

# ***COM 450***



## ***COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY***

***FALL 2011***

***DR MICHAEL I. NIMAN***

***COURSE SYLLABUS***



## **COM 450W (4084) – Fall 2011 Syllabus**

# **Communication and Society**

3.0 Credit Hours

Tues/Thurs 1:40-2:55 / Classroom A307

**Professor: Dr. Michael I. Niman** (<http://works.bepress.com/niman>)

Office Hours: Tuesday / Thursday 3:05 – 4:35

Wednesday 3:45-5:45PM & by appt. 230 Bishop Hall

Website: <http://mediastudy.com>

## **CATALOG DESCRIPTION OF COURSE**

“Capstone study of the role of communication in society; exploration of contemporary issues in mass media and related disciplines; focus on ethical responsibilities of communication professionals.”

## **COURSE SECTION METHODOLOGY**

This course utilizes a cultural studies perspective to critically explore the role and impact of communication on our domestic and global societies. We will examine different communication disciplines (public relations, journalism, public communication, broadcasting) to see how they work together to synergistically impact our personal lives as well as our collective cultural and political environment. We'll look at the power of the media in our increasingly interconnected global community and discuss the ethical responsibilities inherent in wielding such power. Using ethics as an overarching theme, we'll also examine the ethical responsibilities of all communication professionals in various job settings. Students will also learn to employ critical research methods in an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of the media in the postmodern world.

## **COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students, after successful completion of this course, will possess an understanding of the impact of mass media on our society, historically, currently and potentially. They will understand how individual subdisciplines within the field of communication interact with each other and with society. Successful students will be familiar with the ethical issues and arguments associated with

media production and dissemination within contemporary society both on a local and a global level. They will be thinking about how messages impact various diverse populations, and how to empathize with diverse populations of media consumers. Successful students will understand how to conduct academic research, recognize concepts and theories, and apply these to their analysis of media, especially with a critical eye toward a multitude of ethical issues impacting society. Ultimately students will be able to develop complex hypotheses about media and society, and be able to construct empirically based arguments to explain and defend them.

### **Prerequisite for enrolling in Com 450:**

This is the Communication Department's capstone course. It is a **reading and writing intensive** course taken by senior Communication majors in their final semester prior to graduating. You must be a COM major who has completed 90 credits overall, including 30 COM/SPC credits with a major GPA of 2.6 or above. Anyone who does not meet these requirements must resign from this class immediately or receive an automatic course failure. You must also possess literacy skills appropriate for a graduating college senior.

**Grading:** (see my online style guide for written assignments)

### **45% Class Participation (including weekly essays and ad deconstruction project) –**

Includes preparing reading-based weekly *reflection* essays and participating in class discussions. Essays will demonstrate a comprehension of the reading material. You must bring them to class each week. Students will write **one essay for each chapter or article** included as part of that week's readings. A good essay should cite the reading and demonstrate an understanding of the depth and breadth of the issues discussed in the reading while offering your reflection (informed opinion) on the readings. I will collect and grade essays each week. They should be "typed" and pages should be stapled together (buy a stapler). Students who are not in class are not participating (as in not earning a good participation grade). Hence, **I will not accept late essays w/o medical or funeral documentation.** Students should bring essays to class during the week *after* which they are assigned. On the top of each sheet of questions, write "COM450," your name **and the number of the week that they are due.** Example: The readings assigned during week one, Gitlin 1-70, are due on Tuesday of week two, and should read "Week Two" on top of the page.

**15% Exam** – Week 9 (10/27) Comprehensive. Students are responsible for all readings. Essay format. Open Book. Bring Your Books.

#### **40% Final Paper** –

Due 12/8 (your References Cited section will be due Week 10 → 11/17). Write a 10+ page **research** based paper on an issue related to **media globalization** and the media-driven **spread of consumer culture**. Discuss potential topic with professor before initiating research. Cite **at least** 10 sources *not cited* in class, with at least five of these sources being scholarly books or journal articles. Students **must** also show a **command** of the class reading material by referencing **all four** required textbooks. You must use **in-text citations** and include a **References Cited** section. No portion of the paper may be recycled from a previous or concurrent class. You must follow the above instructions to earn a passing grade. See note on plagiarism below.

This paper should contain an **abstract** at the beginning and a **conclusion** at the end. It should articulate a theory and support that theory with an empirical argument backed up by research data. Your grade will depend on the quality of your research and the clarity with which you present your data. Your paper should be at least an honest 10 pages. In order to earn an A grade for the semester, the paper should be of sufficient quality to be accepted for presentation at the annual Buffalo State College Research & Creativity Celebration. Completed papers will become the capstone scholarship project in your portfolio.

Additional details on paper writing and citation styles are available at the professor's website. Your draft Abstract and your initial References Cited section are both due (stapled together) **Week 10**. Submit a final paper copy in class on **12/8** and submit an electronic copy to turnitin.com via the COM 450 Angel Site.

Students will have the opportunity to showcase their research projects and earn a valuable resume/CV line at the Buffalo State College Student Research and Creativity Festival at the end of the Spring Semester. In order to earn an "A" grade in this course, students should submit an acceptable abstract/proposal for a 10 minute oral presentation at the festival. Graduating seniors are encouraged to return at the end of the spring semester and present your work, if possible. However, you will not be penalized if you are unable to return for this engagement. Your Draft

Abstract (due Week 10) will serve as your festival proposal and will be accepted or rejected according to festival guidelines.

**Please Note:**

Grading of student papers will reflect Standard American English usage. Buffalo State students and faculty generally use Chicago, APA or MLA bibliographic styles. All are acceptable. Students should use one style consistently throughout their paper. I prefer The Chicago Manual of Style for this class. A Chicago style guide is available online (Adobe) at <http://mediastudy.com/AAstyleguide.pdf>.

**Plagiarism will result in automatic course failure** and departmental or college disciplinary action. Ask around – I firmly enforce this policy w/o exceptions. Plagiarism means passing off someone else's ideas, work or writing (intellectual property) as if it is your own. **Quotes must be inside of quotation marks** and clearly cited. Any other use of a sequence of words, no matter how few, not written by you constitutes plagiarism. Likewise, any series of **ideas** presented by someone else, or any **analytical structure** written by someone else, must be properly cited **even if you present their work in your own words**. Professor reserves the right to upload all papers into an anti-plagiarism database.

Students entering this course **must** possess literacy skills (reading comprehension and writing) appropriate for a college senior. This is a prerequisite. You **must resign** from this class if you do not possess these writing and reading comprehension skills. You will not pass this class without demonstrating that you have the literacy skills appropriate to a graduating Buffalo State College communication major.

**Cellies** must be in silent mode. Ringing cell phones = lowered semester grade and/or public torment and humiliation.

**Surreptitiously turning in an absent student's assignment** constitutes fraud on the part of both students involved and will minimally result in automatic class failure for both students. A student with an **excused medical or catastrophe absence** may send their paper to class or to my office with another student if it has a clear note attached explaining the reason for the excused absence.

The use of **electronic recording devices** is prohibited in this class except with specific permission of the professor, or except, after notification of the professor, as provided for under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. All course material is protected intellectual property.

3.0 credit courses require at least **9.0 hours of work per week**.

**Please remember that grading is never quite fair**, so don't expect your grade to always adequately reflect what you have learned. The best strategy to address the injustices inherent in grading is to carefully read the reading material, submit exemplary assignments, show up on time, participate in class and avoid any possible ambiguity regarding the quality of your work.

By registering for and remaining in this class, students are agreeing to abide by these guidelines.

**BSC Disabilities Policy:** *"Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the professor and to the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, 120 South Wing, 878-4500"* (BSC Office of Disabilities Services Syllabus Statement).

### **Required Texts (4):**

1) *Can't Buy My Love*, by Jean Kilbourne. Touchstone Publishing (1999). ISBN 0-684-86600-5

2) *Ads, Fads & Consumer Culture (Fourth Edition)*, Arthur Asa Berger (Rowman and Littlefield (2011). ISBN 978-1-4422-0669-4

3) *Toxic Sludge is Good For You*, by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton. Common Courage Press (1995). ISBN 1-56751-060-4

4) *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*, by Todd Gitlin. Owl Books (2002 or 2007). ISBN 978-0-8050-8689-8

Required texts are available at the **Main Street Talking Leaves Bookstore**, 3158 Main St.(between Hertel and Winspear - 837-8554). From BSC, left on Elmwood, right on Amherst or Hertel, left on Main St. Elmwood bus to Hertel bus, get off at Main Street. Consider your trip to Talking Leaves as fieldwork. Spend some time here looking over the other books in the store. Think about how these books subvert the dominant propaganda paradigm?

***Open Your Mind To New Ways of Approaching Old Ideas  
Take Command of Your Own Mental Environment & De-Colonize Your Soul  
Seize Control of Your Own Thoughts and Emotions***

## **Fall 2011 Course Outline**

PLEASE NOTE: Reading-based discussion questions are due the week *after* they are assigned. Readings will be discussed during the week *after* they are assigned.

### **WEEK 1** (8/30, 9/1)

Introductions. Who are we and why are we here? Course overview. Discuss dynamics of power. Discuss concepts of media ethics, cultural studies and semiotics.

*Read Gitlin 1- 70. Prepare two reflective essays based on the Intro and Chapter 1. Essays are due during week 2 and should be labeled "week 2." Follow this format throughout the semester.*

### **WEEK 2** (9/6, 9/8)

Fast lane in the Virtual World – living in the Media Torrent. Popular Distraction. (Information, education and entertainment).

*Read Kilbourne 11-56. Prepare reflective essays based on Intro and Chapter 1 Read Media Unlimited 71-117. Prepare reflective essay. Due next week.*

### **WEEK 3** (9/13, 9/15)

The Hyperfast fast fast Media Torrent. Kilbourne and media activism. Advertising – You are the product. Targeting youth. Censorship. Exporting addiction. (Social engineering, message presentation).

*Read Kilbourne 57-75 and Berger 1-28. Prepare reflective essays based on each of these two chapters. Due next week.*

### **WEEK 4** (9/20, 9/22)

The Psycho-Cultural Model. Branding. Conscious vs. subconscious communication. Product placement and environmental manipulation as communication. Advertising's influence on film and culture. Advertising as

propaganda. Viral communication. Selling cynicism. The iconography of branding. The global consumer.

*Read Berger 29-45. Prepare reflective essay. Due next week.*

### **WEEK 5** (9/27, 9/29)

Branding cont. Coolhunting and the commodification of hip. Media cooptation of rebellion and counterculture. Deconstructing Nike, Tommy Hifiger and Gap advertising and public relations campaigns. The new global teen. (Audience analysis, message construction) {View "Merchants of Cool"}

*Read: Kilbourne p. 95-154 Prepare reflective essays based on each of these chapters. Due next week.*

### **WEEK 6** (10/4, 10/6)

Media and food – obesity, anorexia, bulimia and the funky new culture of eating. Selling food as medication. Glamorizing self-destruction. Sexual disempowerment – the politics of desire. {View "Slim Hopes"}

*Read: Berger: 65-88 (Chap 4) Prepare reflective essay. Due next week.  
Hunt down manipulative auto ads for use in next week's assignment.*

### **WEEK 7** (10/11, 10/13)

Cultural Critique of Advertising. WWMT (What Would Marx Think?). Consumer Culture. Ad Creep. WWFT (What Would Freud Think?). Pavlov's dogs drink Coke. Automania. WWBD (What Would the Buddha Drive?).

*Read Berger 125-165 (chaps 7&8). **Instead of a weekly essay this week, you will complete the following Media Deconstruction (criticism) Project:** Collect two or more seductive print advertisements for vehicles and deconstruct them (in a 5 page paper) using Berger's template for analyzing print ads and Kilbourne's theories about auto ads (week 5 readings), to document manipulative techniques advertisers employed to induce consumer behavior. This project will earn a letter grade that will be calculated into your class participation score. Due 10/18.*

### **WEEK 8** (10/18, 10/20)

The Science of Marketing. Segmenting Society. Values and Life Styles. Who Are You? How to Analyze Print Ads.

*Read Kilbourne 155-216, Stauber/Rampton p. 25-32. . Prepare reflective essays based on chapters. Due next week. **Exam next week – Bring Text Books.***

**WEEK 9** (10/25, 10/27) In-Class Mid Term EXAM 10/27

Selling addiction. Promoting alcoholism. Pushing Cigarettes. The “how to” and “why” of juvenile tobacco and alcohol marketing. Using media synergy to push drugs. {View “Pack of Lies”}

*Read Stauber/Rampton 1-24, (33-46 optional) 47-64, Berger 109-123 (chap 6) Prepare reflective essays based on each required chapter. Prepare for Exam. Due next week.*

**WEEK 10** (11/1, 11/3)

Propaganda theory. Public relations and the American psyche. Edward Bernays and the birth of the PR industry in America. American influences and the nazi propaganda model. The PRSA Code of Ethics.

*Read: Stauber/Rampton p.65-98 (99-122 optional) 123-142. Prepare reflective essays based on each of these two required chapters. Due next week.*

**WEEK 11** (11/8, 11/10) media deconstruction project due 11/10

PR cont. Co-opting social and political movements. Greenwashing corporations and “Astroturf” campaigns. Info smart bombs – highly targeted communication. Tweaking elections. A look at Hill and Knowlton PR Corp. The greening of McDonalds and BP.

*Read: Kilbourne p.270-291, Berger 89-107 (chap 5). Prepare reflective essays based on each of these chapters. Due next week. Final Paper Research Report (list all resources to be referenced) Due Next Week.*

**WEEK 12** (11/15, 11/17) Final Paper Research Report Due 11/17)

Co-opting and commodifying rebellion to sell products. Selling “Power” to the powerless. Feminist critique of cigarette marketing. Violence in the media in its impact on society. Mediated violence against women. Advertising as pornography.

*Read Gitlin 118-175 Prepare reflective essay. Due next week.*

## **WEEK 13 (11/22) No Class 11/24 Wampanoag Genocide Remembrance Day**

Navigating the Torrent. Fans, Critics, Paranoids, Exhibitionists, Ironists and Culture Jammers. WWLD (What Would Lassn Do?)

*Read Berger 187-194 (Chap 10), Gitlin 176-210. Prepare reflective essays. Due next week.*

## **WEEK 14 (11/29, 12/1)**

Global Media, the Emerging Global Culture and Resistance to Global Consumerism. "McWorld vs. Jihad." What does it all mean?

*Read Stauber/Rampton p. 197 – 206. Do not Write Essays – Only Read.*

## **WEEK 15 (12/6, 12/8) Final Paper Due 12/8**

Talking back to the media. Making media. Responding to the media. Co-opting the co-optation. {View Rtmark Video} Alternative Media. Community Media. Media Ethics recap. Media activism. The future. Your future. Using your media skills to foster community building and planetary survival. Go forth and do no evil.

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## **Recommended Media & Society Resources (the short Niman-biased list)**

**Websites:** Websites are listed and linked at <http://mediastudy.com>

**Periodicals:** also see: <http://mediastudy.com/picks.html>

- Extra! Published by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. \$21/year. (800) 847-3993. <http://www.fair.org>.
- Columbia Journalism Review. <http://www.cjr.org> \$12-24/year. (888) 425-7787
- PR Watch. <http://www.prwatch.org/>. Center for Media and Democracy. \$35/yr. - 4 issues. (608) 233-3346. {small – expensive}

**Streamable Films:** Available at <http://mediastudy.com/video>.

**Subscribe:** To easily subscribe to online and paper news and media magazines and news services, visit <http://mediastudy.com/subscribe.html> .

**Books:** Suggested Books are listed at <http://mediastudy.com/books.html>

The Following are Non-Required Supplemental Texts that provide background data to help explore topics covered in this class in further detail:

- The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again by Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols. (2011) Nation Books.
- Mediated by Thomas De Zengotita. (2005) Bloomsbury Press.
- The Culture of Make Believe by Derrick Jensen. (2004) Chelsea Green.
- The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit & Power by Joel Bakan. (2005) Free Press
- Will the Last Reporter Please Turn out the Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It Anthology edited by Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard. (2011) New Press
- Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers by Alissa Quart. (2004) Basic Books.
- Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture by Juliet Schor. (2004) Scribner.
- The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism by Naomi Klein. (2007) Metropolitan
- The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot by Naomi Wolf. (2007) Chelsea

**If you don't learn intellectual integrity and ethics at school,  
it's not likely you'll find them on the job.**

-- Buffalo State College Communication Department

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