

**SYLLABUS**  
**Digital and Media Literacy**  
**COM 250**

**Instructor**

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**Catalog Copy**

Explore how life, work and citizenship have been impacted by digital media and culture & learn how to critically analyze and create media in a variety of forms

**Time/Location**

This is a fully-online class, which has an optional synchronous video class meeting. If you are unable to participate in the online class, you will be expected to watch and comment on the recording in order to receive credit for class participation.

**Website**

All resources are available at the course website: TBA

**Office Hours**

Thursday 6 – 7 p.m. online and by appointment

**WHY TAKE THIS COURSE?**

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**Rationale**

As a result of the convergence within the media environment, people are using media and technology in very different ways as compared to just a few years ago. Consider the experience of growing up today in a wireless broadband household, with easy access to cell phones and laptops, as compared with just a few years ago, when people used the Internet via a phone modem. Go even further back and remember how people viewed only the 500-channels available on the cable television lineup. So much has changed in the past 15 years. For example, in 2003, one third of Americans considered themselves regularly moviegoers, seeing a film in a theater at least once a month. In 2017, only one in 10 people say this is true for them.

When it comes to news and information, trust has become a casualty of the gigantic shifts in the global information ecosystem, as people have learned to distrust the 24-hour news channels that spin hype in an increasingly polarized and hyper-partisan world. During the 2016 Presidential campaign, as we learned about the influence of Russian propaganda on the election process, we were faced with the concept of “fake

news,” a term used to describe everything from conspiracy videos to inaccurate reporting on CNN. In Belgium, public officials and educators help young people interpret and resist the many videos, websites, songs, and video games that lionize radicalization by terrorist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram.

Because the Internet has radically accelerated the free flow of information, old power hierarchies are shifting under our feet. Today, with digital devices in hand, everyone communicates with everyone. Peer-to-peer sharing and new ways of getting media are becoming more and more central to how we work, play and live. YouTube channels entertain us with a wide range of talented amateurs and professional performers who provide information on every conceivable topic, interest, or hobby. We are constantly connected to our friends and family via social media networks. Yet critics like Nicholas Carr say that our digital dependence may come with a cost, not just to the pocketbook, but to our attention spans and our sense of time. Other critics note how media both reflects and shapes cultural values and personal identity.

In today’s media landscape, entertainment, information and persuasion are increasingly blurred. The vast majority of television programs are not scripted comedies or dramas. In 2016, 70 of the top 200 television shows with the highest ratings were reality television programs, depicting ordinary people competing in everything from singing and dancing to losing weight, or just living their everyday lives. The popularity of reality TV invites us to reflect on our increasingly performance-oriented culture, where the desire for status, fame and celebrity shapes how we post and share on social media and may also affect self-image, self-esteem and confidence.

For all these reasons, there has been no better time to acquire digital and media literacy competencies. In fact, we are now seeing a mainstreaming of media literacy as the empowerment-protection dialectic becomes more a part of people’s everyday experience with media. Empowerment enables people to make good decisions about evaluating the quality of media content and use the power of communication to make a difference in the world, while protection is rooted in the idea that critical analysis of media reduces people’s likelihood of negative influence to media content, including violence, propaganda and misrepresentation. Both empowerment and protection perspectives help students to develop media literacy competencies.

## **Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will gain **increased awareness** of media’s role on personal identity and social behavior and appreciation for the role of media in shaping norms and cultural values.
2. Students will strengthen **critical analysis skills** in deconstructing entertainment, information and persuasion in all forms of media and popular culture, applying concepts, theories and knowledge to gain insight on digital media and technology in cultural, historical, economic and political contexts.
3. Students will advance **communication skills** in composing and representing ideas and information in using a variety of forms of expression for authentic audiences and purposes.
4. Students will increase **metacognitive and reflective thinking skills** in considering the impact and consequences of media upon individuals, culture and society.

5. Students will **gain knowledge** of the role of media in maintaining, reproducing or challenging inequalities and injustices in an increasingly global and interconnected world.

## **REQUIRED READING**

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*New York Times*. We will be reading news media coverage about the media industry each week during the semester. [Student online subscriptions](#) are available for \$1 per week.

Hobbs, Renee (2017). *Create to Learn: Introduction to Digital Literacy*. Malden, MA: Wiley/Blackwell. Print book or e-book.

Hobbs, Renee (2020). *Media Literacy in Action: Questioning the Media*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. This book is available online to students free of charge.

## **COURSE DESIGN**

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### **Format of the Course**

This is an online learning experience so you'll have an intense experience that will require self-direction and independent learning.

- *Online Community*. We will use a combination of synchronous video discussion, threaded discussion, Twitter text messaging and other online tools to build and sustain a learning community. Other non-synchronous informal learning assignments (counted as Class Participation) will be assigned each week.
- *Creating media is a powerful form of learning*. The instructor will provide, in writing, specific description of the LEAP assignments with expectations and criteria to be used for evaluation. Assignment materials for each of the assignments listed below will be available under "Assignments" on the course website. After completing each assignment, you will receive written feedback through email.
- *Reflection Matters*. Learning works best when learners engage in self-assessment and reflection. You will be expected to notice what you are learning this semester and compose a reflective essay to summarize and synthesize key ideas using a combination of language, image and multimedia.

### **Open Network Learning Environment**

The design for this course is a form of open network learning environment. Instead of keeping learning behind the walled garden of a learning management system like Sakai, learners participate in online creative and collaborative endeavors, using a variety of digital tools and technologies on the open Internet. The skills you learn by doing this directly transfer to your work as an engaged citizen. In an open networked learning environment, your work is visible and public, and you share your learning with the world.

### **A Note about Technology Competencies**

Everyone is on the journey of a lifetime: learning to learning new technology tools, as our cell phones, tablets, laptops become essential part of leisure, work and citizenship. But we all don't begin this course with the same kinds or levels of skill. Many of the apps and digital tools we explore may be new to you. Others will be quite familiar. Some examples

include: Video ANT, Kami for Chrome, YouTube, WordPress, FlipGrid, Screencast-O-Matic, Padlet, Opinion and Google Docs. You can learn from others and teach others by supporting your peers by being a helper, coach, mentor, colleague, collaborator, and critic. Each of these roles promotes learning.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

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### **LEAP Projects (600 pts)**

In this class, we analyze and create media as a means to demonstrate what we're learning from reading, viewing and discussion. Four LEAP activities designed to support the development of your digital media production skills and help you express the knowledge you are gaining through reading and discussion. Each of the short LEAP experiences contributes to the development of your personal and professional identity. Some LEAPs will be collaborative.

You will have choices as you experiment with representing your learning through various media forms, genres and formats to develop your technology competencies, using different types of tools to accomplish your goals. Each of the following assignments will include specific and detailed guidelines that communicate expectations for the work you are to produce. A rubric with criteria for evaluation will be provided for each assignment.

DUE Feb 7.	LEAP #1. Media in My Life
DUE March 6.	LEAP #2. Critical Analysis
DUE April 3.	LEAP #3. Collaborate: Compare and Contrast Media
DUE May 1.	LEAP #4 Inquiry & Reflection

### **Class Participation (400 pts)**

It is expected that you devote approximately 6 – 9 hours to this course each week in reading, viewing and completing weekly assignments. Weekly informal quizzes will evaluate your comprehension of the class readings. Each week, you will be asked to complete a set of tasks, which will include reading, summarizing and sharing key ideas on the learning management system and Twitter using our course hashtag.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COURSE**

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**Grading Scale.** Assignments will be assessed using specific criteria for evaluation. These are provided to students for each assignment. Letter grades will be assigned using the following scale: A 94-100; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 60-66 ; below 60 F.

### **General Education Requirements**

Successful completion of this course provides General Education credit in the following outcomes:

**B2- Communicate effectively** via understanding audiences, listening, delivering oral presentations, and actively participating in teams or group work.

**C1- Develop and engage in civic knowledge and responsibilities.**

### **What's Public and Private**

In an open-network learning environment, you are expected to maintain a public identity as a learner, as the course aims to develop competencies that directly apply to your emerging identity as a leader in digital literacy education. For the work you create in this course, you may choose to use existing digital tool accounts you already own or create new accounts using a pseudonym. Class members give and receive public feedback in an authentic and responsible manner; instructor feedback and grading is privately provided via email.

**NOTE:** There are no make-up opportunities for missed homework, papers or other assignments. Please do not ask for an exception. Because media businesses rely on strict adherence to deadlines, this course employs a deadline standard similar to most print and TV newsrooms. Work submitted later than 7 pm. on the due date will not be evaluated or counted for course credit.

### **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/>

### **Plagiarism**

Students are expected to make use of remix creativity in this course and produce original writing and creative work. It is expected that you will be the author of all the work you submit. Students should use the American Psychological Association (APA) citation format for identifying all materials used for reference and information gathering. Penalties for plagiarism may range from a reduced grade on an assignment to failing the course.

### **Copyright and Fair Use**

Human creativity depends upon the ability to summarize, use, and rework the creative contributions of others as part of our own learning experience. It is expected that you will carefully select images and multimedia to illustrate, contextualize and comment on ideas. Learn more about how to evaluate when your use of copyrighted materials is lawful.

*The schedule is subject to modification with fair notice.*

## **I. YOUR MEDIA WORLD**

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### **WEEK 1. What is Media Literacy and Why is it Needed?**

Media literacy is a lifelong process. It's a cycle that involves accessing, analyzing, creating, reflecting and taking action using all forms of media as we satisfy our needs for information, entertainment and persuasion. Today most of the media we use comes from a screen. We examine the rationale for the importance of learning to critically analyze and create all forms of media as a fundamental life skill for life, work and citizenship.

- Flood of Information and Entertainment Choices Creates New Demands
- Consider the Consequences: Poor Choices Matter
- Interpretation is Cognitive, Social and Emotional
- Creators and Consumers, Professionals and Amateurs
- Your Personal and Professional Identity is at Stake
- Media Democracy in a Shared Global World
- Knowledge Matters when Combined with Critical Analysis, Creative Production, Reflection and Action
- Empowerment and Protection Paradigms
- How to Chart Your Daily Media and Technology Use
- Questioning the Marketplace of Ideas
- Media Literacy as a Citizenship Skill

### **WEEK 2. Why Do People Prefer Different Kinds of Music and TV Shows?**

We explore fundamental concepts for understanding how audiences make choices of media content, with a focus on music and television. With more choices available than ever before, we need to be metacognitive about how and why we allocate attention to media content. We understand how media platforms, industries and creative professionals design digital experiences to attract and hold attention.

- Awareness: What Attracts your Attention?
- Selective Attention & Selective Exposure
- What Holds Your Attention? Who Controls Your Attention?
- Dialectic of Familiarity - Novelty
- Music Genres and Formats: How Spotify and Pandora Work
- Algorithms and Recommendation Engines
- Why Do People Like Unreal Reality TV?
- Taste Cultures: Differences in Reality TV Preferences by State
- How to Compose a Media Review
- Genres, Codes and Conventions: The Semiotics of Media
- Questioning the Entertainment Media Marketplace

### **WEEK 3. Why do People Create Media and Share Stories?**

Language and media are used to structure and represent human experience, transporting us to new places and providing new experiences through the power of narrative. Media storytelling captures the imagination and represents people, events and ideas in ways that shape and reflect our understanding of the world.

- Language is a Form of Social Power
- Stories as Cultural Recipes for Living
- Analyzing Movies: Character, Conflict, Resolution, Values
- Character Stereotypes Make the Storyteller's Job Easier
- Identity and Identification
- Why People Love when Characters Change over Time
- Dramatic Conflict: The Thrills and Chills of Arousal
- Livestreaming Aggression
- Art Imitates Life: Storytellers Tell Emotional Truths through Fiction
- True Stories Aren't Always True: Contemporary Propaganda
- How to Critically Analyze a Movie, TV Show or Video Game
- Life Imitates Art: When People Use Stories as Models for their own Life Choices
- Questioning the Relationship between Representation and Reality

### **WEEK 4. Who Decides What Makes Media "Good"?**

We examine issues of credibility, quality and value. Different criteria are used evaluate the quality of news, information, entertainment and persuasion. Questions about the trustworthiness of information revolve around philosophical question like, "How do we know what's true?" Despite or perhaps because of the overwhelming quantity of media available, some people use superficial criteria in making credibility and quality judgments. Others share content indiscriminately. Today, celebrities, thought leaders and other experts offer interpretations that are more (or less) informed by deep knowledge, which is why people need to make strategic choices in selecting media content.

- Hollywood Awards and Competitions
- Likes, Chatter, Ratings and Reviews
- Virality: The Power of Sharing
- Marketing Media Products and Services: Promotion Matters
- Measuring Popularity & Quality
- Economic Pressures & Cultural Traditions in Journalism
- How Polarization and Partisanship Shape News Content
- Vice News: Journalism in Transformation
- InfoWars: Conspiracy Journalism
- How to Analyze News
- Audience Fragmentation and Thought Leadership
- Questioning the Need to Pay for Quality Content

## II. THE BUSINESS OF MEDIA

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### **WEEK 5. How do Media Companies Make Money?**

As the saying goes, “Follow the money.” We explore the economics and basic legal concepts that underpin American film, television, video game, music and publishing, which as a global export product are expected to reach more than \$771 billion by 2019. To understand the motives of media producers, we look at the economic and political context in which media messages circulate.

- How Much Celebrities, Musicians, Game Developers and Writers Get Paid
- Visibility, Marketing and Promotion
- Direct, Indirect and Mixed Revenue Streams
- Media Ownership on a Global Scale Equals Profit
- Niche Audiences and The Long Tail
- Intellectual Property, Copyright and Fair Use
- First Amendment Protections
- Level Playing Fields: The Role of Media Regulation
- How to Sell Your Photos Online
- Creativity and Entrepreneurship
- Questioning the Consequences of Media Concentration

### **WEEK 6. Why Does McDonald’s Need to Advertise?**

Consumer culture does more than sell products. It sells ideas and values. We take a close look at the media messages that drive media’s economic engine. Advertising is carefully designed to tap into our hopes, dreams, and fears --and it works. People buy brand name products because products are emotionally tied to human needs, like love, acceptance, status and power.

- Made You Look: How Ads Attract and Hold Attention
- Sexual Power in Advertising
- Breaking through the Clutter
- Why Advertisers Love Children and Youth
- Why We Buy What We Buy
- Consumer Culture is American Culture
- Branding and Personal Identity
- What are Celebrities Advertising?
- How to Analyze a Television Commercial
- New and Improved: Creating and Exploiting Dissatisfaction
- Ecological Costs of Advertising, Promotion and Packaging
- The Thin Ideal in Beauty Culture
- Questioning Why Athletes are Paid to Wear Shoes

### **WEEK 7. Why is Facebook Free?**

We interact with friends and family through online social networks. We explore the economics of online digital media. Facebook has over 1.23 billion daily active users and 85% of them are outside the United States. With cheap data storage and low content production costs, Facebook is highly profitable, reaching \$4 billion in 2016. Ads on



Facebook target individuals with ads that seamlessly blend the details of daily life through content created shared by friends and family.

- Ads that Follow You Around the Internet
- How Do You Make Money from a Free App?
- Users Produce Content for Free
- Your Data are the Product: What Likes and Shares Tell about You
- Facebook Gaming and Advertising Revenue Equations
- How Much Money Silicon Valley Programmers Get Paid
- Entrepreneurial Cultures: Fail Fast
- Staying Private or Going Public: Wall Street and the Demand for Growth
- Hidden Advertising: Sponsored Content and Native Advertising
- How to Analyze Online Advertising
- Google's Ad Words: How Audiences are Bought and Sold
- Understanding Digital Markets: The Future
- Questioning How Much Your Browser History is Worth

### **III. DECISIONS, DECISIONS**

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#### **WEEK 8. How Do Search Engines Work?**

Search and ye shall find, goes the saying. Of course, some people are better, faster searchers than others. And some information is more “findable” than others. We examine the architecture and design of the Internet to understand how search engines work and how people find and access information and entertainment to meet their needs.

Demystifying how Internet search engines work helps people recognize its built-in biases and affordances.

- How the Internet Works
- All Input is Data
- Beyond the Basics of Keyword Search
- Web Crawlers and Indexes
- Algorithms Simulate Human Decision Making
- Signals of Quality
- Autocomplete as Machine Learning
- Your Google is not My Google
- Browser Wars
- The Information Consequences of Personalization
- How to Build a Website that Attracts Audiences
- Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers
- Political Polarization
- Questioning Whether Internet Searching Has Gotten Too Easy

#### **WEEK 9. How Do People Get their News?**

Some people are news junkies and others feel overwhelmed by the 24-hour news cycle and the constant barrage of bad news, with its focus on conflict, conflict and controversy. Why do people watch the news and what difference does it make in their lives? News about current events, crime, and community events helps people make good decisions.

Competition to be the first to report news leads to inaccuracies in journalism, and although journalists strive for accuracy, they make mistakes. Some forms of news even come with entertainment values or persuasive intentions attached.

- There's an App for That: Traffic, Weather, Local News
- Genres of Crime News
- Intergenerational Differences in News Consumption
- Why is Mainstream Media Important?
- Aggregators and Bloggers
- How the News Finds You
- Journalistic Excellence
- The Cost of Newsgathering
- How Public Relations Shapes the News
- Partisanship: News with Interpretation Attached
- Hoaxes, Parody and Satire
- Disinformation Wars
- How to Film an Eyewitness Account
- The Blurring of Journalism, Art and Activism
- Questioning the Future of Journalism

#### **WEEK 10. When it Comes to Information, Who Can I Trust?**

Trust is correlated with increased health, happiness and intelligence. When people can trust their fellow citizens and their leaders, they are more likely to participate in voting and elections and less likely to engage in corruption. Trust even makes us more resilient in the face of disasters-- it improves the human experience. Under what conditions should we trust in the people who create media? When people make good decisions about the media and information they trust, many aspects of daily decision making improve.

- Why Trust Matters
- Reading Within and Across Discourse Communities
- Judgments about Quality Take Time
- Spotting Point of View
- The Power of Compare and Contrast
- Reflection is a Social Practice
- Expertise and Immediacy Both Matter
- Reading Upstream and Laterally
- Valuing Experience over Authority: The Architecture of Trust
- How to Identify the Author, Purpose and Point of View
- Finding and Becoming a Thought Leader
- Questioning How You Know What You Know

#### **IV. ATTENTION MATTERS**

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#### **WEEK 11. Are Netflix and YouTube More Popular than Cable & Broadcast TV?**

With 86 million Netflix subscribers watching nearly two hours per day, Netflix is transforming the way people experience film and television. More than half of Netflix users say that, if forced to choose, they would keep Netflix over traditional television

programming. Binge watching is a sedentary behavior and the medical literature tells us that adults who watch TV for three hours or more each day may double their risk of premature death compared to those who watch less, according to research published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*. When it comes to YouTube, people watch in highly specialized ways. For example, video game commentary is among the most popular of genres on YouTube as are cat videos, police brutality videos, drinking games, soft porn, makeup tutorials and cooking videos. YouTube also contains massive amounts of music from all time periods as well as informational videos on topics that range from fixing a washing machine or negotiating with a used car dealer to advanced quadratic equations and the signs and symptoms of hyponatremia. A close look at how people use Netflix and YouTube gives us a good understanding of the future of television.

- How do You Watch?
- Technical and Social Affordances of Netflix and YouTube
- The Regulatory Environment of Cable and Broadcast TV
- Video Game Commentary and Unboxing Videos
- The Persistence of Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Media
- The Appeal and Terror of Police Brutality Videos
- SubRedditors Curate: Deep Into YouTube
- Sensationalism and Attention Economics
- Fame, Voyeurism and Relationship Ambiguity: Talking to Strangers Online
- The Expectation of Participation: Subscribe!
- When Active Audiences Turn into Trolls
- How to Create a YouTube Channel
- Exploiting Networked Publics: YouTube Partners
- Questioning the Power and Consequences of YouTube Celebrity

## **WEEK 12. Is My Little Brother Addicted?**

Most of our six hours of daily screen time consists of viewing, not reading. YouTube has emerged as the alternative to public broadcasting for parents of young children who appreciate the choices and versatility as even young toddlers learn to use iPad apps. Media and video game use intensifies during childhood and many boys grow up playing solitary or social games with or without their parents, including Minecraft, World of Warcraft, Grand Theft Auto and more. Children are socialized to become passive media users or active media critics and creators during their childhood and adolescence.

- Are You a Bingewatcher?
- Toddlers Play and Learn
- Lights, Camera, Action: Making Media in Childhood
- Video Games, Snapchat and Instagram: Designed for Dependence
- Disney Princess Culture
- Displacement: What You're Not Doing
- Psychological Arousal
- Desensitization to Media Violence
- How to Talk with Your Family Members about their Media Use
- Addiction vs Use: Can You be Addicted to Reading?

- Research Paradigms: Media Effects and Cultural Studies
- Questioning Your Pleasures in Consuming Screen Media

### **WEEK 13. Is Media Empowering or Controlling People?**

The theme of empowerment and protection is an enduring one in the practice of media literacy, even as the pendulum swings to emphasize one or the other at any particular point in time. When a medium is new, we see all of its glorious possibilities: for learning, democracy and social justice. When a medium is maturing, we see how existing structures of institutional power shape the content provided and how people interact and engage with it. Clearly, people need to make informed and responsible choices of what they watch, see, read, listen to and use --and when they “talk back” to the media. What do you love and hate about life in a media and technology-saturated society?

- Media Doesn’t Affect Me: Third-Person Effects
- Appreciating Complexity: It’s Not an Either-Or World
- Agency: Exploring Questions about Human Nature and Free Will
- Structure: Our Life as Social Beings, Responsive to Cultural Norms
- Hegemony and Power: Maintaining the Status Quo
- How to Make Informed and Responsible Media Choices
- “Talking Back” to Media Messages
- Balancing Freedom and Social Responsibility: What we Owe Ourselves and Others
- Embracing Diversity: An Aim of Media Literacy Education
- Questioning the Impact of Media on Society

### **WEEK 14. How Do People Become Media Literate?**

An army of media literacy advocates is needed in order to ensure that all people acquire the ability to access, analyze, create, reflect and take action, using a wide range of media in a variety of format and forms.

- Asking Questions and Sharing Interpretations
- Making Connections between Academic Content and Popular Culture
- Creating Media for Authentic Audiences
- Parents Help Children by Establishing Limits
- Media Makers Create Media to Teach about Media
- Media Companies and Platforms Increase Transparency
- Librarians Support Learners of all Ages
- Activists Promote Media Regulation
- Policymakers Build Momentum for Social Responsibility and Education Initiatives
- Funders Support Youth Media Programs
- Beyond Blame: The Inherent Optimism of Media Literacy Education