

COMM 101H

UNDERSTANDING MASS MEDIA HONORS SYLLABUS

Spring Semester 2006

Westchester Community College

COMM 101H **Understanding Mass Media-Honors** **3 credits**

Study of the impact of American mass media on American culture and on the cultures of other nations. Students are asked to consider how mass media alter concepts of culture; and are encouraged to develop an understanding of the economic forces that influence and shape the media. An emphasis is placed on critical thinking in a seminar situation. Class hrs. 3.

Prerequisite: Approval by Honors Co-Directors. Offered spring semester.

5718 Wed 5:30-8:10 p.m. LIB 321

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TEXT: Richard Campbell, *Media and Culture 5*, Bedford/St. Martins, 2006.

Readings also will include class handouts, and it is recommended that students follow coverage of mass media issues in the news.

GOALS:

The course begins with the premise that, as citizens within a democracy and educated people within an "information society," we must have the critical tools to understand, analyze, and use our primary sources of information, entertainment, and, as some believe, even our spiritual enrichment--the mass media.

The Understanding Mass Media (Honors) course asks students to study the impact of American mass media on American culture in particular and on the cultures of other nations, to consider how the media alter the traditional elements of culture (customs, rituals, icons, and value systems), and to develop an understanding of the economic forces that influence and shape the media. An emphasis will be placed on critical thinking in a seminar setting.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will understand and will be able to explain the impact of mass media on individuals and how the media can replace the traditional elements of culture.
- Students will identify the values that are stressed by the popular culture of mass media.
- Students will develop the research techniques that will enable them to draw original conclusions about the cumulative effects of the mass media on individuals, society and the culture.
- Students will identify and explain the effects of the economic realities of the mass media.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate their findings and conclusions about the impact of mass media on individuals and cultures.

METHODS:

The class will include lectures, documentary analysis, discussions, and research projects to explore these topics. Grading of performance in the class and of understanding of course materials will include evaluation of writing assignments and class discussions.

PAPERS:

Well-documented critical analysis papers take the place of examinations in this class and will measure understanding of course materials as well as your ability to apply critical thinking to the readings, activities and assignments.

GRADES:

Grading for the class will be as follows:

Six Media Projects 60%

Final Exam 20%

Attendance and participation 20%

Grading Scale

A	90-100
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79

C	70-74
D	60-69
F	0-59

COURSE UNITS:

Mass Media and the Cultural Landscape

Mass Communication: A Critical Approach

Information and New Technology: Media at the Crossroads

Sounds and Images

Sound Recordings and Popular Music

Popular Radio and the Origins of Broadcasting

Television and the Power of Visual Culture

Cable and the Specialization of Television

Movies and the Impact of Images

Words and Pictures

Newspapers and the Rise of Modern Journalism

Magazines in the Age of Specialization

Books and the Power of Print

The Business of Mass Media

Advertising and Commercial Culture

Democratic Expression and the Mass Media

The Culture of Journalism: Values, Ethics and Democracy

Legal Controls and Freedom of Expression

MEDIA PROJECTS:

All Understanding Mass Media Honors students will prepare and briefly present six papers. Details to help you complete assignments will be provided early in the semester to provide you with sufficient preparation time to meet required deadlines.

Written presentations should follow standard manuscript form (see "Acceptable Papers" below) and comply with standards of effective essay writing (structure, substance, and style). Whenever research is done, the sources of information must be cited within the paper and listed at the end according to the MLA format. (The library can provide you with their "Documentation Style Sheet," which explains the correct MLA form for citing and listing sources.)

Media Projects Specifications

- Use a minimum of five sources to gain the information you need to accomplish a substantial presentation. Those sources may include interviews, documentaries and, where useful, the results of a survey you constructed and administered. (Note: not all projects are research-based and, therefore, this specification will not apply.)
- Internet sources must be from credible publications and clearly cited within your paper and listed in full at the end. Use the MLA form whenever citing sources and listing them.
- Sources must be balanced: demonstrate an effort to find valuable sources and to make careful use of each (rather than relying on only one or two with the others tacked on to meet the five source requirement).
- The paper will demonstrate the qualities of good writing: a) structured in a way to make the development and progression of your information supportive of a clear purpose; b) substantial in its use of significant information, details supportive of your own generalizations; c) presented in a style appropriate to a reading audience (suitable for publication), a style that shows respect for that audience and the subject you gathered. Your grade for each paper will be based on how well you handle these standards.
- Keep a copy; bring it to class. You may be asked to read or informally explain the project.
- Length of the project is best determined by the task you set for yourself. A rule of thumb, however, is 1000 words.

Meeting the deadline means submitting assignments at the start of the class on the due date. In the event of not being in class on the day the paper is due, you can meet the deadline by Emailing the paper to me in rich text format or as a word document before the start of class that same day; otherwise it will be considered past deadline. Emails with corrupted files, incorrect addresses, forgotten attachments, late delivery or any other problem will not excuse the paper from late penalties.

Up to one day (including weekends and holidays) late –one letter grade
 Up to two days late –two letter grades
 More than two days late –F

Acceptable form for all written projects:

- Papers must be typed on standard 8.5 x 11, white paper.
- Standard manuscript form must be used: margins, double spacing, room at top and bottom, page numbering beginning with page two of the text.
- The paper will have no cover page.

- Near the top, left corner, in this order, include the following information:

Your name
The assignment number
Course & Section #
Date

- Your first page will include a title that gives a specific indication of the paper's purpose (centered).
- Papers must be stapled in the upper left hand corner.
- Do not put papers in folders, plastic binders, etc.

Papers will be returned as unacceptable if:

- a. they do not comply with above;
- b. sources are not properly documented (MLA form);
- c. they do not comply with the assignment;
- d. errors and style problems obscure the content.

Plagiarism:

In the event that I suspect that a paper has been plagiarized, I will ask the writer to meet with me. If my suspicions are confirmed, the paper receives an F. Refer to the college catalogue for a definition of plagiarism.