COMM 201: MEDIA THEORY & CRITICISM Fall 2023
Tuesdays/Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

INSTRUCTOR:
Alex Damarjian, PhD

E-MAIL:
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HOW TO ADDRESS ME:
Professor Damarjian or Dr. Damarjian

OFFICE:
Lewis Towers, Room 900

PRONOUNS:
He/him

OFFICE HOURS:
Tuesday, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. (online)
(or by appointment)

Our lives are built around media. It provides us entertainment, enables connection, and builds our realities. But what effect has it had on our interactions, on our societies? How has its evolution affected the way that we understand the world? More importantly, how do we even begin to question and study media, both traditional and new?

In this course, we will focus on a critical approach to understanding these mediated systems of meaning. Students will be introduced to different theories (historical analysis of media, cultural studies, sociological approaches, Marxist analysis, feminist theory, queer theory, etc.) to give them a grounded understanding of how to approach these questions.

This course is an introduction to understanding the ways that media create our worlds, helps us to create meaning, and mediates our experiences. Focusing on both traditional mass media (radio, television, print) as well as incorporating analysis of new media (the Internet, social media, and networked publics), this course will give students the vocabulary and tools to not only critically evaluate these systems and their impacts, but to engage in research and criticism of them.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

By the end of this course, students will be able to critically assess and understand media through a variety of theoretical frameworks. Students will be able to articulate these frameworks, apply them to the analysis of media, and will be well informed in the various ways that media and technology mediate experience.

REQUIRED MATERIALS/BOOKS

There is one (1) required text for this course. Additional readings for the course will be posted on the Sakai page throughout the semester and students may need their Loyola UVID and password to access additional readings through Loyola libraries.

Titles of topics and additional readings will be listed in the course schedule and students will be expected to complete readings before class in order to fully participate in class discussion and activities.

Students are expected to have access to their own reading materials, laptops or desktop computers, notebooks, pens/pencils to take notes in class and to participate in class activities and to complete class assignments. If this is not possible for whatever reason, please let me know and we will find solutions or alternatives.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

For this class, you will need access to a reliable desktop computer, laptop computer, or tablet to be able to do the discussions, readings, viewings, and other assignments. You will need access to some kind of Word processor, like Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, or Google Docs to work on your assignments. To accomplish this, you will also need a reliable Internet connection.

You will also need to access Sakai regularly to keep up to date with the course materials. Remember that the course schedule outlines all of the required readings, and Sakai will be where readings that are *not* the required books will be.

Recommended BOOKS (available on Amazon or online as an eBook, etc.)

Critical Media Studies: An Introduction (3rd Edition)
Authors: Brian L. Ott and Robert L. Mack
ISBN: 978-1-119-40612-9

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There is a total possible of 100 points that students will receive in this course. The grading scale is:

GRADE	POINTS
A	94+
A-	90 to 93
B+	87 to 89
B	84 to 86

B-	80 to 83
C+	77 to 79
C	74 to 76
C-	70 to 73
D+	67 to 69
D	64 to 66
F	63 and below

Below is a table that breaks down the point values of each assignment. Brief descriptions of the assignments are below the table.

ASSIGNMENT	POINTS
Papers/writing prompts	30 points
Professionalism	10 points
Projects	30 points
Final Project	30 points
TOTAL	100 points

Professionalism (10 points)

I expect students to be kind, patient, and understanding with one another. I expect you all to be courteous and polite in any course correspondence (email and otherwise) with me or other students. If you make an appointment with me for a meeting, I expect you to respect my time and to be on time – if something comes up, please email me or message me on Slack and let me know.

A part of your professionalism score comes from completing the readings and viewings every week, participating in discussion, and turning your assignments in on time. If any of this at any point is not possible, **communicate with me** and we will work something out.

I expect you all to attend class regularly, complete the readings on time, and to participate in class discussions. This course will consist of mostly online discussion on Slack (graded) with an optional Zoom discussion on **Thursdays** during class time. You must participate in the Slack discussions in order to receive credit.

I have divided you all into groups for the Slack discussion portion of the class. You will interact with your group members every week for discussion, and every Tuesday by class time I expect you all to post your initial reactions/reflections to the reading/viewing for that week. Since discussion only works if students interact with one another, you will need to respond to your fellow students by Thursday at 5 p.m.

If a student is combative, rude, or otherwise disrespectful to other students during discussion or towards me, I will take off points from your professionalism score.

Papers(30 points)

This course will engage students in critical analysis of media through two main writing assignments. The first paper will be a textual analysis examining how theoretical concepts like Marxism, feminism, or postmodernism can be applied to a media artifact like a film, viral meme, social media platform, or marketing campaign. Students will make an original argument about how the text operates ideologically using close reading and outside sources. The second assignment will involve an independent research paper investigating an issue or debate in media theory like representation, democratic principles, predictive AI, or consolidation of media power. Students will synthesize scholarly sources and close reading of examples to make an evidence-based argument engaging with current academic discourse.

Alongside these critical papers, students will also compose reflective writing examining their own relationships with media. These media diaries throughout the semester will analyze personal media habits, the role of media in students' lives, and how completing course assignments shifts their understanding of media messages. By engaging in textual analysis, academic research, and self-reflection, students will hone critical writing skills while gaining new perspectives on the complex social, cultural, and political dimensions of contemporary media. The writing projects aim to build skills for unpacking media texts, conducting research, and translating theoretical concepts into original arguments.

Projects (30 points)

In this media theory course, students will explore key concepts, thinkers, and debates within the field through creative and critical projects. The first assignment will involve producing a short video essay analyzing a media text or cultural phenomenon through a theoretical lens like feminism or postmodernism. Later, students will research and write an original paper investigating an issue in media theory like representation, democracy, or ethical concerns. The final group project will allow students to apply theory to create an alternative media intervention, like an experimental video, podcast, zine, or campaign prototype.

One highlight of the course will be developing a video project using AI technology to examine issues related to artificial intelligence and automated media. This hands-on assignment will allow students to gain practical experience grappling with emerging issues at the intersection of media, culture, and technology. Through these varied projects emphasizing both theory and practice, students will engage with foundational media theory concepts while honing creative and critical media skills.

Alex Damarjian
COMM 201 – Fall 2023

Media Object Analysis
October 19, 2020

Final Project (30 points)

Students will complete a group project with their group as the final requirement for this course. Working on a final project with a group will help students to think about an issue or topic that they are interested in in a group setting, which will also further encourage collaboration.

- o The project should be a short story containing your group's vision of the future and media using the theories/frameworks that we learned in class (think a *Black Mirror* style story).
- o Another option you could choose to do is something a group of students did in this class previously: a collection of poems exploring the theories/frameworks covered in this class, or even an art project.
- Or, you can all do a podcast analyzing a media object of your group's choice using one of the theories/frameworks we have learned (use Zencastr to record a podcast remotely).

More information for the final project will be given as the semester goes on and I will be open to suggestions from students if they have ideas that extend beyond the options presented here.

Your final project should be shared with the entire class on Slack, where anybody will be able to comment/react to your group's work. This will be a fun way to end the class and for everybody to see what their classmates have done.

Additionally, students will be required to fill out individual *group member evaluations* for each of their group members. These ratings will be considered when final individual grades are being calculated.

These evaluations must be emailed to the instructor of the course on December 10, the same day the final version of your group project is due.

The deadline for the final project will be December 10, 2020, at 11:55 p.m. Only *one student* should submit all of the materials for the Final Project to the instructor on Sakai, but include all of the names of their group members on them.

COURSE COMMUNICATION

Communicating with your group members will be crucial in having a successful final project. Please make sure that all of you share materials, contact information, and meet regularly in order to have a successful final project. You can communicate using Slack, email, or exchange phone numbers to complete this.

LATE WORK POLICY

You will be expected to turn in and complete all assignments on their assigned due dates at the proper time. Late work will be given a one letter grade reduction until it is submitted.

E-MAIL/SAKAI POLICY

I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on weekends. If you have not received any feedback during this period, please feel free to reach out to me again to ensure your communication was received. The same rule applies to direct messages you may send me on Slack.

I expect students to use appropriate, professional, and considerate language when communicating with me and other students via email. If you are nervous or uncertain about how to go about this, check out this presentation on email etiquette: E-mail Etiquette for Students.

Students are responsible for checking Sakai, Slack, and their LUC email accounts regularly to stay up-to-date on announcements.

If you don't check your LUC email account, you should forward it to an account that you do check. You may also forward your LUC mail to a non-LUC account. Students are responsible for any information distributed via email and/or Sakai.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

During this course, students may be exposed to topics that may be triggering or traumatic. If at any point during the semester you feel uncomfortable participating in a class activity or topic due to this, please let me know and we will try to find an alternative topic for you during that week.

LIMITS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

Under the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, all personnel of institutions of higher education are classified as "mandated reporters" who must report to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) if the reporter has reasonable cause to believe that a minor under 18 years of age known to the reporter in his or her official or professional capacity may be abused (physically or sexually) or neglected.

Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of Loyola University Chicago community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University

offices if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child

- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the LUC Health Center.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from the Student Accessibility Center to the instructor.

The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:
- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;

- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts.

Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:
- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is an act of personal and professional courtesy, as well as intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at http://luc.edu/english/writing.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. A student who submits the same work for credit in two or more classes will be judged guilty of academic dishonesty, and will be subject to sanctions described below. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course.

All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication. The office of the Dean of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances.

The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans. Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations. (The School of Communication policy is consistent with the Academic Integrity Policy of the College of Arts & Sciences.)

DETAILED COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Lesson	Assignment Due
1) August 29th & August 31st	**Tuesday:** Syllabus discussion, An orientation to the course, outlining the key components of critical media studies and what to expect throughout the semester. **Thursday:** *Semiotics and Sign Systems:* Delve into the study of signs, symbols, and their meanings within media, and how these influence our interpretation of media content.	None
2) September 5th & 7th	**Tuesday:** (No Class, Conference) **Thursday:** *Marxist Analysis of Media Ownership:* Explore how media ownership structures align with Marxist concepts of class struggle and capitalist control over the means of communication.	

3) September 12th & 14th	*Media Convergence and Technological Determinism:* Explore how various forms of media are converging due to technological advancements and discuss whether technology shapes media content or vice versa.	Film or TV Show Analysis through Semiotic Principles.
4) September 19th & 21st	*Cultural Imperialism and Globalization:* Examine the influence of dominant media cultures on smaller or marginalized cultures, and how globalization affects media consumption and production.	
5) September 26th & 28th	*Audience Theory and Reception Studies:* Explore how audiences interpret and engage with media content, and how this influences media producers' decisions.	Film script or game design document that incorporate classroom material
6) September 29 & 1st	*Revolutionary Potential of Media:* Debate the potential of media as a tool for organizing and mobilizing social change, drawing on Marxist ideas of revolutionary consciousness.	
7) October 3rd & 5th	**Tuesday:** No Class Work on AI Project **Thursday:** *Alternative Media and Counter-Hegemony:* Discuss the role of alternative and independent media in challenging mainstream narratives and promoting counter-hegemonic perspectives.	Students will demonstrate understanding of a media theory concept by using artificial intelligence to create a talking head video explaining the concept.
8) October 10th & 12th	An exploration of how media content and industries may reinforce or challenge gender norms and inequalities.	
9) October 17th & 19th	The role media plays in shaping and reflecting national identities and cultural heritage.	Create a political campaign or advertisement focused on the role of media in shaping and reflecting national identity:
10) October 24th & 26th	The lecture will explain relevant concepts like hegemony. Our discussion will identify and examine ideological messages and assumptions embedded in	

	entertainment and news media.	
11) October 24th & Nov 2nd	*Postmodernism and Hyperreality:* Explore how postmodern thought challenges traditional notions of reality and how media contributes to the creation of hyperreal experiences.	Students will complete an activity to uncover the dominant ideologies encoded into media texts.
12) Nov 7th & Nov 9th	**Tuesday:** (No Class, Conference) *Media Effects and Cultivation Theory:* Study the impact of media exposure on individuals' perceptions of reality and attitudes, as well as the cultivation of shared social norms.	
13) Nov 13th & Nov 16th	*Media Ecology:* Discuss how different forms of media interact and shape human communication, as well as how media environments impact society	Gather or create historical and contemporary media representations of the chosen city/urban landscape. This could include postcards, paintings, photographs, films, digital art, VR depictions, and more.
Nov 20th & Nov 23rd	**No Class Thanksgiving**	
14) Nov 27th & Nov 30th	Psychoanalytic Views on Media A deep dive into how media messages may interact with unconscious desires and fears, according to psychoanalytic theories.	Students will trace the evolution of media from ancient times to the digital age, mapping out key milestones and their intersections. By creating a dynamic "Media Ecosystem Map", they'll showcase the interdependencies of media forms and their cascading effects on societal norms, values, and communication habits.
15) Dec 5th & Dec 7th	Discuss Final Project No Lectures	**Fall semester classes end**
16) Dec 5th & Dec 7th	Final Project Due	Final Project Due