This course will expose you to the dominant social scientific perspectives for explaining mass communications and popular culture. In other words, we will cover major theories that treat mass media as a dependent variable. We will give greatest emphasis to the production of culture paradigm in sociology but also cover such fields as economic sociology and cultural economics. We will not explore mass media effects, or theories that treat media exposure as a cause of attitudes or behavior.

Lectures

Attendance at the lectures is strongly encouraged, but not enforced. I have decided to not enforce attendance in any way because I worry about grade inflation and I know that the surest way for people to earn Ds and Fs on the midterm and final is to not attend lecture and just say “I’ll get the notes from someone.” If however you would like to play a part in annoying me by putting me in a position where I have no choice but to give most of the class As because you all earned them, then I suggest you attend lecture regularly.

Here are a few things to know that will facilitate your comprehension of lecture:

1. You can come to scheduled office hours to clarify concepts you didn’t understand (but not for private tutoring in the case of absenteeism).
2. I will be posting brief outlines of each lecture and a list of supporting citations. There are three reasons for this.
   1. You can use the lecture outlines as a study guide. If you can’t give a good explanation of the causal logic behind every term on the lecture outline then you’re not ready for the next test.
   2. You can check your spelling of key names and concepts.
   3. I want you to know that I am not making this stuff up and you can check out the supporting citations if you are interested in more details.

There are no laptops in class. This is not only to avoid distractions but also because people take better notes on paper where they have to decide what is important rather than trying to transcribe every word. Exceptions will be made
only by special arrangement and only for people who can demonstrate an injury that impedes handwriting but not typing.

Readings

All readings are on the website with hyperlinks directly in the syllabus and the weekly pages. Most of the readings require you to be on campus or using VPN. If you tend to study off-campus, please learn to use VPN or download them from a campus lab. If you click the link and it asks you for money, this means you’re not using VPN. You should not have to pay for any readings if you access them on campus or from VPN.

Grading and Assignments

There will be a midterm in week five and a final during finals week. Both the midterm and final will be a mix of short answer questions on the lectures and multiple choice questions on the readings. Both exams will require a bluebook. The final is not cumulative, but rather covers material since the midterm.

In addition, you will be responsible for completing five memos on the assigned reading. You may choose any five weeks to write the memos, but I suggest you get started early in the term. There will be no excuses if, for instance, you wait until after the midterm to do them back to back but then have an emergency in week 8 that precludes turning in a memo that week. These memos should be about 1200 words and deal with all of the assigned readings that week. We expect to see not just summary, but also comprehension and analysis of the material. Memos are due at the beginning of your enrolled section. If you are so rude as to turn in the memos and then leave early, the TAs have been instructed to discard your memos. Student-athletes who have away games should meet with their TAs in advance to discuss submitting by email.

You are very welcome to ask myself or the TAs for more clarification or feedback, but I have a firm policy of stare decisis for grades so don’t ask for myself or the TAs to regrade an assignment. There are two reasons for this. First, statistically mistakes should be distributed randomly and if students only appeal cases where mistakes went against them, this will create systematic bias in the grades, which is worse than random error. Second, I want to respect all of you so I have a blanket ban on the behavior most likely to undermine that respect.

*Total grades for the course are 40% midterm, 40% final, and 20% for the memos.* The grade breakdown is the usual 60/70/80/90 cutpoints. We will apply three point bins for “+” and “-.” For instance 76.99 is a “C,” 77.01 is a “C+,” 80.1 is a “B-,” and 83.01 is a “B.”
Calendar of Lectures and Readings

Week 1

Monday
- Intro

Wednesday
- History of the mass media

Readings

Week 2

Monday
- Intellectual Property

Wednesday
- Superstars
- Ordinal choice
- Information cascades
- Network externalities

Readings

Week 3

Monday
- Price Discrimination

Wednesday
- Bundling
- Cable
- Paramount
- Pop music

Readings
• Cowen. "Introduction to Price Discrimination Marginal Revolution University
• Cowen. “Tying” Marginal Revolution University
• Tabarrok. “Bundling” Marginal Revolution University
• Patel. “Over the Top”

Week 4

Monday
• Disruptive innovation
• Streaming media
• Podcasts

Wednesday
• Hirsch organization set model
• Payola

Readings
• Hirsch. “Processing Fads and Fashions” American Journal of Sociology
• “The Fight for the Future of NPR” Slate

Week 5

Monday
• Peterson and Berger’s model of media ownership and creativity
• Endogenous decay
• Exogenous shocks

Wednesday
• midterm

Readings

Week 6

Monday
• Hotelling Theorem of “spatial competition”
• Median voter theorem
• Radio deregulation

Wednesday
• Historical Origins of Objectivity as an Ideal in the News
• News “Objectivity” in Practice

Readings
• Berry and Waldfogel “Do Mergers Increase Product Variety” Quarterly Journal of Economics

Week 7
Monday
• No class, holiday

Wednesday
• Market information regimes

Readings

Week 8
Monday
• Starving artists

Wednesday
• Human capital investment and labor contracts

Readings

Week 9
Monday
• Networks of artistic collaboration

Wednesday
• Team spillovers
Readings

- Rossman, Gabriel, Nicole Esparza, and Phil Bonacich. 2010. “I’d Like to Thank the Academy, Team Spillovers, and Network Centrality.” American Sociological Review

Week 10

Monday

- Cultural capital

Wednesday

*Cultural consecration

Readings


Final Exam: Tuesday, December 10, 8:00am-10:30am.