

SYLLABUS

FALL 2021

COM 520 Media Studies

Department of Communication Studies
Harrington School of Communication and Media
University of Rhode Island

Instructor

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Focus of the Course

This course introduces students to the study of digital media, mass media and popular culture by examining media texts, institutions, audiences, and effects. This semester, we focus on contemporary propaganda in the context of the Internet and social media.

Time/Location

This is a blended class that includes both face-to-face (F2F) and online learning components. Our first meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 8, but after that, the regular weekly meeting will be held Tuesdays, 6 – 8:45 p.m. Classroom location: Davis 107. Course hashtag: #COM520.

Instructor Office Hours, Location

Tuesdays, 4 - 6 p.m. and by appointment. Online or On-Campus: Davis 107. Schedule a meeting: <https://calendly.com/hobbs-2/2021-calendar>

Digital Platforms

- *Public-facing website:* <https://medium.com/media-studies-com520>. Students establish a Medium account to publish their work for this course, submitting work to the Media Studies COM520 publication.
- *Learning Management System:* Pathwright for [Assignments, Readings, and Activities](#). All course content and learning activities are hosted on the Pathwright LMS. You will receive an invitation to this LMS via email. We do not use Brightspace.
- *WikiEdu:* Join the [WikiEdu dashboard for Media Studies COM 520](#). Passcode: ugshpqmo

WHY TAKE THIS COURSE?

Rationale

All around the world, people participate in media culture by listening to music, watching television and movies, using social media, playing videogames, and learning about current

events. But few people understand the complex institutions, policy and governance structures, and psychological processes that shape what we read, watch, see, listen to and play.

Media studies is an interdisciplinary field with a focus on media texts, industries, and audiences. Scholars use a variety of different methodologies and approaches to understand complex phenomenon like fake news, and each of these approaches has strengths and limitations that embody the limits of human knowledge and understanding. The research process is a journey of discovery, where through the creative combination of ideas, new insights emerge.

The study of media has moved from its early roots in the interdisciplinary examination of the arts, culture and current events towards more disciplinary and professional study of media forms (including book and magazine publishing, journalism and news media, advertising and public relations, narrative and non-narrative film, popular music, videogames, the Internet and social media). Critical examination of media institutions, representations and ideologies has advanced an understanding of power relationships in relation to economic, political, and cultural issues.

All around the world, growing concern about data protection, privacy, ethics, and infringements of public liberties have increased government attention to inequalities and discrimination. New forms of propaganda by cyber-racists can undermine the value of racial equality and wreak havoc on democratic ideals. Propaganda is personalized through the practice of influence marketing as influencers establish a sense of authenticity through the representation of the intimate and private self, adopting techniques to show equality and commonality with audiences. As media usage is completely intertwined with intimate social relationships in networked society, people need strategies to shield themselves from subtle forms of coercion. A deeper understanding of the meaning and scope of the First Amendment and an appreciation for the appropriate role of media regulation is needed to balance the interests of free expression and social responsibility. To support these efforts, media literacy education must evolve to help people understand how media texts, audiences, systems, actions, and institutions intertwine in ways that create conditions for propaganda to thrive.

Learning Outcomes

These learning outcomes are expected for every participant. You will:

Gain Knowledge

1. Learn about some key theoretical concepts from the arts and social sciences that have contributed to the disciplinary tradition of media studies;
2. Examine the historical development of propaganda and technology, with attention to the relationship between texts, audiences, and institutions;
3. Understand how media researchers advance knowledge through inquiry.

Develop Research and Communication Competencies

5. Advance reading, research and writing skills by gathering, accessing and evaluating information using print and online materials, including reference books, professional and scholarly publications, reports, and web content;

6. Develop production, performance and self-expression competencies through creating media in a variety of written, oral, digital and multimedia productions.
7. Strengthen collaboration, creativity and critical thinking skills through activities that require the synthesis of divergent ideas, information, and concepts;
8. Deepen reflective awareness of the role of media and technology in your own life.

COURSE DESIGN

Educational Philosophy

This course is based on the assumption that (1) learners are engaged and self-directed, able to make strategic choices in order to maximize all available learning opportunities. Another key assumption of this class is that (2) people learn best by creating media as a way to learn. A final assumption of this course is that (3) reflection is an essential component of learning that can be activated through social interaction in a challenging and supportive community where there are high levels of respect and trust. For the best learning environment possible, we will depend on every student to respect and engage with these fundamental design principles.

Seminar + Open Network Learning

All learning is social learning. The design for this course builds upon the seminar model combined with an open network learning environment. A seminar is a form of discussion-based learning where inquiry is used to explore a set of readings and other course materials. An open-network learning environment enables learners to participate in creative and collaborative endeavors as part of the learning process. In this course, you will develop ideas and creative projects, and connect to people, resources, and tools in an open and transparent way. All work you create for this course will be designed for public audiences.

Format of the Course

Each Tuesday, a Learning Path will open and academic work is expected to be completed by the following Tuesday. There will be a mix of F2F online learning using Zoom video conferencing.

Technology Competencies for Academic Work

Learning new technology tools is a part of the practice of digital and media literacy education. But we all don't begin with the same kinds or levels of skill. In this class, everyone learns from everyone. You can learn from others and teach others by supporting your peers as a helper, coach, mentor, colleague, collaborator, and critic. Each of these roles promotes learning.

ASSIGNMENTS

On the Pathwright LMS, the instructor will provide a specific description of the assignments with expectations and criteria for evaluation.

Create to Learn (400 points)

Each week, a Create to Learn activity is offered. Complete 4 activities over the course of the semester to demonstrate your learning through creating infographics, slideshows, podcasts, and other forms of media. Share your work on your Medium website and submit it for publication to the course Medium website. Create to Learn activities are due on the date shown in the syllabus below.

Wikipedia Project (200 points)

To demonstrate your understanding of the topics and issues explored in this class, each student will contribute original content to Wikipedia to improve public understanding of a particular topic of interest. You may choose to create a new Wikipedia entry or substantially revise an existing entry. This assignment is designed to strengthen research skills, improve your digital and media literacy skills, advance your sense of digital citizenship, and help you become more socially and culturally aware of underrepresentation and other content gaps stemming from bias. [Details about this assignment are located on the class WikiEdu dashboard.](#) These are the key stages of the project:

1. Evaluate the quality of a Wikipedia entry
2. Compose a new Wikipedia entry or substantially revise an existing one
3. Review and offer feedback on the work of a peer

Final Paper or Project (300 points)

Write an academic paper (15 – 20 pages) to advance your own ideas and arguments, building upon your Wikipedia research. You may choose any format or style of academic writing (literature review, essay, critical review, report, research proposal, etc.). With permission of the instructor, you may compose a video, multimedia, or podcasting project. All students create a 2-minute teaser video to promote the work. You submit your work via your Medium website, submitting your Final Project to the class Medium publication.

Class Participation (100 points)

Evidence of active participation includes class attendance, threaded discussions, video and PDF annotation, and in-class large group and small group discussion.

NOTE: PhD students complete additional reading customized to meet their professional needs.

REQUIRED READINGS

These resources will be provided by the instructor.

Allied Media Project (2018). [People's Guide to AI.](#)

Crawford, K. (2008). These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media. In Gerard Goggin and Larissa Hjorth (Eds) *Mobile Technologies from Telecommunications to Media* (pp. 150-162). Routledge.

Daniels, J. (2009). Cloaked websites: propaganda, cyber-racism and epistemology in the digital era. *New Media & Society*, 11(5), 659-683.

DiMaggio, R. (2017). Chapter 3. Media bias. *The Politics of Persuasion: Economic Policy and Media Bias in the Modern Era*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

DiResta, R. (2020, September 20). [The supply of disinformation will soon be infinite.](#) *The Atlantic*.

DiResta, R., Shaffer, K., Ruppel, B., Sullivan, D., Matney, R., Fox, R., ... & Johnson, B. (2019). The tactics & tropes of the Internet Research Agency. New Knowledge.

Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, and K. Foot, *Media Technologies* (pp. 141 – 165). MIT Press.

Gustafsson, N., & Weinryb, N. (2020). The populist allure of social media activism: Individualized charismatic authority. *Organization*, 27(3), 431–440.

- Hobbs, R. (2020). Propaganda in an age of algorithmic personalization: Expanding literacy research and practice. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(3), 521-533.
- Hou, M. (2019). Social media celebrity and the institutionalization of YouTube. *Convergence*, 25(3), 534-553.
- Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2017). Educating for democracy in a partisan age: Confronting the challenges of motivated reasoning and misinformation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 3–34. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216679817>
- Kearse, S. (2020, June 15). The ghost in the machine. *The Nation*.
- Kraft, P. W., Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2015). Why people "don't trust the evidence": motivated reasoning and scientific beliefs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 658(1), 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214554758>
- Levi, L. (2020). Media literacy beyond the national security frame. *Utah Law Review* 4(2), 941-985.
- Lorenz, T. (2018, December 18). Rising Instagram stars are posting fake sponsored content. Atlantic.
- Lorenz, T. (2021, March 10). For creators, everything is for sale. *New York Times*.
- Marantz, A. (2020, April 17). Studying fascist propaganda by night, watching Trump's coronavirus updates by night. *The New Yorker*.
- Marantz, A. (2020, October 12). Why Facebook can't fix itself. *The New Yorker*.
- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.
- Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). Media manipulation and disinformation online. Data & Society Research Institute.
- Menand, L. (2020, November 16). Wikipedia, Jeopardy, and the fate of the fact. *The New Yorker*.
- Ouellette, L., & Gray, J. (2017). Introduction. In L. Ouellette, & J. Gray (Eds.), *Keywords for media studies*. New York University Press.
- Parks, L. (2020). Field mapping: What is the "media" of media studies? *Television & New Media*, 21(6), 642–649. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420919701>
- Parsons P. (2021). The lost doctrine: Suggestion theory in early media effects research. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 23(2):80-138. doi:10.1177/15226379211006119
- Pollitt, K. (2004, January 11). Webstalker. *The New Yorker*.
- Pooley, J. (2021). Suggestion theory across the disciplines: The history of communication research before communication research. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 23(2), 139-143.
- Reeve, E. (2017, March 25). Tay exposes the fairy tales we tell ourselves about racists. *New Republic*.
- Seaver, N. (2015). The nice thing about context is that everyone has it. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(7), 1101–1109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715594102>
- Sundermann, G. & Raabe, T. (2019). Strategic communication through social media influencers: Current state of research and desiderata. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13:4, 278-300, DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1618306
- Taylor, L. (2017). What is data justice? The case for connecting digital rights and freedoms globally. *Big Data & Society*, 4(2), 2053951717736335.
- Thompson, D. (2017, March 6). The clickbait presidency. *The Atlantic*.
- Ugland, E. (2019). Expanding media law and policy education: Confronting power, defining freedom, awakening participation. *Communication Law and Policy*, 24(2), 271-306.

Vetter, M. A., McDowell, Z. J., & Stewart, M. (2019). From opportunities to outcomes: The Wikipedia-based writing assignment. *Computers and Composition, 52*, 53–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.01.008>

Wharton-Michael, P. & Wharton-Clark, A. (2020). What is in a Google search? A qualitative examination of non-vaxxers' online search practices. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 21:1*, 10-20, DOI: 10.1080/17459435.2019.1680572

RECOMMENDED FILMS

The Hater (dir: Jon Komassa), 2020
Coded Bias (dir: Shalini Kantayya), 2020
Trust Me (dir: Roko Belic), 2020
This Changes Everything (dir: Tom Donohue), 2019

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Choose 1 or more:

Benjamin, R. (2019). *Race after technology*. Social Forces.
 Bernays, E. (2005/1928). *Propaganda*. Ig.
 Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda*. Vintage.
 Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the internet*. Yale University Press.
 Hobbs, R. (2020). *Mind over media*. WW Norton & Company.
 Postman, N. (1993). *Technopoly*. Vintage.
 Wu, T. (2017). *The attention merchants*. Vintage.
 Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. Profile.
 Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression*. New York University Press.
 Woolley, S. (2020). *The Reality Game*. Public Affairs.

Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to modification with fair notice.

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	CREATE TO LEARN ACTIVITY
Week 1 9/8	Introduction	Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, and K. Foot, <i>Media Technologies</i> (pp. 141 – 165). MIT Press. Allied Media Project (2018). <u>People’s Guide to AI</u> . Hobbs, R. (2020). Propaganda in an age of algorithmic personalization: Expanding literacy research and practice. <i>Reading Research Quarterly, 55</i> (3), 521-533.	Create a vlog to describe your love-hate relationship with algorithmic personalization

		Cooke, R. (2020, March). The last best place on the internet. <i>Wired</i> , 28.	
PART 1: FOUNDATIONS			
Week 2 9/14	Media Studies: Then and Now	<p>Parks, L. (2020). Field mapping: What Is the “media” of media studies? <i>Television & New Media</i>, 21(6), 642–649. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420919701</p> <p>Ouellette, L., & Gray, J. (2017). Introduction. In L. Ouellette, & J. Gray (Eds.), <i>Keywords for media studies</i>. New York University Press.</p> <p>Lorenz, T. (2018, December 18). <u>Rising Instagram stars are posting fake sponsored content.</u> Atlantic.</p>	Contribute 3 slides to a shared Google doc where you explain a keyword of interest.
9/21	The Intimate and the Ordinary in Mediated Contexts	<p>Pollitt, K. (2004, January 11). <u>Webstalker.</u> <i>The New Yorker</i>.</p> <p>Crawford, K. (2008). These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media. In Gerard Goggin and Larissa Hjorth (Eds) <i>Mobile Technologies from Telecommunications to Media</i> (pp. 150-162). Routledge.</p> <p>Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 13(1), 114-133.</p> <p>Seaver, N. (2015). The nice thing about context is that everyone has it. <i>Media, Culture & Society</i>, 37(7), 1101–1109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715594102</p> <p>Gustafsson, N., & Weinryb, N. (2020). The populist allure of social media activism: Individualized charismatic authority. <i>Organization</i>, 27(3), 431–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419828565</p>	Working with a partner, create a digital timeline of ideas to chart how these authors have explored the intimate and the ordinary in mediated contexts.
Week 3 9/28	Methodological Approaches to Fake News	<p>Thompson, D. (2017, March 6). <u>The clickbait presidency.</u> <i>The Atlantic</i>.</p> <p>DiMaggio, R. (2017). Chapter 3. Media bias. <i>The Politics of Persuasion: Economic Policy and</i></p>	Select one of the types of fake news on the EAVI chart and prepare a 3-page

		<p><i>Media Bias in the Modern Era</i>. Albany: State University of New York Press.</p> <p>Kraft, P. W., Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2015). Why people "don't trust the evidence": motivated reasoning and scientific beliefs. <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>, 658(1), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214554758</p> <p>Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2017). Educating for democracy in a partisan age: Confronting the challenges of motivated reasoning and misinformation. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 54(1), 3–34. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216679817</p> <p>Wharton-Michael, P. & Wharton-Clark, A. (2020). What is in a Google search? A qualitative examination of non-vaxxers' online search practices. <i>Qualitative Research Reports in Communication</i>, 21:1, 10-20, DOI: 10.1080/17459435.2019.1680572</p>	<p>overview of the concept, offering 3 key insights on the term, using 3 scholarly sources using different methodological approaches</p>
<p>Week 4 10/5</p>	<p>Examining Structures of Power</p>	<p>Ugland, E. (2019). Expanding media law and policy education: Confronting power, defining freedom, awakening participation. <i>Communication Law and Policy</i>, 24(2), 271-306.</p> <p>Marantz, A. (2020, October 12). <u>Why Facebook can't fix itself</u>. <i>The New Yorker</i>.</p>	<p>Produce an infographic that depicts the regulatory, structural, and power relationships in a media industry of your choice.</p>
<p>PART 2: PROPAGANDA: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE</p>			
<p>Week 5 10/12</p>	<p>Suggestion Theory</p>	<p>Parsons P. (2021). The lost doctrine: Suggestion theory in early media effects research. <i>Journalism & Communication Monographs</i>, 23(2):80-138. doi:10.1177/15226379211006119</p> <p>Pooley, J. (2021). Suggestion theory across the disciplines: The history of communication research before communication research. <i>Journalism & Communication Monographs</i>, 23(2), 139-143.</p> <p>DiResta, R. (2020, September 20). <u>The supply of disinformation will soon be infinite</u>. <i>The Atlantic</i>.</p>	<p>Create a 5-minute podcast to reflect on key ideas from the readings</p>

Week 6 10/19	Computational Propaganda	DiResta, R., Shaffer, K., Ruppel, B., Sullivan, D., Matney, R., Fox, R., ... & Johnson, B. (2019). The tactics & tropes of the Internet Research Agency. New Knowledge. Marantz, A. (2020, April 17). <u>Studying fascist propaganda by night, watching Trump's coronavirus updates by night.</u> <i>The New Yorker</i> .	View and discuss <i>The Hater</i> by Jon Komassa and write an essay about the film
Week 7 10/26	Post-Truth Epistemologies	Daniels, J. (2009). Cloaked websites: propaganda, cyber-racism and epistemology in the digital era. <i>New Media & Society</i> , 11(5), 659-683. Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). Media manipulation and disinformation online. <i>New York: Data & Society Research Institute</i> , 7-19. Reeve, E. (2017, March 25). <u>Tay exposes the fairy tales we tell ourselves about racists.</u> <i>New Republic</i> .	Curate and annotate a collection of examples of disinformation tactics used since the 2016 Russian election interference campaign
Week 8 11/2	Synthesis	Vetter, M. A., McDowell, Z. J., & Stewart, M. (2019). From opportunities to outcomes: The Wikipedia-based writing assignment. <i>Computers and Composition</i> , 52, 53-64. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.01.008 Menand, L. (2020, November 16). <u>Wikipedia, Jeopardy, and the fate of the fact.</u> <i>The New Yorker</i> .	Read at least 1 chapter from a recommended book & compose 6 Tweets about it, using the course hashtag #COM520 DUE: Creative Brief, Final Paper
PART 4: REPRESENTATION MATTERS			
Week 9 11/9	Algorithmic Discrimination	Kearse, S. (2020, June 15). <u>The ghost in the machine.</u> <i>The Nation</i> . Taylor, L. (2017). What is data justice? The case for connecting digital rights and freedoms globally. <i>Big Data & Society</i> , 4(2), 2053951717736335.	View and discuss <i>Coded Bias</i> by Shalini Kantayya and compose a study guide for the documentary

Week 10 11/16	Identity & Authenticity	Hou, M. (2019). Social media celebrity and the institutionalization of YouTube. <i>Convergence</i> , 25(3), 534-553. Lorenz, T. (2021, March 10). <u>For creators, everything is for sale.</u> <i>New York Times</i> .	Compose an image slideshow that uses ideas from the reading DUE: Wikipedia
Week 11 11/23	Research Futures	Sundermann, G. & Raabe, T. (2019). Strategic communication through social media influencers: Current state of research and desiderata. <i>International Journal of Strategic Communication</i> , 13:4, 278-300, DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2019.1618306	Develop a brief outline for research to address a topic of interest related to the reading
Week 12 11/30	Student Presentations		Write an essay to reflect on your learning
12/7	Synthesis 2	Levi, L. (2020). Media literacy beyond the national security frame. <i>Utah Law Review</i> 4(2), 941-985.	Publish a "top 10 list" of insights from the course

12/13 DUE: Final Paper/Project

COURSE POLICIES

Remix and Fair Use

A course in media studies is dependent upon a robust interpretation of copyright and fair use. Students are expected to make legal use of copyrighted materials for learning, which may include the use of written content, images, multimedia, and other materials appropriate to the learning context. To make a fair use determination about the use of copyrighted materials in your own creative work, consider the context and situation of the original work and your own purpose and goals for using it. Learn more here:

<http://mediaeducationlab.com/copyright>

Plagiarism

Students are expected to produce original writing and creative work for this course, and it is expected that you will be the author of all the work you submit. Students should use the American Psychological Association (APA 7th) citation format for identifying all materials used for reference and information gathering. Please consult the instructor(s) if you have questions on how to identify the information sources that you use in preparing your work. Penalties for plagiarism may range from a reduced grade on an assignment to failing the course.

Accommodation for Disabilities and Special Needs

Any students who have a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation. Contact Disability Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities at 330 Memorial Union, [401-874-2098](tel:401-874-2098), <http://www.uri.edu/disability/dss/>

Coronavirus Precautions

As members of the URI community, students are required to comply with standards of conduct and take precautions to keep themselves and others safe. Universal indoor masking is required by all community members, regardless of vaccination status. If the universal mask mandate is discontinued during the semester, students who have an approved exemption and are not fully vaccinated will need to continue to wear a mask indoors and maintain physical distance. Students who are experiencing symptoms of illness should not come to class. Please stay in your home/room and notify URI Health Services via phone at 401-874-2246. If you are already on campus and start to feel ill, go home/back to your room and self-isolate, and notify URI Health Services via phone immediately at 401-874-2246. If you are unable to attend class, please notify me prior to the start of class at 978 201 9799.