Media Literacy
COM 205/BC 253
Spring 2018

Section 1 - Professor/Class Information

Keith Corso, Ph.D.

Course Number & Section: COM205/BC253
Term: Spring 2018
Location: PH 105
Class Days: MWF
Class Time: 10:30-11:30

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Section 2 - Course Description

This course is designed to take a literacy approach to mass communication. Mass media is so prevalent today and has the potential to influence individual and societal behavior. As a generation that grew up with this pervasive media, much of what is consumed is taken for granted and without much critical thought.

This class is about building the skills necessary to look beyond the simple enjoyment if mass media messages (although that’s okay too). It’s about becoming literate consumers.

Jane Tallim is an education specialist with The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health Children’s Hospital in Ontario Canada, and she define media literacy in the following way:

Media literacy is the ability to sift through and analyze the message that inform, entertain and sell to us every day. It’s the ability to bring critical thinking skills to bear on all media – from music videos and Web environments to product placement in films and virtual displays on NHL hockey boards. It’s about asking pertinent questions about what’s there and what lies behind media productions – the money, the motives, the values and the ownership – and to be aware of how these factors influence content.
Semester Focus
This semester this class will explore media literacy by specifically focusing on science fiction media. Science fiction stories have been around since dime store novels, to comic books, radio shows and especially in television and film. Science fiction has given writers and story tellers a platform to discuss the social issues of the current age under the umbrella of the future.

As we examine media literacy this semester with this special focus we will have ample opportunity to examine not only specific media industries but to closely look deeply at the impact of media messages.

Section 3 - Course Outcomes

At the end of the class the student will be able to:

1. To understand the concepts of media literacy and what is necessary to develop it.
2. To improve the skills of analyzing and evaluating media messages.
3. To develop a sense of one’s own levels of media literacy and be more reflective on what needs to happen to improve.
4. To come to a basic understanding of how media industries work with regard to audience, message and economics.
5. To understand the influences that come into play in the creation of media messages.
6. To become more media literate through the creation of a targeted media message.

Section 4 - Assignments

Science Fiction Pioneer Profile. One of the important aspects of media literacy is getting to know the people behind science fiction. In this assignment, which will be presented in an oral form, you will get to know and so will we, some of the influential people responsible for bringing us the science fiction stories. (15%)

Novel Analysis. We will use the novel Rebel Fleet by B.V. Larson to conduct an analysis. We will examine what make good science fiction story telling. You will then construct an analysis of the book using the criteria we discuss in class. (20%)

Transmedia Pitch. This is the capstone assignment of the semester. You will be placed in small groups and will develop a proposal for a transmedia property based on an idea related to the science fiction and world building. Now, as you read this at the beginning of the semester, you have no idea what I mean by transmedia, but you will. This is a creative project and really allows you to come up with some original idea. (25%)
Star Trek and American Culture. I don’t think it’s possible to deny that at the intersection of American cultural history and television Star Trek is at the forefront. In it’s many incarnations, the Star Trek franchise leads modern science fiction as means of cultural and societal commentary. This is why Star Trek get it’s own special section of this class and why this assignment is here. You will need to complete what is called an Interview with a Trekkie and another of a few approved assignments that explores the Star Trek impact. (30%)

Class Preparation. This is primarily judged by the completion of various homework assignment that are designed to have you prepared for certain classes. Often times, it is necessary to have you complete some work outside class and then bring that work to class. (10%)

Section 5 - Course Materials

BOOK
https://www.amazon.com/Rebel-Fleet-B-V-Larson/dp/1519012667/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1515468628&sr=8-1

Section 6 - Course Policies

ATTENDANCE
Attendance and polices regarding it are often sticking points for college classes. Being in class is important for a number of reasons.

- Not all material is covered in course readings and the time in class provides this additional material
- Assignments are discussed in detail in class and this information is essential to succeeding on assignments and in the class.
- This is an opportunity to have questions answered and get some help on understanding content and often another student’s questions can help you.
- Developing attendance at your college level classes develops the habits of attendance that your eventual job will require.

The policy in this class is simple. You are required to be here. I do understand that at times you can’t make it due to an illness or something similar. Just like an actual job allows a few days for sickness or other personal reasons, I build in some of these to this class. Here is the way it works.

You are allowed three (3) unexcused absences for this class the entire semester. The following are examples of UNEXCUSED ABSENCES.

- You are sick and can’t make it to your class (just remember that even if you go to the health center and they give a slip, it’s NOT EXCUSED).
- You don’t feel like going to class.
• You made arrangements for a doctor’s appointment at home for the class time (please schedule Dr. appointments around classes)
• You make arrangements to go home for a break and need to leave early.
• You are in a friend’s wedding and need to get home for the rehearsal.
• Your family schedules a vacation during classes (yes this has happened).

These are just a few that have come up in the past. If you aren’t sure if something is excused or not, ask.

After the three (3) excuses absences, the final grade in the class is reduced one step for EACH unexcused absence. For example, you have six unexcused absences for the semester. Three are freebies which leaves three over the limit. Your final grade in the class was a B+ but you lose one step in grade for each of the three, the final grade becomes a C+.

The EXCEPTION to the policy would be what I call college RELEASE TIME. This means you are missing class because of a scheduled college activity such as travel for a college athletic event or a field trip for another class. In these cases, you are excused.

If you miss class? Remember the following:
• Whatever assignments (big or small) that were assigned, you are responsible for.
• Check with someone you know you can count on who attended the class. Get any notes, information or assignments from them.
• Never ask if you missed anything important.
• Please don’t expect me to go over material covered in class with you on an individual basis. Time is at a premium and I won’t be able to teach a class twice for an absence.

TECHNOLOGY USE AND CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
As a social media person, I am very aware at how helpful media is to our daily activities and the manner that it can saturate our lives. Additionally, I believe it is a powerful way to enhance learning and build the learning community environment. Throughout the course I may encourage use of technology including social media, Google, texting and other platforms of use. However, this belief in the value and support of technology should not be confused with a condoning of inappropriate use.

As a faculty member who wants to ensure the highest level of learning, as well as professional who expects you to interact at a professional level, it is necessary to spell out certain behaviors that are not appropriate within the classroom (or really, any setting designed to have strategic face-to-face community and interaction such as business meetings, interviews, office settings, etc.).

CELL PHONE USAGE
Simply put, cell phones are not allowed to be used or even out once class begins. Once class starts, silence or power down your phone and then stow it away in a book bag or back pack.
Students who are viewed using a phone or other device will be counted as absent for the class. You may also be reproved during class time. So why this draconian policy?

Simply put, unless we are engaging in a classroom activity that requires a phone or similar technology, these devices are a distraction and to you, others, and me. Use of these devices during class is not allowed. A classroom is in many ways a preparation for a career and job and in these cases using a phone while in a meeting or other similar activity is rude and disrespectful.

**LAPTOP OR TABLET USAGE FOR NOTE TAKING**

These devices ARE NOT allowed for note taking in this class. A recent series of three studies were conducted to see if students did better with class material if they used a laptop for note taking or use and old fashioned pen and paper. The studies showed that students did better with retention and comprehension when they were NOT using a laptop or tablet. Unless you need to use one of these devices because of a disability, then you are not to have one out during class. Bring paper and pen/pencil.

If you would like to read more about the power of handwriting for notetaking and writing in general, please read the following article. [http://mentalfloss.com/article/33508/4-benefits-writing-hand](http://mentalfloss.com/article/33508/4-benefits-writing-hand)

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**Section 7 - Course Communication**

**EMAIL**

I try to let you know everything you need to know while we are in class. However, sometimes people need reminders and I like to have some things in writing. Any more long-form information I want to transmit outside of class will come in the form of an email. I only use the Westminster email address on file so don't ask me to send to another email address. Get in the habit of checking your Westminster email on a daily basis at a minimum. This is important.

**TEXT MESSAGING**

If I have a shorter, text-length piece of information for you I use a service called Remind.com. This allows me to send information to the entire class using an app and it saves my phone from having to store all your phone numbers. It's a great and reliable service which I have used for a few years now with great results. You will be given the information that you need to sign up on the first day of class.

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**Section 8 - Academic Integrity Statement**

The Westminster College Student Handbook states:
Central to the purpose and pursuit of any academic community is academic integrity. All members of the Westminster Community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators, are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity, in keeping with the philosophy and mission of the College.

The most flagrant violation of academic integrity is cheating on an exam or a quiz. Students caught participating in such an activity (either for their own or for another's benefit) will receive a course grade of "F," with no opportunity for the student to receive a "W" or "WF."

Other forms of scholastic dishonesty will be dealt with in a like manner. These may include (but are not limited to):

A. Copying/turning in another's work (e.g., a fellow student's, a past student’s, or work from the internet) as one's own.

B. Lending of one's work to another so that he/she may turn it in as his/her own.

C. Stealing class materials from students, the professor, or from the library.

D. Inhibiting another student from using library materials or other resources necessary for the class.

See the complete Student Handbook for more details and specifics about academic integrity.

https://www.westminster.edu/campus/services/handbook.cfm

Section 9 - Disability Statement

Westminster College is committed to providing services and support for students with physical, psychological, visual, hearing or learning disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. All students who seek accommodations for diagnosed disabilities should contact the director of the Office of Disability Resources for further information. Signed comprehensive medical documentation and/or test evaluations that indicate the nature of the disability and appropriate professional recommendations is required. Guidelines for the documentation can be obtained from the Office of Disability Resources. The disability resources director will review the documentation, determine if the student is eligible for services, and then coordinate the accommodations, auxiliary aids, academic support, and/or referrals as deemed appropriate, necessary, and within the current resources of the College. You can contact the Office of Disability Resources by calling 724-946-7192.
For information regarding civil rights or grievance procedures, contact the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at 724-946-7110

The brochure for disability services can be accessed by using the link below.

http://www.westminster.edu/campus/services/pdf/disabilities.pdf