

Communication 3650: Media & Society

Fall 2020 — Online

Professor: Dr. Kyle Kontour

Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

Email: kyle.kontour@ucdenver.edu

Office: My patio, when the weather's nice

WELCOME TO THE SYLLABUS!

This is kind of a long document, but it has a lot of important information. Yes, I know every professor says that. But the point here is not merely to lay down a bunch of rules or wallow in my own puffery: the information here will help you succeed in this course and may, if the time should occur, provide you with some relief from a panicky situation.

Course Description:

The purpose of the course is guide students through a means of understanding the relationship between media and society: how they shape and influence each other, which is to say, how they shape and influence us. These theories are both acknowledgements of the huge role media plays in society, as well as grand attempts at understanding, therefore, how society “works.” This course is premised on the idea that media and society exist in a dialectical relation, each one shaping the other. Over the course of the semester we will interrogate that dialectical relation over time, beginning with a brief history of the rise of mass media, and systematically making our way forward to the digital media that dominate our lives at the start of the 21st century. Ultimately, our goal will be to understand how media contribute to the ebb and flow of daily life, as well as to our understanding of what it means to be human. In an effort explore these issues, we rely on the required course texts and a number of supplemental materials.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students of COMM 3650 will:

1. Recognize the distinguishing features of different communication platforms in their current socio-historical context. Specifically, students will be able to distinguish the characteristics, logics, ethics, and ideologies which animate the shift to print media and its attending era, the televisual era, and, last, media in late stage capitalism (postmodernity).
2. Develop a deep understanding of the critical frameworks which will help us understand the complex and dynamic relationship between specific eras of communication and the way

audiences might be reflective of the characteristics of the dominant mode of communication in different eras and how this might impact society. This framework should articulate the connection between communication and culture, and respect diverse perspectives and the ways they influence communication.

3. Research, synthesize, organize, and compose three “special assignment” analyses; write one critical research essay; substantively participate in the discussion threads. These assignments are intended to hone your skills as a writer and thinker, and broaden your knowledge of and engagement with our mediated world.

Additionally, this course adheres to the Department of Communication Learning Outcomes: <https://clas.ucdenver.edu/communication/programs/learning-goals-and-objectives>.

Required Texts:

Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Postman, N. (2006). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. 20th Anniv. Ed. New York: Penguin Books.

Throughout the semester I will also assign various articles which I will provide. In order to maintain flexibility and contemporary relevance, these articles are selected on a weekly basis.

Graded assignments and course-grade computation:

The following is a summary of the graded assignments for this class. Details and deadlines follow below. ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE UPLOADED ON CANVAS. The following is a summary of the graded assignments for this class. Details and deadlines follow below.

- Threaded discussions (15 @ 15 pts.): 225 points
- Introduction Thread: 5 points
- Special Assignment #1: 50 points
- Special Assignment #2: 50 points
- Special Assignment #3: 50 points
- Final Essay Thesis Statement: 20 points
- Final Essay: 100 points
- **THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM**

All assignments must be uploaded in Canvas, and all grades will be posted via Canvas. I endeavor to grade as quickly as I am able (within one week), although there may be times when grades might come more slowly—I will keep you posted on this process. Ensuring grades are fair is of my utmost concern.

Assignment descriptions and deadlines

Discussions

As noted above, each of the course's units (counting your introduction) will include a threaded discussion. Each student is required to contribute to all discussions.

On each unit's introductory page I will assign activities or thought exercises that will prepare you for that unit's thread. Then, in the course site's "Discussions" area, you will see the specific questions to which you will respond in your initial posting. In addition to proper grammar and an appropriate tone for discussion, comments must adhere to a high academic standard. Below is the grading rubric I use in assessing your contributions to the thread. Keep in mind that this rubric is based on typical answers, and that something you post may have a combination of different elements.

15	Substantive comment that also contains superlative insight or expands on complex ideas in a creative/useful way.	Cites at least one source from assigned readings and one outside source** in a probative or critical manner.	Replies to other students are substantive, engaged, and encourage students to think critically and deeply about a topic or issue.
14	Substantive comments that demonstrate good critical engagement with the material.	Cites at least one source from assigned readings and one outside source** that bolsters one's argument or point.	Replies to other students are substantive, engaged, and encourage students to think critically and deeply about a topic or issue.
13	Comments show understanding of the material, but expansions on key ideas are minimal.	Cites at least one source from assigned readings and one outside source** in a basic sense.	Replies to other students are engaged and thoughtful, but lack evidence of truly deep thought on a topic or issue.
12	Comments show understanding of the material, but do not expand on key issues or ideas.	Lacks the requisite minimum of citations to readings.	Replies to other students are engaged, but relatively simple and curt; alternatively, replies are rambling and off-topic.
11	Comments demonstrate relatively little engagement with the material.	Lacks the requisite minimum of citations to readings.	Replies to other students are curt or non-existent.

10 or less	Comments demonstrate total misapprehension of the material.	Lacks the requisite minimum of citations to readings.	Replies to other students are curt or non-existent.
------------	---	---	---

What is “substantive”? Please note that by “substantive” I am not referring merely to the length of your response. I will also (mainly) be looking to see that your initial posts and subsequent responses make a meaningful, thoughtful, and relevant contribution to the discussion. Your posts and responses should:

- display your engagement with and grasp of the readings assigned for the unit
- reflect the fact that you actually thought about the issues under discussion and engaged in the activities I assigned to prepare you for the thread
- include comments on real-world events and issues that are relevant to the topics under discussion
- draw connections between the unit’s readings and the real-world media-related events that you and your classmates introduce into the conversation
- be well written (complete, grammatical sentences: this is a homework assignment, not a text message!).

**"Outside sources" may refer to another academic source, a journalistic (news) source, or a post by a professional blogger. In certain instances, "outside source" could also refer to current events or other types of texts—if you're in doubt as to whether that "counts," ask.

My own participation in the discussions will vary. I will (obviously!) read all of your comments but I want you guys to take ownership of the thread. I have found that threaded discussions seem to be most vigorous and enjoyable when the professor is not a controlling presence, but rather a voice that can help guide and encourage discussion.

“Why didn’t I get a 15? I did everything that you asked for!” As a matter of course, a perfect 15 is hard to come by in this course. I have several reasons for this. First of all, if every adequate comment got a perfect score, this would produce grade inflation that is not reflective of the true nature of students’ contributions. Secondly, a “perfect” score indicates that this is a “perfect” comment, insofar as a student has not only met the rubric criteria, but also provided something extra—e.g. exceptional insight, exceptional detail, exceptional knowledge, etc. A 15 is kind of an “ideal” comment, and sometimes the most I can say is that I know it when I see it. Occasionally I will give students a 15 if they have consistently produced several quality posts (i.e., receiving at least a 14), which is reflective of consistently high level work. I endeavor as much as possible to make it so that my grading here is fair and not arbitrary, but I want to be honest that this is ultimately a subjective assessment. If at any point you feel that you have not been dealt with fairly, please let me know—I am aware of the fact that unlike a 15 point comment, I am *not* perfect.

Each unit’s threaded discussions will be locked at the close of the unit (that is, at 11:59pm MT on the unit’s Sunday night), meaning it will not be possible to make contributions to the discussion after that time. You will still be able to read discussion posts after a unit is over, but you will not be able to post additional comments or receive any credit (exception: writing a reaction paper,

which is addressed below). **NOTE: You must make a "first post" by at least Thursday of 11:59pm every week in order to receive maximum points. You will receive a one point penalty per day for a post made after that time.** Discussions are no good if everyone waits until the weekend to post. You will be required to make at least **two** posts in total per week; one that initiates discussion on your own, and one that is a response to another student's post. You can post as much as you like, but remember that you are being assessed on quality, not quantity. If you have concerns about being able to post on time, please contact me.

“What happens if I miss a discussion?” Don’t panic! I allow all students to make up for any missed discussions with a **Reaction Paper**. This is a roughly 750 word document that you email to me via Canvas email in which you either (1) Write a thorough response to the discussion prompt, with citations, or (2) Write a through response in which you talk about something one of your classmates wrote, or in reaction to the thread as a whole. Due dates for reaction papers will be negotiated at the time that you ask to write a reaction paper. Remember: it is your responsibility to reach out to me about writing a reaction paper; otherwise I will just assume you that you chose not to participate in that week’s discussion, and at the end of the semester you will receive a 0 for any missed discussion(s).

Discussion Etiquette

Some of you may be new to online learning, some of you will be long time veterans. In either case, it's worth reiterating that discussion threads are intended to be spaces of collaboration and exchange. As such, I expect everyone to adhere to high standards of mutual respect: critique ideas, not people; foster critical thinking and analysis, not hot takes; act with good intentions, and assume others are doing so also—and so on. In short, treat each other with mutual respect and try to truly understand one another. It is my intention that discussion threads are a safe space for the free exchange of ideas, done respectfully. Remember that you may not agree with some of the things you encounter in this course, coming from me or from you fellow classmates—but it is your responsibility to engage thoughtfully and respectfully at all times. **Hate speech, trolling, or other forms of disrespectful engagement will not be tolerated.** If you have questions about how such things are defined, please talk to me.

With that said, don't confuse politeness with tiptoeing around issues or being boring—one of the most fundamental skills that we wish to foster among our students is learning how to *communicate*! It is possible to disagree with someone without being disagreeable.

To that end: **Discussions dealing with politics in the media must be focused on how these issues are covered/shaped/influenced by media, not whether particular politicians, policies, or viewpoints are acceptable/correct.** That is, it’s okay to bring up political issues—in fact, it would be irresponsible of me to have you avoid politics in this kind of class—but not to argue politics. We are mainly interested in what is *happening* and what it *means*.

So, in summary:

- Posts must be substantive

- You must post at least twice to every thread, one of which must be a reply to another student
- Your first post must occur prior to every Thursday at 11:59pm Mountain Time.
- Posts must be civil and engaging. Discussion of current events and politics is encouraged so long as the discussion is analytical and academic, not a means of trumpeting one's own beliefs or criticizing others'—but that doesn't mean you have to hide your views.

Special Assignments

Special Assignment #1, Textual Analysis: Due Monday, August 31 at 11:59pm

Special Assignment #2, Children's Media: Due Monday, September 21 at 11:59pm

Special Assignment #3, Political Advertising Analysis: Due November 2 at 11:59pm

You will be required to submit three “special assignments” in this class. All three will ask you to perform some kind of original analysis of a media text and write about it. Why is this not an essay? For two reasons. First, I expect your analysis to be slightly shorter than an essay. Secondly, you will not be required to cite any other research in this assignment—all of the work of analysis will be your own. Specific directions, rubric, etc. will be provided for each assignment on Canvas.

Final Essay

Final Essay Thesis Statement: Due Friday, November 30 at 11:59pm

Final Essay: Due Tuesday, December 10 at 11:59pm

You will be required to write one original research essay. In order to produce the highest quality work of which you can be proud and for which you can receive the best grade of which you're capable, I have broken this down into two assignments.

First, you will have to turn in a thesis statement page. The detailed particulars of what this is will be posted in this assignment page on Canvas. But basically, I want you to do some “pre research” to figure out what it is you will be writing about, and then submit a brief summary of your topic along with a thesis statement—that is, a succinct summary of the argument you will be making in your essay. The purpose of this exercise is to build your essay around a focused understanding of the material you will be discussing. If this statement changes in the process of honing a final paper, that's okay—so long as the final product has a clear argument borne of a clear thesis statement.

As for the essay itself, you will choose to address one of a handful of possible paper topics. This essay should be 5-7 pages in length (double-spaced). **Ultimately, quality of content is more important than exact page or word length; this is an estimate based on a balance of thoroughness and succinctness.** Provided in this course is a separate document called “Essay

Guidelines.” Please download it and read it long before starting your paper. The guidelines include both expectations of what constitutes a “good” paper, as well as tips for how to structure a good essay. Some of you may be experts at writing scholarly essays; some of you may be doing so for the first time. This essay guideline will be a handy tool regardless.

I am committed to giving substantive feedback on your paper. Please contact me for a time at least 72 hours in advance of a due date if you would like me to review a draft of a paper or have a question about the topic or structure of a paper. I will not copy edit your paper, and any advice I give you should not be read as a guarantee of your outcome (i.e. “This looks good and you’re on the right track” does not guarantee a good grade). What I will do is give you constructive feedback on the structure of your paper and argument, give you a sense of how good the writing is, and help you generate ideas for getting “unstuck” or tackling an issue. I have many years of experience in guiding students through essays, so please use me as a resource if you feel unsure of your essay. Only papers that are well argued, use sources well, and are near perfect in their presentation (writing quality, spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.) will receive an “A”.

Writing Resources

I highly encourage utilizing various resources in order to assist you in writing superior essays. As already mentioned, I have provided my own “Essay Guidelines” for this course. For your essays you will likely need to seek out scholarly sources, which means utilizing library services for access and research tips: <http://library.auraria.edu/services/researchhelp/specialists>. I would also encourage you to visit the university Writing Center for writing assistance: <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/CLAS/Centers/writing/Pages/TheWritingCenter.aspx>.

Extra Credit:

There is no extra credit in this course. I expect adults at a university to be able to read a syllabus, plan ahead, and do the assignments. That said: we’re in the middle of a pandemic which has had enormous consequences for the mental, physical, and financial health of millions of people. **If you are struggling with the material for *any* reason, come to me about your concerns and we can work together to find a pathway for your success.** Seeing students excel is something I take great pride in, and I will do my utmost to ensure your success. I also understand that life happens: in the past I’ve had students get into serious car accidents, undergo chemotherapy, or simply have the babysitter flake out. I will not coddle laziness, but I will work with you to help you succeed in this course. But I need your help here: I don’t want to receive an email during finals week in which you beg for mercy. Talk to me early and often about any issues that arise that have inhibited your success in this course—I promise, I’m an amiable and understanding person.

Late Work:

I will accept late work, at -10% penalty. Again, please consult with me before just taking a 0%—I will work with you to the extent that fairness and university policies allow.

Generally speaking, I find that if you have completely forgotten about an assignment, or you're up very late trying to get something in to me on time, it's usually better to eat the late points—handing in something a little late that you took the extra time to get right is almost always better than handing in something on time that is rushed and done poorly. **NOTE:** Reaction papers to discussion threads will not be penalized as late work: the grade you receive will be largely in keeping with the rubric established for all discussion threads.

Content Note:

Due to the content and character of contemporary media, a few of the issues discussed in this class as well as some the examples used may be considered offensive by some. While I will try to frame sensitive material in careful and thoughtful ways, the course demands that we explore some controversial issues and potentially offensive content. Furthermore, necessarily discussions and content will involved contentious political issues. I expect respectful, thoughtful discourse on such matters.

Academic Integrity

Students are *required* to know, understand, and comply with the ethical standards of the university, including rules against plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and falsification, multiple submissions, misuse of academic materials, and complicity in academic dishonesty. For suggestions on ways to avoid academic dishonesty, please see the Academic Honesty Handbook: http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center_for-faculty-development/Documents/academic_honesty.pdf. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense, as it diminishes the quality of scholarship and the overall learning environment. Depending upon the nature of the offense, academic dishonesty can lead to various sanctions including grade reduction on a specific assignment, a permanent final course grade of an F, and probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University.

Email Etiquette:

When corresponding with a professor (or any other University official for that matter), you are expected to conduct yourself in a polite and professional manner. At a minimum, this means: (1) including a clear and concise subject line; (2) beginning with an appropriate salutation (e.g., Dear Dr. Kontour); (3) briefly stating your purpose for writing; (4) adopting a courteous and considerate tone; and (5) proofreading your email for correct spelling and proper grammar. Emails that do not conform to these simple rules might not receive a reply. I will do my best to respond as quickly as I can, but if you are sending me an email 8pm Saturday for instance, you should not expect a reply within minutes or hours. You are always welcome to ask for a clarification regarding your grade, but please do not bargain for a better one. That said, I have been known to make mistakes, so by all means point out any that you think I have made—just please do so politely.

Departmental Incomplete Policy:

Incomplete grades are not given to students because they are receiving lower grades than they would like. To be eligible for an incomplete grade, students must have completed 75% of the course assignments with passing grades and have special circumstances outside of their control that preclude completion of the course. The incomplete grade that will be given if the above conditions are met is an I, which means that if the student does not complete the work for the course within 12 months, the grade automatically reverts to an F.

Disability Accommodations:

The University of Colorado Denver is committed to providing reasonable accommodation and access to programs and services to persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who want academic accommodations must register with Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in North Classroom 2514, Phone: 303-556-3450. After you present me with a copy of the DRS's letter (or have a representative of DRS email me directly), I will be happy to provide approved accommodations.

Further Information and CLAS policies:

For relevant university deadlines and procedures (such as the last day to withdraw from a course) as well as academic support sites, please see this website https://clas.ucdenver.edu/faculty-staff/sites/default/files/attached-files/student_services_and_calendar.pdf. For issues concerning academic freedom, please refer to the policies listed here: <http://www.ucdenver.edu/policy/Pages/Academic-Freedom.aspx>. I will happily accommodate religious holidays, and adhere to any FERPA requirements per university policy as described here: <http://www.ucdenver.edu/anschutz/studentresources/Registrar/StudentServices/FERPA/Pages/default.aspx>. There is an exhaustive list of truly excellent CLAS resources for students, ranging from student support to tutoring and advising, which I highly recommend anyone to utilize: https://clas.ucdenver.edu/faculty-staff/sites/default/files/attached-files/student_services_and_calendar.pdf.

Nondiscrimination and Sexual Misconduct

The University of Colorado Denver is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment. University policy and Title IX prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, pregnancy, creed, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, gender identity, gender expression, political philosophy or political affiliation in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. University policy prohibits sexual misconduct, including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or related retaliation. If you have experienced some sort of sexual misconduct or discrimination please visit the Office of Equity/Title IX web site to understand the resources available to you or contact the Office of Equity/Title IX Coordinator (1-844-288-4853). <http://www.ucdenver.edu/policy/TitleIX/Pages/default.aspx>.

As a faculty member, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus, one that is free from sexual harassment. Please be aware that most University employees, including myself, are **mandatory reporters** of *specific* sexual misconduct with the

Office for Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action (EOAA) that is disclosed to us. You can access CU Denver's Sexual harassment policy [here](#). The [Phoenix Center at Auraria](#) provides free and confidential resources and assistance to survivors of interpersonal violence (relationship violence, sexual, violence, and stalking), as well as their friends, families, and concerned others.

Student Code of Conduct

Students are expected to know, understand, and comply with the ethical standards of the university, including rules against plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and falsification, multiple submissions, misuse of academic materials, and complicity in academic dishonesty. For suggestions on ways to avoid academic dishonesty, please see the Academic Honesty Handbook: http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-facultydevelopment/Documents/academic_honesty.pdf

Process for Grade Issues

Student follows grade appeal process or student grievance process in the home school or college.

1. Discuss concerns with the faculty member.
2. If the issue is not resolved after a conversation with the faculty member, discuss concerns with the Department Chair.
3. If the issue is not resolved after a conversation with the Department Chair, discuss concerns with the Associate Dean.

Department Mission:

We are a dynamic community of learners and scholars dedicated to cultivating the knowledge and skills to use communication to create a more equitable and humane world. Our vision is to promote innovation in student learning, excellence in research, and a commitment to social justice. This is established according to five key values: Cultivating creativity and compassion; Encouraging civic engagement; Fostering diversity and global humility; Facilitating career development; and Increasing access to higher education. We do this through specific learning goals: Offering classes that Support Civic Engagement and Foster the Creation of Diverse and Inclusive Communities; teaching students To Analyze Communication in All its Forms; and teaching students To Produce Ethical and Effective Communication in Oral, Written, and Mediated Forms. This is emphasized through five pathways within the major: Community Service and Public Affairs, Strategic Communication, Health Communication, Global and Intercultural Communication, and Media and Cultural Studies. Across all Pathways, we implement five modes of High Impact Practices (HIPs): First Year Seminars; Classes focusing on Diversity/Global Learning; Writing Intensive Classes; Service Learning and Experiential Learning; and Internships and Capstones.

Student Success is Measured in a Communication-Disciplinary-Sense by Achieving Excellence in a Combination of the NCA's 9 Learning Outcomes in Communication (LOCs). Each of these 9 LOCs has many subsets, so for the purposes of this class, we will pursue the following:

- Articulate the importance of communication expertise in career development and civic engagement
- Examine contemporary debates within in the field
- Explain, synthesize, critique, and apply Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts and scholarship
- Engage in Communication scholarship using the research traditions of the discipline
- Differentiate between various approaches to the study of Communication
- Locate and use information relevant to the goals, audiences, purposes and contexts
- Adapt messages to the diverse needs of individuals, groups, and contexts