

## **CMGT 520: Social Roles of Communication Media (4 credits)**

Professor Peter Clarke

Spring, 2020

Tuesday, 6:30 – 9:20 pm, ASC G34

### **Course description and materials.**

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, pretending to make people feel comfortable? James B. Twitchell, *AdCult USA* (Columbia University Press, 1996); Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants*, Parts IV, V, and Epilogue (Vintage, 2017); plus selections I will provide by Ken Auletta, *Frenemies* (Harper Collins, 2018), and Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (Vintage Books, 1995).

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 serves 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).

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); and Ben Fritz, *The Big Picture* (Houghton Mifflin, 2018).

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 8 books by these authors: Twitchell; Wu; Patterson; Greenfield; Thompson; Epstein; Fritz; and Berger. You may find it convenient to order books from an online provider. Most are available in paper editions. Be sure to get the most current editions, whether new or used. Other materials listed above will be distributed to the class at cost.

Students' work in the course consists of five short papers (7-10 typewritten, double-spaced pages each, more if you like, plus references and attachments), and an optional 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 by the means indicated. 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 day. 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, optional, you will compose a question and answer it. Your question will focus on 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 (2-3 pages plus references) by a time that we establish together late in the course.

### **Learning objectives.**

These are abilities you will have acquired by the end of the course. You will be able to analyze:

- Elements of consumer cultures, how they become manifest in communication platforms (i.e., museum exhibits), and the costs as well as benefits that consumerism entails.
- Strengths and weaknesses of current journalistic practices.
- Biological and psycho-social correlates of using digital communication technologies.
- Industrial economic factors that help drive the creation of visual entertainments (TV series, movies, and other video products).
- How virality can be achieved when disseminating cultural messages.

### **Course assignments.**

For details, see syllabus section below, "CMGT 520: Course Assignments."

**Course schedule.**

Class meetings and due dates will follow this schedule:

Weeks

1	January 14	Introduction to the course; start of section on Advertising	
2	January 21	Advertising	
3	January 28	Advertising	
4	February 4	Advertising	
5	February 11	News reporting	1 <sup>st</sup> PAPER DUE IN CLASS
6	February 18	News reporting	
7	February 25	News reporting	
8	March 3	Digital technologies	2 <sup>nd</sup> PAPER DUE IN CLASS
9	March 10	Digital technologies	
10	March 17	SPRING BREAK	
11	March 24	Digital technologies	
12	March 31	Shaping of visual entertainments	3 <sup>rd</sup> PAPER DUE IN CLASS
13	April 7	Shaping of visual entertainments	
14	April 14	Shaping of visual entertainments	
15	April 21	Dynamics of influence networks	4 <sup>th</sup> PAPER DUE IN CLASS
16	April 28	Dynamics of influence networks	
	May 6	NO CLASS MEETING	5 <sup>th</sup> PAPER DUE BY EMAIL

### **Evaluation of your work.**

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. The optional final exam is worth 15 points, which rounds out the course total of 100 points. (Students who choose not to complete a final will have their work percentaged on 85 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 and messages from Prof. Clarke.**

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. Contact me: e-mail [chmc@usc.edu](mailto:chmc@usc.edu); voice (213) 740-0940.

Course assignments and related materials, as well as your grades, are posted on Blackboard. I often send messages via Blackboard with a subject line that reads "CMGT 520 News." Be on the lookout for these messages. The general Blackboard website is: <http://blackboard.usc.edu>, and you will find a HELP link there, too.

### **Other student services and helpful resources.**

The USC Writing Center is available to help students improve their critical thinking and writing skills. It offers free materials and online resources at <https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter>.

The USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity offers free online resources for time management, note taking, paper writing, and goal setting, which can be accessed at <http://kortschakcenter.usc.edu>.

The USC Library offers free research guides on 22 subjects at <http://libguides.usc.edu>.

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### a. Academic Conduct

#### *Plagiarism*

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### b. Support Systems

*Counseling and Mental Health* - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP)* - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)*- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment* - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298  
[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

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 the instructors 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. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu)

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[uscsa.usc.edu](http://uscsa.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Fi = 520 AssignmentsAll

# **CMGT 520:**

## **Course Assignments**

Fi = 520-adcult-2020-Spring

## First Paper

### CMGT 520: Paper on Adcult in the Museum World Spring, 2020

Follow these steps, in order, for best results. The sequencing of Steps 2 and 3 is reversible, depending on your taste and your experience with heavily-promoted museum shows.

1. Read *AdcultUSA*, jotting notes about the defining characteristics Twitchell claims for Adcult. Observe ways that the urge to sell, and to define one's self through consumption, have penetrated virtually every region of American culture--even "sacred" precincts like the church and universities, and liminal<sup>1</sup> episodes such as leaving home for college, graduation, marriage, purchasing a home, or confirmation in a religious faith. Read assigned portions of *The Attention Merchants* and excerpts I distributed from *Frenemies*. Do these contemporary studies of advertising alter our understanding from Twitchell of how brands are created and promoted? If yes, how? If no, why not?
2. Visit the dinosaur exhibits (especially Dino Hall) at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHM). Analyze how the installation/event partakes of Adcult (and, perhaps, resists this commercial embrace--if you feel that it does).

Note how the following "materials" position the works and stage a visitor's relationship to them: a) the gift shop, its merchandise and ways that goods are presented; b) ads for, and media reviews of the exhibit--how other media are used to "brand" dinosaurs; c) how galleries have been decorated, including signage and other presentation-cues surrounding the works; and d) catalog copy and design (you don't have to buy copies; just read and look at enough content to deal with this aspect of promotion). Observe how the show is mounted--arrangement of works, lighting, color, etc. What conceptual schemes have been used to establish the visitor's "understanding" of exhibits and their "significance," aesthetically, scientifically, culturally and historically?

Trail along behind some visitors, singly and in small groups, and observe their responses to the show and to items in the merchandise area; listen in on conversations. What differing impacts does the exhibit seem to have?

3. Read the selection I distributed from Lawrence Weschler's *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*. Visit the Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT). How does this place mock, or parody, or satirize, or burlesque "normal" museums, such as the one you have visited in 2 above? How, nonetheless, does the MJT celebrate the scholarship and sensibility that undergird traditional views of the museum's role? Note the MJT's setting and



everything you see and hear once inside its entrance. Does the MJT provide you additional tools for discerning linkages between the NHM and Adcult? Does the MJT unmask how "normal" museums assert their authenticity and act as wholesalers of critical taste? Explain.

4. Your paper should open with a section that explains what makes Adcult work as a social force, according to Twitchell (3 points); explain how Auletta and Wu's studies either challenge or confirm Twitchell (2 points). Then, present your analysis of the NHM exhibit and spaces that house it, how it exemplifies (and/or resists) the influences of Adcult (6 points). In the course of your analysis, illustrate how your visit to the MJT sensitized you (or could sensitize others) to the ways in which "normal" museums market themselves and their installations (especially heavily promoted shows), drawing parallels to the exhibit at the NHM (6 points).

Very important: Weschler's essay recounts the history of collecting and how museums embraced and "democratized" cultural resources. **Use his ideas as you examine the NHM's presentation and the MJT.** (You may also want to go to the MJT's Wiki entry and explore some of the links you find there.)

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<sup>1</sup>Liminality (from the Latin word *līmen*, meaning "a threshold") is a psychological, neurological, or [metaphysical](#) subjective state, conscious or unconscious, of being on the "threshold" of or between two different existential planes. Cultural anthropologists interested in ritual have used the term to refer to "in-between situations" and conditions when established structures dissolve, hierarchies are disrupted, or uncertainty spikes about the continuity of tradition. In such intervals, people's capacity to adjust their thoughts or emotions can be temporarily unsettled, and they may become especially vulnerable to exploitation. For more about liminality, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liminality>, from which this note has been abstracted.

## Second Paper

### CMGT 520: Paper on News Reporting Spring, 2020

Tom Patterson's *Informing the News* argues that the U.S. civic culture, to the extent that it aspires to wide participation by citizens and accountability by rulers, suffers from six problems that are aggravated by current journalistic practices. Examine each of these problems (Chs. 1-6) by: a) defining the problem and its manifestations; b) identifying the causes of the problem; and c) referring to consequences of the problem. Use heads and sub-heads, as in the box below, to organize your examination of Patterson's point-of-view. This should require 3-4 pages or so.

1. The information problem.
  - a) Definition and manifestations
  - b) Causes
  - c) Consequences
2. The source problem.
  - a) Definition and manifestations
  - b) Causes
  - c) Consequences
3. Etc.

Then, choose a theme or issue that interests you (of political, economic, social, or military importance) that has been covered journalistically since the start of 2016. Avoid stories that are anchored exclusively in elections, in favor of more enduring themes (see paragraph below). Explain in 2-3 sentences why that theme or issue is significant in this time period, in your opinion, relying on at least one authoritative source to help document your opinion. Then, comb through at least two of the four websites below that evaluate U.S. journalistic performance for analyses of how well or how poorly media covered that theme or issue, considering the standards that Patterson advocates. The four websites you should consider using are: [cjr.org](http://cjr.org), [poynter.org](http://poynter.org), [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), [mediamatters.org](http://mediamatters.org), and [mediaresearchcenter.org](http://mediaresearchcenter.org). Note that these sites vary in their political perspectives.

In deciding on a theme or issue, you might start with a topic that interests you (such as opioid addiction, gun violence, wealth disparities, tariffs, immigration). OR, you might use a country as your leading search term (such as South Korea, China, Mexico), and hone in on how U.S. media have covered a topic related to that country or its interests.

In what ways has journalism in the U.S. done well, about your topic, and in what ways done poorly? Cite web sources in your report. How reasoned and fact-based are their critiques? Explain.

Points to be earned: analysis of Patterson (8); coverage of your chosen theme (9).

Note: If you find that the web sources above are narrow or tilted in political perspectives, in your opinion, ask me to suggest additional possibilities.

i = 520NewTechnologies2020

## Third Paper and Class Report

### CMGT 520: Paper and Report on New Technologies Spring, 2020

The preamble for this portion of our course reads: Are interactive, on-demand 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's<sup>1</sup> book, *Mind Change*, advances a number of arguments about how digital media are altering human sense ratios, thought processes, and performance. Start by reading the book, even skimming it, to get a sense of its wide-ranging concerns.

Chapters in *Mind Change* will be divided across class members. On March 24, each member of the class will make an oral report to the class about the ideas or themes in his or her chapters. Each report will cover points 1-3 below and will take approximately 15 minutes. You may use up to four illustrations supporting your presentation; these must be on paper that we can project using the docu-cam (no PowerPoint). Written reports, due on March 31 in class, will cover points 1-4.

Start by reading Chs. 2-4, then your assigned chapters, and finally the remainder of *Mind Change*. Though pairs of students have been assigned chapters for class reports, work independently. Don't be concerned that your reports may cover some of the same ground. Think of yourself as sharing "my take on Chapters X-Y."

Use the sub-heads in bold, to organize your report.

1. **Ideas or themes.** Describe the ideas or themes for which you are responsible.
2. **Evidence and implications.** Use four sources that Greenfield relies on, and explain the evidence supporting or illuminating your assigned ideas or themes. Or, search for your own sources in the research literature. Discuss the implications of this evidence for our understanding of human communication. Study these sources in their entirety, and attach copies of them to your paper.
3. **Steps toward a better understanding.** Think about and describe what additional evidence, or better evidence, could either convincingly sustain the ideas or themes, or help to refute them.
4. **Thompson's slant.** Search Clive Thompson, *Smarter Than You Think*, for ways that he amplifies or challenges Greenfield's central points in all the chapters you have been assigned. Describe the complementarity or the disagreement that you find between Greenfield and Thompson.

Your written report should be 8-10 pages, to accomplish these goals. Sub-title sections, as indicated above, 1 through 4. Add your ideas to section 4 about social implications, based on whether or not Greenfield's arguments/concerns seem valid.

Your oral report is worth three points and your written report is worth 14.

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<sup>1</sup> If you wish to learn more about Greenfield, see her Wiki entry and go onto her website: <http://www.susangreenfield.com>. There's a video there that expresses some of her work.

<b>Chapters in Greenfield</b>	<b>Assigned to:</b>
5-8	
9-12	
13-15	
16-18	
19-20	

Fi = 520-Epstein-2020-Spring

## Fourth Paper

### CMGT 520: Paper Assignment on Visual Entertainments Spring, 2020

This fourth paper, worth 17 points, has two parts. #1 is worth 11 points and #2 is worth 6.

1. Relying on Epstein, how does each stakeholder in a film try to maximize its profitability? Cover these participants: distributor, producer, director/writer, star with bankable status, theater owner, and studio or independent maker. Explain the contractual arrangements and/or most lucrative strategies that are pursued by each participant, giving examples you find in the book and in related sources (see text and footnotes below). For each stakeholder, describe its ideal movie (content and/or form), in keeping with that participant's economic and personal interests.

In addition to the book, go online to Epstein's website.\* Also, Google such terms as "profitability" and "movies OR films". Try "return on investment"  
in

Google's exact window, too. Make visible use of at least five ancillary sources of evidence about the questions above, that you unearth by these means (with citations in your text and references at the end of your paper).\*\*

You may wish to construct your submission as a grid, rather than as a narrative. A grid is fine, even preferable. Just array the participants as six rows, and construct two columns for: a) contracts and strategies; and b) ideal movie.

Part 1 of the assignment will probably occupy 5-6 pages (in grid form, single-spaced).

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\* Access this via [thehollywoodeconomist.blogspot.com](http://thehollywoodeconomist.blogspot.com). Be especially alert to entries about "the numbers behind the industry" (for example, product placements in films, and financial incentives offered by states and municipalities), and other material you find under sections within *The Big Picture*. For ancillary sources, focus on items that weren't included in *The Hollywood Economist, 2.0*.

\*\*The Wiki entry for “Hollywood accounting” has useful links, as well, including footnotes and further reading.

2. Epstein’s studies of the movie business describe legacy arrangements in the industry that continue to govern much of film production. Nonetheless, in 2-3 pages of written text, describe two ways that Fritz argues these arrangements are being altered by new business models and technologies. Number these ways. For each way, what has caused the development, and what are the consequences for the kinds of movies and related entertainment products that are favored for production, moving forward?

Fi = 520-Contagious-2020-Spring

## Fifth Paper

### CMGT 520: Paper on Dynamics of Influence Networks Spring, 2020

*Contagious* by Jonah Berger tells lots of stories (see, also, materials you can download at [jonahberger.com](http://jonahberger.com)). Behind these yarns, however, lie a number of useful ideas about energizing influence networks. Much of Chapter 1, for example, is about the value of scarcity and the power of the unexpected. Think of these as two ideas. You will find many more in the book.

Find three different ideas in *Contagious* that interest you. Express each idea in the following form: “Often, if a brand can invoke (idea a), it will attract greater notice or generate more brand equity than if it fails to invoke (idea a).” Explain the empirical support for this idea, relying on research references that *Contagious* contains or leads you to. Cite these sources and attach a copy of at least one-per-idea to your paper (three attachments in total).

Then, apply each idea to a different brand you know by writing specific changes in its messaging or marketing. That is, the brand now talks about itself this way; instead, it should talk about itself that way, because. . . . Or, the brand now markets itself this way; instead, it should market itself that way, because. . . .

Divide your paper clearly into three sections, each about one of your chosen ideas and applications to a brand. You should be able to complete this assignment in six pages, but take more if you like.

See sample paper on Blackboard, under Content.