

Sociology 366: Sociology of Media

Grand Valley State University

Spring 2011, 1118 ASH, M/W 12:00-3:20

Professor Marshall Battani, 2171 Au Sable Hall, 331-3726. battanim@gvsu.edu, Office Hours: MW 10:00am to 11:30am

Course Description. This course critically examines the production and consumption of mass media. The roles that mass media play in shaping values, ideology, and human interaction will be studied through examination of the economic and social organization of the mass media, media content, and the ways audiences interact with media. Part of Society and the Media theme.

Required Readings

Sutherland, Jean-Anne and Katherine Felty. 2010. Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
Articles and Chapters on Reserve

Course Objectives. **Describe** the role mediated images play in the social construction of reality. **Define and apply** theories of interpretation, active audiences, and media effects. **Identify** underlying values and ideologies of mass media culture. **Describe** the potentially productive and reproductive role of mass media. **Apply** sociological concepts to the analysis of mass media.

This course is part of the General Education Theme 3, "Society and Media." The mass media are more than the common currency of public and private discourse - indeed, even our internal discourse. But just as most of us rarely think about the air we breathe, so do we rarely think about the media that are our constant companion from the cradle. On those occasions when we do, it is frequently the most simplistic of terms: the media cause violence in society, a breakdown in morality, corruption of our political system, reduction in the public attention span. The reality, of course, is far more complex and subtle.

Mass media play a central role in developing and passing on culture, shaping attitudes and opinions, even creating the mythology by which individuals locate and identify themselves. They are also a powerful economic force, indispensable to modern society. This theme examines media from varying perspectives – social, psychological, political, economic, cultural and aesthetic – in order to help students develop intellectual tools to engage and critically interpret their content.

Theme Content Goals. Recognize the power of the media to affect and even create our perception of the world beyond our own experience. Become aware of the social, political, and economic implications of media production.

Theme Skills Goals. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking. To engage in articulate expression through effective writing. To think critically and creatively. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. To integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives.

Expectations. Expect to spend at least two hours working outside of class for every hour spent in class. For this course that means a minimum of twelve hours every week. Whether or not you actually do that is your choice; I will, however, grade your work as if you have.

Attendance. Missing a class session in the Sp/S semester is equivalent to missing over a week of class during a regular semester! Take responsibility for your own actions. Miss class and your course grade drops 1/3. Leaving class early is an absence. Two late arrivals to class equals an absence. If you miss class you are responsible for the material you missed. THIS INCLUDES VIEWING A FILM IF YOU ARE SO UNFORTUNATE AS TO MISS ONE. Appropriate documentation for missing class includes a doctor's note, towing receipt, police report, etc. No documentation? No excuse. **NOTE: Even an excused absence will negatively effect your discussion participation grade.**

If you miss class do not, under any circumstances, ask me if we did anything important that day.

Evaluation. Film Analyses (5): 25% of your grade. Discussion Participation: 30% of your grade. Midterm Exam: 22.5% of your grade. Final Exam: 22.5% of your grade.

Make-ups, Late Assignments, and Extra credit. The midterm can be made up in the case of VERIFIED serious medical or family emergency only.* Make-ups will take place immediately following the final exam. A Missed Final Exam cannot be made up. A situation grave enough to make you miss the final should qualify you for an incomplete according to University regulations. I do not reschedule exams or assignments for personal reasons. (This includes work, vacation, mission trips, etc.) **LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT.** No assignments for credit beyond those listed above will be given.

Disability Statement. If you have a disability that will require special accommodation(s) in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services. If you have already done so, you should have a letter that describes your specific needs and the necessary accommodations. Please bring that letter to my attention as soon as possible.

*If you are unsure whether your excuse for missing a class, exam, assignment, etc. is legitimate, assume that it is not.

	Monday	Wednesday
Week One:	05.09.11 Chap. 1, 2, and "How to Critique a Movie: Film: 8 Mile Film Discussion in relation to "How to.." and to set up analysis.....	05.11.11 Social Class and Inequality <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>2.1, 2.2, 2.3</u> <u>Media Magic (Mantsios)</u> Discussions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 Media Magic (Mantsios) <u>Film Analysis 1 Due</u>
Week Two:	05.16.11 Race and Ethnicity Chap. 3 Film: Crash Film Discussion <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>3.1, 3.2, 3.3</u> <u>Fences and Neighbors (Farley and Squires)</u> <u>Cowboys and Indians (Shively)</u>	05.18.11 Race and Ethnicity Discussions 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 Fences and Neighbors (Farley and Squires) Cowboys and Indians (Shively) <u>Film Analysis 2 Due</u>
Week Three:	05.23.11 Gender and Sexuality Chap. 4 Film: Bend it Like Beckham Film Discussion <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>4.1, 4.2, 4.3</u> <u>Cheerleading (Grindstaff)</u>	05.25.11 MIDTERM EXAM In-class analysis of Week 3 film drawing from all readings so far (Race, Class, and Gender)
Week Four:	05.30.11 MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY	06.01.11 Work and Family Chap. 5 Film: Office Space Film Discussion <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>5.1, 5.2</u> <u>Emotion Work (Hochschild)</u>
Week Five:	06.06.11 Work and Family Discussions 5.1, 5.2 Emotion Work (Hochschild) <u>Film Analysis 3 Due</u>	06.08.11 Global Connections Chap. 6 Film: Redacted Film Discussion <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>6.1, 6.2</u> <u>Construction of Arabs as Enemies (Merskin)</u>
Week Six:	06.13.11 Global Connections Discussions 6.1, 6.2 Construction of Arabs as Enemies (Merskin) <u>Film Analysis 4 Due</u>	06.15.11 Social Change and Environment Chap. 7 Film: Manufactured Landscapes Film Discussion <u>Submit statements and questions for:</u> <u>7.1, 7.2</u> <u>The Nature of Future Myths (Podeschi)</u>
	06.20.11 Social Change and Environment Discussions 7.1, 7.2 The Nature of Future Myths (Podeschi) <u>Film Analysis 5 Due</u>	Wednesday 06.22.10 FINAL EXAM Watch film and write an analysis drawing from appropriate course material.

Sociology 366: Sociology of Media

Grand Valley State University

Spring 2011, 1118 ASH, M/W 12:00-3:20

Professor Marshall Battani, 2171 Au Sable Hall, 331-3726. battanim@gvsu.edu, Office Hours: TBA

* The following is adapted from Schaible, Robert and Rhodes, Gale. 1992. "Talking students, listening teachers: A user's manual for student-led discussion." *Issues & Inquiry in College Teaching & Learning*, 15, 44, 1992

Course Format:

The goals of this course will be met as students learn to form, articulate, and defend opinions in open discussion. Students develop their opinions as they analyze and criticize the texts and as they search for concepts, issues, and themes that connect the texts and the films viewed this semester.

The format, in brief, is as follows. All students prepare for each discussion as if they plan to serve as discussion leader. Obviously, a student who prepares to lead discussion is well prepared to participate. Then at the beginning of each class, I pick a discussion leader and two supporters at random and turn the class over to the students: I do not contribute to discussion until near the end of the discussion period. Instead, I listen, attempting to learn the students' level of understanding of the material, and to see which issues are of compelling interest to them. Near the midpoint of the period, I enter the discussion, but do not take it over. I try to take advantage of what I heard in the first half in order to help students attain a deeper understanding of the material and to make connections across the breadth of the course. In shaping discussions around the issues of genuine interest to students, I aim to bolster their confidence that they can read and analyze complex material on their own.

Rules:

I. At the beginning of the semester

- 1) Purchase all the books and materials for the course. The order of topics in the syllabus may change, so texts scheduled for use later in the semester may be assigned earlier.
- 2) Read the syllabus and course guidelines carefully, listen to the faculty presentation on the first day of class, and ask questions to be sure you understand the course format. You are expected to participate at some meaningful level in class discussions. If you are uneasy about this requirement and tempted to drop, please stick around for two or three discussions. You will probably find them less frightening than you anticipate.

II. Before statements and discussion questions are due

- 1) Read and study the assignment.
- 2) Formulate and write down four or five discussion questions based upon the assigned reading. These will be submitted – typed, double spaced. Keep a copy for yourself
- 3) On the assumption that you will lead the day's discussion, write a brief (less than 5-minute) opening statement about the assignment. Your statement should set the stage for, and end by raising, one or more of your discussion questions. This will be submitted – typed, single spaced. Keep a copy for yourself

III. During discussion sessions

- 1) Listen to the introduction by the designated discussion leader and consider the discussion question(s) or issue(s) he or she raises.
- 2) Discuss the issues raised, keeping to the subject of the readings, attempting -- preferably in this order -- to analyze, criticize, and connect:
 - a) Analyze the readings to gain a deeper understanding of difficult concepts, examples, the author's position, and the author's arguments.
 - b) Criticize the readings, articulating and defending personal opinions about the adequacy of the author's presentation and arguments.
 - c) Connect the issues you have analyzed and criticized to material of previous assignments in order to discern broader themes, similar concepts, and comparable or contrasting opinions.
- 3) As you participate, make good use of the text, at times calling attention to specific passages relevant to the issue at hand. When working with such a passage, allow time for others in the class to locate it and then read it aloud.
- 4) Ignore faculty during their period of enforced silence. Direct your attention to other students and regard faculty as recording secretaries on hand to take down information for use later in discussion.
- 5) Continue the student-led discussion with the same goals after faculty have joined in, using the faculty as needed to provide examples, explanations, and/or alternative positions.
- 6) Take brief notes of points and examples that deepen your understanding; opinions that differ from your own; and arguments that you find helpful, convincing, or worth trying to refute. These notes may be useful when you want to contribute to

discussion, when you formulate study questions for subsequent classes, or when you write papers. Do not, however, allow note-taking to cause you to lose the thread of the discussion.

IV. After class

A. Students (in groups of acquaintances, if possible)

Spend a few minutes reflecting on the preceding discussion, perhaps jotting down notes (or amplifying notes made in class) of points that increased your understanding of the readings, and that may be useful in preparing for the next discussion or writing the next paper. Especially, take note of arguments that interested or surprised you.

How to Lead a Discussion:

Most students have never led a discussion. It is normal to be somewhat fearful about your first try. Most of us (including teachers) are afraid we'll be embarrassed by saying something wrong, being contradicted, or running out of things to say. Here are some suggestions to help you overcome your fears, prepare, get the discussion started, and sustain it. These suggestions apply specifically to the kinds of discussions I wish to have in this course, but you may find them useful any time you are faced with leading a discussion group.

Preparing

To lead a discussion, you must be familiar with the assigned material. "Familiar with" is, I believe, just the right phrase. You need not have mastered the material; after all, a goal of discussion is to move everyone towards mastery, that is, to improve everyone's (even the leader's) understanding. To prepare for discussion (leadership or participation), first read and study the assignment, underlining the more important or interesting points, and making notes in the margins. Then think about and write down some of the main issues that the author raises and a few questions pertinent to the issues. (Examples: 1) The author is trying to show how indirect our knowledge is. How does the author support this contention? 2) The author is explaining how evolution produces new traits. How do new traits appear? Explain the specific examples she uses. 3) This is a novel about the breakdown of a marriage. What factors contribute to its failure?

If you can come up with a handful of questions, you're in good shape. Remember, everyone else in the class is formulating such questions: you can take advantage of their work to make your job easier. (More on this later.)

But what if you are not asked to lead? Is this work wasted? Certainly not; you are now very well prepared to participate as someone else leads. With everyone prepared to lead, everyone is also prepared to discuss, and lively discussions will almost always ensue.

Getting Started

Class has started and your name has been selected. How do you begin? Simply clear your throat and read (or better, present) your prepared statement. End by asking the first question or asking for discussion of the first issue on your list. Before you know it, the hard part -- getting started -- is done.

One word of caution: Start out on a positive note. Avoid beginning with an apology for being poorly prepared or for finding the reading difficult. Treat the day's topic as having real value. Openers like "I didn't get much out of this" or "I don't agree with anything the author said" will stifle, rather than promote, discussion. If you treat the readings as worthwhile, your classmates will follow your lead, join you in examining the day's assignment, and thus make your job easier.

Sustaining Discussion

Discussions, like sleepy horses, need some urging to keep them moving. A discussion leader can often keep things moving with only modest prodding, giving the class its head when things are going well. Of course, if you can contribute something useful, do so; but other kinds of comments or actions on your part can sustain the discussion just as well as an injection of insight. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Get students to talk to each other. Ask for a response to the most recent comments. (Anyone have a response to Clara's opinion?) Or ask a specific student to respond. (Clara, do you agree with Ralph?)
- 2) Get students to defend or explain their opinions. (Marvin why do you say that? What's your evidence or reasoning?)
- 3) Encourage an exploration of differing points of view. When you hear conflicting views, point them out and get the holders of those views to discuss their differences. Perhaps ask a third person to sum up the two positions.
- 4) Keep the class on the subject. If you are even halfway familiar with the material, you know when the discussion is no longer connected to it. Just say so. ("We've gotten pretty far from the readings; let's get back on the subject.") Or simply consult your list of questions. Any sensible response to one of your questions is bound to be pertinent.
- 5) Point to a particular passage in the text relevant to a comment made by one person, or to a discussion among several. This might be a passage that challenges, or sums up and confirms, the views being expressed.
- 6) Don't fill every silence with your own voice. Any discussion will lapse occasionally. It is not your job as leader to avoid all silence. Some quiet periods are productive. Students who are not so quick to speak will frequently get the chance they need when others are quiet. If the silence gets too heavy, take advantage of the other students' lists of questions. (Ginny, give us one of the questions you brought to class.)

Remember, as discussion leader you do not have to be the brains of the whole outfit. You are not expected to know it all; the class is full of students who have read the same assignment that you read. Your job is to give them a chance to talk about it and thus give others the benefits of their thinking. On the other hand, if any one student begins to do all the talking, gently correct this problem by bringing other students into the discussion. You are there to steer, to keep the beast reasonably near the center of the path, by pulling a rein when needed, by loosening the reins when it keeps to the trail, by reining it in when it threatens to gallop away to greener subjects. If students are talking to each other about the reading material, things are going well; relax, listen, and contribute when you can.

The Goals of Discussion

Discussion should lead to two results. First, we want analysis and clarification of the material. What is the author saying? What is the author's intended meaning of key words in the text? What is fact and what is the author's opinion? With what evidence does the author support opinions?

Second, we want response to, and criticism of, the author's work. What do you think of the author's opinion? Is the evidence or reasoning convincing? What other opinions are possible? Compare your opinion with that of the author. What connections (harmonies or conflicts) do you find between this author's ideas and those of other thinkers we have studied?

It is best to attack these two tasks, analysis and criticism, in the order described; after all, we must understand possible readings of the work before I can properly respond or criticize. As discussion leader, you will find that students want to express opinions before doing anything else. Keep pulling the class toward clarification of the readings. The more you accomplish here, the more meaningful and pertinent the criticisms and other responses will be. To reiterate, the discussion will swing naturally toward opinion, just as the horse turns naturally toward home. Keep pulling toward clarification (What does the author mean by...? What is a possible reading of...?) and you will achieve good balance between analysis and criticism.

Finally, we want you to enjoy the discussions. Keep this in mind whenever differences of opinion arise. It's okay to defend your beliefs, but it is also okay to be wrong, to concede a point, to change your mind. A mind that never changes is about as useful as a window stuck in one position. The main object of argument is not to win, but to know the pleasure of real thinking and learning.