

Media literacy

Comm 3263W-006 // Fall 2026

Mon & Wed // 2:30-3:45p // Amundson 120

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Overview

This course provides a survey of some of the major critical approaches that one can take to understanding how “the media” help to shape the world we live in. In particular, we will approach the study of media from a **critical** perspective, with an emphasis on **why** they are the way they are, **how** they came -- and continue -- to be that way, and **what** might be necessary to transform them in ways that would benefit the world as a whole. As a WIRE (Writing Intensive Research Experience) course, it will also help to prepare you for the kind of thinking, researching, and writing that you will need to do in the future, when you complete your Capstone Project.

Contact information

The most reliable way to reach me is email (rodman@umn.edu). I will try to respond to your emails within 24 hours after I see them (which may be several hours later, especially if you send them after 10:00 pm).

Past experience suggests that students rarely (if ever) attend formal office hours, so I have not scheduled any of those. But I would still be happy to meet with you if you have questions about the course that I can help with. Simply email me, and we will find a mutually agreeable day, time, and modality for that to happen.

Philosophy

Any course is like a gym membership: what you get out of it will largely depend on how much time and effort you put into it. Ideally, there are at least three kinds of things that you will learn in this course:

- **new facts** (i.e., information about the world that you have not encountered before)
- **new viewpoints** (i.e., ways of seeing and understanding the world that are different than your own)
- **new skills** (i.e., techniques and abilities that are either new to you or that help you improve existing skills)

These things won't (and can't) simply be distributed to you in neat, ready-to-use packages. If they're going to happen, you will need to commit time, energy, and focused effort to making them happen.

More specifically, you will need to:

- **Read a lot.** Most of those new facts/viewpoints come from the readings. If you read too casually, you'll find it hard to contribute to our discussions and to make well-informed, persuasive arguments.
- **Speak a lot.** While you can learn a lot by listening to what you classmates have to say, in order to get this benefit, everyone (including you) has to contribute to our discussions on a regular basis.
- **Listen a lot.** More precisely, listen carefully and respectfully. You should pay attention to what everyone in the class says, and treat it with the same care and respect that you want for yourself.
- **Write a lot.** Any college graduate should be able to write clearly and persuasively. And the best way to learn this skill is by practicing it. No one becomes a better writer without actually writing a lot.
- **Expect to make mistakes.** Mistakes are a normal part of learning -- and life. You will make mistakes, and that's perfectly okay . . . as long as you learn from them in productive ways.

Time

The University assumes that 1 credit hour equals 3 hours of work/week, and so you should plan on **working at least 9 hours/week** on this course. This is both an **estimate** (reading/writing speeds vary) and an **average** (workloads vary from week to week), and it reflects the **minimum** work needed to earn a **passing** grade.

All scheduled events and deadlines are listed in **US Central Time**, and will be automatically enforced by Canvas. If you are in some other time zone when you submit an assignment, you will still need to adhere to the U's clock to complete that assignment properly.

Canvas

Log in to the [U's main Canvas page](#) and select "COMM 3263" from either the Dashboard or the Courses menu. Canvas offers additional information about how to use the platform in both [text](#) and [video](#) formats. We will use Canvas for several things this semester:

- access to the official course documents
- access to all the required readings
- the delivery point for your major writing assignments
- business-related announcements about the course

There are Canvas apps, which can push notifications/reminders to you and help you access (some) course content. But even Canvas(!) advises people not to use them as the primary platform for navigating a course.

Grades

Grades don't mean what most people think they do, and they're less important than most people think they are. It's possible to learn a lot in a course, but still fail (e.g., by not turning in a major paper). It's also possible to learn relatively little in a course, but still get a high grade (e.g., by keeping information in your short term memory just long enough to do well on exams). More importantly, your grades will rarely -- if ever -- matter again once you have earned your degree. What you learn, however, potentially has lasting value for decades to come.

You will assign yourself a final grade. Sort of. There are baseline requirements (BRs) that you must meet in order to earn a final grade of C- (i.e., the minimum for the course to count toward degree requirements):

- 20 Participation Credits (PCs)
- 2 fifteen-minute Zoom meetings with me (1 during Blocks #1-2, 1 during Blocks #6-7)
- 1 Literature Review project (completed in 4 stages along the way)
- 1 Self-Assessment Essay (SAE) of 1000+ words

My working assumption is that the grade you assign yourself will be the grade that I officially assign you at the end of the semester, but that result depends on you backing up your claim with solid evidence and a persuasive argument. I reserve the right to assign you a different final grade -- higher or lower -- if there is a significant gap between the grade you assign yourself and your actual performance.

If you fall short of **any** of the BRs, the highest grade you can earn for the course is a D+. In such a scenario, the grade you earn will depend on how far short of those requirements you fall.

Participation credits (PCs)

This is **not** a lecture-based course. Our class meetings will be structured around discussions and workshops, so you'll need to:

- attend class regularly,
- do the required readings carefully,
- come to class prepared to discuss those readings in thoughtful ways,
- contribute to in our in-class discussions/workshops in a non-trivial fashion.

We have 27 scheduled class meetings this semester, each of which allows you to earn 1 PC. You need to earn **at least 20 PCs** in order to meet the BRs for passing the course. On any given day, I will do my best to make sure that everyone gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you if you have been extra quiet or, alternately, that I will ask you **not** to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and other students have not been heard from.

Your in-class participation needs to be significant, thoughtful, and on-topic. Simply occupying a seat in the room and/or offering a few vague generalities during our discussions is not enough. For grading purposes, if you are "present in name only" (PINO) for one of our class meetings, you will **not** earn PC for that day. As the term implies, a PINO day happens when you are physically present, but you do not contribute to our discussion in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not limited to) days when:

- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading, and/or
- you are primarily a passive spectator during our in-class activities.

What counts as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance, and I will email you about any such decision within 24 hours of the class meeting in question.

Ideally, everyone will attend -- and contribute productively to -- every class meeting all semester long. In reality, this never happens, but it is still a worthy goal. The course is set up to minimize the impact that missing class (within reason) will have on your grade, but the impact that missed classes have on your learning is much harder to compensate for. Here are important guidelines for missed classes, regardless of why you are absent:

- **If you feel sick, stay home.** Being in class is important for your learning. But your health -- and the health of those around you -- is more important than that.
- **Contact me.** I don't need (or want) documentation for your absences, and I can't re-enact everything that happened in class for you. But staying in touch with me will help you stay on top of things.
- **Support each other.** There's no substitute for being part of an in-person discussion, and there are limits to what someone can tell you about what a room full of people said during 75 minutes of class, but it's still a good idea to have a "buddy" who can share their notes for classes you miss.

Literature review (LR)

Your major assignment for this course will be to compile and write a literature review focused on a significant research question concerning a topic of your choosing related to **critical media studies**. You do **not** need to design or complete the research project that would allow you to answer your chosen question, but the final version of your LR should help to lay the intellectual foundations for such a project. Your completed LR will include reports on **5-10 academic sources**, in which each report will:

- **summarize** the major claims, findings, and arguments made by the source's author(s),
- **evaluate** the major strengths and weaknesses of the source, and
- **explain** how and why the source matters to the project that your research question would be part of.

You will tackle this project in 4 major Stages. Each Stage has a deadline designed (1) to keep you from procrastinating, (2) to give me time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) to give you time to act on that feedback in productive ways:

21 Sep	Stage #1	Research question essay
12 Oct	Stage #2	Preliminary bibliography (10+ sources)
9 Nov	Stage #3	Draft version of a report on 1 source
23 Dec	Stage #4	Final version of your full LR

All the deadlines above are 5:00 pm deadlines.

Please see the Literature Review handout on Canvas for (1) full details about the assignment's requirements and (2) helpful tips for completing them successfully.

Self-assessment essay (SAE)

In a well-crafted and thoughtful essay of **at least 1000 words**, tell me the final course grade that you deserve, and make a **persuasive argument** to support that claim. Important issues to consider in your SAE include:

- **The quantity of the work you did.** How far above and beyond the BRs did you go? If you barely trickled past them (e.g., 21 PCs, and an LR that covers 5 sources), you'll have a much harder time justifying a higher grade than if you clearly exceeded them by a lot (e.g., 27 PCs, and an LR that covers 9 sources).
- **The quality of the work you did.** Did you make consistently strong contributions to our in-class discussions? Or did you do just enough to avoid PINO days? Did my feedback on your LR stages describe them as excellent, or did I suggest that they needed significant revisions? If the latter is true, are you confident that you made the kind of revisions I suggested?
- **What you actually learned.** Remind yourself of what you knew (or didn't know) in September, and then compare that to what you know in December. One way to make a strong case for a particular grade is to evaluate the distance you've traveled over the course of the semester and/or to write an essay that visibly demonstrates what you've learned.
- **The University's official standards for grades.** These are quoted directly below. Did you merely meet the course requirements (e.g., earn a C), or was your work outstanding (e.g., earn an A)?

[N.B.: This is not an exhaustive list of issues to cover in your SAE, nor are you obligated to address them all.]

Your SAE is due by **5:00 pm on 23 Dec**. Please remember that the SAE is one of the BRs you **must** meet for the course. As such, every 100 words (or fraction thereof) that your SAE falls short of the 1000 word requirement will result in a penalty of a fractional grade deducted from your course grade (e.g., if you otherwise would have earned a B, but your SAE is only 920 words long, you will receive a B- for the course).

This course follows the University's published standards for A-F grading:

- A: "achievement that significantly exceeds expectations in the course"
- B: "achievement that is above the minimum expectations in the course"
- C: "achievement that meets the minimum expectations in the course"
- D: "achievement that partially meets the minimum expectations in the course"
- F: "signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed"
- I: incompletes will only be given under "extraordinary circumstances" (i.e., major life emergencies)
- S/N: only students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis are eligible for these grades

Word counts

- The word counts represent the **minimum** writing necessary to produce acceptable work. Your goal should be to write **strong** assignments, rather than simply meeting the required word count and then stopping.
- The word count requirement for any given assignment is **firm**. If what you've written falls short of that count by even a single word, you will **not** receive credit for that assignment.
- Different apps/programs use different rules for counting words. Submitting work that is just barely long enough comes with the risk that something you think is long enough on your end will fall short of the minimum requirement on my end -- and the latter is what matters.
- Don't pad out your writing with "empty" words. If more than 10% of any given text you submit consists of filler prose (e.g., extended summaries of the readings, generic greetings, etc.), **only the non-filler words will count** toward meeting the word count requirement.
- Only the main body of your text counts. Headers, footers, titles, and reference lists do not count. Quotes from other sources **do** count, but **only** if those quotes are trimmed to an appropriate length (e.g., do **not** quote a 75-word passage from one of our readings if only 10 of those words are actually necessary for your argument to work well).

File formats

Acceptable formats for your written work are:

- LibreOffice (.odt)
- Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)
- Rich Text Format (.rtf)

Written work submitted in other formats (PDFs, Microsoft Works, etc.) or as links to online files (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.) will **not** be accepted.

For Stage #3 of your LR, the version of the source you submit along with your essay **must** be a PDF.

Zoom meetings

You are **required** to have at least 2 one-on-one Zoom meetings with me (see Canvas for the link): a Check-in meeting during Blocks #1-2, and a Progress meeting during Blocks #6-7. There is no formal grade or evaluation for these meetings, but they are **not** optional. To set these up, email me at rodman@umn.edu with suggestions for specific days/times that fit your schedule. Please keep the following guidelines in mind:

- My schedule is generally most open on **Tuesdays** and **Thursdays** from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. Please aim for those days/times first if you can.
- You should block out **15 minutes** for each of these meetings. If you want/need more time than that, please tell me so when setting your meetings up.
- **Do not wait** to set these up. They need to be **completed** (not just scheduled) by the listed deadlines, and the best way to get days/times that fit your schedule is to set up your meetings in advance.

Check-in meeting (9 Sep - 11 Oct)

This meeting is an opportunity to touch base early in the semester, and to help you get off to a strong start. This would be a good moment for you to raise any questions or concerns that you have about the course (including the readings, the assignments, the in-class discussions). If you have an accommodations letter from the DRC, this meeting would be a good time to discuss that (though if this applies to you, please send me a copy of that letter **at least 24 hours prior** to our meeting). Please note that my availability for Zoom meetings will be severely limited from 10-20 Sep.

Progress meeting (23 Nov - 16 Dec)

This meeting is an opportunity for you to make sure that you finish the course well. This would be a good moment for you to raise any questions or concerns that you have about the kind and/or amount of work you need to do to complete the course successfully and/or to justify the final course grade you are aiming for.

Scholastic dishonesty

The following is a partial list of examples of scholastic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying another student's work (in whole or in part)
- having someone else do any of the course's required work on your behalf
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

Penalties for scholastic dishonesty range from no credit for the relevant assignment to a final course grade of F. These penalties are independent of any that might be imposed by the U. For more details, please see the U's [student conduct code](#) and the information page on [potential consequences](#) for code violations.

If you choose to use AI "assistants" (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, Perplexity, etc.) in connection with your work for this course -- and to be as clear as possible, I would **strongly** recommend that you do **not** do this -- do so with **extreme** care. While such tools can potentially be helpful for brainstorming ideas and sharpening your own arguments, using them to do the major thinking or writing that you need to do yourself means that you're not actually learning what you should be -- and that you run the serious risk of **not** earning credit for any affected assignment. Remember that AI tools have a number of known weaknesses:

- They "hallucinate" in ways that generate false, misleading, and even dangerous information.
- They produce vague, generic prose rather than thoughtful, critical arguments.
- They mimic the appearance of human thought without actually engaging in such thought themselves.
- They are **not** trained to understand or analyze the kind of readings you will need to understand and analyze in order to complete the course successfully.

There is no penalty for using AI tools in this course (much like there is no penalty for using "spell check"), but it is **very** unlikely that you will be able to count on AI to do the required work for this course in a satisfactory fashion.

Disability accommodations

If you have an accommodation letter from the U's Disability Resource Center (DRC), I will be happy to make accommodations for you that are consistent with the course's major learning outcomes and the major goals of the assignments. To that end, here are some important considerations:

- Please share your DRC letter with me **as soon as you can**, since I cannot make accommodations happen retroactively, nor can I make them happen without having received a copy of your letter.
- DRC letters are intended to open up **an ongoing dialogue between us** about how best to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to succeed in this course. I will email you after reading your letter with my sense of how/if the requested accommodations match up with the course, and you should respond with any questions or concerns you may have, so that we can reach a happy mutual understanding.
- Individual accommodation letters can (and do) vary, but they are also largely put together from a range of common accommodations. Many of the most common requests either do not apply to this course or they are already built into the syllabus for everyone.

- The most commonly requested accommodation is for flexible deadlines. If your letter includes this request, such extensions can be granted within reason. Please bear the following in mind, though:
 - Accommodation-related extensions are **not** automatic. You need to **contact me in advance** to request them, and we need to agree on a new deadline for the assignment in question. That revised deadline then becomes the trigger moment for whatever late penalties would normally apply.
 - Such extensions have unavoidable “domino” effects. The semester doesn’t (and can’t) get extended, and I will provide feedback on a “first in, first back” basis. So, for example, an extension for stage #2 of your LR necessarily means that my feedback on that stage will happen later, and that you’ll have less time to incorporate that feedback into stages #3-4.

General tips

- **Read the syllabus.** It contains the basic rules for the course. If you find yourself dealing with major life emergencies, I may be willing to bend the rules, but failing to know the rules is **not** such an emergency.
- **Do not overburden yourself.** There are only 168 hours in a week. If your schedule requires 80+ hours/week for school, work, and other major responsibilities (e.g., jobs, internships, family care), then you may want to find ways to ease your load.
- **Contact me if you need help.** If the reading has you baffled, if you want to discuss an idea you have for an assignment, or if you have questions/concerns about the course, set up a Zoom meeting with me. I’m happy to help if I can.
- **Stay on schedule.** The material we cover early in the semester will help to set up material we will cover later on. If you fall behind, catch up on whatever material you missed/skipped as quickly as possible.
- **Plan ahead.** The work you need to do for this course takes time, and the semester will go by **much** faster than you think. Trying to cram most of your work in during finals week will not serve you well.
- **Do the required reading.** Your ability to do well in this course depends on you doing the required reading with care and thought. If you simply skim those readings -- or blow them off -- both your learning and performance will suffer.
- **Prioritize well.** There are lots of things in this world more important than this course. But most of those won’t excuse you from the course requirements -- and the ones that will tend to be major life emergencies. This course shouldn’t matter more than everything else in your life -- but your coursework will suffer if you put it too low on your priority list.
- **Your chance to earn your grade ends on 23 Dec.** The only exceptions to this rule involve major life emergencies. In such cases, you will need to provide independent verification of the emergency in question, and you will receive a final grade of “I” pending the completion of the work that you’ve missed.
- **The semester lasts fifteen weeks -- and they all count.** This course is set up so that it’s possible to recover from a slow start and still succeed. But overcoming a slow start successfully **will** require you to work extra hard at the end of the semester.

Miscellaneous

- We will cover topics that may evoke strong differences of opinion. I don’t expect the group to agree on everything, but I do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable, but verbal bullying and personal attacks will **not** be tolerated.
- The content of this course -- both in-person and online -- is not intended for public circulation or distribution. You can make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. You can download copies of online materials to help you complete the course successfully, but not otherwise. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- I will do my best to accommodate your needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you **must** provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with **enough lead time** for such accommodations to be arranged.

- The [Center for Writing](#) offers a range of services designed to help you with research and writing projects.
- [Student English Language Support](#) offers a range of services to help international students.
- Please pay attention to the U's official notices regarding:
 - [policy statements for syllabi](#)
 - [policy regarding makeup work](#)

Schedule

- All readings will be made available on Canvas.
- As a general rule, we will discuss the readings for any given week on Mondays, and use our Wednesday sessions to discuss your LR projects.

Week 1	9 Sep	Introduction
• no readings		
Week 2	14-16 Sep	Research / Writing I
NO CLASS MEETINGS		
• Booth, <i>The Craft of Research</i>, chs. 1-3		
Week 3	21-23 Sep	Research / Writing II
LR Stage #1 due	21 Sep (5:00 pm)	
• Booth, <i>The Craft of Research</i>, chs. 4-6 • Kearney, "Introduction, or How to Cook an Artichoke"		
Week 4	28-30 Sep	Workshops Round #1
• your classmates' LR Stage #1 essays		
Week 5	5-7 Oct	Effects
• Vaidhyathan, "Are Cell Phones Really Destroying Kids' Mental Health?" • Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words"		
Week 6	12-14 Oct	Representations
LR Stage #2 due	12 Oct (5:00 pm)	
• Beltrán, "Representation" • Hayes & Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Thinking About a Black Film"		
Week 7	19-21 Oct	Audiences
• Hills, "Audiences" • Bird, "Imagining Indians"		
Week 8	26-28 Oct	Money
• Burkart, "Political Economy" • Sterne, "There Is No Music Industry" • Hesmondhalgh & Meier, "What the Digitalisation of Music Tells Us . . ."		
Week 9	2-4 Nov	Technology
• Slack & Wise, <i>Culture and Technology</i> [selections] • Rodman, "The Net Effect"		

Week 10	9-11 Nov	Race
LR Stage #3 due	9 Nov (5:00 pm)	
	• Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes" • Rodman, "White Lies" • Rodman, "The Problem With Happy Endings"	
Week 11	16-18 Nov	Gender
	• Banet-Weiser, "Introduction" [<i>Empowered</i>] • Littler, "The Rise of the 'Yummy Mummy'"	
Week 12	23-25 Nov	Intellectual Property
	• Sinnreich, "What Is Intellectual Property?" • Rodman, "The Goose, the Monkey, and the Lion"	
Week 13	30 Nov - 2 Dec	Social Media
	• Cho, "Social Media" • Ingraham & Reeves, "New Media, New Panics"	
Week 14	7-9 Dec	Artificial Intelligence
	• Crawford, "Introduction" [<i>The Atlas of AI</i>] • Crawford, "Labor"	
Week 15	14-16 Dec	Workshops Round #2
	• LR work-in-progress presentations	
Finals week		
LR Stage #4 due	23 Dec (5:00 pm)	