Media Literacy, Leadership and Social Change

Fall 2007 syllabus

Faculty: Roberta Oster Sachs  
http://www.law.richmond.edu/faculty/rsachs.php

Class time: Tues. & Thurs. 11:15am -12:30pm
Location: Jepson, Room 106

Office hours: Wed. 12:00-1pm, or email for an appointment
Location: Jepson, Room 243
Phone: 804-287-1855
Email: Rsachs@richmond.edu

Course Description: In our media-saturated world, there are infinite opportunities to watch, read, listen to, and create media. Images often overwhelm us, paralyze us, and shape our perceptions of the world and ourselves. In the 21st century, the ability to be media literate (to make careful and critical analyses of the media that surround us) is a critical leadership skill. This course will provide an introduction to media literacy and teach the skills needed to examine many genres of media, including news, the Internet, You Tube, student media, advocacy media, political websites, film, radio, newspapers, magazines, advertising, and social marketing. We will learn to deconstruct media stereotypes of race, ethnicity, gender and class. We will study the ethical principles of journalism, and examine convergence, media ownership and the role of the “citizen journalist.” Through analysis of current research, deconstructing media, and guest lectures from practitioners, we will focus on the importance of media literacy in our daily lives and learn how to use media to become active citizens and empowered leaders.

Definition: “Media Literacy provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.”
(The Center for Media Literacy).

Required reading: Newspapers -- Every day you should read the headlines and skim key stories in The Richmond Times-Dispatch, The New York Times, The Washington Post, watch local and national TV news, and cable, and browse news and political websites You should always read The Collegian when it comes out.

**Weekly course readings**: Readings will be posted on Blackboard or will be handed out in class. Most weeks we will read between 4-6 articles, news stories or web-based research material. The approximate reading load will be 20-30 pages/week. The class will be topical and the schedule may change when news events warrant. I will also distribute current articles and I ask students to help by bringing relevant articles, links to websites, and information about films, events and talks, to the attention of our “newsroom.”

**Course Requirements and Grading**: (assignment descriptions listed at end of syllabus)

- 2 papers (30% each)
- Group project (20%)
- Class participation and attendance (20%)

**Class format**: Our classroom will be run like a newsroom. We will sit around a rectangular table discussing our opinions in an open and safe environment. This class is designed to be a seminar rather than a lecture course.

**Classroom policies**: I respect and value student input and want to know what you think about the media we are analyzing. Some of this material is disturbing and emotional and our discussions will help us understand the power of the media messages we are experiencing. Your attendance, participation, and preparedness are required. One unexcused absence is understandable, but your final grade will be lowered for additional unexcused absences. Please let me know ahead of time if you know you will miss class for any reason. Participation grades will be based on the quantity and quality of contributions made to discussion as well as attendance. Individual participation and active learning will make this class interactive and enjoyable. Therefore, you must come to class prepared to discuss the reading or screening assignments and be ready to express your opinions and listen to those of your classmates. **There will be requested attendance at many events on campus** (in lieu of some classes).

---

**Week 1**

**Media Literacy and Social Change**

**Tues., Aug., 28**

**Media Literacy and Social Change**

Course overview. What is media literacy and what is social change? How can they be linked? How are they related to leadership? **Discuss**: the underlying premises of media literacy and why it is important to know how to “read” and critique the media; the theory of the active audience; stereotypes of gender, race, ethnicity and class in the media.
Thurs., Aug. 30
Media Literacy – Core Concepts

We will discuss some of the core concepts and theories of media literacy, looking at some of the academic research in the field as well as some print and video examples.

Week 2
Media Leadership: Ownership and Power

Tues., Sept. 4
Media Ownership and Power

Overview of traditional mainstream media – who are the leaders in the field? Who owns the major news organizations? How did so much power get concentrated in the hands of such a small number of companies? Discuss network evening newscasts, ABCnews.com web cast, news magazine shows, Nightline, morning news, Sunday talk shows, and 24-hour cable. What is the role of shows like The John Stewart Show? How powerful are traditional newspapers? What is the role of the Internet in educating citizens?

Assignment #1 due in class (personal media history)

Thurs., Sept. 6
Inside TV News

How is a network TV news program produced? What is the role of anchors, reporters, producers, and executives? How are stories pitched? How important are ratings? Examine race and gender of reporters, story lineup, tone, use of visuals and audience manipulation. We will also discuss the “objectivity” of news; the construction of news stories and the techniques that are used to manipulate viewers.

Week 3
News and Terrorism

Tues., Sept. 11
How the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks Changed TV News Reporting

On the 6th anniversary of the terrorist attack, we will look back at how the press covered that day, and explore issues that come from contemporary coverage of this milestone anniversary. Discuss working for “Dateline NBC” and covering the attack. Screen clips from stories I produced for “Dateline.” Screen Princeton student films about 9/11.
Thurs., Sep. 13
No lecture today, but we will screen the documentary film, “Emmanuel’s Gift” in class. For those observing the Jewish holiday, you may screen the film on your own time (it will be on reserve in the library). Be prepared to discuss the film in class on Sept. 18th.

Week 4
The Power of Advertising

Tues., Sept. 18
Critique Emmanuel’s Gift and do in-class exercise deconstructing print ads.

Thurs., Sept. 20
Deconstructing Advertising

* Guest speaker: Mike Lear, Associate Creative Director, the Martin Agency
Why is advertising so powerful in our society today? How is it connected to our everyday lives? What should we know as future leaders about how advertising is used to get a message out, or to stop a negative message? What tools do advertisers use to manipulate consumers to buy their products? How can we deconstruct an ad?

Week 5
Media Leadership: Politics and Journalism

Tues., Sept. 25
Media Leadership: Covering Politics

* Guest speaker, Glenn Proctor, Executive Editor, The Richmond Times-Dispatch
Discuss the role of Executive Editor. How does a local paper cover a national election? How are the candidate’s race and gender covered? Does a newspaper reflect the views of the community? Who controls the editorial page? How do issues of race play out in news coverage in Richmond? How can a paper be a leader in civic discourse?

*** 7pm – Forum event/Modlin Center: A Dialogue on Left, Right and Center with political observers Susan Estrich and Richard Lowry.

Thurs., Sept. 27
Media Coverage of Elections & the Role of the Press in American Democracy

Discuss news coverage of the political campaigns and the power of the press. How is the web being used in these campaigns? TV ads, viral marketing? Who has the power? Discuss issues of: advocacy journalism, political bias, and polarization of the media.

Assignment #2 due (six-page paper: critique and deconstruct media)
Week 6
Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Class
Diversity in the Newsroom and the Newspaper

Tues., Oct. 2
Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Class
Examine our own personal biases and stereotypes. How do we identify unconscious and conscious bias? How do media images feed into our stereotypes? How do they impact our feelings about ourselves and our body image? Discuss images of minorities, women, and people with disabilities.

Thurs., Oct. 4
Diversity in the Newsroom and in the Newspaper

* Guest speaker: Mary Curtis, columnist, The Charlotte Observer

*** 7pm - Forum event/Modlin Center: Beyond Black and White/All about Barack and Much More; National Public Radio’s Senior Correspondent, Juan Williams

Week 7
Social Marketing
And Theories of Violence

Tues., Oct. 9
Social marketing: using media tools for social change

We often think of marketing as a way to raise awareness about a product or to promote a company or enhance its image. But increasingly, the tools of marketing are being used for social advocacy, to promote healthy practices and behavior change, and social causes of all kinds. We will deconstruct examples and analyze their effectiveness.

Thurs. Oct. 11
Theories of Violence

How do we understand violence in film, TV, and video games? What kind of impact does the violence have on our society? What are the theories that under gird media violence? Screen “Rape Is”
Week 8
Pornography, Violence and Power

Tues. Oct. 16 – no class - fall break

Thurs., Oct. 18
Media Images of Women and Men

* Guest speaker: Professor Diane Rosenfeld, Harvard Law School
Discuss the use of pornography and violence in mainstream media and pornography as a direct correlation with violence against women (an “indicator). Screen examples of exploitative media images of women and men.

Week 9
Using Film for Leadership and Social Change and Convergence and the Citizen Journalist

Tues., Oct. 23
Documentary film for social change

Examine the role of documentary film as a vehicle for social change. What is the difference between a documentary and an advocacy film? What is the filmmaker's role in shaping our opinions and what techniques do they use? Is Michael Moore a documentary filmmaker? What about Al Gore and Spike Lee?

Thurs., Oct. 25
Convergence and the Citizen Journalist

Discuss new media economics and how it shifts the media landscape; analyze the impact of the web in the convergence movement. What is a complete journalist and what is the job of a journalist in a shifting media landscape? What is a citizen journalist and what kind of an impact can he/she have on public discourse?

Assignment #3 due (six-page paper on leadership in the media)

Week 10
Ethics in Journalism and Understanding the Difference between PR and Propaganda

*** Mon. Oct. 29 7pm – Forum event/Jepson Alumni Center:
Media Messages, Missteps and Inside Stories from Newsrooms and Campaigns; Lisa Green, Glenn Proctor and Keith Woods – moderated by Roberta Oster Sachs
**Tues., Oct. 30**  
Ethics in Journalism

* Guest speaker: Lisa Green, Senior Producer, NBC Weekend Today Show

Journalists are constantly confronted with difficult questions of ethics and law in their work, from how the reporter should represent her/himself in the field, to protecting confidential sources, to First Amendment issues. We will discuss the use of hidden cameras, national security issues, trespassing and invasion of privacy, as well as recent high profile news stories such as the Kobe Bryant rape trial and Dateline’s series, “To Catch a Predator.” Discuss Ch. 4 in *Elements of Journalism* (Journalism of Verification).

**Thurs., Nov. 1**  
Public Relations or Propaganda? Two case studies

Review the difference between public relations, propaganda and news. We will examine sources of information about the war in Iraq, and ask: what is public relations, and what is propaganda? What happens to “independent media” in a time of war? What do both the right and the left have to say about this issue?

---

**Week 11**  
The Virtues of the Virtual World

**Tues., Nov. 6**  
The Virtues of the Virtual World: Blogging, Podcasts and YouTube

* Guest speaker: Professor Julie Dobrow, Tufts University

What happens when information comes first from the Internet, and how can we evaluate it? Is Wikipedia a valid source? What about Face book and My Space? What is the role of You Tube and blogs in political debates? What are the political/social/cultural impacts of blogs? Who are the leaders in the “blogosphere?” Can blogs affect social change?

**Thurs., Nov. 8**  
Student filmmakers and social change

---

**Week 12**  
Leadership, Money and Power in Media

**Tues., Nov. 13**  
Leadership, Money and Power in Documentary Filmmaking

Why is it so difficult to get funding documentaries? Who are the leaders in the documentary world who are making it? Who is producing great work that is difficult to fund and access? Who are the trailblazers what are changing the story?
***7pm Wed., Nov. 14 – 7pm Forum event/Jepson Alumni Center: Americans in a Different Mirror: How We Are Connected to Each Other and What Our Future Holds, Ronald Takai

Thurs., Nov. 15
The virtual world of online reporting

* Guest Speaker, Chad Matlin – researcher for “Slate”

**Week 13**

**Tues., Nov. 20** – screen and critique the documentary, “Invisible Children” in class. If you cannot make it to class, you must screen it before Tues. 27 and be prepared to discuss it in class.

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14**

**Youth Media and Leadership**

**Tues., Nov. 27**
Youth Media and Leadership

Who are the leaders of campus journalism and advocacy filmmaking? Why has the “Invisible Children” campaign been so successful? Screen and deconstruct examples. How did they reach positions of leadership? Who is following? Analyze how the filmmakers use viral marketing and a slick advertising campaign to get their message out.

**Thurs., Nov. 29**
Student presentations

**Week 15**

**Tues., Dec. 4**
Student Presentations

***7pm Forum Event/Jepson Alumni Center; Through the Labyrinth: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Women as Leaders; Alice Eagly, Professor of Psychology at Northwestern

**Thurs., Dec. 6 – last class**
Student presentations
ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment #1 – personal media history and analysis (ungraded)
(4 pages, double-spaced) Tell your personal media story, describing your exposure to media from childhood to today. What did you watch and read? When and how much media did you consume? How did your family and friends use media? How important was/is media in your life? Did you experiment with making media? How do you think media affected you growing up? What does media mean to you today? What are your current media preferences – what do you watch and read and why? How do you think media affects you and our society at large?

Assignment #2 – (30%) (6 pages, double spaced) Critique and deconstruct multiple examples of a single media source – such as magazines, news broadcasts, political websites, etc. For example, look at 3 issues of “Slate,” the online magazine or Glamour Magazine or 3 broadcasts of ABC News or 3 issues of Time magazine or the Richmond Times Dispatch or the Washington Post. Be sure to use the tools of media literacy we have discussed to analyze your genre, focusing on depictions of race, ethnicity, gender and class. Also, be mindful of how production techniques shape your perception of the images and the implicit and explicit messages contained in these media “texts.” Include a critical analysis of the tone and content of the media and your opinion about any stereotyping of race, ethnicity, gender and class.

Assignment #3 – Leadership in the media (30%)
(6 pages, double spaced) Choose a media company from a list I will distribute in class and write about the leadership of that company. Who holds the power? Who owns the company? What other media products do they own? Whom are they trying to reach? What tools/techniques do they employ? How did they rise to power? What are they doing with that power – is it a pure business model or a force for social change? Include a critical analysis of the tone and content of the media.

Assignment #4 - GROUP or INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
Design your own advocacy campaign on a public policy issue (20%) Use any form of media – video, writing, web design, PowerPoint, film, photos, ads, to create a media campaign. Present this to the class and hand in a 2-page description of the project, explaining why you used certain images, the narrative, etc and list your sources. This is an opportunity for you to pull together many of the issues we've discussed this semester, apply what you've learned in a creative way, and end the semester with a product that empowers you to make a difference.