

COMM 185

Global Media in a Digital Age

Fall 2026. 9:50-11:25 a.m.. T-TH. Goldspohn 36.

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(he/him/his)
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Office Hours: Monday 12 noon to 3 PM; Tuesday 8-9:30 AM

Course Description

The mass media are an inescapable feature of contemporary global society. Nowhere is this more evident than here in the United States. Social media, television, film, video games, recorded music and other forms of mass communication dominate our leisure time. The media's endless flow of stories, discourses, sounds and images shape our understanding of world events, our values, our politics, our desires, even our sense of self. This course provides a comprehensive survey of the history, structure, and social impact of the major media (the news industry, recorded music, film, radio, television, video games, social media etc.) with special emphasis given to the Internet and digital media. We will also consider the organization and impact of media-dependent industries such as advertising and public relations. Although the course will be primarily focused on media in the U.S., some time and attention will be devoted to global media industries and cultures. And we will pay special attention throughout to the media's central role in our democracy and civic life. The ultimate goal of the course is prepare students to think critically and systematically about the media and its enormous influence on our lives as citizens of our country and the world.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will:

1. Demonstrate a critical understanding of both legacy and digital media and understand their impact on society both in the U.S. and around the world.
2. Be able to identify the economic, social, political, regulatory and technological forces that have shaped the evolution of media industries, particularly in the U.S..
3. Demonstrate a basic working knowledge of some of the important theories and analytical concepts scholars use to analyze media texts, products and effects.

Required Texts

Richard Campbell, Christopher Martin and Bettina Fabos. Media and Culture: Mass Communication in a Digital Age (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's). 2022 14th Edition.

In addition to our textbook, you'll be expected to read a few other articles and documents. A few required readings will be placed on Canvas. The other materials are available online; the relevant links can be found on the syllabus and will be placed on Canvas as well.

Procedures, Requirements and Expectations

Course Format:

Lecture & Discussion. This course combines lecture and discussion. Towards the beginning of most class meetings I will usually spend some time lecturing but much of our class time will be devoted to group discussion of course readings, course themes and particular media texts. I often use powerpoint slides and will try place the slides for my lectures on Canvas immediately *before* each lecture (so you do not need to copy down the text of the slides themselves, just focus on the main points).

Please note that my lectures usually *supplement*, rather than simply *summarize*, the readings. Sometimes I will go over all the key points of the assigned readings; sometime I won't even mention them. In either case, a portion of the information and the specific case studies presented in the lectures will be new. So, if you miss class, please be sure to get the notes from a classmate.

I will set aside time for structured group discussion in most of our class meetings and some classes will be nothing but discussion. For class discussion to flow well, you'll have to do the required reading, complete any required discussion-generating writing assignments and make an effort to participate. In class discussions, it will be my job to pose overarching questions, facilitate and keep the conversation flowing.

Also, I will sometimes give you ungraded but required "homework" assignments that are designed to prime our classroom conversations. I will typically collect these from you at the end of the class for which they are assigned.

Graded Take-Home Writing Assignments. In this course, you will be asked to complete two graded short take-home writing assignments: a 850-word (roughly 3-4 pages double-spaced in Times) critical analysis of a film currently showing in theaters and a somewhat longer 1000-word (roughly 4-7 page) report on a global media conglomerate, each worth 20% of the grade. Assignment sheets will be passed out at least 14 days before the due date. All writing assignments should be submitted electronically (usually through a submission link on Canvas). Please submit your writing assignments as Word documents. It is easier to comment on them that way. Your written work should be relatively free of mechanical and grammatical error. Be sure to back-up your work. Put *your name, the date and the name of the class* on all assignments. See the attached Guidelines and Standards for Written Work for more details about my grading criteria and expectations for your writing.

Exams. In addition to the writing assignments listed above, there will also be an in-class midterm and a comprehensive final exam during finals week, each worth 20% of your final grade. The midterm will consist of fill-in-the blank, multiple choice, short answer questions and an essay question. The final exam will cover the readings and lectures for the entire course and will consist of three long essays as well as some fill-in-the-blank and/ or multiple-choice questions.

Class Participation, Homework and Attendance. Your attendance, completion of ungraded homework assignments and participation in class—particularly the amount and quality of your

contributions to class discussion-- will determine 20% of your grade for the course. I do not want ANYONE coming to class showing even the slightest symptoms of COVID or any other communicable disease. If you are feeling ill or have been told to quarantine, please stay at home. To receive a high score for your participation, you should not only do the reading for class but also come prepared to say something. And you should make an effort to complete all ungraded homework assignments (and be prepared to turn them in when asked).

Grades. Your grade for the course will be based on the take-home writing assignments, the midterm, the final, and your attendance , ungraded homework and class participation. The film review and the media conglomerate profile are each worth 20%. The midterm will count for 20% and the final 20%. Class participation, homework and participation will count for 20% of your grade for the course. To make it easier for me to calculate final grades, each assignment or grade component will receive both a letter grade and a corresponding point score. On my grading scale, an A is 93% to 100% of the possible points, 90 to 92% is an A-, 88% to 89% is a B+, 83% to 87% is a B, 80% to 82% is a B-, 78% to 79% is a C +, 73% to 77% is a C, 70% to 72% is a C-, 68% to 69% is a D+, 60% to 67% is a D and anything less than 59% is an F.

Below is a breakdown of the points for each assignment or final grade component:

1 film review @ 200 points=	200 points
1 midterm@ 200 points=	200 points
1 media conglomerate profile @ 200 points=	200 points
1 final exam @ 200 points=	200 points
Class participation, attendance & homework=	200 points
1000 total points possible	

To figure out how you are doing in the course at any time during the term, simply divide the points you've earned so far by the number of points you could've earned.

Late Work. The due dates for each of the writing assignments are clearly listed on the schedule below (and **highlighted in yellow**). I do accept late work but will usually reduce the grade for a late writing assignment a full letter grade for each week it is overdue. I will not accept any late work after the date of our final exam.

Extra Credit Opportunities. From time to time, I will give you the opportunity to earn 15 points of extra credit by attending and writing a short (4-5 sentence) reflection on a campus event related to the course. I have noted a few extra credit opportunities already on the schedule below (two in week four, one in week eight and one in week nine).

College Policies. This course syllabus includes by extension the [college policies and resources for students](#) posted on Canvas. Visit [College Policies and Resources for Students](#) to learn more about college policies that apply to all courses and the support services available to students.

Academic Honesty, AI etc. I will send you a separate document outlining my policy on plagiarism, academic integrity and use of AI in writing and research in more detail. Suffice it

to say, you should avoid using AI LLMs for any purpose other than gathering information (as you would using a web search engine). Presenting writing generated by ChatGPT, Claude or other LLM as your own will be considered cheating. We will discuss my policy on this in class in much more detail prior to your first take home writing assignment.

Ground rules for Class Discussion:

Politeness. In class discussions, assume that other people are doing the best they can. If you disagree, that is great, but don't make your disagreement into a personal attack or attribute malice to those with whom you disagree. Similarly, if someone disagrees with you, take a breath and think about what they are saying before "firing back."

Privacy of the classroom. In order to enable free-wheeling discussion and uninhibited debate where people are allowed to make mistakes, do not take videos, screen-shots, or otherwise record or copy anything anyone in this class says—except for your own personal use—and refrain from publishing comments by me or your classmates made during class on social media or any other publishing platform. Likewise, do not share any of my course lectures, videos, documents, assignment sheets or PowerPoint slides with anyone outside of this class. If you fail to honor these privacy guidelines, you could receive an "F" for the course and possibly face even more serious consequences.

Course Schedule

Below is a projected schedule of the readings and assignments for the course. We may fall behind schedule from time to time and, if we do, I'll make an effort to get us back on track or will adjust the course schedule. I encourage you to *keep up with the reading even if we are behind schedule* and to read ahead if your workload permits.

Week 1.

Tuesday, August 25. Introductions: Why study the media? Media, culture & democracy- a critical approach/ An overview of the course.

Thursday, August 27. The first mass media: the Golden age of the Press/ What exactly is news?

Reading: Campbell et al., Chapter 8, "Newspapers and Magazines: From Print to Digital Brands" and Chapter 13, "The Culture of Journalism."

Bring media use diaries to class.

Week 2.

Tuesday, September 1. The evolution of journalism/"objectivity" in journalism/ fake news/ media ethics & the SPJ code

Reading: Steve Macek and Andy Lee Roth, "It's True that Corporate Media is Biased, But Not in The Ways Right Wingers Say," *Truthout*, November 27, 2020. Available here:

<https://truthout.org/articles/its-true-that-corporate-media-is-biased-but-not-in-the-ways-right-wingers-say/>

Tuesday, September 3. Journalism today/ *The 1619 Project* as a case study.

Read: Nikole Hannah-Jones, “America Wasn’t a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made It One: The 1619 Project”, *New York Times*, August 14, 2019 (on **Canvas**).

Week 3.

Tuesday, September 8. Finish news media. Motion pictures and the origins of Hollywood/The elements of Hollywood film: star, director, genre & narrative

Reading: Campbell et al., Chapter 7, “Movies and Visual Storytelling”

Tuesday, September 10. The Hollywood formula in action: The case of *The Silence of the Lambs*

Viewing Assignment: If you have never seen it, watch *The Silence of the Lambs* in preparation for today’s class. You can view the film for free via the Internet Archive, but it is also available on several streaming platforms: [https://archive.org/details/the-silence-of-the-lambs--1991--1920x1038/The+Silence+Of+The+Lambs+\(1991\)+-+English+-+1920x1040+-+23.976+FPS+-+AVC1-H.264+\(9199+Kbps\)%2C+DTS+\(1509+Kbps\).mkv](https://archive.org/details/the-silence-of-the-lambs--1991--1920x1038/The+Silence+Of+The+Lambs+(1991)+-+English+-+1920x1040+-+23.976+FPS+-+AVC1-H.264+(9199+Kbps)%2C+DTS+(1509+Kbps).mkv)

Week 4.

Tuesday, September 15. Finish discussing *The Silence of the Lambs*/ Hollywood today

Reading: “Study Highlights”, “Introduction,” “Hollywood Landscape,” “Leads,” and “Overall Cast Diversity,” in *Hollywood Diversity Report 2025: Featuring Film* (UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, 2025), 2-27, and scan the rest of the report (on **Canvas**)

Film Review Assigned

Extra Credit Opportunity:

Wednesday, September 16.

Screening: Russell Banks: *I Write To Be a Better Person* followed by a Q & A with director Denis Mueller.

6:30 PM Stevenson Hall.

Thursday, September 17. Hollywood concluded; Sound Recording and Popular Music: The development of sound recording technology (and the music industry).

Reading: Campbell et al, Chapter 4 “Sound Recording and Popular Music”.

Extra Credit Opportunity:

Constitution Day Event

Thursday, September 17.

A collective viewing of a Constitution Day webinar about the First Amendment and academic freedom followed by a forum and discussion about the crisis in American democracy.

Webinar 4-5 PM Smith Hall

Forum and Discussion 5:30-6:30. Smith Hall

Week 5

Tuesday, September 22. Sound Recording and Popular Music: The development of sound recording technology (and the music industry)/ Rock ‘n roll

Thursday, September 24. Rock continued/ The music industry in the age of the mp3, iTunes and Spotify

Week 6.

Tuesday, September 29. Voices in the air: The radio industry and the birth of broadcasting/ FCC regulation/ Radio in the network era.

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 5, "Popular Radio and the Origin of Broadcasting"

Listening: Orson Wells and the Mercury Theater of the Air, "War of the Worlds" here:

<https://youtu.be/Xs0K4ApWl4g>

Thursday, October 1. The reinvention of radio after TV/ Radio today/ Podcasting.

Listening: Serial, Season One, Episode 1 here: <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one>

Reading: David Carr, "Breakout Podcast Sets Stage For More," *New York Times*, November 24, 2014 (on Canvas)

Week 7.

Tuesday, October 6. On all the time: TV and American Culture/ The origins of TV in the US.

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 6, "Television: From Broadcasting to Streaming."

Film Review Assignment Due By 5 PM Tuesday, October 6.

Thursday, October 8. TV programming in the network era/ the coming of cable and other technological changes

Week 8.

Tuesday, October 13. Streaming, Binging and YouTube/ The future of broadcasting and cable?

Midterm Review Sheet Distributed

Tuesday, October 13. Extra Credit Opportunity:

Book Launch for *A New History of North Central* edited by Shereen Ilahi and Ann Durkin

Keating. This new history contains chapters about racism and race relations at the College, LGBTQ+ inclusion on campus, NCC women's athletics and student anti-war and women's rights activism. The editors and contributors will each make brief remarks. Refreshments will be served.

12-1:30 PM, Stevenson Hall

Thursday, October 15. No Class Fall Break.

Week 9.

Extra Credit Opportunity:

Monday, October 19. Screening: Trump: The First 100 with Brian Karem Stevenson Hall

6 PM

Screening of a documentary about the first 100 days of Donald Trump's second term as president directed and narrated by Brian Karem, veteran broadcast journalist (CNN, FOX). Followed by Q&A with the director.

Trailer: <https://www.thefirst100doc.com/>

Tuesday, October 20. Talking 'Bout a Revolution: the rise of the internet & search, the web's killer app/ AI.

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 2, "The Internet, Social Media and AI"

Thursday, October 22. Midterm Exam. (Professor Macek will be in Ithaca, NY at a conference. A proctor will administer the exam).

Week 10.

Tuesday, October 27. The social media explosion/Should we regulate young people's access to social media?

Reading:

Jonathan Haidt, "Get Phones Out of Schools Now," *The Atlantic*, June 6, 2023 (on Canvas)

Thursday, October 29. Social media continued/Digital gaming

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 3, "Digital Gaming and the Media Playground"

Week 11.

Tuesday, November 3. Spin: Finish video games/The PR Industry

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 11, "Public Relations and Framing the Message"

Thursday, November 5. PR and Social Advocacy; Case Study: the (Red) campaign/ Begin Advertising

Browse: The (Red) website: <https://www.red.org/how-red-works/> and <https://www.red.org/our-impact/>

Week 12.

Tuesday, November 10. And now a word from our sponsor: Advertising and consumer culture// Analyzing advertiser's persuasive tactics

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 11, "Advertising and Commercial Culture"

Thursday, November 12. Gender, sexuality and advertising imagery

In-Class Screening: *Killing Us Softly 4*

Week 13.

Tuesday, November 17. Finish discussing *Killing Us Softly*/ The business of the media: corporate ownership, conglomeration, globalization, deregulation, outsourcing and growing wage inequality.

Reading: Chapter 12, “Media Economics and the Global Marketplace”.

Media Conglomerate Profile Assigned

Thursday, November 19. The business of media continued/ The case of Disney

Reading: Part I. Item 1 Business (pages 2-17) of the *Disney Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Financial Report*. Peruse the financial data in Part II. Full report is here:

https://s206.q4cdn.com/979796730/files/doc_financials/2025/ar/2025-Annual-Report.pdf

Week 14.

Tuesday, November 24. Finish Disney/Introduce the First Amendment & Free Speech

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 16, “Legal Controls and Freedom of Expression”

Thursday, November 26. Thanksgiving Break. No Class.

Week 15.

Tuesday, December 1. Exceptions to First Amendment protections/Censorship/ Regulation of Broadcast Media & the Internet.

Final Review Sheet Distributed.

Tuesday, December 3. Finish First Amendment/ Media Effects.

Reading: Campbell, Chapter 15, “Media Effects and Cultural Approaches to Research”

Week 16.

Tuesday, December 8. Finish Media Effects /Course Surveys/Final thoughts

Finals Week.

Thursday, December 10. Final Test 10:30 AM-12:30 PM

Media Conglomerate Profile Due @ 5 PM Friday, December 11 .

Guidelines and Standards for Written Work

- All written work must be typed, double-spaced in 12-point Times or New York font with one inch margins and should have a title page. Please **submit all work as Word files**. Written work must be responsive to all aspects of the assignment, including length, and should use either the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the Chicago system of documentation and style.

- Include a title page with your name, a title, the date and a word count for your paper.
- Written work should be relatively free of mechanical and grammatical error.
- Document every reference, including page numbers whenever possible. Refer to a writer's manual if you need guidance about how to do this.

- Support claims not common knowledge with evidence and conclusions with argument. Take time to plan your papers and devote some time to rewriting them. Always keep a second copy of your work.

- Assume your reader has not taken this course. Define all terms whose definitions are controversial or obscure. Take time to explain the theories you are using. Include as much detail as you need to support your argument. Illustrations (diagrams, storyboards, photographs, photos of still frames, etc.) are welcome.

- Grades: Failure to follow any of the above guidelines will result in a lower grade. Otherwise, here are my standards:

An "A" paper demonstrates that the writer has not only mastered the concepts of the course, but has applied them in an original, imaginative and incisive manner. The paper shows a command of the language that allows the writer to express ideas and observations clearly, effectively, in detail and with virtually no mechanical errors. Reasoning is careful. The paper includes adequate documentation. "A"s are reserved for exceptional essays.

A "B" paper demonstrates that the writer has understood the concepts of the course and has applied them with some originality. The paper shows the writer can organize a coherent essay with few errors. Reasoning is careful and contradiction-free on the whole. The paper for the most part includes adequate documentation.

A "C" paper demonstrates that the writer has understood most of the concepts of the course but needs to pay more attention to reading or writing. Reasoning can be sloppy in places. Documentation is erratic.

A "D" paper demonstrates that the writer has only a minimal understanding of the concepts of the course. Significant gaps in the writer's comprehension indicate the need for more study. The paper shows the writer's basic compositional skills are below satisfactory. Reasoning is sloppy or full of contradictions. Documentation is unsatisfactory.

A "F" paper demonstrates that the writer has little, if any, understanding of the concepts of the course. Because of the writer's lack of skill or concern, the work includes gross errors as well as a lack of content. Documentation is negligible. The paper may also fail to address parts of the assignment.

A paper may combine characteristics of different levels of work. In that case, the grade will depend on the paper's overall demonstration of knowledge of the material and of college writing skills.

Please see me if you have questions about my standards or about any of your grades for the course.