

CMGT 520: Social Roles of Communication Media

Professor Peter Clarke

Fall, 2017

2:00 to 4:50, Wednesdays, ANN 309

Overview.

We examine how media shape people's conversations, their personal identities, their views of politics and power, narrative entertainments, the marketing of goods and services, and other realms of life. Materials emphasize the American experience, but many international students take CMGT 520; they find relevance to their own cultures, and do top quality work. Required readings and class sessions cover five major topics. The books are fun and informing--the kinds of works that anyone entering communication management would want to read.

Topics are:

1) Do advertising and commercialism, centerpieces of modern media, promote mediocrity and public anxiety, while, ironically, making people feel comfortable? James B. Twitchell, *Adcult USA* (Columbia University Press, 1996), plus a selection I will provide by Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (1995). (Note: I have good reasons for assigning these older works.)

2) What are common strengths and shortfalls in reporting the news? In today's world of social media and proliferation of other channels, does journalism remain a force that frames people's consciousness and serve as a lightning rod for social values? Are the conventions of reporting social and political affairs failing to meet current needs? Thomas Patterson, *Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism*, (Vintage Books: 2013).

3) Are interactive, on-demand, and often mobile media technologies reshaping human thought and social organization? If so, in what ways, and should we greet all these changes cheerfully? Why, or why not? Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark on Our Brains* (Rider, 2014); Clive Thompson, *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology Is Changing Our Minds for the Better* (Penguin, 2013). I will also distribute an excerpt from Jacob Silverman, *Terms of Service: Social Media and the Price of Constant Connection* (Harper, 2015).

4) How do financing and business structures in Hollywood shape our visual entertainments? Whose interests are served when movies, and movie-like narratives get produced? Edward Jay Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist 2.0: The Hidden Financial Reality Behind the Movies* (Melville House, 2012).

5) What are the dynamics of influence networks, and how are both large and niche consumer markets for cultural goods created? Jonah Berger, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* (Simon & Schuster, 2013).

So, to summarize, buy 6 books by these authors: Twitchell; Patterson; Greenfield; Thompson; Epstein; and Berger. You may find it convenient to order books from an online provider. Most are available in paper editions; all can be found used. Other materials listed above will be distributed to the class at cost.

Students' work in the course consists of five short papers (6-8 typewritten, double-spaced pages each, plus references and attachments), and a final exam. This syllabus arrays topics by dates and explains the grading of your work. Please note that papers are due on the dates and at the locations indicated, and in hard copy, not electronic form. Late or misdirected submissions will not be accepted--unless there is a documented medical reason, or you have made prior arrangements with me.

During each class session, we will discuss ideas that relate to the topic listed in the syllabus for that evening. But I will bring different materials to bear on that topic than your readings emphasize. You should read the assigned works prior to the course section dealing with the associated topic.

For the course's final exam, you will compose a question and answer it. Your question will revolve around a theme of your choice, a topic that has been exposed by course readings and/or discussions. You will e-mail me your question and answer (2 pages plus references) by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, December 5.

Class meetings and due dates will follow this schedule:

August 23	Introduction to the course; start of section on Advertising	
August 30	Advertising	
September 6	Advertising	
September 13	Advertising	
September 20	News reporting	1 st PAPER DUE IN CLASS
September 27	News reporting	
October 4	News reporting	
October 11	Digital technologies	2 nd PAPER DUE IN CLASS
October 18	Digital technologies	

October 25	Digital technologies	
November 1	Shaping of visual entertainments	3 rd PAPER DUE IN CLASS
November 8	Shaping of visual Entertainments	
November 15	Dynamics of influence Networks	4 th PAPER DUE IN CLASS
November 22	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
November 29	Dynamics of influence networks	5 th PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Written assignments.

I will elaborate on written assignments in class and hand out detailed instructions to guide each short paper that is based on readings. Each of these papers is worth 17 points.

More about grading.

The final exam is worth 15 points, which rounds out the course total of 100 points. The course's letter-grades will be awarded according to the following schedule:

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	69 or less

I will award extra points for contributions to class discussions. I NEVER penalize someone for asking a "stupid question" (there are not many of these, really), or for voicing a confusion, disagreeing with me, or challenging a course reading. So, speak up! You have nothing to lose.

Attendance at class is an important part of our learning experience together. There will be a sign-in sheet each evening. Missing two or more classes will cost you 3 points per occasion. Please let me know beforehand if you need to miss a class.

Contact information.

It's easy to arrange a visit, so contact me to find a time convenient to both of us. My office is Room 324G, but I often meet students in a coffee shop or elsewhere.

Contacting me: e-mail chmc@usc.edu; voice (213) 740-0940

Academic integrity statement.

The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the SCampus Guide. It is the policy of the School to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the School's major or minor.

ADA compliance statement.

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. Contact information for DSP can be found online through USC's home page.

Please explain why your disability will interfere with submitting course work in a timely fashion.