

COMM 383m
Sports, Communication, and Culture
Course Syllabus
TTh 2:00-3:20
ASCJ G26
Fall, 2017

Instructor: Dr. Dan Durbin

Office: ASCJ G21A

Office Hours: TTh 10:30-11:00, 1:00-2:00, T 5:30-6:30; and by appointment.

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Course Objectives: This course examines the interrelationship between sports and media in today's society and how that interrelationship reinforces social values, sometimes challenges social norms, and draws on the cultural identification of class, race, and gender to identify sports values with cultural values. Drawing on theories of rhetoric and social criticism, we will examine media's role in telling the story of sports and, in telling that story, shaping and reinforcing cultural values. Students will study several critical approaches to sports and public discourse and will apply those approaches to sports organizations, the news media, and popular media. **Specific Student Outcomes Include:** 1.) Become conversant in the language of sports business and sports media; 2.) Become conversant in the language of sports research and theory; 3.) Understand the evolution of sports media in the United States and its impact on American culture; 4.) Recognize recurrent trends in sports and sports media; 5.) Demonstrate proficiency in examining sports communication critically.

Required Reading:

Billings, Andrew C. Butterworth, Michael L. and Turman, Paul D. Communication and Sport: Surveying the Field. Los Angeles: Sage Publications 2012.

Course Notebook (available at the bookstore).

Course Reader (available at the bookstore).

Assignments: Much of this course is taken up in a study of sports narrative in various media and how those narratives draw on and reinforce larger social values. So, most assignments will offer students the opportunity to carry on their own critical research into how sports organizations and media create meaning from the events played out on the field. Students will write two critical analyses, develop a twitter discussion log and take two exams.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation-----	5
Defining Sport Paper-----	10
Sports Event Analysis Paper-----	15
Sport and Society Critical Analysis Paper-----	25
Midterm-----	20
Final Exam-----	<u>25</u>
Total Points-----	100

Course Notebook: I have overhauled the course notebook and class notes (again). You cannot take the class with an old notebook. Be sure you get the new one.

Readings: While the first readings will largely focus on critical approaches to the subject, much of this semester’s readings will include actual reports of sporting events, editorials on sport, and critical analyses of sports films and television shows. There will also be articles and book chapters on larger social issues that have both impacted and been impacted by sports and the communication complex that creates the story of sport. Therefore, you have readings on issues of race and sport by Jackie Robinson and Frank Robinson and issues of gender and sport by Alison Gordon (among others). We will not discuss all these texts in detail. But, it is important that you read them (and, let’s face it, they are a lot more fun than reading dry textbooks). They will give you a much stronger sense of how the story of sports has been told and how that story intersects culture.

Diversity Issues: This course focuses on several important diversity issues and their interrelationship with sports and sport culture. Issues of social class, race, and gender have been part of the history, culture, and communication of sports since at least the nineteenth century. During the first month of class, we will discuss in detail the role social class had in defining the concept of “sport” and “sportsman” in the United States. Drawing from this discussion, we later discuss the role of sports in social change and in issues of race and gender. By its nature, sports directly impacts social values and social

change. So, it is nearly impossible to discuss sports without also discussing the ways it has impacted society. In this discussion, we will focus on how various media (television, film, radio) have helped create the interaction between sport and culture over these issues.

Paper Grades: All written work is to be typed following the guidelines for research paper writing found in either the MLA or APA handbook. Papers will be graded on quality of organization, clarity and depth of analysis, and writing competence. Each error in spelling or grammar will result in a reduction in your paper grade. Papers with an excessive number of errors in grammar, spelling or MLA usage (fifteen or more) will be returned to the author for a rewrite. Failure to rewrite the paper will result in a zero for that assignment. Rewritten papers will be docked one letter grade for having been rewritten.

Should you have questions or concerns regarding the grade you got on a paper, the school identifies the appropriate procedure as follows. Take a forty-eight hour “cooling off” period as you review the comments on your paper. If you still have questions or concerns, contact the teaching assistant who graded your paper to set up an appointment to review the paper. Should a question or dispute remain after discussing the grade with the T.A. you should contact your professor who will discuss any potential next steps with you.

Participation and Absence Policy: Attendance in class cannot be counted as participation. Students will receive participation grades based on the quality and quantity of their participation in class (and on Twitter) throughout the semester. You will be allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. **Each** absence beyond two will result in an automatic 1% deduction from your *final class grade*. Also, remember that, when you are absent, you cannot participate in class. So, excessive absences will also impact your participation grade. Being tardy or leaving class early will be counted as half an absence. Also, please turn off cell phones while in class. Leaving class to answer a cell phone will be counted as an absence. Finally, note that the T.A.’s will be checking on attendance from student listings in the registration file throughout the semester---don’t rely on a friend to sign you in as, if you are found to be absent on a day that you are signed in, you will be counted as absent and reported to student conduct.

Guest Speakers: Guest speakers take time out of their schedules to come speak with you on important topics related to this class. Many of these people are busy executives whose time is very valuable. They cannot be expected to take time to speak if students are online “facebooking” or text messaging on cell phones while they speak. Any time we have a guest speaker, you are expected to turn off your computers and cell phones and focus on the speaker. Students found on their computers during guest speaker sessions will be docked one point off their participation grade (one percent off their total class grade). As we may have several guest speakers, this can add up fast.

Sports and Social Change Program: Later in the semester, various programs will be offered for the fall Sports and Social Change series. Several may offer you extra credit

opportunities. However, there may be a major program one evening during the semester (probably on a Thursday night). As part of your class responsibilities, you are to attend that event and take notes. Notes from the event will form the basis of a number of exam questions on your final exam and your attendance is mandatory. There will also be events during class. Any guest speakers or class events will generate questions for exams, as well.

Late Work: All late papers will be docked one letter grade for each class period they are late. Any time after the **start** of the class in which the papers are due will be considered late.

Disability Services: 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 me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Students requesting accommodations for taking tests in DSP must have their information to me and DSP in sufficient time to set up accommodations at DSP.

Academic Integrity: 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. If you have any doubts about what is and is not an academic integrity violation, please check with me. 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.

Note: All writing assignments in this class must be turned in to Turnitin.com. We will discuss this at greater length later in the semester.

And, Another Note: We have a TREMENDOUS volume of material to cover in this class. We will discuss many of the articles in the course reader and many of the chapters in the course textbook. However, we will not be able to cover all material. There will be questions on exams over reading material not covered in class. Any questions over material we don't cover in class will be very simple and general and will only test your basic comprehension of the material.

Tentative Class Schedule and Due Dates

Weeks One, Two and Three

8/22-9/7

Introduction and Approaches to Sports Studies

During our first three weeks, we will examine approaches taken by rhetorical and communication scholars who have critically analyzed sports discourse. We will also trace the history and evolution of sport as an academic discipline and discuss current approaches to the subject.

Readings: Billings, et al. Chs. 1, 2, 5 and 14 (pp. 1-46, 92-113, 306-328), Durbin, Course Notebook-Appendix C (189-199).

Weeks Four and Five

9/12-9/21

Sports Organizations: Social Class and the Evolution of Sports Organizations in America

During this section, we will discuss how social class determined “sporting” activity in nineteenth century America with the “leisure” class defining “sport” as a “leisure” (not “labor”) activity. We will also discuss how early sports organizations sought to identify their sport with the leisure class and developed rules to identify their sport with the values of the leisure class (e.g. incorporating “blue laws” into organizational rules). We will examine the use of stadiums and other venues as settings for the sports drama and as symbols used to purvey values that identify the sports organization’s goals with the values of the larger culture.

Readings: Billings, et al. Chs. 3, 4, 8 and 13 (pp. 47-91, 161-186, 283-305).

Week Six

9/26-9/28

News Reports: Communicating the Story

Our discussion of news will focus on the extended story of sport, media’s role in changing information into event, narrative, and epic. We will examine the evolution of news media, the impact of evolving media on sports narratives, and the social implications of those changes.

Readings: Billings et al. Chs. 10-11 (pp. 209-257).

Defining Sport Paper Due 9/28

Weeks Seven and Eight

10/3-10/12

Sport Cultures and Media Narratives of Sport

We will draw on research examining the ways in which sports organizations develop and maintain organizational culture, media construct narratives to fit social expectations and organizational interests.

Readings: Course Reader- Trujillo, "Interpreting (the Work and Talk of) Baseball: Perspectives on Ballpark Culture" (pp. 350-371), Hansen, "Narrating the Game: Achieving and Coordinating Partisanship in Real Time" (pp. 269-290), Mullen and Mazzacco "Coaches, Drama, and Technology: Mediation of Super Bowl Broadcasts from 1969 to 1997" (pp. 347-363), Farrell, "Media Rhetoric as Social Drama: The Winter Olympics of 1984." (pp. 158-182).

Weeks Nine and Ten

10/17-10/26

Sports, Social Norms, and Social Change: Issues of Race

We will examine issues of race and sports, the breaking of baseball's color line, the slow movement forward on many issues and the continued challenges. We will also discuss issues of naming and the reification of racist assumptions.

Readings: Billings et al. Chs. 7, 9 (pp. 139-160 and 187-208). Course Reader-Miller, "Indians,' 'Braves,' and 'Redskins': A Performative Struggle for Control of an Image" (pp.188-202), Robinson, "The Noble Experiment" (pp. 38-49), Robinson Frank: The First Year "Prologue: The First Shall Not Be Last," Murray, "One Man's Opinion," "As White as the Ku Klux Klan."

Midterm Exam-October 17

Sports Event Analysis Paper-Due October 26

Weeks Eleven and Twelve

10/31-11/9

Sports, Social Norms, and Social Change: Issues of Gender

This section extends the discussion of social issues to gender concerns. We will discuss Alison Gordon and the first women sports reporters, the response of sports organizations to the deeper involvement of women in sports, naming issues and Title IX. We will also discuss feminist responses to sports media and the objectifying of women in *Sports Illustrated*, on sports television (including ESPN and Fox Sports), and through the variety of sports media.

Readings: Billings et al. Ch. 6 (pp. 114-138). Course Reader: Fink and Kensicki, "An Imperceptible Difference: Visual and Textual Constructions of Femininity in *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*" (pp. 317-340), Gordon, "Foreword" and "Token Broad" (pp. 7-10, 118-137).

Week Thirteen and Fourteen

11/14-11/21

Sports, Sports Gaming, Legal and Virtual Realities

Sports become part of social life as they enter homes and modify the behavior of fans. This section explores some of the more profound changes sports have brought into American homes. We will focus on several participant cultures that have grown from fan reaction to sports and the appeal to fans to take part in sports as "coaches" and "players."

Readings: Billings et al. Ch. 15 (pp. 329-350). Course Reader-Daglow and Kavanaugh "Fantasy Baseball" (pp.629-632), Gordon, "The Fans" (pp. 86-98), Durbin, "Take Me Home to the Ballgame: Baseball Board Games in American Popular Culture" (pp. 1-13), Miller, "The Boys Life in Reel Time" (pp. 64-74), Hylton, "The Major League Players Association and the Ownership of Sports Statistics: The Untold Story of Round One" (pp. 87-108), *Uhlander v. Hendrickson*, *EI Newsletter* Vol. 4 No. 2, July 1974. Class Viewing: "Of Dice and Men."

Thanksgiving Holiday November 23, no class.

Week Fifteen

11/28-11/30

Sports and Film: Sports Myth and Reconstructing Race, Gender, and Patriotism in Sports Films

We will study the representation of sports and sports myth from its earliest portrayal in silent films to iconic images in films such as "Pride of the Yankees." We will examine the image of sports each approach creates and the sports and social values each reinforces. In particular, we will focus on issues of race in the film "Brian's Song" and the reconstruction of nationalism in "Miracle."

Readings: Billings, et al. Ch. 15 (pp. 291-308). Course Reader-Aden, "Nostalgic Communication as a Temporal Escape: *When it was a Game's* Re-construction of a Baseball Work Community" (pp. 20-38), Most and Rudd, "Don't Bet on it . . . The Representation of Gambling in Baseball Cinema" (pp. 233-242). **Course Notebook**, Durbin, "'Cinderella Man: Deconstructing the Male Myth in American Sports Films" (pp. 131-144).

Class Viewing-Selections from "The Pride of the Yankees," "Brian's Song," "Miracle."

Sport and Society Paper Due 11/28

Final Exam December 7, 2-4.

**COMM 383m: Sports, Communication, and Culture
Class Assignments**

Writing Assignment #1

Defining Sport Paper

4-5 pages

Fall, 2017

We began our semester with a discussion of sport as performative public discourse. Drawing on ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, Richard Weaver, and Chäim Perelman, we sketched out ways in which sport functions as a form of rhetoric, a constructed public discourse in which rules establish preferred values and behaviors and the actions of athletes become proofs or examples of those behaviors in action. Sports build discourses of praise and blame from the athlete's actions, discourses that work to modify the behavior of the audience; to get the audience to see the goals of the sport as having moral purpose, to identify with the praised actions of the athletes and embrace them, ultimately, to act in manners consistent with the values praised in athletic performance.

Your first paper is a think piece. You are to examine your favorite sport as performative public discourse. You are to identify three well-known rules from that sport. These may be written or unwritten rules (remember, for instance, that baseball has a whole series of unwritten rules regarding how players in Major League Baseball are "supposed" to play the game). You are then to offer at least one illustration of a story from the last year (2017) in which an athlete succeeded or failed to fulfill one or more of those rules and was praised or blamed for doing so. You are to find at least one story on popular media that covered the story (this could be newspaper, magazine, popular blogs or podcasts). You are to show how the story used the athlete's actions as a *proof* or example demonstrating something praiseworthy or blameworthy. You are then to draw conclusions from each story regarding what readers are supposed to see as right/wrong and the values they are motivated to embrace (e.g. a story in which it is praiseworthy to "win at all costs" would represent a much different value scheme from a story in which it was praiseworthy to "lose by playing the game fairly and not cheating").

Papers must be 4-5 pages in length and have a **minimum** of four cited references. Papers will be graded on clarity of argument, application of class theory, and writing quality. Papers with excessive errors in spelling or grammar (over fifteen) will be returned to the author for a rewrite. Rewritten papers will lose a letter grade and the authors will receive a zero for the assignment until the rewritten papers are handed in.

Writing Assignment #2

Sports Event Analysis Paper

5-6 pages

Fall, 2017

One of the premises of this class is that sports narratives are, to a great degree, shaped by the media on which they exist. At the same time, we assert that elements of the sports narrative must remain coherent across the various media on which the story is told or they will be meaningless. In this paper, you will examine a sports narrative across several media, identifying key elements of the narrative that shift, depending on the medium, and elements that remain stable.

As we discuss throughout the semester, for the vast majority of its audience, the narrative of a sporting event is created in the mediated presentation of the event. Even at live events, fans are treated to mediated framing of the event (scoreboards, replays, announcements of important milestones, and so on). However, the experience for those viewing sports over traditional and online media is typically even richer in narrative construction. The sports story told on the field or court is deconstructed by directors and producers and announcers and reconstructed as a mediated narrative.

You are to write a critical analysis of the presentation of a single sports event across three media platforms. One of those platforms must be traditional media (either television or radio). Another must be some form of online media (espn.com, coverage on the league site, or the team site, take your pick). The third must be a twitter trend on some aspect of the game. You are to examine the varying ways in which these media create narrative coverage of the event.

Since you must follow these narratives concurrently, you must watch a live broadcast of the sports event as it happens. Hence, you cannot watch a pre-recorded event from before the start of the semester. You need to watch an event as it occurs, live. Failure to follow this prompt will result in you having to rewrite the paper.

Key to this assignment is recognizing that you are not examining the actions on the field but the ways in which broadcasters and online sources reconstruct the actions into stories. You are examining how these communicators create the experience of the sport for their viewers and readers and how, in creating that experience, create messages that tell their viewers/readers what is important, who are the heroes/agents of action, what is the struggle or dramatic focus.

You are to use the elements of narrative theory to make your analysis. You are to identify ways in which each narrative creates a coherent (internally consistent) story out of the event and ways in which the three media create fidelity (or fail to create fidelity) between their accounts. For instance, you might find a national broadcast on Fox Sports of an event that identifies a particular player or team as failing to live up to expectations, having a poor outing, or failing to play hard. You might find that story recast by the team's website so that the player or team is alleviated of blame for the failure. You can

note that these stories lack fidelity probably because of the conflicting values of the story-tellers (the broadcasters want to offer a relatively unbiased opinion, the team wants to sell you their product--a "great" team worth cheering for).

You are not to examine any sports from USC. You must examine a **professional** sports event. I cannot make any exceptions to this policy, even if you mistakenly write a paper on an amateur event. You will receive no grade for a paper on an amateur event and will have to rewrite the paper at a ten percent loss of grade. So, make sure the event you want to examine is a professional event before writing your paper.

Drawing on class theory, your analysis should examine the ways in which the directors of classic media **construct the story** of the event and compare that construction with those of non-traditional, online media. How do the play-by-pay announcer, color commentator and director (who chooses the shots) reconstruct the game? What do they focus on (and get you to focus on)? How do they create the impression that they are constructing an objective report of the event? What do they do that supports the interests of the sports team or league or athlete?

Specifically, you are to examine the construction of characters by the media. Who are the lead characters in this story for the media? Who are the heroes and/or villains? Who are the agents and who are the opposition? What actional tendencies do the story-tellers point to in order to reinforce their identification of certain characters as central, important, stars, agents, or heroes? What does this tell us about the values of the story-tellers (what do they value in heroes/agents . . . what do they criticize in villains or heels)?

Compare this to how the online source constructs the game. What is the focus of the online source? If it is a "fan" site, what does it create as "of interest" to fans (in other words, by focusing on one thing, what does it imply should be of interest to you as a fan)? If it is a team or league site, what does it do to promote the interests of the team or league? What sort of advertising does it put forward? What team/athlete products, services or events does it promote? How does it create a "home team" language (verbal or nonverbal)?

Finally, during the game, you are to find a twitter conversation on some element of the game and follow the conversation to its end. You are to explain how the twitter users reconstruct the game. What do they focus on? What is of importance to them? How do they create the story of the game or event? This should only take a limited time and a limited part of your analysis as there are likely to be several different conversations that appear and disappear during the time that the event takes place. Follow one, review it, and explain how the twitter users create the game in a way that varies with those of the more traditional purveyors of the game (and may conflict with their interests). I realize that we are already into the era of Snapchat and Instagram and a variety of other forms of social media that may supersede Twitter. But, for the moment, Twitter will work fine as our engine of social media narrative.

This paper should be primarily descriptive in analysis. This means that you need to load it up with specific illustrations from the various media you examine. You also need to demonstrate a mastery of class concepts by showing how each narrative construction of the event: 1.) recreates the event in a way unique to that medium and 2.) displays the interests of the communicators who employ that medium.

Note, in spite of the fact that this is a class paper, you will be performing a pretty comprehensive marketing analysis (albeit, brief). Central to effective marketing is knowing your target audience(s), the media you have available and the ways in which that media shapes your message. So, this can be a particularly valuable exercise if you have any interest in working in sports media or marketing.

You don't have much space (only 5-7 pages), so you need to have very clear illustrations and explain them succinctly. This may seem like a lot to do during a single event. However, remember that you can review twitter feeds after the event. So, make sure you focus strongly on the broadcast of the event. C papers will simply repeat what was seen on the various media. B and A papers will show how the different media create different forms of communication and how the interests of the communicators inform their discourse.

Papers will be graded on clarity of explanation and analysis, strength of insights, and effective use of class concepts. Papers with excessive errors in spelling or grammar (over fifteen) will be returned to the author for a rewrite. Rewritten papers will lose a letter grade and the authors will receive a zero for the assignment until the rewritten papers are handed in.

Good luck and let me know if you have any questions. I'm excited to hear about what you find.

Writing Assignment #3

Sport and Society Critical Analysis Paper

7-9 pages

Fall, 2017

We have discussed the intersection between sports and society on a variety of issues including race, gender, and social class. You are to trace a story involving sports and one of these key social concerns (or other major social concerns) from the last **five** years. Writing on an older story will lead to a zero on this assignment. You are to trace the entire "story" of one major sports event of the last five years. You are to follow the story's trajectory from first report to last report. Thus, the story must (for the moment) be considered dead (ended). If you have any questions regarding this, ask me.

Your analysis of the story will involve a critical discussion of the value systems the narrators from sports and society brought to this particular issue. As we've noted, in

some cases, sports have been well ahead of society in bringing about social change, in many other cases, sports have been way behind society and in most cases sports have followed their own unique value criteria in matters of race, gender, sexuality, disabilities, and social class. In examining the story, you are to describe the values exemplified in the actions of sports organizations and compare those to the values shown in the actions of the contemporary society. You are to point out when the authors of articles on the event praise or blame a set of actions by the sports organizations or others. Your comparison should illuminate the distinct value systems brought to these important social arguments and the ways in which the media shape the rhetorical perspective of audiences concerning these values.

For example, in 1987, Al Campanis, General Manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, made some infamous remarks on ABC-TV's "Nightline" program. Campanis stated that African-Americans may not have the "tools" to be Major League Baseball managers. These comments immediately caused a firestorm of controversy throughout the country. Yet, as groups throughout the United States voiced anger over Campanis's comments, the first reaction of the Dodgers and Major League Baseball was to defend Campanis as a leader in positive race relations in baseball. These actions showed a clear disjunction between the perspective of the sports organizations and of the larger culture. Or, as we've discussed in class, in 1965, the Chicago Bears started assigning rooms on the basis of position rather than race. This action was perceived as radical and offensive in some parts of American society, especially the South. Yet, it made Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo into sports icons whose story was eventually told in *Sports Illustrated* and a pair of movies.

The tension between the pragmatics of sports and the views of the larger culture should give you a fascinating field to explore in examining the trajectory of a sports story that deals with issues of gender, race, sexuality, management and labor, classic American value systems, social class, and so on. Reporters, caught between having to offer an "accurate" account of events and the current social dialogue concerning events, will shape the narrative of these events from their own and collective perceptions of values. So, your analysis should help your reader see the ways in which all discussions of sport promote values and how those values function between the pragmatics of sport (you've got to win) and the larger social issues that sport intersect.

Do NOT start with the most famous story you know. Likely, many other students have already started pursuing that one. Start with your favorite sport and look at various stories from the last five years that might impact the discussion of social issues and social change.

To examine your story, you will need to search the archives of a major news service (The LA Times, The NY Times, etc.). You are to examine the reports to find the first notes indicating the event(s) that reflected social change or controversy, the evolving narrative as the story began to develop characters/setting/events/social tensions, and the climax and conclusion of the story.

Drawing on the theoretical approaches discussed at the start of the semester, you are to examine the narrative construction of the story, how reports turned events into stories, how those stories framed events and sustained or challenged cultural norms, and how the narrated relationship between characters, setting, and events exemplified the tension between various players in the cultural drama.

This is not a review of the events that were reported, nor is it a repetition of news reports. You are to critically assess the stories, explaining their role in sustaining cultural values.

Papers should be 7-9 pages in length. Each paper should have a **bare minimum** of 10 cited references (you should easily find far more than this in news reports alone). All papers must follow MLA or APA guidelines for research paper writing. Papers will be graded on quality of writing, clarity of argument, depth of analysis, and quality of insights. While you will need to perform only limited *academic* research for this assignment (few journal articles), you will need to complete a full study of one story and your works cited page should note references to a complete cycle of reports.