# **Social Issues and the Media**

## *COM 453 / DeSantis*

Fall 2010

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*OK, first things first: If you are not prepared to read 20 to 30 pages of incredibly interesting writings per day, drop the course . . . now. If this class is going to work, all of us will have to read thoroughly and be prepared to debate, share, and create ideas with each other. Now that that is said, let us move on.*

Social Issues and the Mass Media (COM 543) is designed to give students an insight into the influences that the American Media have on the social consciousness and the behavior of American society. My goal is to get students to view the media from a critical perspective, viewing it not just as a form of entertainment, but as the creator of our shared social reality. Once media are viewed as a salient superstructure, that potentially has the power to construct how we define ourselves, others, and our world, we can begin to play an active role in shaping and using media in ways that promotes our society's higher ideals.

The assigned readings from COM 453 can be divided into 5 major sections, each of which illuminates important and interesting aspects of media in our society: 1) Gender, Race, and Class in the Media; 2) New Technology in the Digital Age; 3) The Economics of Today’s Media; 4) The Harmful Impact of TV; and 5) The Media’s Role and Responsibilities in a Democracy.

#### Required Books

Bucy, E. P. (Ed.). (2005). Living in the information age: A new media reader (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

# Lind, R. A. (Ed.). (2009). Race/Gender/Media: Considering diversity across audiences, content, and producers (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Postman, N. (1985). Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of sow business. New York: Penguin.

### Assignments

**I. Major Qualitative Research Paper (30%):**

Each of you will write a data-driven media-analysis paper. In short, you will select a body of media data *(e.g., The New York Times or Fox’s coverage of the war; MTV’s top 20 rap videos for 2009; Cosmopolitan’s makeup ads from 1970 to 2010; Sports Illustrated swim suit issue; The lyrics of Bruce Springsteen, etc.)* and say something smart about it. Many more details will follow.

**II. Think Piece on “Amusing Ourselves to Death” (20%):**

Postman’s book has been one of the most significant works in media studies for over 25 years. Since his death, however, the uses and forms of media have radically changed in America. Your task is to write an addendum (i.e., a new concluding chapter) to his book, describing how you think this new digital revolution has either reinforced, augmented/changed, or undermined his major arguments about public discourse and media.

**III. Daily Reading Reviews (40%)**

To both reward your daily reading and to help you engage in those readings, you will turn in typed notes (1.5 spaced, one-inch margins) on each reading at the beginning of every class. Here are some specifics to help clarify this assignment:

* Your Edited Readers by Bucy and Lind: For each reading assigned, you will 1) write a brief summary of the work and 2) comment on its strengths and weaknesses. You are encouraged to make a stand and have an opinion about these readings.
  + *Length*:
    - For works 5 pages and under: 1 page review
    - For works 5 to 7 pages: 1.5 page review
    - For works 7 to 10 pages: 2 page review
    - For works 10 pages or more: 3 page review
* Out-Of Class Documentaries:
  + *Length*:
    - 3 pages

**III. Class Participation (10%)**

If this class is going to work, all of us must not only read carefully and critically, we must also be prepared to share our ideas with each other. I must mention, however, that I am looking for the quality of your statements, not just the quantity of your outbursts.

To strengthen your participation grade, bring in new information from newspapers, magazines, documentaries, web sites, or blogs about changes and innovations in media use, technology, and their effects on society.

**Attendance**

You will be allowed **two** unexcused absence. For every exceeding unexcused absence, there will be a 5% grade reduction from your final grade. To have an absence excused, you will need to give your instructor legitimate written proof from a recognized source explaining the absence.

Arriving late or leaving early **three** times throughout the course of the semester will result in one unexcused absence.

**Classroom Ethics**

**3.1 Plagiarism**

All academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by a student to his/her instructor or other academic supervisor, is expected to be the result of his/her own thought, research, or self-expression. In any case in which a student feels unsure about a question of plagiarism involving his/her work, s/he is obligated to consult the instructor before submitting it. When a student submits work purporting to be his/her own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgment of the fact, the student is guilty of plagiarism.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student and the student alone.

**3.2 Cheating**

Cheating is defined by its general usage. It includes, but is not limited to, the wrongful giving, taking, or presenting any information or material by a student with the intent of aiding him/herself or another on any academic work which is considered in any way in the determination of the final grade. Any question of definition shall be referred to the University Appeals Board.

**The sanction of punishment for a student who is accused of either plagiarizing or cheating is a minimum of an E grade for the entire course, but it may involve suspension, dismissal, or expulsion from the University.** As you can see, these are serious measures for academic offenses which we believe are serious. If you have any questions about whether you may be committing either of these academic offenses, be sure to contact your instructor.

**Fall 2010 Schedule**

* **August**
* 25—First Day/Class Introduction

Week 2

* 30 Topic: The Communication Revolution
  + Read: 1, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 in “Living” by Bucy
* **September**
* 1 Topic: New Media Theory
  + Read: 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 3

* 6—Labor Day—No Class
* 8 Topic: Convergence, Content, and Interactivity
  + Read: 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 4

* 13 Topic: Media Concentration
  + Read: 4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 in “Living” by Bucy
* 15 Topic: At the Interface: New Intimacies, New Cultures
  + Read: 5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 5

* 20 Topic: Media Saturation and the Increasing Velocity of Everyday Life
  + Read: 6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 in “Living” by Bucy
* 22 Topic: Networking Computing: Promises and Paradoxes
  + Read: 7, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 6

* 27 Topic: Questioning Information Technology
  + Read: 8, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 in “Living” by Bucy
* 29 Topic: Electronic Democracy
  + Read: 9, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 7

* **October**
* 4 Topic: The Digital Divide
  + Read: 10, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4 in “Living” by Bucy
* 6 Topic: Copyright and Regulation
  + Read: 11, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4 in “Living” by Bucy

Week 8

* 11 Topic: Privacy and Surveillance
  + Read: 12, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4 in “Living” by Bucy
* 13 Topic: Changing Paradigm in Media Use
  + Read: Pages 1- 60 in “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Postman

Week 9

* 18 Topic: Changing Paradigm in Media Use
  + Read: Pages 1- 60 in “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Postman
* 20 Topic: Changing Paradigm in Media Use
  + Read: Pages 1- 60 in “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Postman

Week 10

* 25 Topic: Consideration of media Effects
  + Read: Pages 1-16 & 2.1, 2.2 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* 27 Topic: Consideration of media Effects
  + Read: 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind

Week 11

* **November**
* 1 Topic: Audience Reception
  + Read: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* 3 Topic: Audience Reception
  + Read: 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind

Week 12

* 8 Topic: Journalism, Advertising, and PR
  + Read: Part II/Content, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* 10 Topic: Journalism, Advertising, and PR
  + Read: 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind

Week 13

* 15—NCA (Outside Class Assignment--TBA)
* 17—NCA (Outside Class Assignment--TBA)

Week 14

* 22 Topic: Film and Entertainment TV
  + Read: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* 24—Thanksgiving Break—No Class

Week 15

* 29 Topic: Film and Entertainment TV
  + Read: 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* **December**
* 1 Topic: Music and Media
  + Read: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind

Week 16

* 6 Topic: Music and Media
  + Read: 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8 in “Race, Gender, Media” by Lind
* 8 Last Day of Class--Topic: Catch-Up Day
  + Read: TBA