-34.

Rosen, Jill. "Stalking the Slooflirpa." *American Journalism Review* 24, no. 3 (2002): 14-15.

Shabbir, Haseeb, and Des Thwaites. "The Use of Humor to Mask Deceptive Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* 36, no. 2 (2007): 75-85.

Demotivator Due

Response Paper 2: Describe why you created the demotivator as you did. What makes it work?

Week 6 Considering Media in Detail: Sound

9/28 Albini, Steve. "The Problem with Music." <http://www.negative.land.com/albini.html>.

Volpacchio, Florindo. "The Mother of All Interviews: Zappa on Music and Society." *Telos*, no. 87 (1991): 124-136.

9/30 Inglis, Ian. "'Sex and Drugs and Rock'n'roll': Urban Legends and Popular Music." *Popular Music & Society* 30, no. 5 (2007): 591-603.

Jones, Steve. "MTV: The Medium Was the Message." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 1 (2005): 83-88.

Schilt, Kristen. "'A Little Too Ironic': The Appropriation and Packaging of Riot Grrrl Politics by Mainstream Female Musicians." *Popular Music & Society* 26, no. 1 (2003): 5-16.

Media Analysis Due

Week 7 The Epistemology of Digital Media

10/5 **Fall Break: No Class**

10/7 De Abreu, Belinha. "Seventh Grade Students and the Visual Messages They Love." *Knowledge Quest* 36, no. 3 (2008): 34-39.

Reaves, Shiela, Jacqueline Bush Hitchon, Sunq-Yeon Park, and Gi Woong Yun. "If Looks Could Kill: Digital Manipulation of Fashion Models." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 19, no. 1 (2004): 56-71.

Palser, Barb. "Artful Disguises." *American Journalism Review* 28, no. 5 (2006): 90.

Week 8 Considering Media in Detail: Internet and Parasocial Interaction

10/12 Jones, Chris, Ruslan Ramanau, Simon Cross, and Graham Healing. "Net Generation or Digital Natives: Is There a Distinct New Generation Entering University?" *Computers & Education* 54, no. 3 (2010): 722-32.

Logan, Robert K. "Making Sense of the Visual - Is Google the Seventh Language?" *Semiotica* 157, no. 1-4 (2005): 345-51.

10/14 Eyal, Keren, and Jonathan Cohen. "When Good "Friends" Say Goodbye: A Parasocial Breakup Study." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50, no. 3 (2006): 502-23.

Week 9 Creation as Literacy

10/19 Crabb, Peter B. "Video Camcorders and Civil Inattention." *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 11, no. 4 (1996): 805-16.

CrimethInc. Workers' Collective. "Media, Independent." In *Recipes for Disaster*, 346-357. Olympia, WA: CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective, 2005.

Sinnreich, Helene. "Reading the Writing on the Wall: A Textual Analysis of Łódź Graffiti." *Religion, State & Society* 32, no. 1 (2004): 53-58.

10/21 Holtz, Shel. "Communicating in the World of Web 2.0." *Communication World* 23, no. 3 (2006): 24-27.

Klinenberg, Eric, and Claudio Benzecry. "Cultural Production in a Digital Age." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597, no. 1 (2005): 6-18.

Ricchiardi, Sherry. "Online Opposition." *American Journalism Review* 28, no. 2 (2006): 60-62.

Week 10 Telepresence

10/26 Knight, Brooke A. "Watch Me! Webcams and the Public Exposure of Private Lives." *Art Journal* 59, no. 4 (2000): 21-25.

Vasalou, Asimina, and Adam N. Joinson. "Me, Myself and I: The Role of Interactional Context on Self-Presentation through Avatars." *Computers in Human Behavior* 25, no. 2 (2009): 510-20.

10/28 White, Michele. "Too Close to See: Men, Women, and Webcams." *New Media & Society* 5, no. 1 (2003): 7-28.

Response Paper 3: Have you interacted with others on webcams? If so, what did you like about it and what did you dislike? If you have not, why not? Would you if you had access?

Week 11 Technopoly

11/2 Technopoly, Chapters 1-2

11/4 Technopoly, Chapters 3-4

Week 12 Technopoly continued

11/9 Technopoly, Chapters 5-6

11/11 Technopoly, Chapters 7-8

Response Paper 4: Pick a technology and describe in as much detail as possible what is gained and what is lost when such a technology becomes widely adopted.

Week 13 Creation Lab Time

11/16 Lab Time (I will be at NCA)

11/18 Lab Time

Week 14 Technopoly continued

11/23 Technopoly, Chapters 9-10

11/25 Thanksgiving: No Class

Week 15 Technopoly continued

11/30 Technopoly, Chapters 11

12/2 Discussion of Political Economy of Media

Response Paper 5: Postman has argued that we live in a technopoly. Do you agree? And why should it matter?

Week 16 Final Projects

12/7 Presentation of Final Projects

12/9 Presentation of Final Projects
Documentation Due

Regarding Changes in Course Requirements

Since all classes do not progress at the same rate, the instructor may wish to modify the above requirements or their timing as circumstances dictate. For example, the instructor may wish to change the number and frequency of exams, or the number and sequence of assignments. However, the students must be given adequate notification. Moreover, there may be non-typical classes for which these requirements are not strictly applicable in each instance and may need modification. If such modification is needed, it must be in writing and conform to the spirit of this policy statement.