

**Eastern Illinois University**

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**From the Selected Works of Scott Walus**

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Fall 2019

## Media Criticism

Scott M. Walus, *Eastern Illinois University*

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/scott-walus/6/>

Communication 5610: Media Criticism  
 Fall 2019. Room: Buzzard 2441  
 M 7-9:30 p.m.

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**Instructor:** Dr. Scott Walus  
**Email:** smwalus@eiu.edu

**Office:** 1536 Buzzard Hall  
**Office Hours:** M 6-7 p.m. / T 4-6 p.m. / W 1-2 p.m.

Always use Panthermail outside of class to contact (allow 24 hours for a response). Face to face communication works great and will get you in-depth answers quickly.

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**Required Texts:**

All readings are on the communal flash drive. Also, bring a notebook and writing utensil.

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**Course Description:**

This course is an overview to studying media content, producers, and audiences. This empirical and critical overview maps the current state of mass communication and media studies research through both theoretical and applied pieces. Specifically it provides the foundations to entering a conversation on media studies, the methodology and theory behind producer studies, various theoretical approaches to textual analysis, and approaching audience and reception studies.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding how to study media meanings and influence.
2. To deconstruct the pressures and limitation placed on media producers.
3. To apply various media lenses to unpacking a media text or channel.
4. To understand the role of audiences and the variances in decodings.

**Professionalism/attendance:**

While attendance is not required, reading and attending class are critical for gaining a working knowledge about media theory. In-depth discussion and unpacking are irreplaceable, and the course is structured around these two activities. Furthermore, you are expected to read for class as the both the “brings” and class discussions revolve around the concepts.

**Assignment Policy**

I do not accept late work, although the coupon policy allows you two extensions throughout the semester (read the coupon at end of the syllabus for complete terms). All assignments are due within the first five minutes of class and must be in printed, hard copy form (I do not accept e-mailed assignments). You also must be present for the entire duration of the class for the assignment to be accepted.

**General Grading Guidelines**

Projects in the professional world do not receive partial credit. They are either of professional quality or not. However, projects of a professional quality seldom happen on a first draft. Both journal articles and media productions always require revisions that ultimately improve the project. The assessments in this class will mirror the professional world:

- All assignments are assigned orally. There is always substantial time for clarification in class.
- You must have a solid document on the day it is due or else you cannot make revisions, and therefore receive a zero.

- There is only the score of full points or zero. The score of full points will be awarded to well-researched and supported projects that meet the requirements of the assignment.
- If you get a zero, you have until the stated dates to revise the project and hand it in with your final presentation. Revisions alone do not guarantee points. Careful thought and analysis combined with attention to detail result in a quality study and only a quality study will receive full points. present it publicly in class. The project has to be right. This can take one draft or four.
- I am on your team and will do everything I can to help you get the project to this level of quality. We serve the product, not our egos!

There are several advantages to this grading process. First, it mirrors a professional environment (both scholastic and skill-based), where your work is not complete until it is ready for the public. Secondly, it rewards good work with full credit, which is incredible upside. Third, it allows for revision, which is an invaluable skill and will motivate you to do quality work as you must stand by your work. The drafting process is an invaluable one. Unlike other classes “just getting it done” does not get you points; it must be right.

### **General Grading Guidelines:**

Grades will be assigned as follows:

100-90% = A

89-80% = B

79-70% = C

69-60% = D

59– 0% = F

In any course, it is important to remember that each of you begins with zero points and must earn your way up to each of these grades. I am here to support you in this process, but this process is ultimately your own evolution as a scholar as you demonstrate not only an understanding of the material, but also the ability to apply to real life situations and critically evaluate the material and case studies. Grading will be done as follows

**C:** Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect. This score does not indicate any shortcoming. All the work was done adequately and completely, and the work showed basic understanding and mastery of the course material.

**B:** Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements. Not only were all the basic expectations met, they exceeded minimum expected quality levels. This work probably showed one or more of the following characteristics: excellent understanding of the class material, excellent application of theory to practice, unusual thought and thoroughness in thought and preparation.

**A:** Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements. This work is superior in every respect and represents the highest level of achievement. Its quality is good enough that even though there is still room for improvement, it would be unreasonable to expect a college student to do better.

**D:** Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it does not fully meet course requirements, While there was merit to what was done, there were also deficiencies that meant the work did not fully meet the minimal expectations.

**F:** Represents performance that fails to meet the course requirements and is unworthy of credit. This work shows serious deficiencies in regard to the expectations for the assignment.”

### **Points Breakdown:**

Throughout the course of the semester, you will examine a single media text. This can include a myriad of texts such as a popular television show, a format of radio, websites, pieces of social networking, variants of advertising, print media, or any other type of media that lends itself to analysis on all three levels of

media studies. I will provide detailed guidance for the major writing assignments and each of the major assignments and weekly reflections must be typed.

Weekly brings	7
Four data check-ins	2
Producer study: Pressures and limitations	4
Textual analysis / theory situating	4
Audience pilot study	4
Presentation & publication/presentation plan	1
Total: 22 points	

### **Cell Phones & Digital Devices:**

No cell phone / tablet / digital device usage is allowed in this class. Unless directly directed to use the device for in-class research or if you inform the professor about an urgent situation where someone will be contacting you, device usage is banned. This classroom is a space for complex thought and conversation. In order to have complex thought and conversation, you need to be present without disruption.

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology study demonstrated that it is impossible for the brain to multi-tasking and any attempt to do so “ruins productivity, causes mistakes, and impedes creative thought.” Disrupting a thought process by checking digital content is not good for learning or the generation of new ideas. Checking your phone also makes class time emotionally less enjoyable. The National Institute of Health found that a rise in anxiety and stress is directly related to problematic cell phone usage. If you believe you will have a difficult time abstaining from digital devices, you are not alone. A Baylor University study found that 60% of college students felt mentally and physically addicted to their cell phones.

In order to encourage a singular focus, I will not accept whatever assignment is due that day from you and you will receive a zero on it if you look at your digital device during class. This is any glance at a cell phone or table. If you are choosing to take notes on a lap top, this includes literally anything besides a word processing document being open. There are no warnings. If you continue to look at the device, you will lose a previous “bring” point for each infraction. To add some spice to the equation, if I miss the infraction, and your classmate informs on you, he/she gets the “bring” point taken from you.

I run a classroom that places a premium on showing up and engaging with a topic. Under this system, conversations are more intriguing, students report a deeper understanding of material, and every class period goes by faster. “Be here now,” as there is no advantage to thinking about somewhere else.

### **Academic integrity:**

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU’s Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards. You are expected to write your own papers and generate your own answers on quizzes and exams. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Consequences of academic dishonesty range from failing of the course to expulsion from the university.

### **Students with disabilities:**

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

### **The Student Success Center:**

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, text taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student

Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581- 6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

### **Student Standards:**

All faculty in the Department of Communication Studies are expected to uphold the standards of good scholarship and we expect our students to do the same. Students earning a degree in Communication Studies will develop superior reasoning/critical thinking, argumentation, writing and presentational skills while also building comprehensive knowledge of their content area. Students in Communication Studies classes will be expected to read all assigned materials, write extensively, complete their own work, and engage in respectful interactions in the classroom. We, as a faculty, agree to hold our students to these standards.

### **Tentative Class Schedule:**

Note: To get credit for “brings” for the week, for each reading, you must write down three topics you wish to discuss. These do not have to be formal and may be written by hand on the article itself. You must have them within the first five minutes of class and be present for the duration of the class period to get credit. I may use my discretion and not accept the “bring” if the articles have clearly not been read.

### **Section 1: Foundations**

#### **Week 1 - What is media and why do we have to criticize it?**

#### **Week 2 – Conceptualizing media and media studies**

Berger “Media”  
Durham Peters “Mass Media Defined”

Assign: Producer study: Pressures and limitations

#### **Week 3: No classes held (Labor Day)**

#### **Week 4: Effects, Texts, and Encoding**

Sparks “A brief history of media effects research”  
Kellner – “Media Culture”  
Hall – “Encoding/Decoding”

Check-in 1: There's something going on here....

#### **Week 5: Media industry structures**

Frith “The Industrialization of Popular Music”  
Hall et al “The social production of news”  
Jaramillo “The family racket”

#### **Week 6: Producer studies**

Levine “Toward a paradigm for media production research”  
Ross - “Were producers and audiences ever separate?”  
Caron “Translating Star Trek into a Francophone context”  
Barkin “The foreigning gaze”

#### **Week 7: Channel and symbolism**

Meyrowitz- “Medium Theory”

Crisell “Radio Signs”  
 Fiske “The Codes of Television”  
 Williams “Video game lightning rod”

Check-in 2: Producer data and industry/popular press

**Week 8: Transition to textual analysis**

Phillipov “In defense of textual analysis”  
 Pinchevskit & Brand - “Holocaust perversions and pulp fiction”  
 Walus “1000 Ways to Die”  
 Meizel “American Idol and the American Dream”

Assign Textual analysis  
 Due: Producer study: Pressures and limitations

**Week 9: Textual analysis : Semiotics & myth**

Seieter “Semiotics and structuralism”  
 Mika “Semiotics in commercials”  
 Barthes “Mythologies”  
 Barthes “Myth Today”

**Week 10: Representation**

Gray - “The politics of representation”  
 Phalen, Kim, & Osellame “Imagined presidencies: The representation of political power”  
 Dixon & Azocar “Representing race on television news”  
 Dyer “Stereotyping”

**Week 11: Ideology**

Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney “Ideology”  
 Winslow “Extreme home make over and ideology”  
 Kipnis “Male desire and female disgust: Reading Hustler”

Check-in 3: Textual coding sheets and abstracts  
 Assign Audience Study

**Week 12: Audience-driven research**

Ruddock “Audience research and cultural studies”  
 Ang “Dallas and the ideology of mass culture”  
 Willis - “The Golden Age”

Due: Textual Analysis

**Week 13: Audience studies: Decodings not guaranteed**

Dixon “Schemas as average conceptions”  
 Jhally & Lewis “Enlightened racism: The Cosby show, audiences, and the myth of the American dream”  
 Radway “Reading the romance”  
 Ang “Living Room Wars”

Assign Publication/Presentation Path

**Week 14: New frontiers of gratifications**

Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch - “Uses and Gratifications”

Barton - “Uses and gratifications of talent shows”

Gudelunas - “Uses and gratifications of apps for gay men”

Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs “Beatlemania: Girls just want to have fun”

Check-in 4: Audience data transcripts

**Week 15: Coding & Revisiting Producer and Textual Analysis**

Due: Draft of audience study and original data

Due: Revisions on Producer Study & Textual Analysis

**Week 16: Putting it all together**

Final: Monday, Dec. 9 7:30-9:30 p.m. (as scheduled by the university).

Due: Final draft of audience study

Due: Presentation and publication path

**This coupon entitles \_\_\_\_\_ to turn in any one assignment the next class period of CMN \_\_\_\_\_ for literally any reason. This includes all excused or unexcused reasons including, but certainly not limited to: illness, alarm clock malfunction, oversleeping, leaving for vacation, printer malfunction, funerals, weddings, “just totally spacing on it,” work issues, computer explosions, not understanding an assignment, exhaustion, vehicle malfunction, or literally any reason. This coupon provides you with an extension to do the assignment (from “brings” to major projects) without question or judgment. This coupon must be attached to the late assignment.**

**EXTENSION COUPON**

**Usage Notes: There is an absolute limit of two extensions per semester.**

**This includes both excused and unexcused absences. If you choose to use this coupon on a typically unexcused reason and then you have a family emergency / illness / some other typically excused reason, you are out of luck. Use these wisely.**

**Restrictions: Non-transferrable, not valid after Week 14, or for group work.**

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