Comm 251: Understanding Media Industries

Dr. Amanda Lotz

Meeting times:
Lectures: M&W 8:30-10:00 MLB Lecture 1
Discussion Sections:
251.002, T 4-5:00, 3302 HM
251.003, T 5-6:00, B143 MLB
251.004, T 6-7:00, B143 MLB

Information about the Instructors
Amanda Lotz, Ph.D. (Amanda is fine) E-mail: lotz@umich.edu
Office Hours: M: 4-5:00; W 1:30-2:30, and by appointment.
Office Location: NQ 5445 Office Phone: 615-4036

Graduate Student Instructor:
Sarah Erickson Email: sareri@umich.edu
Office Hours: M 10:30-12:30, and by appointment
Office Location: NQ5356

Course Description
Understanding Media Industries guides students through an introductory exploration of the complex and rapidly evolving media industries in the U.S. The course examines the influence of media industry organization and practices on society at the same time that it offers students pursuing both scholarly and professional careers related to the media industries a comprehensive overview of how the industries work, why they work as they do, and the broader theoretical and practical implications of the media industries. Questions such as “why is media industry organization important?” “how do we make sense of media industry changes?” and “what are the key issues facing media industries?” animate our analysis. Here we understand the business of media as a component of its status as culture. Students should leave the course with expanded knowledge of the inner-workings of the media industries to which they will subscribe and consume from throughout their lives.

Course Goals
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
- explain a framework for understanding the operation of the media industries
- apply the framework to particular industrial contexts or industries
- recognize contemporary events and tie them to and explain them through the framework

Required Reading Material
(This book is somewhat optional; you’ll be working in groups for this unit and it is necessary for each group to have a copy).

Other readings will also be posted on Ctools, within the week they are due, in folders called Applied Reading. The Supplemental Material folders for each week will hold links to the media prompts used in class for your review, if needed.
Graded Course Activities
The following is subject to change, particularly if measures are needed to help boost participation and reading. A comprehensive final exam may be given if performance is lacking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tests/Quizzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>15% 2/5</td>
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<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>15% 3/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 3</td>
<td>20% 4/30 8-10am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Mandate assignment</td>
<td>5% 1/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forces of change paper</td>
<td>20% 4/21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walkman Project</td>
<td>10% 2/25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecture Participation</td>
<td>Extra credit up to 2.5%</td>
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Brief Paper Assignments:
Media Mandate Assignment
After reading the Mandates chapter, watch one episode of PBS Newshour (http://video.pbs.org/program/979359630/) and listen to one hour of the NPR evening news show All Things Considered (4-5:30 on 91.7, 4-7 on 89.1; or you can listen to the full show or individual stories at: http://www.npr.org/templates/rundowns/rundown.php?prgId=2).
Write a two-page response paper discussing how the news offered by these non-commercial outlets differed from that you are familiar with on commercial news outlets. Your paper should apply concepts from the Mandates chapter and specific content from the news shows you watched and listened to.

Exams
Exams will also include information about contemporary issues that you should be aware of as part of reading or media posted to CTools (see supplemental material folder). Exams may include a take home component.

Forces of Change Paper
This assignment has two-prompts and should total 8-10 pages, but as two distinct answers. Its purpose is to give you the opportunity to apply your understanding of the “forces of change” to your industry. These questions require you to assess how the issues of the rise of the symbolic economy, digitalization, and globalization are affecting your assigned industry from various perspectives. Top responses will incorporate both nuanced application of class materials as well as additional research and will address all 3 “forces of change.” Pay attention to the timeframe prompts and be sure to research the history of your industry. (If you are passionately interested in writing about an industry other than the one to which you are assigned, speak with your GSI).

Section 1): Imagine you are an artist (you can pretend you are someone else if that is utterly unimaginable). If you were launching an artistic career in your media field today, how would you do it? Explain how it is different today than in 1990 and 1970. How might these differences affect the nature of your art?

Section 2): Imagine you are an executive (in your industry). What are the biggest challenges that you’ve faced in the last decade? What will be the greatest challenges in the next 10 years?
Section Work

Industry Application Question Sets
Many weeks each group must respond to questions summarizing their discussion and assessment of any question prompts given to them exploring how the week’s reading applies to their industry. At various points in the semester, groups may need to do and show evidence of additional research. These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. All group members will receive the same grade and it is our expectation that all group members will contribute to the questionnaire writing during the semester. GSI’s may modify this requirement if deep engagement and on-task working established.

Walkman Group Presentation
Your industry group will select a media-related technology or other media entity and you will compose an application of the circuit of culture model to your topic. You may use the cultural processes from du Gay et al’s circuit of culture (production, consumption, regulation, representation, identity), or identify others (if choosing this option you should also present a rationale as to why this cultural process is relevant). A more detailed assignment is available on CTools.

Participation Grades
Section: Attendance is expected and will be taken regularly in discussion sections. All unexcused absences will result in grade penalties; more than 3 absences from discussion section will earn an F for the Discussion Section grade. Extensive excused absences may require additional assignments. Merely attending section will earn you a C for section participation, at best. Attendance and participation are not the same thing, nor is quantity of participation preferable to quality. In order to earn full attendance/participation credit, students must come to class with readings completed and contribute to discussion sections with insight and questions. Students who desire higher grades will need to participate in discussion and can indicate their understanding of the material by keeping abreast of current issues and bringing these in for discussion in sections and lecture. See below for ways to keep abreast of news.

Lecture: This class incorporates several components of a flipped classroom. Students should not expect to come to class and have reading material rehearsed; rather, I will answer questions and review concepts students identify as troublesome and apply the reading concepts to contemporary events and happenings. Students who regularly engage in discussions during lecture and provide insightful answers to Pizza questions may earn extra credit.

Also, if you miss any of the two lectures or the discussion section during the first week, the instructor will assume that you are planning to drop the course and will give your slot to a student on the waitlist. If you have legitimate reasons for absence during the first week you must give prior notice to the instructor (lecture) or GSI (discussion section).

Please inform me (or your GSI in the case of discussion sections) of absences due to religious observances or other excusable reasons, preferably both in-person and by e-mail. It is your responsibility to make sure your GSI knows you are present—repeated late arrivals or early departures will also affect your section grade.
General Policies
*Papers WILL NOT be accepted via CTools, and must be submitted in hard copy unless first cleared with instructor/GSI.
*All papers must be completed and submitted on time to receive credit for the course.
*Papers are due on the date posted; and will be penalized one letter grade each day the paper is late.
*There are NO make-up exams.
*Acceptable paper form for this class is 1” margins, double-spacing, a font no larger than 12 and preferably Times or Times New Roman. Works cited need not be on a separate page (begin at the end of the paper), and gratuitous spacing at the beginning of a paper is not regarded fondly.

Grading Policy
Students are expected to come to lectures and discussion sections with readings completed and comprehended. Please note: there is a difference between completing readings and comprehending readings. I recommend taking notes, highlighting, and writing down questions as you move through the readings. Students who have performed well on my tests have also found it helpful to write a paragraph to a page summary after completing a reading to make sure they understand the main points, and then use this summary when studying for exams. You will be required to do more than regurgitate information, particularly later in the semester, but must synthesize materials from lectures and readings in developing your own analyses.

All papers and examinations must be completed and submitted on time to receive credit for the course. Late papers will automatically receive a grade one degree lower for every day of lateness.

Following the standards of other professors in this department, your performance will be graded on the following scale:

A = Extraordinary. “A” work requires a full command of the material, a strong sense of purpose, clear and compelling thought, and skillful writing.
B = Good to very good. This is work that provides a very solid fulfillment of the assignment. Papers demonstrate clear argumentation and presentation.
C = Acceptable. This is work that fulfills the minimum required by the assignment. It might lack skillful argumentation, but shows an understanding of the material. It might also suggest interesting approaches to the material, but falter in carrying them out.
D = A major deficiency in writing and argumentation.
F = Unacceptable. The paper does not satisfy the minimum required by the assignment.

There is not a standard grade scale for the class. Each assignment is likely to have its own scale to allow for curving.

This is a challenging class covering a lot of material. In order to cover all necessary material, lectures will not always cover the reading assignments, so you’ll need to synthesize the material on your own. You may be confused in early lectures; if you find this being the case, please come into office hours to sort through troublesome material. Taking notes in this class is a must, from both lectures and readings.

Other Information
Subscription to Industry Resources
I will post links to stories that are relevant to our current issue discussions on the CTools site. You may also want to subscribe to the following digest service to keep abreast of ongoing changes and issue in the media industries. I strongly recommend reviewing the What are You Missing? Blog post updated every 2 weeks at Antenna: http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/
You can also get daily email of stories from Benton Foundation’s Benton Communications-Related Headlines (BENTON-COMPOLICY), For subscription information, visit: http://www.benton.org/headlines
Statement on Ability
Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs.

I am happy to accommodate students with special needs whenever possible. Please feel free to discuss particular needs with me as soon as possible, preferably by the end of the first week of class in order to guarantee accommodation. If a crisis affecting your class performance arises, please notify me or your GSI promptly.

Intellectual Honesty
Plagiarism and cheating are very bad and can result in course failure and expulsion. Don’t even try me. Plagiarism is turning in any work that is not your own, this extends beyond papers to include take-home exam assignments and issue briefs. Scholastic dishonesty will result in failure of the assignment and notification of the Dean’s office. Dishonesty on the forces of change paper may result in failure in the class.

CTOOL Reading Bibliography


Burgess, Jean and Joshua Green. Chapters 1 &2. You Tube: Online Video and Participatory Culture Polity, 2009. 0745644791

Course Schedule

1.1 Wednesday January 8  
Course Introduction  
(Connection: Gnome Business Models; DigiDist YouTube Monetization)

2.1 Monday January 13  
Key Ideas  
Reading: UMI Chapter One: Ideas and Vocabulary, Elberse, “Blockbusters”

DISCUSSION SECTION 1: Assign industry groups, discussion format and expectations

2.2 Wednesday January 15  
Mandates  
Reading: UMI Mandates; “Self-Censorship in China”  
(Connection: Mand China Cracks down on Ent);

3.1 Monday January 20  
No Class: MLK

DISCUSSION SECTION 2:  
Key Ideas and Mandates

3.2 Wednesday January 22  
Conditions: Regulation  
Reading: UMI Regulation (Connection: Reg 2012 Indecency; Reg Formal Game);  
*Media Mandate Assignment Due

4.1 Monday January 27  
Regulation--Details  
Reading: FCC for Cable Price Regulation; AT&T/Verizon Net Neutrality (Connection: Reg Apple Ebook)

DISCUSSION SECTION 3:  
Regulation

4.2 Wednesday January 29  
Conditions: Economics  
Reading: UMI Economics (pp. 95-114); Advertising’s Big Four; A-L: How Much for Movie to be Profitable?; M-Z: Toolkit Case Study/Winter’s Bone

5.1 Monday February 3  
Emerging Media Industry Economics  
Reading: UMI Economics (pp. 114-23); Free, Chapter 2 “Free 101: A Short Course on a Most Misunderstood Word” pp. 17-34; (Connection: Free Anderson; Facebook Like Monetization; Adwords MSNBC);  
Supplementary Reading: Free, Ch. 9 “New Media Models” pp 135-1

DISCUSSION SECTION 4:  
Economics  

5.2 Wednesday February 5  
Exam 1

6.1 Monday February 10  
Conditions: Technology  
Reading: UMI Technological Conditions (Connection: Tech/Dist/Ec CD; Tech MP3; NYT as TV News);

DISCUSSION SECTION 5:  
Walkman Assignment Introduction

6.2 Wednesday February 12  
Doing Industry Study: Case of the Walkman  
Reading: Walkman, Introduction, pp. 1-6; Netflix/Near-Death Spiral; Netflix Press Release
7.1 Monday February 17
Doing Industry Study: Reading Representation and Identity
Reading: Farhad Manjoo, “The Great Tech War of 2012”
(http://www.fastcompany.com/1784824/great-tech-war-2012)

DISCUSSION SECTION 6:
Walkman Group Time

7.2 Wednesday February 19
Doing Industry Study: Production, Globalization, and Labor
Reading: “Apple Manufacturing”

8.1 Monday February 24
Creative Practices Application
Reading: UMI Creative Practices; In class screening of Brilliant but Cancelled

DISCUSSION SECTION 7:
Walkman Group Presentations

8.2 Wednesday February 26
Practices: Creation
Reading: Epstein, “Plus CA Change: Paramount’s Regime Change.”

March 3-7
UM Spring Break

9.1 Monday March 10
Practices: Distribution and Exhibition
Reading: UMI Distribution and Exhibition Practices; Unkind Rewind; The Making of a Blockbuster (Connection: Dist Film Rental; Dist Theatrical to DVD);

DISCUSSION SECTION 8:
Practices: Focus on Film: Dist. & Exhibition Activity

9.2 Wednesday March 12
Auxiliary Practices
Reading: UMI Auxiliary; Epstein, “The Studios: Required Reading”

10.1 Monday March 17
Exam 2

DISCUSSION SECTION 9:
SCREENING: “The Reality of Reality”

10.2 Wednesday March 19
Issue 1: Rise of the Symbolic Economy
Reading: UMI: The Rise of the Symbolic Economy; Jobs Crisis/LA; Labor Conditions in VFK Industry (Connection: SymEc iEconomy NYT Video)

11.1 Monday March 24
The Rise of the Symbolic Economy and Media Ownership
Reading: Michael Curtin “Feminine Desire in the Age of Satellite Television” (13 pgs); Ben Bagdikian, “Common Media for an Uncommon Nation” (25 pgs)

DISCUSSION SECTION 10:
Rise of the Symbolic Economy
Reading: “Freelance Writing's Unfortunate New Model;”

11.2 Wednesday March 26
Issue 2: Digitization
Reading: UMI Digitization; Digital Magazines/eBook Publishers; Louis CK/Direct Distribution (Connections: Digi Prod Leverage Final Cut Pro; DigiCreation-DLSR Cameras)
12.1 Monday March 31  Digitization and Fragmentation (Kitior Guest Lecture)
Reading: Turow, Breaking Up America (Chapters 1&2) (Connection: Frag-Status of Cultural References; ATC Common Culture Story 1;)

**DISCUSSION SECTION 11:**  Focus on Music: Digitization
Reading: iTunes Singles Killed Music Industry (Connection: Digi Econ Music Perry; Download Sales)

12.2 Wednesday April 2  Digitization and Distribution
Screen Anderson Talk (30m)

13.1 Monday April 7  Futures of Media Industries: Online Distribution (Kitior)
Reading: Green and Burgess You Tube: Ch. 1&2; Jenkins “Transmedia” (http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html) (Connection: Trans YouTube $100K)

**DISCUSSION SECTION 12:**  Paper Workshop

13.2 Wednesday April 9  No Class

14.1 Monday April 14  Issue 3: Globalization
Reading: UMI Ch. 11 Globalization, Israeli TV/U.S. Audiences; Trolling Overseas for TV Concepts (Connection: Global Burmese Pop)

**DISCUSSION SECTION 13:**  Globalization

14.2 Wednesday April 16  Globalization Strategies
Reading: “Beyond ABBA;” Obst, “Global Film”

15.1 Monday April 21  Globalization and Trade
In class screening: Exporting Raymond
*Complete forces of change paper due

April 30: 8:00-10:00 am  FINAL EXAM