

# Sociology of Television & Media

SOCL 299  
Fall 2010  
TTH 12:30pm-1:45pm  
Swords 302  
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## I. OVERVIEW

This course investigates the evolving role of television in shaping our understanding of, and relationship to, the world. Our inquiry will focus on the economic, political, social, and ecological implications of television as it relates to democracy, consumerism, human relationships, and how we make sense of the world both as individuals and as a society. More specifically, we'll be examining the nature of entertainment, advertising, news, and the institutions that create television programming. How does the news shape reality? How does advertising actually influence human behavior? How does entertainment impact how we perceive our own lives? Who decides what program choices exist on television? The course will emphasize deep reading, critical thinking, a variety of audio/video materials, in-depth research, and the development of a resource- and skill-set that will allow you to further your critical consumption of television on your own.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Achieve a basic understanding of the national and global social transformation resulting from the evolution of television and related mass media.
2. Grasp the many complexities and contradictions that television and related mass media bring to our ability to distinguish the difference between fantasy and reality.
3. Gain the ability to think critically about the creation, distribution, and both intended and unintended consequences of television and related mass media on a macro and micro level.
4. Acquire the skills necessary to parse out the economic, political, cultural, and environmental impacts of our modern television news, entertainment, and advertising.

## IIIa. REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. *Amusing Ourselves To Death* by Neil Postman – Penguin – (1985) 2005.
2. *The Culture of Fear* by Barry Glassner – Perseus – 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed – (1999) 2010.
3. *Unspun* by Brooks Jackson et al – Random House – 1<sup>st</sup> Ed – 2007.
4. *How to Watch Television News* by Neil Postman et al – Penguin – Rev Ed – (1992) 2008.
5. *Media Literacy* by James Potter – Sage – 5<sup>th</sup> Ed – (2000) 2010.
6. *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* by Nicholas Abercrombie - Penguin - 5th Ed – 2006.
7. [DVD] *Sociology of Television & Media Course Videos (to be issued in class)*

## IIIb. RECOMMENDED READINGS

8. *Mediated* by Thomas De Zengotita – Bloomsbury - 2006.
9. *Manufacturing Consent* by Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky- Pantheon – 2002.
10. *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* by Jerry Mander – Harper Perennial – 1978.
11. *The Problem of the Media* by Robert McChesney – Monthly Review – 2004.
12. *The Medium is the Massage* by Marshall McLuhan - Ginko – 2005.
13. *Born to Buy* by Juliet Schor - Scribner – 2005.
14. *The McDonaldization of Society* by George Ritzer - Sage – 2007.

#### IV. INSIGHT-QUESTION CARDS

In lieu of weekly response papers, I've decided to create a much more efficient assignment that will allow you to: keep up with the readings, get credit for your hard work outside of class, and facilitate class discussion on any given day. It should only take you 10 minutes to prepare, twice a week, and it should allow you to focus more specifically on the ideas in class that speak to you.

In brief, for every class, you will bring in a 3X5 card with your name, the class day (WEEK #3 – Thursday), and an *insight* gained from the readings/videos on the front (1-2 sentences). You'll also include one *question* sparked by the readings/videos on the back. What you write is completely up to you. You will hand these in at the end of every class period. They will not be returned to you, but I will give overall feedback to the class on the quality of the cards and am happy to help you improve your own IQ cards upon request during office hours. At the end of the semester, I will assess the quantity (50%) and quality (50%) of the IQ cards you've handed in to determine a fair grade for your work on them. Your IQ cards will count for 10% of your final grade.

#### V. MICRO EXPERIMENTS

On ten days of class strewn throughout the semester, you will be assigned a micro experiment to perform on your own. Each of these experiments is designed to illuminate some aspect of television and media that cannot be effectively understood through reading, listening, or watching documentaries. Not every experiment will bear the same results for each of you, but they are designed to maximize your ability to think critically about fundamental issues in the field. It is important to note that you should ALWAYS do the experiments BEFORE the readings/videos for that week, otherwise the experiments may well fail.

Each of the micro experiments should only take you 30-45 minutes to complete, including the time that it takes to write up the insights you gained by doing the experiment on a 4X6 card. Make sure that you write your name on the card, experiment number, and that you fill at least one side completely with your insights. Each week these cards will be returned with either a ✓+ (exceptional work), ✓ (good work), ✓- (acceptable work), or 0 (unacceptable work). I will give overall feedback to the class on the quality of the experiment cards and am happy to help you improve your own experiment cards upon request during office hours. Your micro experiment cards will count for 10% of your final grade.

#### VI. ASSIGNED OFFICE HOURS

On one of the 13 weeks of class, you will be required to attend my office hours for 10 minutes so that I can get to know you and gain a better understanding of how the class is going for you. You may bring in specific questions or topics to discuss, but it is not mandatory to do so. Your office hour visit will count for 1/5 of your scholarly attitude score (2% of your final grade).

#### VII. SCHOLARLY ATTITUDE

Many college instructors evaluate a student's "participation" as one component of his or her total course grade. In this class, you will be evaluated on your "scholarly attitude." Having a "scholarly attitude" involves developing intellectual curiosity and a genuine engagement with the ideas presented in the course. Students with a scholarly attitude take the student role seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, bringing unsolicited materials to share that are directly relevant to the topics being covered, come early and/or stay late to raise their own questions about the material, and generally go above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities during lecture (iPods, texting, checking email, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with obtaining a particular grade in the course.



#### SAFE ZONE

This class respects all people regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, age, social class, religion, ethnicity, or ability.

I understand that some college classes do not lend themselves to the nurturing of your intellectual curiosity. The inclusion of a “scholarly attitude” score reflects my own commitment to cultivating a spirit of inquiry among my students. In other words, I promise to do my best to spark your interest in the course material. The points will be given out as follows: Excellent = 8, Very Good = 7, Good = 6, OK = 5, Fair = 4, Low = 3, Poor = 2, Unacceptable = 1, Nonexistent = 0. To receive anything above OK, you must stand out in my mind as having gone above and beyond the others in the class. Only one or two of you will receive the highest possible score. This will make up 8% of your grade. The other 2% comes from your assigned office hours. The total of the two make up 10% of your grade. Note that this score is not assessed along the typical grading scale – it is earned from the bottom up.

### VIII. MID TERM EXAM

In the middle of the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate your ability to apply your new found knowledge on a mid term exam that will cover all of the material presented up to that point, including lectures, discussions, experiments, readings and videos. It will be a very straight forward assessment of you total comprehension of the material including concept definitions, short answers, and essays. The week of the mid term exam, the class will include an overview of its structure, assessment criteria, and sample questions so that you will face no surprises on the day of the exam. The mid term exam will take place on October 21<sup>st</sup>. This exam will make up 20% of your grade.

### IX. RESEARCH PAPER

During the second half of the semester you will craft a research paper (5 page minimum, single-spaced, 10pt font) where you will investigate one aspect of the television universe using the conceptual frameworks that we discuss in class. You will be asked to utilize all high-quality sources (i.e. you cannot websites without my expressed permission) in your investigation. Details of this paper will be handed out at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> full week of class (Tuesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>), including examples of possible topics. This paper will make up 20% of your grade.

### X. FINAL EXAM

At the end of the semester, you will again be asked to demonstrate your ability to apply your knowledge on a final exam that will cover all of the material presented *after* the mid term exam. It will be a very straight forward assessment of you total comprehension of the material including concept definitions, short answers, and essays. The last weeks of class will include an overview of its structure, assessment criteria, and sample questions. On the day of the final exam, you **MUST** return your course DVD. The final exam will take place sometime between December 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. This exam will make up 30% of your grade.

### XI. GRADES

<i>Engagement</i>	>	Scholarly Attitude	10%
	>	IQ Cards	10%
<i>Analysis</i>	>	Micro Experiments	10%
	>	Research Paper	20%
<i>Comprehension</i>	>	Mid Term Exam	20%
	>	Final Exam	30%

### XII. COURSE POLICIES

Please note that late work will not be accepted except in the case of a medical/family emergency that must be verified with documentation. Make-up exams will not be offered. If you have any special requirements, please speak with me during the first week of class about possible accommodations. Attendance is not compulsory. Please come only if you are truly interested in learning about television and its impacts on society.

WEEK	DATE DUE	TOPIC	READINGS & MICRO EXPERIMENTS
0	THU Sept 2 <sup>nd</sup>		n/a
1	TUE Sept 7 <sup>th</sup>	<i>INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL THINKING &amp; MEDIA LITERACY</i>	Perry – Stages of Critical Thinking Plato – The Allegory of the Cave Hardin – The Tragedy of the Commons MICRO EXPERIMENT 1: Personal Narrative
	THU Sept 9 <sup>th</sup>		Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Introduction, Foreward Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapters 1,2 Media Education Foundation – 10 Reasons
2	TUE Sept 14 <sup>th</sup>		<i>SOCIAL THEORY: TELEVISION &amp; MEDIA</i>
	THU Sept 16 <sup>th</sup>	Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Chapters 1-5	
3	TUE Sept 21 <sup>st</sup>	<i>OWNERSHIP &amp; ORGANIZATION: PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE</i>	Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapters 7,16 MICRO EXPERIMENT 3: Watching The Watchers
	THU Sept 23 <sup>rd</sup>		McChesney – The Problem of the Media VIDEO – <i>PBS Frontline: Merchants of Cool</i> VIDEO – <i>The Corporation: Media Ownership</i> VIDEO – <i>The Dana Carvey Show: Ep 2</i> (both)
4	TUE Sept 28 <sup>th</sup>	<i>ECONOMICS: ADVERTISING &amp; CONSUMPTION</i>	Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapter 13 VIDEO – <i>The Corporation: Basic Training</i> VIDEO – <i>TV Nation: Avon in the Amazon</i> MICRO EXPERIMENT 4: Ad World
	THU Sept 30 <sup>th</sup>		Media Education Foundation – Advertising Exposure Media Education Foundation – Deconstructing an Advertisement VIDEO – Commercials 1,2,3
5	TUE Oct 5 <sup>th</sup>	<i>POLITICAL SPHERES OF INFLUENCE</i>	Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Chapters 8,9 VIDEO – <i>60 Minutes: It's the People, Stupid</i> (both)
	THU Oct 7 <sup>th</sup>		<b>Jackson &amp; Jamieson – <i>Unspun</i></b>

**FALL BREAK**

6	TUE Oct 19 <sup>th</sup>	<i>PART I WRAP-UP &amp; REVIEW</i>	<i>[course questions]</i>
	THU Oct 21 <sup>st</sup>		<b>*** MIDTERM EXAM ***</b>
7	TUE Oct 26 <sup>th</sup>	<i>REALITY: UNDERSTANDING THE NEWS</i>	Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Chapter 7 Postman & Powers – <i>How to Watch TV News</i> : Chapters 1-6  MICRO EXPERIMENT 5: News World
	THU Oct 28 <sup>th</sup>		Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Ch 10 Postman & Powers – <i>How to Watch TV News</i> : Chapters 7-13
8	TUE Nov 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>REALITY: DECONSTRUCTING THE NEWS</i>	Glassner – <i>The Culture of Fear</i> : Intro x2, Chapters 1,2 Media Education Foundation – Video News Releases  MICRO EXPERIMENT 6: Deconstructing The News
	THU Nov 4 <sup>th</sup>		Glassner – <i>The Culture of Fear</i> : Chapters 8,9,10  AUDIO – <i>On The Media</i>
9	TUE Nov 9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>FANTASY: ENTERTAINMENT &amp; THE OTHER</i>	Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapter 11  MICRO EXPERIMENT 7: Entertainment World
	THU Nov 11 <sup>th</sup>		VIDEO – <i>The Truth About Lies: The Tube Is Reality</i> VIDEO – <i>Beauty Mark: Creating the Ideal</i> VIDEO – <i>Race, The Power of an Illusion: Real &amp; Unreal</i> (both)
10	TUE Nov 16 <sup>th</sup>	<i>FANTASY: ENTERTAINMENT &amp; VIOLENCE</i>	Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapter 19 VIDEO – <i>Tough Guise: Violence, Media &amp; Masculinity</i> VIDEO – <i>Columbine News Story &amp; Gun Store</i>  MICRO EXPERIMENT 8: Life & Death
	THU Nov 18 <sup>th</sup>		VIDEO – <i>Faces of the Enemy</i> VIDEO – <i>The Fog of War</i>
11	TUE Nov 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>THE REALITY VS. FANTASY PROBLEM REVISITED</i>	Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Chapter 6,10 VIDEO – <i>The Corporation: Undercover Marketing</i>  MICRO EXPERIMENT 9: Watching Nothing

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

12	TUE Nov 30 <sup>th</sup>	<i>MEDIA ALTERNATIVES</i>	Potter – <i>Media Literacy</i> : Chapters 21,22 MICRO EXPERIMENT 10: Alternatives
	THU Dec 2 <sup>nd</sup>		Postman – <i>Amusing Ourselves To Death</i> : Chapter 11 VIDEO – <i>The Machine</i> VIDEO – <i>The Yes Men: Fake News &amp; Revealing Culture</i> VIDEO – <i>Culture Jam: CBC Rough Cuts Documentary</i>
13	TUE Dec 7 <sup>th</sup>	<i>RESEARCH EXCHANGE &amp; REVIEW</i>	<b>*** RESEARCH PAPER DUE ***</b>
	THU Dec 9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>CLASS WRAP-UP</i>	n/a

	TBA	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	
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*All full-length books and videos/films are noted in bold along with major assignments.*