



MEJO 490.002
Media Literacy
Fall 2020 (Remote)**

Instructor: Dr. Barbara Friedman
Email: via Sakai Messages only
Drop-in Office Hours: W 11:30-12:45
(via Zoom), and by appointment

Graduate Assistant: Autumn Linford

Course Overview: Media, broadly construed, are a primary source of information about the world, contributing to the formation of knowledge about important issues, and about ourselves and others. Media messages are cultural products informed by technological apparatus, norms, practices, values and experiences of the organizations and individuals from which they originate. Amid a proliferation of information and a range of devices with which to stream it, our consumption has become routinized and ‘natural.’ But media’s influence on virtually every facet of our lives should not be accepted uncritically; it must be examined.

This course engages with new forms of literacy to aid us in recognizing and interrogating the complexity and power of media as it relates to audiences, industry, content, impact and ourselves—“paying attention to what we pay attention to.” And because media are vital for the exercise of our democratic rights, these same forms of media literacy will help us to identify in media production, distribution and consumption points of intervention where we can take actions to effect meaningful change.

Learning Outcomes: Media literacy is a vital part of our ability to participate actively in a democratic society and in a global context, thus the habits of mind (a kind of “active skepticism”) you will cultivate in this course will be widely applicable. Media literacy refers to a process or set of skills based on critical thinking. Simply, it “challenges the power of the media to present messages as non-problematic and transparent” (Kellner & Share, 2005). Adopting a range of perspectives and approaches, you will:

- develop an informed and critical understanding of how media organize and function;
- recognize and analyze the techniques media use to produce meaning and construct reality;
- reflect on the impacts of media messages and technology tools on individuals (including ourselves) and communities;
- formulate personal strategies for media literacy;
- identify and address current issues/problems related to media.

AEJMC Values & Competencies: The Hussman School of Journalism and Media’s accrediting body outlines a number of values that our majors should be aware of, and competencies our majors should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate from our program. You can learn more about them [here](#).

No single course can give you all of the AEJMC values and competencies (but this one imparts quite a few), but MEJO classes are designed to collectively and incrementally build your abilities in these areas. In this class, we will address many of the values and competencies and, in particular:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

Required Text:

W. James Potter, *Media Literacy*, 9th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019).

Other Material: In addition to the text, a combination of scholarly works (~15-30 pages each), popular media (short reads), and audio and video will comprise required material. Readings will be available via **Sakai Lessons**, and video/audio will be either embedded or indicated by URL.

To be successful in the course, you must complete required reading as scheduled and keep pace as best you can. The reading material figures into our learning objectives and will help you to complete the assignments that follow and to meet deadlines.

If you don't understand something about the reading, no problem—pose your questions on the designated Sakai Forum for crowdsourcing so that we can all benefit from clarification, or come to virtual office hours. If you don't do the reading, on the other hand, or you leave the reading until the end of the semester—that *is* a problem that will inevitably impact your performance in the class.

**** Operating Instructions for this Remote Course**

Important: Each Monday at 5 p.m., weekly materials will be posted to Sakai Lessons (reading, assignments, PPTs, etc.).

This course has two components:

1. Synchronous/Live Content

- **Mondays:** Beginning at 11:30 a.m., I will offer a live/synchronous presentation (brief) via Zoom, with discussion following (ending 12:45 p.m.). Details to join by phone or web will be posed to Sakai Announcements and will be consistent all semester. These synchronous sessions are an opportunity to engage in real time with me and with your classmates, but attendance at these sessions is optional. All sessions will be recorded and posted to Sakai by 5 p.m. Monday as part of the week's lesson.
- **Wednesdays:** Another opportunity for real-time meeting is drop-in office hours via Zoom, 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Details for joining will be posted to Sakai Announcements. Office hours allow us to connect across space (and in some cases, time), for you to ask questions about your work, seek clarification and resources, share experiences with media and more. I encourage each of you to drop in at least once or twice during the semester. These sessions will not be recorded.

*Note that Zoom instructions for Monday live sessions include options for joining via web or phone. If you join via web, you are not required to turn on your video (though we'd love to see your beautiful face!).

2. **Asynchronous content** (no real-time interaction)

- a. In this course, the bulk of your work will occur asynchronously; you will work independently and we probably won't be online at the same time. This is intentional on my part, with safety, inclusion and compassion top of mind. Asynchronous instruction is a way for me to provide you with the frameworks and tools you need for this course, and for you to explore and engage with the material at your own pace. Individual assignments will not be timed, but they have consistent due dates/times. Much of this work will take place via Sakai Forums.

To ease access to content and engage different learning styles, I will do my best to provide materials in a range of formats. At the same time, I understand that your ability to engage in online learning may be challenged by things that are not necessarily within your control: access to technology, hardware and software; work/family responsibilities; food insecurity and physical/mental well-being, to name a few.

Should you encounter obstacles to accessing resources or to completing your work, it is your responsibility to communicate with me *as soon as possible*. If you know in advance that internet connectivity will likely be a challenge, please communicate this at the start of the semester. Please do not wait until the end of the semester or after grades are submitted to tell me that you deserve a break because of a hardship. At that point it will be too late. Instead, own your power and advocate for yourself. I will work with you to find a solution so that your grades are not adversely affected by things beyond your control.

Solidarity and Anti-Racism: I respect the inherent dignity of all people and recognize that systemic racism, anti-LGBTQ sentiment, ableism and other forms of exclusion and injustice have caused and continue to cause harm to many. As a scholar and teacher, I am focused on issues related to gender, race and class, and I am committed to actively educating myself about how I can best be anti-racist and an ally to minoritized and marginalized communities. If you find something in my teaching approach that is problematic, please talk to me. I pledge to receive your criticism openly and without defensiveness, and to rectify the situation and repair harm done.

University Policies

Special Needs: If you have any disability or other special situation that poses challenges to meeting the requirements described in the syllabus, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you have not done so already, you should also contact the [Department of Accessibility Resources & Service](#) (AR&S).

Given that we are living through a pandemic, special attention must be given to physical and mental health. The University has implemented multiple sources of assistance (including financial). The [Carolina Together](#) website has information you may find useful, particularly at the "Health and Wellness" link and the "Students and Families" link. Many students have also benefitted from UNC Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](#)), available 24/7.

Safe@UNC: The University's [Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Other Misconduct](#) states that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject by federal law to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources, including confidential options, [here](#).

Diversity & Inclusion: UNC-Chapel Hill is obligated by law and mission to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. The Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (214 W. Cameron Ave., Chapel Hill, NC 27599 or 919-966-3576) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's non-discrimination policies. You may also/instead contact the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (919-966-4042/711 NC RELAY).

The School of Media and Journalism's mission and vision statements related to diversity and inclusion are [here](#).

Honor Code: Students must adhere to the letter and spirit of the [University honor system](#). Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated—this includes plagiarism, cheating or any false means of obtaining a grade—and may result in failure of the course, and suspension or expulsion from the university. All academic work in this course is to be your own work, unless otherwise specifically provided. If I suspect academic dishonesty, I have a duty to report it to the School's Associate Dean, the Student Attorney General, or the judicial programs officer in the Dean of Students' office for further action.

Plagiarism is defined as “deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” If you have any questions about the way you are using source materials, consult UNC Libraries' “Identifying Plagiarism” [tutorial](#) and/or see me.

In addition, this syllabus and original materials are intended for MEJO 490.2 exclusively; please respect my request that you not reproduce or post the materials (in part or whole) in other settings.



Assignments and Evaluation

Reading Leaders (15%): You are expected to make substantive contributions to this upper-level course by leading discussions in the Sakai Forums. Since we don't have a formal attendance/participation policy, this is your opportunity to show up and show out—it demonstrates to me that you recognize your role in this class regarding individual *and* group success. This means, for example, completing assigned readings before you enter our virtual space and

then bringing your full self with relevant questions and reflections to deepen our understanding of the material.

You will do this work in small groups; a sign-up sheet will be posted to Sakai early in the semester. I will use these criteria to evaluate your role as reading leaders:

a) Content and understanding: Do your question(s) emerge from the reading, and do they challenge us to think further about the material? Do you help others to understand material?

b) Creativity: Do you generate your own insights and examples and share them with your classmates?

c) Curiosity and interest: Do you bring enthusiasm to our learning community? Do you make connections between the reading and current events, specific media messages or personal experience?

Reading Respondent (10%): Each student will engage in a small-group online discussion with Reading Leaders. A sign-up sheet will be circulated early in the semester.

Quizzes (10%): Class performance on quizzes are another signal to me that we can move ahead with our learning, or that we need to review material before proceeding. Quizzes will be administered infrequently throughout the semester. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped at the end of the semester.

Media Analyses (40%): Throughout the semester, you will be asked to apply the media literacy techniques we've talked about and demonstrate your understanding via short writing assignments. Deadlines will be indicated on Sakai.

Your analyses will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- a) In executing the analysis, have you followed the instructions correctly and thoroughly? (Assignments that do not follow instructions will earn a "zero" grade.)
- b) Understanding: Does the analysis connect with the reading/lecture to demonstrate understanding of the concepts associated with the particular media literacy tool/strategy, and to justify why it is effective on a particular media message?
- c) Application: Does the analysis indicate proper application of the technique or strategy?
- d) Interpretation: Are the results of the analysis clearly explained and do they flow logically from the method and content used?
- e) Self-reflection: Has the author reflected on the implications of the analysis for their own role/responsibility as a media consumer/producer?
- f) Grammar and usage: Does the analysis reflect proper grammar and usage?

Final Exam (25%): The final exam is cumulative and will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, identifications, short answers and essays. When the University releases the final exam schedule, I will post details to Sakai.

Grade Scale

A = 95.0 and above	B+ = 87.0-89.99	C+ = 77.0-79.99	D = 66.0-69.99
A- = 90.0-94.99	B = 84.0-86.99	C = 74.0-76.99	F = 65.99 and below
	B- = 80.0-83.99	C- = 70.0-73.99	

Note: Grades are assigned according to criteria established by a UNC-CH Committee on Grading. For example, an "A" grade indicates superior work, whereas a "C" grade indicates sufficient performance and an "F" indicates an unacceptable performance. For an understanding of what the various grades mean, see the UNC Registrar's page [here](#).

Grades are not negotiable, but I will discuss with you any substantive concerns you have about them, and you can check Sakai or ask me any time how you're doing in the class if you're unsure. If you want to discuss an assignment grade, I encourage you take 24 hours to reflect upon the work before coming to virtual office hours or contacting me for an appointment. You must contact me with your concerns within (1) one week of receiving the grade.



A Note on Civility: The classroom, whether in person or online, is a particular environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that we maintain respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, for the professionalism of the instructor, and for the general goals of academic freedom. I expect us all to express ourselves with reason, clarity and compassion. Please refrain from judging individuals by the collective groups of which they are members (e.g., gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.); and assess intellectual ideas and arguments by the evidence supporting them, and not based on the identities of the individuals who create or espouse them.



TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This gives you a *general* idea of how the course will unfold. Content will almost certainly be adjusted as we go along, to incorporate current events and accommodate student interests. For that reason, it's best to **rely on Sakai Lessons** for each week's content.

Sakai Lessons is my distribution point for all materials, except for Potter reading.

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings
1	Aug. 10, 12	Introduction to course; media dependency; critical media literacy	Potter, chaps. 1-2 Duck & McMahan, chap. 13 Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture"
2	Aug. 17, 19	Audiences	Potter, chaps. 3-4, 13-14 "Paying Attention: The Attention Economy"
3	Aug. 24, 26	Audiences	Hall, "Encoding and Decoding" Smith, "It's just a movie"
4	Aug. 31, Sept. 2	Audiences	McIntyre, "The Roots of Cognitive Bias" Gorham, "The Social Psychology of Stereotypes"
5	Sept. 9	Industries	Potter, chap. 6 <i>Listen</i> (39:53): "Societies Online: Facebook and Democracy, with Siva Vaidhyanathan, " Public Books 101 podcast (Note: You can also find this audio and transcript at publicbooks.org)
6	Sept. 14, 16		Potter, chap. 7 <i>Listen</i> (46:09): "Societies Online: Privacy and Power, with Alice Marwick, " Public Books 101 podcast (Note: audio & transcript also at publicbooks.org)
7	Sept. 21, 23	Content	Kovach and Rosenstiel, "The Way of Skeptical Knowing" McIntyre, "What is Post-Truth," and "Science Denial as a Road Map for Understanding Post-Truth"
8	Sept. 28, 30		<i>Watch</i> (9:09): " How the decline of newspapers creates 'news deserts' around the country, " PBS NewsHour (transcript available) News Literacy Project (TBD)
9	Oct. 5, 7		News Literacy Project (TBD)
10	Oct. 14	Impacts	Potter, chaps. 8-11
11	Oct. 19, 21		Potter, chap. 12
12	Oct. 26, 28		Reed and boyd, "Who Controls the Public Sphere" Noble, "A Society, Searching"
13	Nov. 2, 4	Personal Strategies	Potter, chap. 15

			Tolentino, “What It Takes to Put Your Phone Away” <i>and/or Listen</i> (64:38) “Individuals Online” with Amanda Hess & Jenny Odell, Public Books podcast
14	Nov. 9, 11	Confronting Issues, Taking Action	(In groups) Potter, Part VII (issues 1-6) Marwick & Lewis, “Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online,” pp. 1-32
15	Nov. 16		Review for final
	<i>TBD</i>	<i>Final Exam</i>	

