Communication 575: Advocacy and Social Change in Entertainment and Media

Fall 2011
Section 20853D

Professor Doe Mayer
Mary Pickford Chair

Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
Thursdays: 9-11:50am  Annenberg Room 230, 4 units
Instructor office hours: Tuesday 4-5pm (or by appointment)
School of Cinematic Arts, Room 411
Email: dmayer@usc.edu

“The universe is made of stories, not atoms.” Muriel Rukeyser

“For every complex problem there is a simple solution that is wrong.” George Bernard Shaw

“To be successful in education we need a good sense of history, humility and a deep respect for the people with whom we work.” Paulo Friere

“When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint, and when I ask why they have no food, they call me a communist.” Dom Helder Camara, Brazilian archbishop

Course Description

This course will examine the many ways that media and entertainment are used by groups with diverse agendas to attempt to influence individual behavior and sway public and institutional policies. We will look at the topic through both American and global models of social change. The first half of the course will define and study various disciplines and approaches that contribute to analytical thinking in the field---social marketing, communication campaign design, entertainment-education, political movements, journalism etc. It will also review relevant history and theory.

The second half will examine the topic through specific media and will provide case studies of advocacy and social change efforts. We will be looking at these efforts through the prisms of film, television, digital technologies, graphics and music, etc. Many weeks the class will include guests in the specific media, or representatives of community organizations, social organizations, or academic study. The class will consider multiple methods of evaluating the
impact of attempts to effect change, and study some of the limitations and shortcomings in the field. Your own personal reflections and development will be supported by keeping a weekly journal that reflects on the content of the class and the readings.

Course Objectives:

- To gain a broader understanding of the role of diverse groups (donors, producers, ngos, government agencies) in advocating for change through media and entertainment.
- To study the multiplicity of approaches to this topic through the lens of social science, politics, organizational agendas, leadership, creativity and personal passion.
- To be able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of different strategies and approaches to this topic and be able to critique design material and its effectiveness in social change arenas.
- To analyze how specific media have been used in advocacy and social change efforts including movies, digital technologies, television, music and graphics
- To consider the ideological, ethical, political and social implications of media production and analysis.

Required Texts:


Guidelines for this class:
This graduate class will be conducted as a seminar, and so substantive student participation and regular attendance are required. Attendance will be taken for each class and tardiness or absence will have significant bearing on your grade. I expect you to complete assignments on time. If you have questions, please speak to me at least a week in advance of deadlines.

Components of Course Evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation &amp; Attendance</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Report/Discussion lead</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course Requirements:

**Journal: 30%**: Weekly Journal assignment. (Due Sunday nights by midnight to dmayer@usc.edu). Please Note: 2 or more late entries will be graded down substantially. Journals are required for each week, even if you didn’t attend class.
The journal assignment is intended to encourage you to think about the relationship between media and social change and to bring your own thoughts and concerns to the foreground. The journal should also help you reflect on and assimilate the wide range of materials and ideas that you will be exposed to within the class in the context provided by the readings and in-class discussions. I am interested in your assessments and interpretations of this material theoretically, historically and practically. I expect your feelings and thoughts about the subject to change during the course of the semester: a written record of that journey will be useful to you and me.

The following is a series of suggestions to guide you in the writing of the journal. Clearly this assignment allows, even encourages, a great deal of latitude in your responses. Since there is no mid-term exam, this is my primary method of judging the degree to which you have absorbed the readings and subject matter of the class. I encourage you to include in your journal any film or video or other media exposure (newspapers etc.) you happen to have outside of class which might be relevant to the course. In general, the entries should include these three components:

1. A straightforward presentation of titles, author, perhaps a brief summary of the material as presented in the readings. This section is diary like, an aid to memory. It need not be separate from the rest: it might well be incorporated into the overall pattern of your entry. *Do not just summarize the work—the point of the journal is to integrate your thinking through a number of the intellectual components you are being exposed to.*

2. A brief evaluative response to the material discussed or read. This is your opportunity to express personal reactions and ideas spurred by the reading. *Remember—personal response is only one category of this chronicle, albeit an important one.* By this I mean that liking or disliking the work is only a starting point for an interrogation of why.

3. A concise account of the relationship between the material under consideration as presented in readings, lecture material and class discussion. *This is the portion of the journal that requires you to analyze and think critically.*

You should begin to draft your journal entries before the class in which we discuss the relevant material so that you can use them as the basis for your contributions to discussion.

**Class Participation and Attendance: 25%**

Central to the work of the course is an emphasis on an active engagement with readings and media. I expect students to attend all classes and to arrive on time and prepared to discuss course materials. More than two unexcused absences will affect your grade.

**Short Report and Lead a Discussion: 15%**

The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to focus close attention on a particular topic and to lead a portion of classroom discussion. By our second meeting, be ready to sign up to present on a particular day. From among the breakdown of weekly subjects pick one or two additional examples (media or readings) and make a brief report on them that raises questions for discussion.
The report should be no longer than 15 minutes. In the first 5 minutes concisely describe the critical writing and/or the media your report focuses on and then raise at least 3 questions for discussion. Instead of broad, general questions (like “so what do you all think?”) try to pose specific ones; and instead of questions that have a yes or no answer try to frame questions that will spark discussion. During the remaining 10 minutes, you will lead a discussion of your questions. On the day of your presentation, turn in a 1-2 page summary of your report and the list of questions you plan to ask the class.

Final Project: 30%

The final project for this class will be a research/analysis paper analyzing a campaign, piece of media or social change project based on what you have learned in the class. It should be an activity or campaign we have not specifically studied in class. The paper should be approximately 20 pages. You must discuss this project with Professor Mayer in advance, and turn in a 1-2 page paper prospectus and bibliography by Nov. 17th. You must also make a presentation describing your final paper to the class Dec. 1 or 8.

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty on any assignments is grounds for failure in the course (see USC catalogue).

Students with Disabilities: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to one of the faculty (or the CA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Eight Tips for Critical Thinking (as defined by Carol Tavris and Carole Wade from their textbook Invitation to Psychology)

1. Ask questions: be willing to wonder
2. Define your terms
3. Examine the evidence
4. Analyze assumptions and biases—your own and those of others
5. Avoid emotional reasoning
6. Don’t oversimplify
7. Consider other interpretations
8. Tolerate uncertainty
Course Schedule

Aug 25.  Week 1- Introduction and Overview

What is Advocacy and Social Change? Who are the audiences? How much do we know as designers or proponents of change? How much do we know as audiences? What ethical issues come to mind when we think about media and change? Can media really change attitudes and behavior at all?

Assignment for Sept. 1:

For next week come to class prepared to discuss a theory that you think applies to course content. It can be a theory you have previously studied or read about, or a theory that connects to your interests in this subject matter. This would include social change, health communication, leadership, psychology, sociology, anthropology or critical thinking theories and others. (many are mentioned in the Pink Book reading below)

Sept 1.  Week 2 - History, Theory and Practice of Communication Campaigns

Readings:


Sept 8.  Week 3 - Social Marketing and Advertising

Readings:


**Sept. 15**  
**Week 4 - Importance of Narrative and Story-Telling, Entertainment-Education**

**Readings:**


**In-Class Screening:** Soul City, Detective VJ, children’s programming

**Sept. 22**  
**Week 5 - Protest Movements and their Effect on Change**

The Roles of NGO’s and advocacy groups in change.

**Guest speaker:**  
Barbara Osborn-- Liberty Hill Foundation

**Readings:**


**Review:**  
*Crude Justice.org* - look over website.  
*Liberty Hill website*

**Sept. 29**  
**Week 6 – Journalism**

**Guest speaker:** Robert Scheer

**Review:**  
*Truthdig.com*
Readings: TBA

**Oct. 6**

**Week 7 – Politics**

**Guest Speaker:** Tom Hollihan  
The Tea Party and its' influence on America

**Readings:**


**Review:**  
[Moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org)  
Watch at least one hour of Fox news this week

**Oct. 13**

**Week 8 – Film and Participant Media**

**Guest Speaker:** Sarah Newton

**Readings:**

[http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/sites/default/files/docs_on_a_mission.pdf](http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/sites/default/files/docs_on_a_mission.pdf)

**Review:**  
View Participant Media [website](#)  
View [Food Inc.](#) before class

**Interesting websites not required:**  
[One World.net](#)  
[Mediastorm.org](#)  
[Listenup.org](#)  
[Documentaries on a Mission](#)

**Oct. 20**

**Week 9 – TV and Health Messaging**

**Guest Speaker:** Sandra de Castro Buffington, Hollywood Health and Society –  
View [HHS website](#)

**Readings:**


Oct. 27  Week 10 - Posters, graphics, comics

Guest Speaker: Carol Wells, founder and executive director of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, *Can Art Win a War?*

Readings:

1. Carol A. Wells, *Why the Poster in the Internet Age?* Massachusetts College of Art; and the Center for Political Graphics

2. Comic Books for Social Change:


Nov. 3  Week 11 - Music

Guest Speaker: Josh Kun

Review:

View before class: *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* (2002) or *Shut up and Sing!* (Dixie Chicks) 2006

Readings:


2. TBA

Nov. 10  Week 12 – Digital technology: ICTs and Games
Guest Speakers: Carmen Gonzales and Benjamin Stokes

Readings:


Review:

Review Games for Change website and read at least one article Video games for Politics, Activism and Advocacy

Review site: [Vozmob](http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm_159.pdf)

**Nov. 17**

*Week 13 – Evaluation*

(possibly no class) Professor may be speaking at EE conference in India

Readings:


**Nov. 24**

*Thanksgiving. No Class*

Individual meetings with Prof. Mayer to discuss final paper/presentation (Nov.14, 15, 21, 23)

**Dec. 1**

*Week 14 – Final Report and Presentation*

**Dec. 8**

*Week 15 – Final report and presentation (note this class falls during the exam period)*