**Political Economy of Communication**

**MDST 4704 Fall 2016**

**Tu/Th 12:30 p.m. -1:45 p.m.**

**489 New Cabell Hall**

**Instructor:** Katharine Allen

**Contact information**

*Emails*: [kra135@psu.edu](mailto:kra135@psu.edu)

[kra9t@virginia.edu](mailto:kra9t@virginia.edu)

*Twitter*: @kralaw (please make sure to request to follow me on Twitter)

*Office Hours:*

Traditional: Mondays/Wednesdays 1:00-3:00

Virtual: Individual Chat: By appointment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This survey course introduces students to the political economy of media. Central themes include political economy's historical development, its usefulness to the study of media & communications, & its contemporary applications in scholarly research. Students will be introduced to the power dynamics & institutional forces that impact media institutions, industries, ownership, cultural production, consumption & distribution in the US & elsewhere.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

This course will critically explore some of the basic issues of economic nature of American mass media systems and their relationship to larger economic and political structures. After successfully completing the course, students should be able to:

• Demonstrate understanding of economic incentives of media;

• Demonstrate understanding of the relationship of economic incentives of media to the needs of a democratic society;

• Demonstrate understanding of current trends in media institutions and industries;

• Demonstrate understanding of critical approaches to media economics;

• Demonstrate the ability to apply concepts in class to new situations in media.

Through the readings and class discussions, you will develop the tools to ***critically evaluate*** the state and sources of international communication. You will critique media presentation of global and domestic issues— particularly the ways that international crises, other countries, and their problems are portrayed to you through the media. Throughout the course, you will be asked to question how your views of the world have been constructed through media, and how these views might be different for people in other countries, and especially how these views might be different for you if you were given different sources of information.

**READINGS:**

There is **NO REQUIRED TEXT**

* Excerpted material will be on UvaCollab in the Readings Folder or linked in the syllabus
* ***Often class discussions will reference current events in the context of political economy theory. Current events discussed in class discussions are fair game for exams.***

A great way to keep up to date is to follow a news source (e.g., Huffington Politico, Slate) on Twitter, Facebook or other social media

Following Current Events and News: An awareness of current events and a consideration of how they specifically impact our own lives and communication across borders is essential for understanding much of this course material, as many of the classroom examples will be placed in the context of current events. As such you will be expected to follow:

* Traditional news, taking advantage of the *New York Times, USA Today, and The Daily Progress*
* Alternative news sources-each week I will post an “alternative news source of the week”
* International news, e.g., *Al-Jazeera*, *The Guardian*, *Granma*
* In very rare instances, special news programs or commentary (i.e. *Nightline*, BBC reports, Internet content, etc.) specifically related to the issues we are discussing in class.
* Major broadcast news, e.g., MSNBC, CNN, FOX, CBS, ABC, NBC, PBS
* Political satire news programs and Internet sites, e.g., John Oliver’s *Last Week Tonight*, *The Borowitz Report*, *The Onion*, *The Daily Currant*

,

* ***Often class discussions will reference current events. Current events discussed in class discussions are fair game for exams***

A great way to keep up to date is to follow a news source (e.g., *Huffington Post*, *Politico*, *Slate*) on *Twitter*, *Facebook* or similar sites

**ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION**

* Attendance is not mandatory although highly encouraged. This class is about critically evaluating and comparing world media systems and dialogue and debate with fellow students will foster your ability to do so.
* In addition, although lectures are posted online after class

***The PowerPoints that are posted AFTER lectures do NOT include all material from lecture and as such if you do not attend class you will miss important material.***

* For those students who ***attend class regularly and actively participate*** in class discussions ***participation consideration*** will be given when deciding whether or not to round up final grades, e.g., a 94.5 would be rounded to a 95, giving the student an A, rather than an A-.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Your grade in this class is based on three exams, and two writing assignments that will consist of a corporate profile (5 pages) and a critical analysis piece (10 pages) that will analyze some aspect of the US media system through a political economy lens. Students will be graded according to the following formula:

Exam 1 20 percent

Exam 2 20 percent

Exam 3 (final exam): 30 percent

Corporate Profile: 10 percent

Final Paper: 20 percent

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL 100 percent**

**Exams (70 percent of final grade)**

Each exam will consist of questions related to any and all course-related work (readings, lectures, in-class activities, discussions, etc.) covered up to that moment. Only the Final Exam will be cumulative

**Corporate Profile (10 percent of final grade)**

Research and gather information on a media corporation, company, union/guild, or trade association (i.e. RIAA and MPAA) to help analyze that entity. 5 quality pages incorporating concepts from class/readings/viewings, as well as a good deal of outside research are expected. These may be organizations independent of the “mass” corporate media system.You will choose your corporation by October 10 and send a proposal for approval.

**Critical Analysis Paper-10-12 pages (40 percent of final grade)**

You will choose some aspect of the US media system to analyze via a political economy lens. For example, you might choose the music industry, the election, general politics, social movements, etc. You will identify and critique the interrelation of wealth, power, and communication that is represented by your chosen topic.

Writing papers in communication studies often requires you to do three tasks common to academic writing: analyze material, read and critique others’ analyses of material, and develop your own argument around that material. You will need to build an original argument (sometimes called a “theory” or “plausible explanation”) about how a communication phenomenon can be better understood. The word phenomenon can refer to a particular communication event, text, act, or conversation. To develop an argument for this kind of paper, you need to follow several steps and include several kinds of information in your paper. First, you must demonstrate your knowledge of the phenomenon and what others have said about it. This usually involves synthesizing previous research or ideas (a literature review). Second, you must develop your own original perspective, reading, or “take” on the phenomenon and give evidence to support your way of thinking about it. Your “take” on the topic will constitute your “argument,” “theory,” or “explanation.” You will need to write a thesis statement that encapsulates your argument and guides you and the reader to the main point of your paper. Third, you should critically analyze the arguments of others in order to show how your argument contributes to our general understanding of the phenomenon. Assume that your audience for your paper includes your classmates as well as your instructor, unless otherwise indicated in the assignment. A rubric, writing resources, and citation guide (APA) will be provided.

**EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to the graded course requirements there will be 2 extra credit opportunities yet to be determined. They may take the form of lecture attendance, out of class movie or documentary viewing or other form. Both will require a writing component. Those who complete the extra credit assignments receive either 1 or 2 extra credit points based on the quality of their work.

**OUTSIDE OF THESE TWO OPPORTUNITIES, THERE WILL BE NO**

**EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNED. IT IS UP TO YOU TO PURSUE THE OPPORTUNITY**

**AT THE TIME GIVEN.**

***ANY REQUEST FOR FURTHER EXTRA CREDIT (e.g., “is there any way I can improve my grade”) WILL BE DENIED ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT UNFAIRLY ADVANTAGES ONE STUDENT OVER THE OTHERS.***

GRADING

\*Grades are earned based on the following scale:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | A+ | 100 |
| A | 95 |
| A- | 90 |
| B+ | 87 |
| B | 83 |
| B- | 80 |
| C+ | 77 |
| C | 73 |
| C- | 70 |
| D+ | 67 |
| D | 63 |
| D- | 60 |
| F | 0 |
| IN - Incomplete |  |

Please note that with the exception of ***participation consideration*** as described in the Attendance Policy below, there is no ‘rounding’ in the grading scale. For example, an 89.0 is an B+ and is not rounded up to an A-, etc. Your numerical score is firm.

POLICIES

Thank you in advance for cooperating with the following policies:

* Attendance Policy: Attendance is not mandatory although ***highly encouraged***. This class is about critically evaluating the state of international communications and dialogue and debate with fellow students fosters your ability to do so. Further, for those students who ***attend class regularly and actively participate*** in class discussions ***participation consideration*** will be given when deciding whether or not to round up final grades, e.g., a 94.9 would be rounded to a 95, giving the student an A, rather than an A-.
* Personal communication devices: Use of cell phones, tablets, or any other personal communication devices or programs in the classroom during class time is strictly prohibited. **Made sure these devices are turned off prior to entering the classroom, you will be asked to leave if they disturb the class.**
* Food and Beverages: Food and drinks are officially prohibited in the classroom by university policy. Although I will not be policing the room you will be asked to dispose of any food items I see being eaten flagrantly and may be asked to leave if you are found consuming them during class time more than once.
* Classroom Etiquette: **It is more than likely that during discussion and other times you may encounter ideas and positions with which you do not agree. Some may even offend you**. This is part of the strategy behind the course, designed to challenge you to engage with alternative and opposing perspectives. This process is vital to grooming your critical thinking skills. Should you disagree with the concepts under review, please remember to stop and think about what is being said before drawing conclusions and making impulsive statements. When you do respond, please do so in a *thoughtful* and *respectful* manner. Passion is essential for debate, however disrespect, condescension, and/or outright dismissal of your fellow students or course content is unacceptable. No topic or perspective is off limits, but they must be presented with maturity and critical thinking.
* Online behavior: Emails or correspondence to both me and other students should be done so with the *Rules of Netiquette.*

[*http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html*](http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html)

* Missed deadlines: No excuses for late work will be accepted unless coming from an official source (e.g., a note from your doctor, an email from your advisers or coaches, etc.) I will not make exceptions, for to do so is to reward unprofessional behavior as well as to give one student an advantage over the others. I suggest that you get your work done and done on time.
* Emailing the instructor: Please only email me through ***UvaCollab***; *I am not responsible for answering email sent through ‘webmail,’* as it can easily get lost amidst other emails I receive. While I may not always be able to answer emails immediately, I will make every effort to answer your email as quickly as possible. If you have not received a response from me within 24 hours, you can assume I did not receive your correspondence.
* Twitter: If you do not already have a Twitter account, please go to <https://twitter.com/> to sign up for one and request to follow me @kralaw; I will disseminate information through Twitter as well as UvaCollab. Don’t worry! I will not follow you.
* **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY** : Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of University. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF' (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the University. As students studying communications, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own, AKA [Milli Vanilli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wikki/Milli_Vanilli)). The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at:

<http://www.virginia.edu/onmyhonor/honorNetscape.html>

Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with me. Please remember, once a matter has been referred to Academic Integrity, it is out of my hands and there is no dropping the issue.

* Disability access: UVA welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Student Disability Access Office, located in the Elson Student Health Center, and at 434.243.5180 or sdac@virginia.edu For further information regarding SCAC, please visit their web site at

<http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/sdac/sdac.html>

Should you have the need for reasonable academic adjustments, you should notify me as

early in the semester as possible.

**Course Schedule**

**PART I.**

**Week 1: August 22-August 26**

***Introduction to Political Economy of Communications***

**Lectures:**

Introduction, course syllabus

Defining Political Economy of Communications

Theories of Communications

**Readings:**

Syllabus

Watch: Edward Bernays and the Art of Public Manipulation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiKMmrG1ZKU>

**Week 2: August 30-September 2**

***Wealth, Power, and Class in the U.S.***

**Lectures:**

Manufacturing Consent

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal Critiques

Net Neutrality

**Readings:**

[Domhoff, W., (2010). Class domination theory of power. Who Rules America?](http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/class_domination.html)

Sweezy. The Triumph of Financial Capitalism

<http://monthlyreview.org/1994/06/01/the-triumph-of-financial-capital/>

[Stiglitz, J. (2011, May). Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%. Vanity Fair.](https://cms.psu.edu/section/content/default.asp?WCI=pgDisplay&WCU=CRSCNT&ENTRY_ID=A88AD4D3BB784E56B849EA3BCC61B95)

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105>

Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent

<http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/Manufacturing_Consent.html>

**Week 3: September 5-September 9**

***Media in Democracy***

**Lectures:**

How Democracy is supposed to work

How Democracy is working

Effects on Democracy/The Election

**Readings:**

Fraser, N. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy

Who owns the Press?

<http://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart>

Watch: Media, Inside Story

**Week 4: September 12-September 16**

***U.S. Commercial Media: Historical Perspective***

**Lectures:**

Media Regulation

Media Deregulation

The Telecommunications Act of 1996

**Readings:**

Corocan, M. (2016) Democracy in Peril.

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/34789-democracy-in-peril-twenty-years-of-media-consolidation-under-the-telecommunications-act>

 [Croteau, D. & Hoynes, W. (2005). Media, markets and the public sphere. The Business of the Media. Pine Forge Press (Chapter 1).](https://cms.psu.edu/section/content/Default.asp?WCI=pgDisplay&WCU=CRSCNT&ENTRY_ID=71CB3AB767A74AAD9B8E0100E4B049AE) ANGEL

**Week 5: September 19-September 23**

***Structure: (BIG) Media Ownership***

**Lectures:**

Big Media Ownership and Structure

Big Media Ownership Structure and Content

Big Media Ownership Structure and News Coverage

**Readings:**

Bagdikian, B. (2004). “Common Media for an Uncommon Nation” and “The Big Five”

in *The new media monopoly.* Boston: Beacon.

Becker, J. (25 June, 2007). Murdoch, ruler of a vast empire, reaches out for even more, *New York Times.* <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/business/media/25murdoch.html>

Shah, A. (2009). Media Conglomerates

<http://www.globalissues.org/article/159/media-conglomerates-mergers-concentration-of-ownership>

**Week 6: September 26-September 30**

***Commercial Media: Business Strategy***

**Lectures:**

**Watch:**

The Collision of Consumerism and Journalism

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/collision-journalism-consumerism/>

**Readings:**

Media Giants at

[**http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/giants/**](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/giants/)

**Extra Credit 1 Assignment Opens**

**Week 7: October 3-October 7**

**Reading Day October 4**

**Exam 1: Thursday October 6**

**Week 8: October 10-October 14**

***Advertising: Media’s Structure & Content***

**Lectures:**

Advertising: Functions and Effects

The Political Economy of Consumer Culture

Cause Marketing and the Citizen Consumer

**Readings:**

McAllister, M.P. (1996). “Advertising’s External and Internal Control” in *The commercialization of American culture: New*

The hidden costs of consumer cause marketing, at

<http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_hidden_costs_of_cause_marketing>

**Week 9: October 17-October 21**

***Corporate Media, Journalism, and War Coverage***

**Lectures:**

Corporate Profiles

Rubric

Tips

Media and War

Message Force Multipliers

**Readings:**

Nichols J. & McChesney R. (18 March, 2009). “The death and life of great American newspapers,” *The Nation*

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090406/nichols_mcchesney?rel=hp_picks>

Barstow, D. (20 April, 2008). “Behind TV analysts, Pentagon’s hidden hand.” *The New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/us/20generals.html?_r=1&ex=1366344000&en=196b27df83cc255c&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&page>

Watch Independent Media in a Time of War

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/independent-media-in-a-time-of-war/>

**Week 10: October 24-October 28**

***Terrorism and the Media***

**Lectures:**

The Nature of Terrorism

Terrorism in the Media

Psychology of Mass Mediated Fear

ISIL

**Readings:**

**Week 11: October 21-November 4**

****

**Readings:**

Snow, N. Media, Terrorism, and the Politics of Fear

Wired (2015). Why ISIS is winning the Social Media War

<https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>

**Week 12**: **November 7-November 11**

**Lectures:**

**Exam Review**

**Exam II, Thursday November 10**

**Week 13: November 14-November 18**

***Media and the Culture Industry***

**Lectures:**

The Culture Industry and “commercial artifacts”

Media and Music

**Readings:**

Bettig, R. & Hall, J. (2004) “Media Concentration and Culture: The Movie and Music Industries,” Chapter 3 in *Big Media, Big Money*.

Meehan, Ch. 4, “*Star Trek,* Synergy, and the Transindustrialization of Tribbles”

**Week 14: November 21-November 25**

**, November 23**

**No Class November 24**

**Lectures:**

Watch: Consuming Kids

[*http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/consuming-kids/*](http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/consuming-kids/)

**Extra Credit II Opens**

****

**Week 16: December 5- December 9**

**Lectures**

Exam Review

Exam Q&A

Course Wrap Up

**Classes end December 6**

****

IMPORTANT DATES

There are 3 Exams and 1 Critical Analysis Paper

Exams:

**Thursday October 6**

**Thursday November 10**

**Final: Thursday December 15, 2-5**

Final Paper

**Friday December 16**

***\*The instructor reserves the right to make alterations to this syllabus\****