



## COMM 432: American Media and Entertainment Industries

Russell Newman, [rnewman@usc.edu](mailto:rnewman@usc.edu)

University of Southern California

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Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12 – 4:10pm  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12 and by appointment

### Introduction

It is commonplace to hear that we're experiencing a 'communication revolution' in entertainment and communication technology. Beyond such platitudes, the foundations of our media system—how we got here, *why* it exists in the form it does, the logics undergirding it—are rarely examined in-depth: it is generally accepted as-given. This upper division undergraduate course is designed to give you a critical understanding of our media's history and what drives it—even as it is in the process of being shaped today. By the end of this course, you will:

- Have a grasp of the history of American broadcast and broadband media and telecommunications;
- Have an understanding of past- and present-day regulatory debates, the key players in Washington, the broader workings of power in the regulatory and legislative spheres, and how these have been integral to the development of our media;
- Develop an understanding of the commercial logics behind our media system and how they play a role in strongly influencing what content is created and how these technologies operate;
- Understand how to use publicly available government information to track, comment on, and participate in emergent policy debates.

**Required Texts.** You should order from your favorite online bookseller the following books:

- **McChesney, Robert W. (2013).** *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy.* New York: The New Press.
- **Wu, Tim. (2011).** *The Master Switch.* New York: Knopf.
- **Vaidhyanathan, Siva. (2011).** *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry).*
- In addition to the course readings, you are expected to follow current events daily. Please subscribe *right now* to these, for starters. But you should get in the habit of following the business pages of one or more newspapers (an RSS reader will help you immensely to do so):
  - Benton news headlines ([www.benton.org](http://www.benton.org))
  - Free Press' *Media Fix* (<http://www.freepress.net/media-fix>)
- Additional resources for following current events that I like:
  - Public Knowledge's Public Policy Blog: <http://www.publicknowledge.org/blog>.
  - Jeff Chester's *Digital Destiny* blog (<http://democraticmedia.org/blog>). He also has good resources from his main page, <http://www.democraticmedia.org>.

### **Course Requirements.**

- *Final exam (30%).* There will be one final exam in this class, worth 30% of your final grade. It will be a take-home exam distributed on the last day of class, due two days later. It will be comprehensive but not cruel.
- *Current event analysis / contextualization (20%).* One of the principal goals for this class is to give you the ability to visit the business and media/marketing pages of any newspaper and be able to provide (a) some historical contextualization for that event or issue, (b) a description of the stakes and important developments in this event or issue, and (c) an opinion about it. This is what I will ask you to do.
- *Labs and in-class assignments (40%).* After finding a current event, development, or policy issue to examine, three times during the class, you will be required to perform perfunctory research on the topic and to reflect on what our authors have said. Completed 'labs' will be posted on a class blog via Blackboard, which means they will only be viewable by those of us in this class. Each week you will need to find new sources to develop your understanding of your topic more deeply, ultimately building toward the final paper (the current event analysis previously mentioned). Each post should be about two to three well-thought-out paragraphs. It should address and critically engage with at least one of the readings for that week (wrestle with the readings, pose new questions, agree/disagree with author's position, draw connections with other readings, ask questions about the readings, etc.). **They will be due by SUNDAY AT 11:59pm following their assignment.** Late lab posts will be given a zero. Occasionally, there will be in-class activities, responses, or quizzes which will count toward this portion of your grade as well.
- *Participation and attendance (10%).* It's summertime, and the living is easy – except for this class. There's a lot of material here due to its compressed nature. This class will feature extensive discussion: it's the only way to make sense of many of the concepts that we will be encountering. As such, attendance will be taken every class. Life does happen even during compressed classes as this one, so the key is to communicate with me if you are having any problems. Please don't let problems fester.

## Class Policies

Late submissions – including blog posts – will NOT be accepted. All deadlines are firm. If you are aware of a conflict that will prevent you from completing an assignment on time, you are responsible to contact the instructor in advance. Emergencies will require written documentation.

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity Code as detailed in the SCampus guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violations or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor. The University presumes that you are familiar with its standards and policies. Should you be found to have committed a violation, ignorance of these standards and policies will not be accepted as an excuse. For further clarification, please refer to "University Student Conduct Code" and "Appendix A: Academic Dishonesty Sanction Guidelines" in the SCampus guide.

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own. The following is the Annenberg School for Communication's policy on academic integrity: Since its founding, the USC Annenberg School of Communication has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

Any student requesting academic accommodation 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 your instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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## Class Schedule and Readings.

Readings are subject to change, but any changes will be announced in class and noted on blackboard. All readings on blackboard are denoted with "[BB]" and are posted in the "Assignments" section. *While I foresee few changes to the below, always please consult the "Assignments" section of blackboard to ensure you are doing the correct reading each week.*

**1. July 9:** Introduction, welcome.

### **2. July 11: Framing the study of media industries**

- Raymond Williams (1974). Chapter 1, "The technology and the society," from *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. [BB]
- Robert McChesney (2013), Ch. 3: "How can the political economy of communication help us understand the Internet?" from *Digital Disconnect*. [BB]
- Tim Wu (2011). "Introduction," from *The Master Switch*. [BB]

### **3. July 16: Framing media economics**

- Gillian Doyle (2001). "Introduction to media economics" from *Understanding Media Economics*. [BB]
- C. Edwin Baker (2002). Introduction, Chapter 1, "Not toasters: The special nature of media products," from *Media, Markets and Democracy*. [BB]
- C. Edwin Baker (2002). Chapter 4, "The market as a measure of preferences," from *Media, Markets and Democracy*. [BB]
- James Rorty (1934). "The Business Nobody Knows" from *Our Master's Voice*. [BB]

#### **4. July 18: History - Early broadcasting (1920s-30s)**

- Juan González and Joseph Torres (2012). "Words with wings" from *News for all the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*. [BB]
- Robert McChesney (2008), "The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves, 1928-1935" from *The Political Economy of Media*. [BB]
- Tim Wu (2010), Chapters 2, 5, and 9 from *The Master Switch*. [BB]

#### **5. July 23: History – Policy debates of the 1940s into the 1950s with adoption of television**

- Victor Pickard (2010), "'Whether the giants should be slain or persuaded to be good': Revisiting the Hutchins Commission and the role of media in a democratic society." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27:4, 391-411. [BB]
- Victor Pickard (2011), "The battle over the FCC Blue Book: Determining the role of broadcast media in a democratic society, 1945-8." *Media, Culture and Society* 33:171. [BB]

#### **6. July 25: History - Television and logics from the mid-century on; rebirth of 'media reform'**

- William Boddy (1985). "The studios move into prime time: Hollywood and the television industry in the 1950s." *Cinema Journal* 24:4. [BB]
- Juan González and Joseph Torres (2012). "The color line and the public interest: The post-war period" (selection) and "Fierce Rebellion, Furious Reaction, 1963-2003," from *News for all the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*. [BB]

#### **7. July 30: History – The Internet**

- Tim Wu (2010). "Mr. Vail is a big man," "The foreign attachment," "Broken Bell," "The Return of AT&T," from *The Master Switch*.
- Robert McChesney (2013), Ch. 4: "The Internet and capitalism I: Where dinosaurs roam?" from *Digital Disconnect*.

#### **8. August 1: Commercial logics of our times (1)**

- Robert McChesney (2013), Ch. 5: "The Internet and capitalism II: Empire of the senseless?" from *Digital Disconnect*.
- Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller (2012). "Workers" from *Greening the Media*. [BB]

#### **9. August 6: Commercial logics of our times (2)**

- Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011). "Google's ways and means: Faith in aptitude and technology"; "The Googlization of us: Universal surveillance and infrastructural imperialism"; "The Googlization of the world: Prospects for a global public sphere," from *The Googlization of Everything*.

#### **10. August 8: Journalism's crisis**

- Robert McChesney (2013), Ch. 6: "Journalism is dead! Long live journalism?" from *Digital Disconnect*
- W. Lance Bennett (2012). "Inside the Profession: Objectivity and the Political Authority Bias" from *News: The Politics of Illusion (9th Ed.)*. [BB]

#### **11. August 13: Emergent issues**

- Class presentations of your current event analyses with discussion; review for final exam; distribution of final exam.