

**Fall 2014 – New Perspectives: Media History and Analysis**

(3 hours)

W 4:00 – 6:50 PM

-----  
Instructor: Dr. Gerald Voorhees

Office: DMS 2008 / ML 254D

Office Hours: By Appointment

gvoorhees@uwaterloo.ca

**I. Course Description**

Global communication networks linked by “new” media communication technologies date back to the 1500s. What has changed about the media? The scale, speed and logic – cultural and programmatic – through which the media operate. Students will be introduced to key moments in the building of networks, where new technologies such as the book, photo, telephone and computer precipitate significant shifts in social relations. What has changed about the ways we understand the media? The attitudes, assumptions and perspectives – intellectual and occupational – through which we study media. Students will receive training in the critical analysis of these media through the use of conceptual tools such as semiotics, medium theory, cultural studies, and algorithmic analysis.

**II. Course Objectives**

1. To provide students with historical and cultural grounding in the interaction between technological developments and the shaping and transfer of knowledge
2. To equip students with critical and conceptual tools to effectively analyse the representation, construction and contestation of culture in a variety of media.

**III. Required Materials**

You will need a means to take notes during class, whether that is a notebook and pen, a lap top or tablet. You will also need access to a printer and to the course readings on LEARN. Assignments must be turned in as a physical, printed form, unless otherwise specified. For class readings, you may make use of a physical or electronic copy, as long as you bring it to class, though you will likely find that it is very important that you be able to take easily accessible notes in the margins of your readings.

**IV. Course Requirements and Evaluation:**

I will do my best to communicate my standards and expectations for each particular assignment. However, you are both *encouraged* (because I want you to succeed in this class) and *expected* (because you are adults) to request clarification whenever you have questions.

A. All assignments are due at the time directed by the professor and syllabus in the format specified for that assignment. All work must be received by in the manner requested (i.e., paper copy, DVD, etc.). Simply emailing files within the deadline period will not meet this requirement. Late work is not accepted.

B. Please wait at least 24 hours after you have received a grade before discussing it with me. However, if you want to discuss a particular grade you must do so no more than one week after the grade is returned. I'm happy to address questions and concerns; I'm not interested in negotiating point values once you've done the math for how an assessment will impact your overall grade.

C. ALL assignments must be completed in order for a student to pass this course with a C grade or higher. Any student receiving a grade of D or lower on any assignment is strongly encouraged and expected to discuss the matter with me in office hours.

D. I will be using a standard A through F scale outlined at the following URL: <http://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/uWaterloo-Grading-System>. The following is a brief sketch of what qualities correspond to each letter grade in this class:

- Cs are the average; they are not what you get for blowing off this class. A grade of C indicates that you *met all of the criteria* on a given assignment. C's are not cause for alarm—they mean that you are doing fine.
- Bs shows that you have done *more than what is required*. It may mean that you have done extra research and contributed regularly to class discussion, and that you have produced a paper that is stylistically innovative, interesting, and exceptionally solid.
- An A performance is a superior performance in this class. To get an A, you must expend increased effort to seeing and thinking beyond the surface level in your reading, research, and speaking as well as show particular skill in composing your work. An A performance includes being a *leader* in class activities and demonstrating *critical* thought in both class discussion and your assignments.
- To get a D, you will not have completed all assignments in a sufficient and *timely* manner. Also, a D will be given if it is clear that *sufficient effort and time is not being spent on reading, your major assignments, and class participation*.
- An F will be given in cases where a student's work is *seriously lacking*. Plagiarism will also result in a grade of F.

E. Grades are based on the distribution of 100 points. Those points breakdown as follows:

---

Participation	15	points	15	%
Free Writes	20	points	20	%
Discussion Leadership	15	points	15	%
Final Project	50	points	50	%

---

**1. Participation (15 Points).** Your contributions to discussion, group activities and the general classroom atmosphere will be vital in determining what knowledge and skills you take from this course. This means that you are expected to show up on-time having properly prepared for whatever is planned according to the class calendar or prior announcements. You should ask questions, offer answers, listen, facilitate others' opportunities to contribute, and respect your classmates' opinions. Students who do not attend class will receive no participation credit for missed days. A respectful attitude towards your classmates is required.

**2. Free Writes (20 Points).** At the start of each class meeting for which a reading is assigned, we will take 10 minutes to generate some starting points for discussion by writing about the readings due for that day. Typically, I will provide 2 prompts that assume you've done the reading and require you to think about, challenge and apply the ideas from the reading. You may use one quote no longer than one sentence; otherwise the substance of the free-write should be expressed in your own words. If you know you will be absent (for a doctor's appointment, job interview, etc.) you must speak with me in advance so that you can turn in a free-write at the same time or before your classmates; they will not be accepted late.

**3. Discussion Leadership (15 Points).** At one point during the semester, you and a partner will lead a class session's discussion of a reading. Your presentation will take place during the first 30 minutes of class immediately following the free-write and should do three things:

1. Provide an exegesis of the main ideas of the reading. The theory or argument around which the reading is organized must be given the weight of the presentation. However, you ignore other relevant or interesting concepts.
2. Highlight the possible applications of the ideas from the readings. Application can range from helping us better understand how technologies mediate our relationship to the world to concrete insight into marketing techniques or consumer behavior. Either way, these should be linked to events or experiences outside of what is discussed in the readings.
3. Initiate class discussion of the readings. Prepare questions for discussion. Discussion is an opportunity to teach or reinforce ideas, apply concepts or further speculate about their application, and argue for and against the ideas outlined in a reading. Feel free to use it for any of these purposes. Just keep discussion centered on the reading.

The Monday *before* the discussion, the team must email me a PDF handout that provides a prose exegesis of the readings, bulleted explanation of (potential) applications, and a list of questions/topics to be discussed. The PDF should be no more than two double-spaced pages. I will make copies for distribution in class. The day *of* the Discussion Leadership, the team is responsible for guiding the class discussion by asking pertinent questions, soliciting peer opinions and insights.

**4. Final Project (50 Points).** Working with a team, you will:

- Present your project to the class on November 22. Prepare a 10 minute presentation and expect 10 minutes of Q&A.
- Write a short paper (5 pages or 2500 words) explaining the intention of the work, how the design is intended to communicate effectively.
- Create a multimodal (substantially involving at least 3 of the following modalities: text, image, video/animation, audio, data visualization, game/simulation) media object or environment in response to one of the following options:

Option A. Critical Product Review. Select a new media technology (approved by professor) and review the product applying the theories, ideas and arguments developed in the course readings and discussions. You may direct your critical product review to the audience of your choice: educational, government, enterprise, consumer, etc. Your objective is to evaluate the product in a broader context than its avowed application and consider the product's merits, dangers and emergent properties or applications; in short, its implications for society, culture and the political-economic system broadly.

Option B. Professional Development Module. Design an instructional module to teach a "big idea" or set of related ideas developed in the course readings and discussions. You may direct your instructional module to the audience of your choice: engineers, marketing, design, HCI, or the product development team more broadly. Your objective is to educate entrepreneurs and developers about the "big idea" so that they understand the importance of and are able to think about it in relation to the social, cultural and political-economic merits, dangers and emergent properties or applications of their projects.

**V. Academic Integrity**

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4.

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

***Other sources of information for students:***

Academic Integrity website (Arts)

Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo)

**VI. Students with Disabilities.**

The Accessibility Services office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

**VII. Decorum in the Classroom.**

Cell phone use in class is strictly prohibited. This includes voice, text, video, data or any other current or future transmission technology. If your phone rings or you respond to a message, I will ask you to turn it off and place it in my safe-keeping for the remainder of the class.

Computers may be used for note-taking purposed only. If you use a computer for any other purpose, I'll ask you to turn it off and place it on my safe-keeping for the remainder of the class.

Any behavior that disrupts the learning environment or impinges on the dignity of a classmate will result in the offending student being asked to leave the classroom for the day and perhaps for good.

**VIII. Schedule****Sept. 10     Introductions and The Old Perspective**

Read: Althusser - Ideological State Apparatuses (Excerpt)

Read: Herman & Chomsky - The Propaganda Model (Excerpt)

**Sept. 17     The Canadian School I**

Read: McLuhan - The Medium is the Message

Read: Innus - Minerva's Owl

**Sept. 24     Interpreting Visual Rhetoric I**

Read: Barthes - The Rhetoric of the Image

Read: Stuart Hall - Encoding and Decoding

**Oct. 01     Interpreting Visual Rhetoric II**

Read: Barthes - Camera Lucida

Read: Barthes - The Death of the Author

**Oct. 08     Constructing Visual Rhetoric**

Read: Crary - The Problem of Attention

- Oct. 15     The Canadian School II**  
Read: Gitelman - Always Already New, Introduction  
Read: Murray - Inventing the Medium
- Oct. 22     Electrical Media**  
Read: Marvin - Introduction & Locating the Body  
          & Annihilating Space, Time and Difference
- Oct. 29     Computational Media I**  
Read: Crary - 24/7, Ch. 1-2
- Nov. 05     Computational Media II**  
Read: Crary - 24/7, Ch. 3-4
- Nov. 12     Computational Media III**  
Read: Wardrip-Fruin - Expressive Processing (Introduction)  
Read: Bogost - Rhetoric of Video Games
- Nov. 19     Project Work Day**
- Nov. 26     Project Presentations**