

JOURNALISM 50 SECTIONS 1 (MWF) & 2 (TTR)

W. A. Dorman, Prof. of Government

Office: Mendocino Hall No. 3026

Department Office [for this class]: Communication Studies—Mendocino Hall 5014

Phone 278-7310 (Office/Voice Mail)

E-Mail: dormanw@csus.edu

Web Site: www.csus.edu/indiv/d/dormanw

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00 a.m. to 10:45

Tuesday 12 noon—1 p.m.

(Or by Appointment)

SPRING 2007

"Mass Media and Critical Thinking"***

Catalog Description: Introduction to reasoning skills useful to the journalism major and general education student alike in interpreting and judging information, entertainment and advertising in the mass media. Emphasis on how to assess the quality of news as information, and on how to think critically about the effects of mass-produced culture. 3 units.

The human animal is the only species with a mind to change—and little or no willingness to change it.

William A. Dorman, lecture, 2006

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The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds. They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received from others.

---C. Wright Mills

Excerpt from his essay, "The Cultural Apparatus"

As the sociologist C. Wright Mills suggested, we do live in a "second-hand world" in which many of the things we know were learned from others rather than experienced first hand. This means, quite simply, that more than ever we are dependent on the meanings given us by the mass media and through mass communication. This course is an introduction to thinking critically about what the media produce and how they produce it. In other words, we consider how to think most usefully about how the mass media inform, entertain, and convince us to buy. As well, we will explore how to think critically about the media themselves as a major institution that affects everything from our politics to our self-image. The course will emphasize informal logic and reasoning skills that are necessary for (1) the effective evaluation and construction of arguments; (2) the systematic appraisal of evidence; and (3) the value of being reasonable. In addition, we will explore the need for a coherent, evidence-based critique of media performance.

The course is organized around four areas of study. The first will serve as an introduction to the concept of critical thinking and to some of the rudimentary skills associated with critical thinking. The rest of the semester is broken into units that focus on a particular aspect of media as a shaper of our interior worlds: The nature of mass media in modern society; media as informer; and media, images and self. In each of these units, you will be introduced to additional critical thinking strategies.

Learning Objectives

Throughout the semester, the goal will be to develop a sense of what a reasoned argument looks like and hone the skills necessary to make one, including developing the abilities to recognize fallacious arguments and evaluate the strength of evidence used to support claims. Perhaps the central concern of the course is with how to develop and maintain intellectual standards for the way we think. While the material in this particular course happens to be either drawn from the mass media or concerns the mass media as an institution, the aim of this course is to develop critical thinking strategies that can be used with any subject matter. The result is that you should end up with (1) better reasoning skills for daily life and (2) a better understanding of the mass media, which, for good or ill, provides much of the raw material for the modern reasoning process.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Howard Kahane and Nancy Cavender, Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life, 10th ed., Wadsworth Publishing, 2001.

W. James Potter, Media Literacy, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, 2005.

(Make certain you have the correct editions)

*** This course fulfills the 1992-2001 General Education Program's requirement for Area A3: Critical Thinking.

Course Requirements:

You will be expected to complete reading assignments and will be tested on them, to attend regularly, and to participate in class discussions. This is a lecture-discussion class, with emphasis on student response. The instructor uses a Devil's Advocate approach, which means that he asks many questions to get discussion going. Therefore, it's wise to keep up with the reading assignments and to review your notes frequently. From time to time, I will also ask students to paraphrase or sum up the comments of their classmates; this requires *active listening*. You will also be responsible for a number of "no-fault" writing assignments, which will be explained in class.

TESTS: There will be an examination after each unit of study, ONE OF WHICH WILL BE PARTLY TAKE-HOME. Study guides will be provided. Not all exams will have the same format, but may include multiple choice questions, brief essay questions, and analytical exercises.

ESSAY: A take-home essay (in lieu of a final exam) will be assigned in the 13th week of the semester, and will be due the final day of classes, Thursday, May 17, or Friday, May 18, depending on your section.

****MAKE-UP POLICY*: Only students who have a compelling reason such as illness will be allowed to make up a missed examination. Should you unavoidably miss an examination, you **MUST** speak with me personally or leave a message at my voice mail number no later than the morning of the scheduled examination.

If your excuse is acceptable, you must take the exam on a day agreed upon by the instructor at the Testing Center, which offers a make-up test service on a limited basis for missed classroom exams. The Testing Center's Make-up testing hours are by appointment only, Monday through Thursday AFTER 5 PM. The fee is \$6.00 per exam. To call about an appointment, dial (916) 278-7870.

****TESTING BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT*. Category 1: Students with disabilities. It's your responsibility to get certification of test/course accommodations from the office of Students With Disabilities at the beginning of the semester and show it to me. Too, at least a week in advance of a midterm, you should schedule an appointment to take the exam in the Testing Center and bring the "green sheet" to me so that I can send a copy of the exam over. Category 2: In *rare* instances where a student convinces me that a family, athletic team or other obligation interferes with their taking the exam at the regularly scheduled time and place, they may take the exam one or two days early at the Testing Center if they make appropriate arrangements. Under **no** circumstances may Category 2 students take the exam AFTER the scheduled date.

NO FAULTS: Frequently, you will be asked to complete "no fault" assignments or take no fault reading quizzes. No faults are ungraded, but they are scored 0, 1 or 2. The score of 0 is given to students who don't do the assignment or take the quiz OR whose work does not meet the minimum; a 1 (which is the most common score) means the student completed the task as assigned, OR gave a quiz answer indicating s/he had done the reading. A score of 2 is given for work or an answer that is *clearly superior* to the norm. Understand that no faults are a regular requirement of the course; they are not "extra credit." If you fail to successfully complete no faults, it can result in a reduction in your final grade. Moreover, assuming that you get mostly ones, which is the case for most students most of the time, no faults will not **HELP** your final grade except in two situations: (A) If you have a minus grade based on averaged scores from midterms, adequate performance on no faults may erase the minus; and (B) Should you get a significant number of twos, which is unusual, no faults might result in a plus being added to your final grade.

SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT NO FAULTS: No fault quizzes on assigned reading are routinely given throughout the course, and these quizzes are given in the first minute or so of the class. Latecomers will not be allowed to make them up. Therefore, regular attendance AND punctuality are recommended.

Course Materials:

Please purchase a package of 3X5 unruled note cards and bring a few with you to class each session.

Class Participation Requirement:

Meeting the class participation requirement (approximately 25% of your semester grade) means that a student will attend regularly, keep up with the reading, complete all in-class writing exercises, and actively engage in class discussion, but, most importantly, it involves successful completion of “no faults “ AND required Reaction Papers (see below).

Reaction Papers for Selected Readings--Requirement:

While I suggest that you outline all readings as an aid to understanding and for study purposes, you are *required* to write brief (one or two pages) *Reaction Papers* for those assigned chapters in Media Literacy that are followed with double asterisks [******] in the reading assignments section of this syllabus. These papers must be typewritten. NO MAKE-UPS ARE PERMITTED. These mini-essays will not be graded (i.e., they are "no-faults") but they will comprise a significant part of your class participation grade. A sheet explaining in more detail how to fulfill the Reaction Paper requirement will be handed out early in the semester.

SPECIAL NOTE: Computer or printer failure is *NOT* an acceptable excuse for late work; back up your work frequently and begin printing out final drafts early enough to avoid catastrophe.

Extra Credit:

I will make an extra credit assignment available toward the end of the semester, but good performance on the midterms and good class participation is the best path to a higher grade in this class. Indeed, where grades above C are involved, extra credit work can only erase a minus or add pluses; it cannot lead to a full letter grade jump.

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS/ CLASS PARTICIPATION: There will be a number of mini-assignments during the semester, most of which will be completed in class. Therefore, regular class attendance is essential or you will fall behind.

GRADING: Grades will be assigned roughly on the basis of 3/4ths for examinations and 1/4 for class participation and miscellaneous assignments (including "no faults " and Reaction Papers based on selected readings). Grading standards are those outlined in the university catalog.

ATTENDANCE: You are expected to attend regularly. Unexplained absences will result in a reduction of your semester grade. Please be in your seat by the time class begins. It is difficult to maintain continuity in a class session with students straggling in late.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE: 1). The class begins on the hour, and it will count against your grade if you're late more than once or twice; 2). Class participation is encouraged, but once class begins, no private conversations; 3). The overworked custodial staff has asked that there be no eating or drinking; so be it.

Special Note--RETURN OF FINAL ESSAYS:

The only guarantee that your final essay can be returned is that you turn it in with a self-addressed envelope with *sufficient postage on the day it is due.*

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Reading Assignments: Should be read by date indicated

Remember that No Fault Quizzes may be administered at any time on reading material on or after its assigned date. Also keep in mind that *Media Literacy* chapter assignments followed by double asterisks [**] require a Reaction Paper to be submitted no later than the Thursday or Friday class session of the week specified (depending on your section).

NOTE: Reading assignments do not always correspond with the sequence in the text books' tables of contents, nor are all chapters in the books assigned reading.

Abbreviations: *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* [LCR] and *Media Literacy* [ML].

Unit I--(Intro. to Critical Thinking)—Weeks 1--5

<u>Week No.</u>	<u>Read by:</u>	<u>Textbook:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>
2	February 5 February 8	LCR ML	Preface & Chapter 1 Preface and Chapter 1
3	February 12 February 15	LCR ML	Chapter 2 Chapters 2** & Chapter 3
4	February 19	LCR ML	Chapter 6 Chapter 4
5	February 26	ML	Chapter 5** & Chapter 13

For the first midterm, you will be tested on the following fallacies (and their variations) discussed in Kahane/Cavender: *Appeal to Authority* [p.48]; *Small Sample* [p.92]; *Unrepresentative Sample* [p.92]; *Hasty Conclusion* [p.91] and *Irrelevant Reason (Non Sequitur)* [p.78].

******First Examination on reading to date and lecture material******
Thursday, March 1, or Friday, March 2, depending on your section

Unit II---(Media as Informer)—Weeks 6-10

<u>Week No.</u>	<u>Read by:</u>	<u>Textbook:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>
6	March 5	LCR Chapter 7	
7	March 12	ML	Chapter 7
8	March 19	ML	Chapter 16**
9	April 2	LCR	Chapter 11
10	April 9	ML	Chapter 20

For this examination, you will be tested on the fallacies covered in the last unit **PLUS** the following new ones as discussed in Kahane/Cavender: *Questionable Premise* [p.61]; *Ad Hominem Argument* [p.73]; *Slippery Slope* [p. 84]; and *Lack of Proportion* [lecture & pp. 137-39].

******Second Examination on reading to date and lecture material******
Thursday, April 12 or Friday, April 13, depending on your section

Unit III--(Nature of the Modern Mass Media)— Weeks 11-13

<u>Week No.</u>	<u>Read by:</u>	<u>Textbook:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>
11	April 16	ML	Chapter 9
12	April 23	ML	Chapter 10**
13	April 30	ML	Chapter 11

For this examination, you will be tested (**IN-CLASS**) on reading and the fallacies covered in the previous units **PLUS** the following new ones as discussed in Kahane/Cavender: *False Dilemma* [p.58; *Two Wrongs Make a Right* p.75]; *Questionable Analogy* [p.96]. You will also be asked to respond to several takehome exam questions. There are no other reading assignments in *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* for this unit of study.

******Third Examination [take-home due date and in-class quiz]on reading
to date and lecture material]****
Thursday, May 3, or Friday, May 4, depending on your section**

Unit IV---(Media, Images, & Self: Entertainment and Advertising) –Weeks 14-15

NOTE: For this unit, In-class quizzes will be used to test for currency in the following readings.

<u>Week No.</u>	<u>Read by:</u>	<u>Textbook:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>
14	May 7	LCR ML	Chapter 10 Chapters 6 & 8
15	May 14	ML	Chapter 17

***Essay is due Thursday, May 17, or Friday, May 18, depending on your section**

SPECIAL NOTE: Remember that final papers/essays can be guaranteed of return only if you provide a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage on the day you hand them in.****