

School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies

MDIA 207-News Analysis

Tuesday 10:00 AM, Wednesday 1:00 PM—HU323

Term 1 2008

Coordinating Instructor: Dr. Douglas A. Van Belle

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Office Hours: 1-3PM Tuesdays.

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Course Aims

This course provides students the opportunity to develop the theoretical background and skills necessary for critically analyzing the various information products generated by the increasingly global news media. Rejecting the naïve assumption that the news is an accurate and objective reflection of reality, the ways in which the news presents a distorted but consistent view of the world are systematically examined, with an emphasis on how and why these distortions exist and persist. This course should be particularly useful for students considering future careers involving journalism, media consultation and news analysis in the governmental, public and corporate sectors.

Course Objectives

By focusing on the dynamics involved, it is expected that students will develop an understanding of the news media that will allow them to successfully interact with either the input of information into the news process or the knowledgeable utilization of the resulting news product. Specifically students are expected to be able to:

- 1) Identify and analyze systemic influences that intervene between the source event and the delivered news product.
- 2) Identify and analyze procedural influences that intervene between the source event and the delivered news product.
- 3) Identify and analyze economic and business influences that intervene between the source event and the delivered news product.
- 4) Identify and analyze political and social influences that intervene between the source event and the delivered news product
- 5) Demonstrate a comprehension and ability to apply theories and findings from the text and ancillary readings

Expectations and Presumptions

Students are presumed to have a high level of interest in the news as a subject of analysis and inquiry.

Students are presumed to have all of the knowledge and skills of a second-year university student. This includes the ability to write coherent argumentative papers of a modest length, the ability to independently extract relevant information from assigned readings and the ability to prepare for tests.

An assignment worth a significant portion of the student's grade will require using the Lexus/Nexus media database to retrieve newspaper coverage for an independent analysis. Some specifics of using the database will be discussed in lectures and tutorials. However, students are expected to be reasonably computer literate. This includes the ability to use a word processor, the ability search and explore the Internet and competence using email as a means of communicating with the course coordinator and tutor.

As documented in the course catalog, the average student is expected to commit a full 15 hours per week to a second-year paper. This means 12 hours of reading, study, assignments and writing in addition to lectures and tutorials. If you read slowly, have trouble writing in English or have other difficulties working efficiently, you should commit additional time as needed.

All students will be assessed with absolute equality. No exceptions to course requirements will be made for personal circumstance of any kind. Students with documented special needs will be accommodated on a case by case basis, but accommodations will only be made to help the student attain the required quality of work. There will be no adjustments to the work expected from the student. The course is designed to minimize the need to make such accommodations, but students should inform the course coordinator and their tutor of any specific needs at the beginning of the term.

Students are expected to be able to work comfortably in English. This includes understanding lectures, reading, writing, speaking and all other aspects of university work. An occasional, minor grammatical or vocabulary error in written English will be overlooked so long as the substantive content remains clear. No other adjustments to assessment or course material will be made for non-native English speakers or others who might have language difficulties.

Texts, Required Materials, and Expenses

All students are expected to purchase the required text. Every effort has been made to insure that the class materials are reasonably priced but books are expensive. The book students are required to purchase is:

Jackie Harrison (2006) News. Routledge.

MDIA 207 ancillary readings: All ancillary readings are required and all are available free of charge to students, on-line through the VUW library.

Students are also required read the Dominion Post, daily, throughout the semester.

In addition, students will be expected to read independently as needed for the completion of assignments and this may require the payment of interlibrary loan fees and/or the purchase of additional reading materials.

Tests and Assessed Assignments

This course is internally assessed. Below is an outline of the points of student assessment. These criteria are final for Term 1-2008 and supersede all other descriptions or depictions. All four assessments must be completed to pass this course. Please note the definition of completion for the tutorial assignments in its description.

Mid-Term Test	30%
Take Home Test	30%
Term Paper (3000 Words)	30%
Tutorial Assignments	10%
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Total	100%

Mid-Term Test, Wednesday 9 April, 2008: 1:00 PM— HU323

The Mid-Term test is focused on the student's ability to meet Objective 5. The test will be held in the lecture theater. Testing accommodations will be made as required but official university documentation must be offered to both the tutor and coordinating instructor at the beginning of the term. Make up tests will only be offered to students with documented emergencies and please do note that the university is very strict about what counts as an emergency. **TRAVEL PLANS FOR THE BREAK ARE NOT AN ACCEPTIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR RESCHEDULING TESTING.**

Term Paper, Due Friday 23 May, 2008 11:59 AM

The term paper will be turned in before Noon. These essays are to be placed in the essay submission box in the Media Studies office, located on the second floor of KP-42. Papers must include a signed cover sheet. Late papers will be accepted. However, without a documented excuse that meets the university requirements for granting an extension, late papers will suffer significant penalties imposed on the cruel whims that arise during the coordinating instructor's unpleasant moods. At a minimum, this includes a 15% penalty, with an additional 5% taken off for each working day after 23 May, 2008. Papers turned in after Friday, 30 May will still count as completing the assignment, enabling a student to pass the course, but will be limited to a maximum grade of 51%. The specific topic of the essay will be announced during the term. The term paper is intended to evaluate Objectives 1-4.

Take Home Test, Due Tuesday 10 June, 2008, 11:59 AM

The take home test will be handed out at the end of lecture on Wednesday 28 May, 2008, and it must be turned in before Noon on Tuesday 10 June, 2008. These tests are to be turned in as an essay and should be placed in the essay submission box in the Media Studies office, located on the second floor of KP-42. All tests must include a signed cover sheet. Late tests **will not** be accepted under any but the most extreme and documented circumstances. The take home test is designed to evaluate the student's mastery of all five course objectives.

Tutorial Assignments

Tutorial assignments will be assigned and explained during tutorials and will be due at the start of tutorial the following week. These single page assignments are intended primarily as exercises to enhance tutorial discussions and student engagement with lecture material. They are marked by the tutor on an acceptable/not-acceptable basis. They will address all five of course objectives. Students must attend at least 70% of tutorials and complete 50% of tutorial assignments to complete this assessment. Students who do not complete this part of the assessment will fail this course regardless of their marks on other assessments.

Additional notes on written assignments.

Always keep a copy of the finished essay or take-home test. It is your responsibility to submit the assignment on time, and in the event of loss, regardless of fault, it is in your best interest to be able to immediately make a new copy available to your tutor.

All text should be typed. We prefer double spaced but, alternatively you could leave a blank line between the lines you type. In respect of script size, you probably want to use a 12 point font for the main essay text and a 10 point font for footnote/endnote details. Markers prefer a nice Times Roman or similar serif font, but if you don't mind failing, feel free to experiment with something fancy and hard to read.

The essay and the take home test must include a signed Media Studies cover page. They must be stapled and each page numbered. Do not use plastic covers or binders. A stack of essays in plastic covers exhibits many of the same qualities as a stack of live fish.

In the assessment scheme developed for evaluating student performance, every possible effort is made to give the student the best possible mark that can be justified while at the same time striving to be fair to every student in the course. For the most part, this means that when your test or other assignment is returned to you it has already been evaluated for all of the nits, bits and pieces that could help your grade. Unless there has been some kind of gross error on the part of the marker, grades are final when recorded. Your tutor will be happy to discuss your grade with you and he will become down right giddy if you ask his advice on how to perform better in the future. However, please keep in mind that tutors have a wide variety of responsibilities and are only paid for a limited number of hours of work. Try to either utilize a scheduled time that is set aside for interacting with students or if that is impossible, schedule an appointment. The easier it is for your tutor to focus on your work, the more valuable the feedback will be.

General Explanation of Assessment Criteria

Comments recorded on papers and tests are made in reference to and as a compliment to these general definitions of what the letter marks signify.

A+ (85-100%)

Excellent work showing sophisticated and independent thought. Superior analysis, comprehensive research, good theoretical or methodological understanding and impeccable presentation.

A (80- 84%)

Work is distinguished by their clarity of thought and argument. Question is answered skillfully, is meticulously structured and the argument is convincing. Demonstrates sophisticated comprehension of the topic, a familiarity with scholarship & research in the area, and a clear understanding of related theoretical issues. A high standard of critical analysis. Presentation and organization are excellent with correct use of citation conventions when required.

A- (75- 79%)

Work of a high standard: ideas could be of 'A' quality material but the overall effect was undermined by limitation or inconsistency in one area. It could also be 'A' material that was flawed by the quality or consistency of its technical presentation, research support, or theoretical understandings. Demonstrates independent thought, good writing skills, effective selection/structuring of material, and a general clarity and sense of purpose.

B+ (70% - 74%)

Work which exhibits a good standard of research and of writing. Contains some perceptive analysis, and effective research, preparation and planning. This work may demonstrate insight and perception but this standard is not maintained through the whole work. The argument, technical quality, and other elements may be inconsistent in quality. May require greater integration of theoretical or empirical analysis. Demonstrates some independence of thought.

B (65% - 69%)

Consistently good work and still above average. May demonstrate strong analysis, theoretical reading or contextual knowledge, but without integrating these elements into a balanced argument. May be well researched and documented but in the 'B' range there could well be a deficiency in some aspect of research or understanding. May have problems with technical presentation, structure, argument and/or research.

B- (60% - 64%)

Good work but may not be consistent and thus falls short of 'B' quality in one or more respects. In this grade area the work will have exceeded the standard expected for passes at this level. Question is satisfactorily answered and has been appropriately informed by research, but there is less attention to the detail and complexity of issues. There may be

problems with the essay structure, the writing style, the selection of material or the argument. There may also be problems with presentation, expression, and grammar.

C+ (55% - 59%)

The essay is limited in achievement due to an overall incapacity for independent research or thought – hence it will tend to demonstrate a reliance on lecture material. Work in the C range will have paid insufficient attention to critical sources and not be widely researched. Work in this category may have deficiencies in structure and organization, the quality of argument, and/or the writing style.

C (50% - 54%)

Satisfactory completion of set tasks only. Basic engagement with the subject matter, and lacking in critical analysis or a considered conceptual approach. May be poorly planned and constructed, with serious problems of clarity and expression. May not have used or have acknowledged an appropriate range of sources. May be purely descriptive. There may be some significant problems with writing, research or organization.

D (40% - 49%)

Misses the point of the exercise or has failed to respond adequately to it. The work is deficient in important respects to the extent that it cannot be regarded satisfactory at this level. A 'D' grade essay may contain some elements of attaining a pass grade.

E (0% - 39%)

E's are bad.

General University policies and statutes

Students should familiarize themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar available in hard copy or under 'About Victoria' on the VUW home page at www.vuw.ac.nz.

Student and staff conduct

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps are to be taken if there is a complaint. For information about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor or refer to the statute on the VUW policy website at:

www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct

The Policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at:

www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct

Academic grievances

If you have any academic problems with your course you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned; class representatives may be able to help you in this. If you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the relevant Associate Dean; VUWSA Education Coordinators are available to assist in this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievance Policy which is published on the VUW website at:

www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances

Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means *no cheating*. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one's own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk. Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning,
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course,
- suspension from the course or the University.

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website:

www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html

Students with Impairments (see Appendix 3 of the Assessment Handbook)

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials or in meeting the course requirements, please contact the course coordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively, you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support

Services (DSS) to discuss your individual needs and the available options and support on a confidential basis. DSS are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building:

telephone: 463-6070

email: disability@vuw.ac.nz

The name of your School's Disability Liaison Person is in the relevant prospectus or can be obtained from the School Office or DSS.

Student Support

Staff at Victoria want students to have positive learning experiences at the University. Each faculty has a designated staff member who can either help you directly if your academic progress is causing you concern, or quickly put you in contact with someone who can. In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the support contact is **Dr Allison Kirkman, Murphy Building, room 407**. Assistance for specific groups is also available from the Kaiwawao Māori, Manaaki Pihipihinga or Victoria International.

Manaaki Pihipihinga Programme

This programme offers:

- Academic mentoring for all Māori & Pacific students at all levels of undergraduate study for the faculties of Commerce & Administration and Humanities & Social Sciences. Contact Manaaki-Pihipihinga-Programme@vuw.ac.nz or phone 463 6015 to register for Humanities & Social Science mentoring and 463 8977 to register for mentoring for Commerce and Administration courses
- Postgraduate support network for the above faculties, which links students into all of the post grad activities and workshops on campus and networking opportunities
- Pacific Support Coordinator who can assist Pacific students with transitional issues, disseminate useful information and provide any assistance needed to help students achieve. Contact; Pacific-Support-Coord@vuw.ac.nz or phone 463 5842.

Manaaki Pihipihinga is located at: 14 Kelburn Parade, back court yard, Room 109 D (for Humanities mentoring & some first year Commerce mentoring) or Room 210 level 2 west wing railway station Pipitea (commerce mentoring space). Māori Studies mentoring is done at the marae.

Student Services

In addition, the Student Services Group (email: student-services@vuw.ac.nz) is available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at:

www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/

VUWSA employs Education Coordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and faculty delegates. The Education Office (tel. 463-6983 or 463-6984, email at education@vuwsa.org.nz) is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building.

Contacting the Coordinating Instructor

During the second term of 2004, the voice mail for the coordinating instructor's office phone began sending all messages to an alternate universe. While the sentient wombats of that universe are thoroughly annoyed and have valiantly tried to remedy the situation, they have no fingers and have trouble pushing the little buttons on the phone. The coordinating instructor has found that he likes the arrangement and has, thus far, thwarted all efforts to fix the system. As a result, students who wish to make contact should use the email address provided above for anything official or otherwise requiring a response, such as requests for appointments, requests for make up assignments, complaints about grades, gripes about the course or Elvis sightings.

The other way to make contact is to drop by on Tuesday Afternoons during posted office hours. Office hours are primarily intended for quick questions, clarifications of the material, questions about how to improve on the next test or other consultations that do not require preparation by the instructor. Consultation that requires conscious thought on the part of the instructor generally requires an appointment.

Blackboard

Blackboard is evil. However, it will be used as a bulletin board for this course. Note-taking guides for lectures and copies of assignment handouts and an occasional other thing will be posted on blackboard during the course of the term. It will not be used for direct communication. Students wishing to contact the coordinating instructor should not use the Blackboard system and should send an email directly to the instructor.

Course Schedule

Attendance at all lectures is mandatory. Note-taking outlines will be provided on Blackboard, however lecture notes, powerpoint slides and other aspects of what is presented in lectures will not be provided outside of those lectures. Students missing a lecture will have to find another student willing to share notes and discuss that lecture.

Do note that the readings do not proceed straight through the text.

Section 1 Creating the News

Week 1

Tutorial Activity: Tutorial signups.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 26-2-2008 Introduction. Teaching strategy and related suggestions for learning strategies.

Wednesday 27-2-2008 A political economy framework for conceptualizing the news industry, its actions and its products. A brief discussion of relevant journalism topics: The news professional, the working environment, beats, assignments, deadlines, journalistic norms and expectations, the journalist as generalist, education backgrounds of journalists.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 2: Written definition of what is News. Students should spend several hours examining the variety of available media sources and from that observation and that observation alone, write a clear but brief (one page double-spaced) definition of what they believe defines a text as news. This, as with all tutorial assignments must be typewritten (Word Processed) and a copy must be handed in to the tutor at the beginning of the tutorial for which it is assigned.

Readings For Week 2: Harrison Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2

Tutorial Activity: Introduction of tutor and tutorials. Discussion of expectations and student strategies for success. Discussion of Definitions of News.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 4-3-2008 Agreement reality, news as a representation, not a reflection of reality, thinking in terms of the construction of news as the construction of a public sphere or mediated reality.

Wednesday 5-3-2008 The stained-glass window as a metaphor for the metaphor of the news as a window on the world.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 3: Offensive headlines. From at least three different days of coverage in the Dominion Post. Students should gather 3 headlines (at least 9 total)

that will offend some group in society. Students should then identify the group and find an advertisement in the paper that might reasonably be argued to target that group. The headlines themselves and notation of the group and advertiser should be typed for handing in. The stories themselves should be cut from the paper and brought in to the tutorial to facilitate discussion but do not need to be turned in.

Readings For Week 3: Harrison Chapter 4 (Note Chapter read out of order)

Week 3

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of target audiences, advertisers and how that might influence coverage choices.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 11-3-2008 The Business of News—The Audience as Product, Costs versus the value of the product

Wednesday 12-3-2008 The Business of the News—Advertising, delivery costs, market sizes and niche versus mass audience strategies.

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of target audiences, advertisers and how that might influence coverage choices.

Lecture Topics: Imperatives and limitations on the news-Newsworthiness, the dramatic story structure

Tutorial Assignment for Week 4:

Written definition of what is Dramatic. Students should watch at least one episode of a serialized soap opera, such as Shortland Street, Coronation Street, Days of Our lives, Desperate Housewives, at least one crime drama, and a feature-length film that is rated for a children's audience. From these and only these viewings, write a brief (one-page double spaced) definition of what makes something dramatic.

Readings For Week 4: Harrison Chapter 3

Week 4

Tutorial Activity: The William Shatner School of Acting Dynamics, Discuss.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 18-3-2008 Imperatives of and limitations on the news-Newsworthiness

Wednesday 19-3-2008 Imperatives of and limitations on the news-The dramatic story structure

Readings For Week 5: A Strategic Guide to Writing for the Classroom.

Week 5

Tutorial Activity: Essay assignment handed out. The use of library database access to research articles discussed.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 25-3-2008 No lecture.

Wednesday 26-3-2008 What your parents never told you about essays

Tutorial Assignment for Week 6: Will it Play In Peoria? Find and extract an article from the Dominion Post that would be of interest to a pig farmer in Peoria Illinois, USA. Prepare to explain why s/he might choose to read it?

Readings For Week 6: Harrison Chapter 5.

Week 6:

Tutorial Activity: Term Paper Assignment handed out and discussed.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 1-4-2008 Imperatives and limitations on the news-Gatekeeping and logistics Theory

Wednesday 2-4-2008 Imperatives and limitations on the news-Gatekeeping and logistics Example

Tutorial Assignment for Week 7: None. Try studying

Readings For Week 7: None try studying.

Week 7

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 8-4-2008 Sex Lecture...Seriously.

Wednesday 9-4-2008 Test, be happy

Tutorial Assignment for Week 7: None. Try studying

Readings For Week 8: Harrison Chapter 7 (Note: chapter read out of order)

Ancillary reading: Livingston, Steven and D. Van Belle (2004) "The Effects of New Satellite Newsgathering Technology on Newsgathering from Remote Locations." *Political Communication* 22 : 45-62

Week 8:

Tutorial Activity: Paper Writing Workshop

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 29-4-2008 Mutual exploitation model of the news

Wednesday 30-4-2008 Three social/political communicative roles of the news- Top down, lateral, bottom up.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 9: Sources in the news. Students will take the front pages of the Dominion Post from Two days during week 7 and list all identified or quoted sources of information. This list should be organized by story, and typed.

Readings: Harrison Chapter 6 (Note: chapter read out of order)

Ancillary Reading: Bennett, W. Lance (1990) Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States. Journal of Communication 40, Vol 2. Spring, 103-125

Section 2 Engaging the News

Week 9

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of sourcing patterns.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 6-5-2008 Elite dominance of the sources of news-Framing

Wednesday 7-5-2008 Elite dominance of the sources of news-Indexing

Tutorial Assignment for Week 10: Writing of a press release. Take one of the most often repeated of stories you have heard from family or friend and write a one page double spaced press release for it.

Readings: Harrison Chapter 8

Week 10

Tutorial Activity: Critique and discussion of peer's press release.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 13-5-2008 Elite dominance of the sources of news- strategies, taking advantage of the business imperatives of the news

Wednesday 14-5-2008 Elite dominance of the sources of news- pseudo events, controlled news environments, spin, back to framing

Tutorial Assignment for Week 11: Using the Lexus/Nexus database, find and briefly analyze one news story from each of 4 distinct protest events (4 stories in total).

Readings: Ancillary Reading

McLeod, Douglas M and Benjamin H Detenber (1999) Framing effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of Communication*. Vol. 49, Iss. 3; p. 3 (21 pages)

Week 11

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of protest coverage assignment.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 20-5-2008 Classic concept of Agenda Setting - Protest, and the disadvantaged voice, Investigative journalism

Wednesday 21-5-2008 Classic concept of Agenda Setting - The drama of scandal and the myth of conspiracy

Term Paper, Due Friday 23 May, 2008 11:59 AM

Tutorial Assignment for Week 12: Write a draft of the first paragraph for the term paper. Paragraph must fit the structure outlined in Van Belle and Van Belle article on writing

Readings for Week 12: Ancillary Readings

Stamm, Keith, Michelle Johnson and Brennon Martin (1997). Difference among newspapers, television, and radio in their contribution to knowledge of the contract with America. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74, 687-702.

Section 3 The Good Stuff

Week 12

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of take home exam assignment.

Lecture Topics:

Tuesday 27-5-2008 Television versus print- Differences in structure and format, audience response

Wednesday 28-5-2008 Analyzing the news- Coverage of Lebanon versus Israel.

Take home test handed out.

Take Home Test Due Tuesday 10 June, 2008, 11:59 AM