Psychology of Mass Communication
Syllabus
Spring 2013

Credits*:* 3.0
Course information: MC 420
Prerequisites: MC 190
Instructors: Nina Bagdasarova, PhD, nina.bagdasarova@gmail.com

Class meets: Tuesday 10:50 -12:05 a.m. in Room 1/321
Thursday 10.50-12:05 a.m. in Room 1/321
Office hours: By appointment, at least 2 days before in advance via e-mail or in person

Course Description

This course examines how media influence our knowledge of ourselves and our world. Media definitely affect our attitudes, values and even behavior. The media effects do exist and the journalists are the main authors of these effects. The question is: what instruments (consciously or unconsciously) do they use to frame our vision of events? What narratives and metaphors shape our everyday life? What discursive figures determine our choice? And finally: what kind of reflection is required from media professionals?

To get better understanding of journalists' work we will try to acquire the following skills:

- Understand how different types of analysis can be used to study effects of media
- Get a basic understanding of the effects of media on attitudes and behavior
- Understand how media effects are shaped by narratives and metaphors
- Understand how dominant discourse affect the media products and vice versa how media effects influence discursive practices
- Understand how media construct a reality which may or may not be similar to the "real world"
- Analyze TV programs, film, news, etc. for messages and values conveyed

Course Organization

The course is organized in two major streams: (1) acquiring of theoretical approaches and (2) application of theories to media products analysis

Methods

We are going to employ the following learning methods:

- participating in seminar discussion (listening and talking);
- independent reading and research;
- searching for relevant materials for presentations and essays;
- preparing and conducting group presentation;
- group analysis in seminars;
- consolidating notes and material after seminar;
- preparing and drafting research paper

Seminar Discussion

It is essential that all students complete the required reading and preparing examples/presentations before class in order to participate fully in seminar discussion. Everyone is expected to take part in discussions, which will be based on a required reading, as well as some examples or relevant materials provided by students. You will be asked to respond to issues raised by the readings and in the seminar presentations. Seminars also provide you with an opportunity to ask questions about things that you don't understand. Your participation in seminars is a crucial part of your own and others' learning, and is an important transferable skill. Seminars require the full participation of all students in order to make them effective learning environments.

Study Groups

It's necessary to form students' groups for preparing groups presentations. The different groups can be formed for different assignments according your own preferences. The optimal group size is no more than 3 members. The work in pairs is welcomed.

Literature

Harris, R.J. *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, **Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004**. **(Available as a department's reading book)**
George Lakoff, *The Political Mind*, **Viking, 2008**
Teun A. van Dijk, *The Reality of Racism. On analyzing parliamentary debates on immigration.*
Teun A. van Dijk, *Structures And Strategies Of Discourse And Prejudice.*
Teun A. van Dijk, *New(s) Racism. A Discourse Analytical Approach*
Teun A. van Dijk, *Media, Racism and Monitoring*
Robert A. Saunders, Wiring the Second World: The Geopolitics of Information and Communications Technology in Post-Totalitarian Eurasia, in ***Russian Cyberspace*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009): 1-24.**
Heather MacLeod, Examining Political Group Membership on LiveJournal***, Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009): 13-26.**

Topics and schedule

	Topics	Required readings, homework and assignments
Week 1	**Introduction to the course. Principals and levels of media analysis.**	
Tue, 10/01	INTRODUCTIONS. Psychology of mass media: what it might be about? Application of psychological approaches in mass media: how does it work? The main principals of mass media analysis.	
Thu, 13/01	MEDIA ANALYSIS. Mass media analysis: the effects and their framing.	Harris, ch. 2, pp. 18 -27,
Week 2	**Principals and levels of media analysis.**	
Tue, 18/01	What do we know about metaphors, and narratives? The level of discourse analysis.	Lakoff, Ch. 1, pp.21-42, Ch.3 pp78-82 (to be provided)
Thu, 20/01	What does a concept of discourse means in mass-media? Discourse analysis as a method of research	Van. Dijk, *The Reality of Racism…*
Week 3	**The practice on discourse analysis**	
Tue, 25/01	Students' presentations on chosen topics	To prepare an example of brief analysis on any chosen materials
Thu, 27/01	Students' presentations on chosen topics	
Week 4	**Theories of mass-communications**	
Tue, 1/02	Social Cognitive Theory; Cultivation Theory; Socialization Theories; Uses And Gratification Theory. What does phenomena of "para-social" relations means?	Harris, ch. 2, pp. 27 -34; provide the examples for each theoretical approach (no more than 1 paragraph)
Thu, 3/02	Agenda setting; Schema theory. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 2, pp. 34 -39, brief argumentative essays (1 of 2 topics alternatively): What is in common between agenda setting theory and discourse analysis? What does distinguish the schema theory on narrative analysis? (no more than 2 pages)

Week 5	**Media experience**	
Tue, 8/02	Cognitive components of the media experience (empathy, suspense, humor, mood management) *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 2, pp. 39-52
Thu, 10/02	Practice on media experience analysis: demonstration of mass-media materials and discussion	Groups work: preparing the materials for discussion using different fields of analysis: ads and marketing, news, talk shows etc.
Week 6	**Media portrayals of groups**	
Tue, 15/02	Portrayals of the genders. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 3, pp. 53-65
Thu, 17/02	Practice on gender stereotyping analysis: the women's/men's magazines, ads and marketing, TV-series, documentary	Groups' presentations on chosen materials analysis
Week 7	**Media portrayals of groups**	
Tue, 22/02	Practice on gender stereotyping analysis: the women's/men's magazines, ads and marketing, TV-series, documentary	Groups' presentations on chosen materials analysis
Thu, 24/02	Representation of ethnicity. Discussion on methods of analysis.	Harris, ch. 3, pp. 65-78 Teun A. van Dijk, *Media, racism and monitoring…* Teun A. van Dijk, *Structures And Strategies…*
Week 8	**Media portrayals of groups**	
Tue, 1/03	Practice on ethnic and migrants stereotyping analysis: newspapers materials, Internet resources materials, TV shows	Group presentations: comparative analysis on chosen materials (*Little Britain* and *Nasha Russia* shows; *Simpsons* and *South park* cartoons)
Thu, 3/03	Practice on ethnic and gender stereotyping analysis: TV comic shows and cartoons. How humor may help to deconstruct dominant discourses.	
	SPRING BREAK. NO CLASSES (MON, 7/03 - FRI, 11/03) **MIDTERM**	
Week 10	**News: setting the agenda**	
Tue, 15/03	Characteristics on newsworthy events. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 7, pp. 187 – 208
Thu, 17/03	Effects of news coverage. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 7, pp. 208-223

Week 11	**News: setting the agenda**	
Tue, 22/03	Discussion on methods of news analysis	Teun A. van Dijk, *New(s) Racism.*
Thu, 24/03	Practice on news coverage analysis	Groups presentations: comparative analysis on chosen materials
Week 12	**Public concern for "Indecent" materials: violence and pornography**	
Tue, 29/03	Violence in the media. Effects of media violence. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 9, pp. 255 – 287 24 hours – BBC materials on tortures in the series.
Thu, 31/03	Sex and Pornography in media. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 9, pp. 287 – 316
Week 13	**Advertising and marketing**	
Tue, 5/04	Psychological appeals in advertising. Cognition and marketing. *(Discussion)*	Harris, ch. 4, pp. 92 – 122
Thu, 7/04	Practice on advertising analysis.	Group presentations.
Week 14	**Internet and new communication technologies**	
Tue, 12/04	Beyond traditional mass communications.	Robert A. Saunders, *Wiring the Second World…*
Thu, 14/04	Cyberspace: new audiences or new communities? Psychological effects of Internet communication	TBC (Communicative image)
Week 15	***Internet and new communication technologies***	
Tue, 19/04	Blogsphere: Live Journals, Diaries and reportages. *(Discussion)*	Heather MacLeod, *Examining Political Group Membership…*
Thu, 21/04	Indecent and forbidden materials in Internet.	TBC
Week 16	***Internet and new communication technologies***	
Tue, 26/04	What do the news mean for YOU-tube users? Communication through the exchange.	TBC
Thu, 28/04	Isn't each of us a journalist now? What does it mean to be 'a professional' in Digital Age? *(Discussion)*	TBC
Week 17	***Internet and new communication technologies***	
Week 18	**FINAL EXAM. Analytical paper on chosen materials**	

Requirements and Evaluation

We will try to make classes interactive and practical for all of us. It will be possible if you come prepared to all classes, lectures and seminars, having read the required material. Productive work will also be possible if you attend classes regularly, come to class on time. Excessive disruptions, from whatever source or whatever reasons will not be tolerated.

Grading system		*Assessment scale*			
Participation in seminar discussions	30%	**A**	91 and above	**C+**	66-70
Group presentations	30%	**A-**	86-90	**C**	61-65
Essays	10%	**B+**	81-85	**C-**	56-60
Midterm	10%	**B**	76-80	D	51-55
Final exam (DEC 14)	20%	**B-**	71-75	F	50 and less

Note! Grade 'X' – an administrative drop – is initiated only by instructor, which means a student cannot request it.

Grading Guidelines for Seminar discussion

'A' - A student comes to class with clear stated questions and relevant examples/illustrations concerning the reading. The questions should demonstrate student's critical and analytical skills. A student should actively participate in the discussion. Active participant should be ready to support his/her ideas by evidences. A student should be respectful to the opinions of others.

'B' - Student comes to class with ready questions and examples. The questions should demonstrate student's critical and analytical skills. However, the questions are not aimed at facilitation of the discussion in the class (they are not very clear) and some of examples are not completely relevant. A student should actively participate in the discussion. He/she expresses interesting ideas but does not always support them by evidence. A student is respectful to the opinions of other people.

'C' - A student comes to class with few ready questions and examples. S/he sometimes enters a discussion. While expressing his/her opinion, he/she does not "stick" to the point. His/her arguments/examples are not always clear and relevant.

'D' - A student comes to class without prepared questions/examples. He/she does not demonstrate interest in the discussion: rarely enters discussion. Alternatively, a student dominates a discussion. He/she does not allow other participants to express their opinion.

'F' - A student comes to class unprepared. S/he does not make an effort to participate in the discussion. Participants who demonstrate rude or disrespectful behavior will be asked to leave the classroom with the "F" grade.

Note! It's to the instructor's discretion to give grades like A-, B+, B-, etc.

Grading Guidelines for Group presentation

'**A**' – Presentation is comprehensive and exceptional quality. It's well-structured and designed, with creative and convincing arguments, which are supported by clear evidence, and they It's may or may not provoke a discussion, but a group should be able astutely evaluate counter-arguments.

'**B**' – Presentation is thorough and thoughtful, though they lack originality, comprehensiveness or insight. It's logical and clear, and have well-reasoned arguments and structure.

'**C**' – Presentation shows competency of the subject matter, with an adequate structure. It contains some ideas (based on required readings and lecture ideas), which demonstrate analytical skills, though overall they are not well developed.

'**D**' – Presentation have evidence of some thought, though they lack analytical structure.

'**F**' – Presentation is none of the above

Note! If you don't attend classes for conducting the presentation you should submit a doctor's confirmation or other evidences explaining your absence otherwise you'll get 'F' for this presentation.

Essay

Your essay must be brief and clear (no more than 1,500 words), typed, and well presented with proper references and bibliography.

Final paper

The final paper may take one of 3 forms (your choice). You may *either* (1) thoroughly analyze one media product, *or* (2) conduct your own research using approaches covered in the class, *or* (3) create your own media product (means product description) which would based on alternative framing regarding current mainstream production.

OPTION 1: Analyze one media product

- identify the media effects of this product;
- show how these effects are framed by narratives or metaphors;
- demonstrate which discourse this product belongs to;
- compare this product with other products and provide arguments supported your interpretation

OPTION 2: Conduct your own research on media effects

- conduct several interviews or focus group discussions on certain media product or topic covered by media;
- analyze these discussions/interview using learned approaches
- compare your results with other research conducted on similar topic
- provide clear conclusions and well founded explanation for them

Note! You don't have to transcribe the conducted conversations but you must submit the audio files.

OPTION 3: Create a media product/product description

- identify certain topic covered by media that needs alternative interpretation;
- analyze the mainstream media effects and framing
- compare your idea with other products and offer an alternative framing and professional design based on a different instruments
- provide clear and comprehensive description of your media product (TV show outline, web-site justification, etc) or submit (if possible) the product itself (newspaper article, blog posts, etc).

Deadline: ***Week 18, Friday, 7th of May 2010, by 5:00 PM***

Paper turned in after deadline will have 5 points deducted for each day it's late. There will be no rewrites. Please keep (hard and electronic) copies of your papers for your own records.

Academic Integrity

According AUCA policy the educational activity is free of fraud and deception. No cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information and citations is acceptable. The facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, tampering with the academic work of another student, and lying to the instructor are unallowable. Please refer to the University's Undergraduate Catalog 2008-2010 for additional information on Honor Code, which is also available on AUCA website.

Anyone found to be academically dishonest is subject to receiving an "F" for the course.

Note! This syllabus is subject to change at discretion of the lecturers to accommodate instructional and/or student needs. You are responsible for any changes announced during lectures/seminars even though you are absent.