

CST 170: Introduction to Mass Media

Spring 2009, 3 Credits: Lecture and Discussion Format

ALH 214; T/R 1:00 - 2:15 p.m.

Professor: Dr. Jim Brancato

Office: Hartzel 234

Email and Phone: Jpbranca@cedarcrest.edu; ext. 3470

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the basic processes and institutions of the mass media, as well as an introduction to fundamental research about the role of mass media in our daily lives. The course awards 3 credits towards the Study of Written Texts category in the Acquisition of Knowledge component of the central curriculum of Cedar Crest College. It does so through exposing students to crucial studies and perspectives in the study of mass communications, so that by the end of the semester you will have a solid understanding of the field as well as an insight into how our social lives are shaped by media institutions and productions. It will also introduce you to primary sources/original texts of crucial importance to the development of mass communications as a scholarly discipline.

Course Objectives

The goal of the course is to allow students to see the variety of ways that culture and society are influenced by mass communication technologies, and to pose more insightful questions about the history of media, its influence on mass persuasion, its effects on human behavior, its construction of an environment for political decision-making, etc. The concepts and theories we cover should provide a framework for understanding the effects of media more deeply, while also helping students to determine which areas of interest they might like to explore in upper-level classes or perhaps even careers in the variety of fields related to communications processes.

Course Outcomes

With the successful completion of this course:

1. Students will know the most prominent studies within the empirical research tradition regarding mass media in America. They will be able to compare this research tradition with a European cultural studies approach to mass media research.
2. Students will have a working knowledge of the foundational theories of mass communication and of the effects of mass media on both individual behavior and society.
3. Students will be able to ask critical questions about the role of the mass media in American culture, and how mass media industries both reflect and shape social values and perspectives.
4. Students will understand how to prepare and deliver a debate on a current controversial issue related to mass communication.

Textbooks

Alexander, H. and Hanson, J. (2009) *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Mass Media and Society*. 10th Edition. Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group/Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

Cogswell, D. and Gordon, P. (2007). *Chomsky for Beginners*. N.Y.: For Beginners.

Straubhaar, J. & LaRose, R. (2009). *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture, and Technology*. 6th edition. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth.

Assorted articles/readings, either on reserve or distributed in class.

Student Assignments/The Classroom Environment

Conduct in the class at all times is governed by the rules and provisions of the Cedar Crest Honor Code, as well as the Cedar Crest Classroom Protocol. It is your responsibility to become aware of these codes and provisions, found in the Customs Book and other campus publications. On each exam, I will ask you to affirm your commitment to these principles, with a statement like the following: "I fully support the Cedar Crest College Honor Code and the Classroom Protocol code as stated in the Customs Book".

These codes of ethical behavior are especially relevant to this course. This is a fairly large class for Cedar Crest College, and because of this, I am asking each one of you to be responsible for attending class on time and conducting yourself properly once class begins. Proper conduct is outlined in the Classroom Protocol listed above. Simply, it means being respectful of your neighbors and class discussions and lectures by not talking, or by not acting in any way to disturb your peers. Large classes tend to increase the anonymity of students, which can encourage people to act in ways that they wouldn't ordinarily do. I am asking your help in creating a positive classroom environment for questions, discussion, lecture, and listening. Please try to be seated before class starts, and not pack-up and/or leave before class is over. If there is a legitimate reason that you can't uphold this request, please ask me about this ahead of time (for example, you must leave early due to a class trip, etc.). If a student cheats during an exam, or is found to have plagiarized material for an assignment, I reserve the right to either fail the student for the assignment or for the class.

I expect students to arrive having read the assigned materials. I consider "having read" to mean not necessarily mastering the material; indeed, it is my responsibility to help you to understand what I have assigned to you. So, coming to class with a question about the reading is often much more helpful to everyone than, say, commenting on it (although that is helpful as well!). Feel free to request clarification on any points about readings or lecture at any time.

Finally, students must type all written materials submitted for any assignments; make sure to have backup copies.

Student Assessment/Evaluation:

Participation/Attendance	10%
Two Exams (at 20% each)	40%
Debate Assignment (including written outline and bibliography)	25%
Final Cumulative Exam	25%

Examinations will be in mixed format (some objective, some essay). Exams may include a short take-home section to be typed and later submitted; I will let you know more details as the semester progresses. Extra credit may be available through additional essay questions on the exam.

The Group Assignment is a team presentation of a controversial issue in the text *Taking Sides*. Each team of four students must present both sides of a controversial issue, based on the reading and research done outside of the class. Two students must take the affirmative side of an issue and present that side, while the two remaining students of the group takes a "negative" or opposing position. These viewpoints will be presented to the class in a debate format, and the class will decide (as a group and anonymously) which team presented the stronger case. *Your grade is not determined by "who won" or which side the audience prefers.* Rather, you will be evaluated by how comprehensively and clearly your case is presented. We will present these issues every Friday during the semester. You must be prepared with any handouts or audio-visual materials you need to present your case. The audience will have read the materials assigned in the textbook, and should come prepared to ask the team questions after the initial presentations are made. Therefore, to present your side thoroughly, **you must collect as much research and information as you can** to bolster your position that come from sources outside of the text (although, of course, your arguments may overlap or come to similar conclusions to the authors in your text). **Although you are working with a partner, you are graded individually. Do not rely on your partner(s) to research for you. The amount of research and knowledge you have on the topic will be evident to the audience during the debate.**

Why do this assignment? I am a strong believer that oral presentation skills are crucial to your future success, regardless of your choice of career. All courses in Communications Studies try to include student presentations to help build these skills, and this course is the first for most students. *I don't expect you, therefore, to be a skilled presenter!!* Doing your best, using guidelines I will discuss in class, is the only expectation I have.

Attendance Policy:

Every student can be absent three times without penalty. After one absence, 5 points will be taken off your Attendance and Participation grade. If you are absent more than three times, and are ill, you need to have a valid written medical excuse (by your physician) for your absence, in which case no points will be deducted. *If a student misses 10 or more sessions, with no valid*

medical excuse, will be graded an F for the course.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is defined and covered by the rules and provisions stated in the Student Handbook and other campus publications. If a student is found to have plagiarized material for an assignment, the student will receive an "F" for the assignment and/or for the class, including referral to the Dean of Students Office for further disciplinary action.

College Policy Regarding Disabilities:

Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Advising Center.

Tentative Class Schedule

All Debates Will Take Place on Thursdays, Unless Otherwise Noted Below

Month/Week	Topic/Reading
I (J20, 22)	Introduction to Communication, Gerbner and Cultivation Theory John Dewey and Mass Society Readings: Media Now, Ch. 1
II (J 27, 29)	Societies Based on Orality and Literacy Readings: Media Now, Ch. 2
III (F 3, 5)	Orality, Literacy, and the Electronic Age Readings: Media Now, Ch. 3 (specific pages announced in class) <i>Video on "The Ad and the Ego", if time permits</i>
IV (F 10, 12)	Images as a Form of Argument; Technological Determinism; Jean Baudrillard Readings: Begin Reading Glassner (begin with the Introduction) <i>First Media Issue Debated on Thursday Feb. 12: Group 1</i>
V (F 17, 19)	Review and Catch Up <i>Group 2 Debate</i>

- VI
(F 24, 26) **TEST #1 Tuesday, February 24**
Media Industries: Newspapers, Radio, TV
- VII
(M 3, 5) Media Industries Continued
Group 3 Debate
Readings: Media Now, Ch. 4
- VIII
(M 10, 12) No Class: “Spring” Break
- IX
(M 17, 19) TV/Radio Ownership and Regulation/Deregulation
Group 4 Debate
Readings: Media Now, Ch. 6 & 8
Video: Speech for Sale (if time permits)
- X
(M 24, 26) Media Ownership and Regulation/Deregulation Continued
Group 5 Debate
- XI
(M 31, A 2) The American Research Tradition
Readings: Media Now, Ch. 13
Group 6 Debate
- XII
(A 7, 9) **TEST #2, Tuesday April 7**
Group 7 Debate
Readings: Media Now, Ch. 13
- XIII
(A 14, 16) European Research Tradition: Cultural Studies
Group 8 Debate
- Deadline for Course Withdrawal: April 14
- XIV
(A 21, 23) Cultural Studies and Cultural Imperialism
Readings: Media Now, Ch. 16
Group 9 Debate
- XV
(A 28, 30) Catch-Up /Review for Exam
- XVI
(May 5) **No Class: Follow Friday Schedule**
Final Exam Date and Time To Be Announced. Make sure you are available to take the exam on the day and time assigned by the Registrar’s Office.

