

COM493-001 SPICE '12 Tentative Syllabus (last update 10.25.11)

Course: COM493, Section 001, 3.0 credit hours
Special Topics: Media Psychology and Influence [SPTP: Media Psych & Influence]

Semester: Summer 2012, June 11 to July 6

Instructors: Prof. Dr. Nicholas David Bowman
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Course Readings: Materials in class will be made available in a variety of online and offline formats. Be sure to have access to

- Course reading pack, which will be provided to you before the first day of class.
- Course Facebook account (URL TBA) and Twitter feed (follow #SPICE12 and @bowmanspartan)
- Course document download URL (TBA)

Course Format: As an advanced course, we will rely in large part on your preparedness for course discussions. The typical course format will begin with a short reflection assignment – usually a question prompt or other “cold discussion” – followed by a structured lecture, a short break and a peer-led discussion.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Week One – “A History of Media Psychology”, which will feature discussion of the early “moral panic” days of research, including The Payne Fund Studies, The Seduction of the Innocent, and a discussion of the psychological underpinnings of the infamous War of the Worlds broadcast. Our discussion this week will also include an overview of the history of leisure and it’s relation (positive and negative) to society.

Week Two – “The Limited Effects Paradigm”, which will focus our discussion on the social and psychological mediating variables that explain media influence as powerful under specific conditions. Here, we will discover the work of Schramm, Rogers, Lazardsfeld, Shaw and McCombs among others who were among the first identify the individual difference variables so important to the study of media psychology.

Week Three – “Contemporary Media Research”, which will bring our understanding of media psychology into the domain of Zillmann and Bryant – the pioneers of the modern study of media influence – and take us to the current state of the field. Here, we will discuss research on media

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violence, aggression, sexuality and racism in the media to understand how we currently see the relationship between media, the individual, and society. Notably, we will study the influence of this early scholarship on the specific study of entertainment and society.

Week Four – “Application and Extension”, which will challenge students to suggest areas of research ripe for replication and extension. Today’s media environment is undergoing rapid and major changes, with the fragmentation of media audiences, increased mobile access to media, and increased interactivity with media messages among just a few of the changes uprooting the classic media production system. Using their understanding of media and entertainment to this point, students will be asked to propose areas of the extant literature in need of revision given today’s modern, de-massified and masspersonal media environment.

Major assignments:

Students’ proficiency in understanding of course concepts will be evaluated based on:

- *Attendance (10%)* – As a discussion course, it is imperative that students are present at each course meeting. Absences are inexcusable and will result in a reduction of points of 3% for each absence; note that absences after three will result in a 10% overall grade reduction.
- *Reading Comprehension (40%)* – Throughout the course, student’s comprehension of the assigned readings will be assessed by the Instructor through a variety of methods, including pop quizzes, oral examinations, impromptu explanations and other student-led discussions. Students will be expected to understand the material (or at least, have shown an effort to understand material), and failure to do so will result in a 10% weekly reduction
- *Research Proposal (50%)* – To conclude our course, students will be asked to propose an original study that could be feasibly carried out given the resources available to them – with the intention of conducting the study at a later time. Details on this project will be provided in class, but at a minimum the proposal will require:
 - An abstract that summarized the study
 - A five to seven page literature review that culminates in the proposal of testable research questions or hypotheses
 - A proposed methodology rooted in the socio-psychological perspective that addresses how the potential study will answer the proposed research questions or hypotheses

Grading scale:

Grades will be assigned using a 4.0 scale, with the following breakdown:

- 4.0 = 93% of all course points and greater
- 3.0 = 80% to 92% of all course points
- 2.0 = 70% to 79% of all course points
- 1.0 = 60% to 69% of all course points
- 0.0 = 59% of all course points and less

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Communication Studies core objectives:

This course is designed to satisfy the following core objectives as set by the WVU Department of Communication Studies:

- Understand the major theories of human communication and apply them to various contexts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the process of critical analysis of communication messages from a social science perspective.
- Understand and evaluate the role of media in society.
- Understand the importance of ethical issues involved in various communication contexts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate social science criteria to evaluate communication research.

Disability Services:

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

Social Justice:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to foster a nurturing learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our university does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Academic Dishonesty:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. Cheating on exams is a form of academic dishonesty and will be punished. Any student found cheating on an exam will receive a 0 for that exam. Any violation of these policies or the general WVU policies will be prosecuted to the fullest extent permitted by this university, up to and including expulsion from WVU.

Drop Policy:

If you choose to withdraw from this course, you must do so yourself through the STAR system. You are not automatically withdrawn from this course if you stop attending class and I am unable to administratively withdraw you for nonattendance.

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Note: The course syllabus is a contract of policies. If you do not withdraw from the class, it is assumed that you have read through this entire document and agree to these policies.

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