

SOCI 3555 / MDST 3555 Media, Culture & Society

Classes (days/times): January 9-April 7, 2017; Tuesday & Thursday, 4:00 PM-5:30 PM

Location: AT 5041 (Thunder Bay) / OA 2020 (Orillia)

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Desire2Learn website: <https://mycourselink.lakeheadu.ca/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of SOCI 3555 is twofold: (1) to offer a conceptual understanding of mass media from a uniquely sociological viewpoint; and (2) to consider the principal issues of contemporary media in the context of Canadian society and culture. Thus, on one hand, the course will be focused on defining the media, understanding its principal structural elements, and considering its power and effect; on the other, the course will explore the media as an integral part of Canadian society's cultural makeup and assess critically some of the most important aspects of media's role in and impact on creating and shaping the parameters of what we come to recognize as ourselves, our culture and our society.

As indicated by its title, the course is focused on exploring the three foundational sociological categories: 'media', 'culture', and 'society'. The basic assumption behind the course is that these categories cannot be understood separate from one another, and that—in light of the course's theme(s)—understanding media as a socio-cultural reality of contemporary society ultimately rests on coming to terms with media's nature, logic of operation and effects within the context of something sociologists label as 'culture' and 'society'. Media, in other words, is not a universe onto itself, separate and independent from society and its cultural realities. Rather, it is something that both creates and is created by society and its cultural demands and, therefore, something that has to be examined and explained as one of constitutive parts of the larger realities of society and its culture. Thus, the objective of the course is to explore various relationships and connections between media, culture and society, and offer an understanding of how the working of society and its culture informs and is informed by the working of the media.

Our exploration of media, culture and society will take two forms: conceptual and practical-empirical. The purpose of the former is to provide a general theoretically-informed framework for understanding media and its relationship to culture and society, while the purpose of the latter is to look at specific issues of media and culture as they pertain to Canadian society. In addition, the objective of the conceptual exploration of media, culture and society is to provide an analytical lens through which the practical realities of Canadian society and its media and culture can be understood in sociologically meaningful ways.

The issues of media, culture and society are alive, dynamic and vibrant, and the most effective way to explore them is through dialogue and exchange of ideas. SOCI 3555, therefore, is constructed as a combination of formal lectures and structured class discussions/debates. The aim of the lectures is to provide the foundation for constructing a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of—and interrelationships between—media, culture and society from a uniquely sociological viewpoint: The purpose of class discussions/debates is to create an interactive learning environment for hands-on sociological explorations of specific practical issues and problems of media and culture

in the context of Canadian society. All students are expected to take an active role in class discussions/debates.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of the course is to provide students with a comprehensive sociological understanding of the issues related to media, culture and society. By the end of the course, the diligent student will possess a considerable theoretical, conceptual and practical-empirical competence in looking at/thinking about media, culture and society from a uniquely sociological viewpoint, as well as have developed sensibility with regards to the main practical issues/problems of media, mass communication and culture in the Canadian context.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

We will be using the following required textbooks:

- *MediaMaking: Mass Media in a Popular Culture* (2nd ed.), by Lawrence Grossberg *et al.* Thousands Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2006. ISBN: 9780761925446

All additional course resources will be available at our Desire2Learn course website.

As the course in great measure relies on your active interest and participation, you are expected to have read your weekly assignments *before* coming to class.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your performance in the course will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

- Midterm Exam (30%):** March 2
- Final Exam (35%):** TBA
- Reflective Commentaries (25%)**
- Class Participation (10%)**

Both exams will be a combination of definitions and short-essay answers. Please note that *there will not be any multiple choice or true/false questions*. There will be some choice regarding the range of possible answers. You will be responsible for course readings, lecture materials, and anything else presented during our class time. There will be a pre-exam review session with the purpose of clarifying difficulties and problems encountered during your preparation for the test. Both exams will be submitted through Desire2Learn course website.

Exam questions for the midterm exam will be released on March 2 at 4PM, through Desire2Learn course website. You will have 90 min. to complete the exam and make an on-line submission by no later than 5:30PM. **Please note:** late submissions will absolutely not be accepted and failing to hand in the exam on time will result in a zero as your exam mark. You are free to write the exam in our classroom, or anywhere else you feel comfortable.

Final exam will be executed in the same manner. More details to follow.

Reflective commentary is a written reflection *on the commentary readings* (see Course Schedule for details). With the exception of Week 1, Week 7 and Week 8 (when you do not have to hand it in), the commentary—to be submitted through Desire2Learn course website—is **due by the beginning of every Thursday class** (this is **not negotiable**). The purpose of the commentary is (1) to offer your own thoughts about sociological claims presented in the readings, and (2) to formulate three discussion questions about what you find to be the most constructive, or problematic, aspects of the claims/points made in the readings. In formulating your questions you have to explain their

importance in terms of the key issues, problems and/or questions considered in the general readings (from *MediaMaking* textbook).

To write a successful reflective commentary you should follow these five steps:

- (1) read assigned chapter(s) from *MediaMaking* and understand the main conceptual/theoretical points
- (2) read *all* commentary articles and understand the main issues/problems addressed
- (3) think about the issues/problems addressed in the commentary readings in light of the conceptual points discussed in *MediaMaking*
- (4) offer *conceptual*—i.e. sociologically relevant—reflections once you are comfortable with step 3
- (5) formulate three discussion questions and explain their sociological relevance, keeping in mind the general theme of the class for which you are writing your commentary

Please keep in mind that **reflective commentary is not about summarizing the articles** but about offering your own sociological take on the main points raised in the discussion readings.

The length of each commentary should not exceed three pages of typed text, using 1.5 line spacing and 12 pt Times New Roman font. Please avoid using a cover page and put your name and your student ID number in the top-left corner of page 1.

Participation mark is a reflection of your *active and meaningful* input in our class discussions and debates. *Passive classroom presence does not warrant any participation marks.*

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following grading scale will be applied in evaluating your course work:

90-100% (A+)

Outstanding Performance: superb mastery of the principles and materials treated in the course; exceptional fluency in communicating that mastery and a high degree of originality and independence in applying material and principles.

80-89% (A)

Excellent Performance: comprehensive in-depth knowledge of the principles and materials treated in the course; fluency in communicating that knowledge and originality and independence in applying material and principles.

70-79% (B)

Good Performance: thorough understanding of the breadth of materials and principles treated in the course and ability to apply and communicate that understanding effectively.

60-69% (C)

Satisfactory Performance: basic understanding of the breadth of principles and material treated in the course and an ability to apply and communicate that understanding competently.

50-59% (D)

Marginal Performance: adequate understanding of most principles and material treated in the course, but significant weakness in some areas and in the ability to apply and communicate that understanding.

40-49% (E)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

1-39% (F)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

0% (F)

Academic Dishonesty: demonstrable violation of the academic rules of conduct as defined by Lakehead University academic standards.

Your grade is a reflection of your performance in the course, which is the only criterion for your final mark. *There will be no rescaling of grades at the end of the course* and no adjustments except for legitimate clerical errors. Please take note of that.

According to Lakehead University defined standards, grade 0-49% constitutes unsatisfactory academic performance and means failing the course; 50-59% is a minimally accepted level of performance for passing the course, while 90-100% constitutes outstanding performance. For details on evaluation and grading see your *Lakehead University 2016-2017 Academic Calendar*, section University Regulations (V Standing).

If you wish to review your course work you can do so within *seven days* from the day the marks have been posted.

GENERAL POLICIES

Academic Statement: Each student is asked to submit a brief statement about his or her academic background as it relates to the Sociology program in general and this course in particular. The statement should be accompanied by either your recent photograph or a photocopy of your Lakehead University student ID card.

Email: Emailing is to be regarded as an official form of communication. Only emails sent through Lakehead University account will be read and replied to. All other email messages will be ignored.

Cell phones: Cell phones are to be turned off during lectures (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Notebooks/portables: Use of notebook computers and/or portable devices during lectures is **not allowed** (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Audio/video devices: Use of audio/video recording devices during lectures is **not allowed** (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is not mandatory but is highly recommended. If you decide to attend, you are expected to arrive on time and be respectful to other students in class. Disruptive and otherwise inappropriate behaviour in the classroom will not be tolerated. Students engaged in such behaviour will be dealt with accordingly.

Disclaimer I: The information in this syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced and discussed in class before being implemented.

Disclaimer II: By taking the course you acknowledge that you have read and understood—and are in agreement with—SOC/MDST 3555 course contents and policies, as outlined and explained in this syllabus.

COURSE SCHEDULE

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| <p>Week 1 (Jan 9-13)</p> | <p>Course introduction; syllabus walk-through; introductory review</p> |
| <p>Week 2 (Jan 16-20)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Narratives of Media History” (Chapter 2 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “1967, The Birth of Modern Canada” • “The Canada Experiment: Is This The World’s First ‘Postnational’ Country?” • “No Core Identity”? |
| <p>Week 3 (Jan 23-27)</p> | <p>General readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Media in Context” (Chapter 1 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) • “Media People and Organizations” (Chapter 3 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Canada On Screen: Free Movies All Year Long!” • “Canadian Content Rules for Online Media Have Weaker Support, Survey Suggests” • “CRTC Eases Canadian-content Quotas for TV” • “CRTC Gets an Earful at Hearings on Future of TV” • “Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly Urges Change at CBC, CRTC to Boost Canadian Content In Digital Age” |
| <p>Week 4 (Jan 30-Feb 3)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Media and Money” (Chapter 4 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Problem with Postmedia” • “Big Idea for Canadian Media: Provide Incentives for Local Ownership” • “Save Canada’s News Media? Like We Said in 2005...” • “Why Media Concentration in Canada is a Myth” |
| <p>Week 5 (Feb 6-10)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Media and Politics” (Chapter 11 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Why the Government and Media Need to be Kept at Arm’s Length” • “Culture of Secrecy Endangering Democracy: CJFE” • “How the Internet Hurts Political Reporting and Breeds Spin” • “Social Media is Blinding Us to Other Points of View” |

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| <p>Week 6 (Feb-13-17)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Media, the Public, and Normative Theories” (Chapter 12 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Canadians Not All That Active Politically, Study Finds” • “The Media and the Message” • “Lightweights?: Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box” • “Does Social Media Help or Hinder Political Debates?” • “Media Literacy More Important Than Ever” |
| <p>Week 7 (Feb 20-24)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">FEBRUARY BREAK - NO CLASSES</p> |
| <p>Week 8 (Feb 27-Mar 3)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">PRE-EXAM REVIEW</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MIDTERM EXAM</p> |
| <p>Week 9 (Mar 6-10)</p> | <p>General readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Meaning” (Chapter 5 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) • “The Interpretation of Meaning” (Chapter 6 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Toronto Professor Jordan Peterson Takes on Gender-neutral Pronouns” • “Into the Heart of the Matter” • “Into the Heart of Political Correctness” • “‘Of Africa’ at the ROM Aims to Repair Old Wounds” • “PQ Unveils Plans For Its “Other” Canada 150 Commemoration” |
| <p>Week 10 (Mar 13-17)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ideology” (Chapter 7 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Canada’s Media Language is a Little Too Newspeak-y” • “Dear Canadian Media: Your Racism is Showing” • “How To Combat Islamophobia in the Media” • “‘Dumb Indian’ and Other Slurs Used to Combat Racism in Provocative Campaign” |
| <p>Week 11 (Mar 20-24)</p> | <p>General reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Producing Identities” (Chapter 8 in <i>MediaMaking</i>) <p>Commentary readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “2016 Paralympics: Media Depictions of Disabled Athletes are Improving, Says U of T Researcher” • “Because it’s 2016: The Canadian Film Industry’s Gender Gap” • “How Can Indigenous Voices Be Better Represented in the Media?” • “Canadian Media Sucks at Representing Muslims in Canada” |

Week 12
(Mar 27-31)

General readings:

- "Consuming the Media" (Chapter 9 in *MediaMaking*)
- "Media and Behavior" (Chapter 10 in *MediaMaking*)

Commentary readings:

- "Branding in the Age of Social Media"
- "Sexism in Advertising: What Canadian Men and Women Find Unacceptable"
- "Racism On Canadian TV: Advertising Feeds Stereotypes, Study Finds"
- "The Teenage Brain on Social Media"
- "Is Social Media Harming Our Mental Health, Researchers Wonder?"

Week 13
(Apr 3-7)

General reading:

- "Media Globalization" (Chapter 13 in *MediaMaking*)

Commentary readings:

- "Old Canadian Media Reveals Its Washington Bias With Recent Coverage"
- "Anti-Palestine Media Bias Remains Untouchable Even to Canada's Media Critics"