

The School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies Proudly Presents
MDIA 412 International News Media
Wednesdays 3-5PM

Coordinating Instructor: Dr. Douglas A. Van Belle
Office: KP44-210
Email: doug.vanbelle@vuw.ac.nz

Course Aims

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the theories and findings from the primary areas of academic research related to the international news media.

Course Objectives

By focusing on the dynamics involved, it is expected that students will develop an understanding of the international news media that will allow them to successfully interact with the academic research related to the subject, including preparations for conducting independent research. Specifically students are expected to be able to:

- 1) Read, deconstruct and assess academic research on this subject.
- 2) Identify and analyze connections between academic research publications as they fit within a larger body of knowledge.
- 3) Suggest ways in which future research might be fruitfully conducted from the foundation of the existing body of knowledge.
- 4) Utilize library, database and published resources to find readings appropriate to the subject of study.
- 5) Demonstrate comprehension of the general state of knowledge in the study of international news media.

Expectations and Presumptions

Students are presumed to have a high level of interest and self-motivation.

Students are presumed to have all of the knowledge and skills expected of an honours student. In addition to a reasonable undergraduate background in one of the cognate streams in media studies, 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 debate issues in a clear, rational academic fashion.

Students are expected to be reasonably computer literate. This includes the ability to use a word processor, the ability search and explore the Internet, the ability to use library resources for the study of current research, and competence using email as a means of communicating with the course coordinator.

As documented in the course catalogue, students are expected to commit a full 24 hours per week to an honours paper. This means 22 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 quantity or quality of work expected from the student. The course is designed to minimize the need to make such accommodations, but students should inform the course coordinator 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 of the assignment is 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

For our weekly, assigned readings we will read research articles, the vast majority of which will be available in hardcopy in the library and/or online through the library.

One book is required and must be purchased:

Shoemaker, Pamela J. and Akiba A. Cohen (2006) News Around the World. Routledge

Tests and Evaluated and Assignments

Below is an outline of the points of student assessment and a rough depiction of how they factor into the final student grade. Please remain aware of two things: First, whether or not it is specifically listed below, every assignment, every class discussion, every activity will factor into the student's final grade. Second, the weighting of these elements is approximate and students should know that in the final evaluation of your performance I will give a modest degree of extra emphasis to the area or assignment where the student has been the most successful. All points of assessment must be completed to pass the course. Also students are reminded that all grades assigned by the instructor are provisional.

Critical Review Essay	40%
Research Prospectus	40%
Weekly Preparation Notes	10%
Readings Selections Notes	10%
<hr/>	
Total	100%

Critical Review Essay

The critical review essay is one of the primary written assignments for the course and will be turned in before 11:59 AM, Thursday 10 April 2008. The expectation is that the student will examine research publications in an area of study and then write an essay that moves one intellectual step beyond summarizing. The student is expected to use the material within the research to forward an argument that demonstrates a critical analytical examination of the material. This assignment will require the student to conduct a significant quantity of self-directed reading and library work and students should begin early in order to insure that they can obtain interlibrary loan material in a timely fashion. The assigned length for this assignment is 3,000-3,500 words. However, because the written length of work can vary tremendously in relation to the predominant methodologies of the research being examined, a better rule of thumb is that the student is expected to spend the better part of 2 weeks working on this project, roughly 30-35 hours.

Research Prospectus

The research prospectus is intended to build upon the literature review assignment. However, students who are unhappy with their literature review assignment may opt to undertake the additional work of creating a new literature review. Other than the extra work, there is no penalty in switching topics. This essay will detail an argument addressing the “where next?” question in regards to an area of research inquiry. Students considering moving on to the Masters are encouraged to put this argument in the form of a detailed research proposal which could be combined with an edited version of the critical review essay to create a document that could easily serve as a proposal for a master’s thesis. Other options can include more general arguments about where this field of research should move, what other fields of study could benefit by engaging this field of study in a specific way, or any other argument that tackles a what next question. The assigned length for this assignment is 3,000-3,500 words. However, because the written length of work can vary tremendously in relation to the predominant methodologies of the research being examined, a better rule of thumb is that the student is expected to spend the better part of 2 weeks working on this project, roughly 30-35 hours. This assessment must be turned in before 11:59 AM, Thursday 12 June 2008.

Weekly Discussion Notes

The weekly preparation notes are notes, questions and discussion points distilled from the readings. They are meant to facilitate discussion and must be completed before each seminar meeting. Two copies should be brought to the seminar, one to be turned in at the start of the seminar and one for the student to use during the discussion. 70% of these must be completed to complete this assessment.

Readings Selection Notes

Developing the skills to explore a subject and find readings of significance is a point of emphasis in this course. As such, students will be expected to take parameters of a specific avenue of study, or a starting point offered by the instructor, identify read and be ready to discuss the material in class. Readings selection notes will present a bibliography of readings selected and then a brief summary of the logic of exploration, selection and

rejection as it fits with the subject, the starting point (if one was offered) and the student's interests.

Additional notes on written assignments.

Always keep a copy of the finished assignment. It is your responsibility to submit the assignment on time, and in the event of loss to make a new copy available to your tutor.

All text should be double-spaced. Alternately a student can leave a blank line between the lines of his or her own typing, or could type on every other line. In respect of script size, you should use a 12 point font for the main essay text and a 10 point font for footnote/endnote details. A serif font, with little feet at the bottom of the letters like this one is preferred, but if you don't mind failing, feel free to experiment with something pretty and hard to read.

The essay assignments include a 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 greased weasels.

In the scheme developed for evaluating student performance, every possible effort is made to give the student the best possible grade 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.

Also, it is important to note that work is graded against a set standard, not against the other students in the course. While these must remain individual projects, students are encouraged to engage in cooperative efforts to enhance their performance such as reading and critiquing drafts or suggesting readings to one another.

General Explanation of Assessment Criteria

Comments recorded on papers and tests are made in reference 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 STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise 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 hardcopy or under "about Victoria" on the Victoria homepage at:

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/calendar_intro.html

Information on the following topics is available electronically under "Course Outline General Information" at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/newspubs/universitypubs.aspx#general>

- Student and Staff Conduct
- Academic Grievances
- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism
- Meeting the Needs of Students with Impairments
- Student Support

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 actually 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 or Wednesday 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. Other types of consultation generally require an appointment.

Blackboard

Blackboard is not used for this course.

Course Readings Schedule

Since the students will be selecting most of the readings for our seminar discussions, there is no weekly schedule of readings. Readings for the 2nd and 3rd week, and a starting point for students to select readings for the 4th week will be circulated via email shortly after the first seminar. The readings topics or starting points for the rest of the term will be forwarded in a similar fashion as the interests and discoveries the students bring to class lead us through the vast literature related to International News Media.