

Sociology 4TT3
THE SOCIOLOGY OF MASS MEDIA

Winter, 2016
Day and Time of Class:
Wed. 14:30-17:20

Instructor: Dr. D. Young
Office (**see note below**): KTH/629, Ext. 23615
Office Hours (**see note below**):
Tues. 14:30-15:30
Tues. 17:30-18:30
Email (**see note below**): youngd@mcmaster.ca

Course Outline

Contact Information

My name is Dr. Young. My office location and hours are indicated above. Feel free to drop by or call during these times. **Please Note:** I would appreciate it if you would make every effort to see me during scheduled office hours. However, if you are unable to speak with me during my scheduled office hours, you may ask me to arrange an appointment for you. My office hours will *not* be in effect during scheduled university closures (e.g., holidays), scheduled university breaks (e.g., mid-term recess weeks), or the term-end examination periods.

My office telephone number is indicated above. **Please Note:** Leave your name, a telephone number (spoken slowly), and a very brief message.

My email address is indicated above. **Please Note:** If you send an email message to me, ensure that your message

- is sent from your McMaster email account to my McMaster email account (*not* from any other email account or from Avenue to Learn mail)
- uses “Sociology 4TT3” as a subject line
- includes an appropriate greeting (either “Hi Dr. Young” or “Hello Dr. Young”)

If your email message does NOT contain the three elements noted above, you may NOT get a reply. Make sure that your message deals with something short and simple (such as setting up an appointment). Complicated matters can only be addressed in my office. Email will only be read and replied to during regular working hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm).

Course Description

This course familiarizes students with selected issues in the sociology of mass media. It is *not* necessary to have previous background in relevant sociology courses (because I will be giving an introductory lecture that aims to get all students on the same page), but relevant background can certainly be useful. Relevant background includes courses on media institutions, media and social issues, political sociology, or social movements.

Part I of the course considers theoretical and methodological issues. We will become familiar with two critical perspectives on the mass media. One is political economy, and the other is

cultural studies. These Marxian-influenced theoretical perspectives focus on the issues of power, inequality, and conflict in relation to the mass media. Essentially, political economy ties these issues to media production while the perspective of cultural studies links the issues to media content. While addressing theoretical issues, we will also discuss methodological approaches to the mass media by examining both administrative research and critical research.

Part II builds on the earlier discussion of critical political economy by examining a variety of topics connected to media production. These topics include ownership (such as the dangers of growing ownership concentration among media companies); globalization (including the impact of transnational media companies and the Internet); the state and its role (with regard to issues such as globalization, legislation, regulation, promotion, and broadcasting); and conflict between private media companies and the state (on the one hand) and social movements (on the other hand) over media policy and other issues.

Part III builds on the earlier discussion of critical cultural studies by considering several topics associated with media content. These topics include dominant ideology, hegemony, and counter hegemony; the under-representation and misrepresentation of subordinate groups (labour unions, the working class, women, and minorities) in the mainstream media; the interpretation of mainstream media content by subordinate groups; and the role of alternative media in relation to the political objectives of social movements.

Course Learning Objectives

This course has several objectives. By the end of the course, you will

- understand theoretical and methodological approaches that sociologists and other scholars have used to study the mass media
- comprehend how media production is connected to political and economic aspects of capitalist society (such as regulation and ownership)
- grasp how media content reflects capitalist, patriarchal, and racist ideology
- recognize the conflicts that exist between powerful classes or groups and less powerful classes or groups with regard to media production and media content

All of the objectives noted above are connected to the *topic* and *content* of the course. Additional objectives include helping you to enhance your analytical skills, organizational skills, writing skills, and referencing skills through written work.

These objectives reflect several of McMaster's Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (see <http://csl.mcmaster.ca/COU/pdf/Undergraduate%20Degree%20Level%20Expectations.pdf>). For instance, by encouraging you to think about different theoretical and methodological approaches within the sociology of mass media, the course as a whole will enhance the depth and breadth of your knowledge as well as your knowledge of methodologies. The research paper will provide an opportunity to engage in application of the knowledge you have obtained. The take home examination will test the overall depth and breadth of your knowledge. In various ways, the course requirements will also develop your autonomy and professional capacity. For example, your written work will require you to display academic integrity, and your seminar participation will require the exercise of initiative.

Course Format

This course is scheduled to run for up to three hours each Wednesday. You will be given a 15 minute break at a convenient point (toward the middle of the class period). You *must* be prepared to stay for the entire class.

The format will vary from week to week. For example, there will be film presentations in some weeks but not others. There will be only one formal lecture, but there will always be class discussions. Along with class discussions, other types of active learning will be utilized in various weeks.

Please Note (Hearing Problem): Please keep in mind that I am partially deaf. This can make it difficult for me to hear comments or questions, especially if there are many students in a course or if a classroom has poor acoustics. Therefore, when students are asking questions or making comments, or when any class discussions are taking place, please listen and refrain from making any noise. Competition from other sounds (talking, sorting notes, adjusting chairs, etc.) makes it extremely difficult for me to hear what someone is saying to me.

Film Presentations

Some films may be shown in this course. You are advised to take notes on any films that are screened since you may be required to incorporate the films into a take-home examination. Some of the films may be housed at McMaster, and it may be possible for students to borrow them from the Mills library. However, I may borrow other films from universities across Ontario through a special inter-university loan system that only professors have access to. If you miss the screening of any films that cannot be viewed outside of class, you are advised to borrow notes from students who saw these films.

Avenue to Learn

In this course, we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster email accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Avenue to Learn will be used in a limited way during this course. It will be used to post major announcements as well as discussion questions. It is your responsibility to check Avenue to Learn regularly for any announcements.

Please do *not* contact me through Avenue to Learn. There are two reasons for this. First, I rarely go on Avenue, and I prefer to use my McMaster email account for correspondence. Second, it is impossible to reply to messages sent from Avenue to a McMaster email account. Consequently, if you expect your message to be read and replied to, be sure to send the message from your McMaster email account to my McMaster email account.

Course Requirements

The course requirements, and the weights attached to them in the calculation of your final grade, are as follows:

Seminar Attendance and Behaviour	10%	Grade determined after classes end
Verbal Responses to Discussion Questions	10%	Grade determined after classes end
Active Learning Activities	30%	Completed during various classes
Research Paper	25%	Due on Apr. 6
Take-Home Examination	25%	Distributed on Apr. 6 and due on Apr. 20

You *must* complete *all* of these course requirements. Unless there are extreme circumstances, I will *not* free a student from completing a particular requirement and arrange for the weight to be shifted to another requirement; in order to get the full value of the learning experience, it is my view that you need to do all of the work associated with the course. More information about the course requirements can be found in the sections below.

Seminar Attendance and Behaviour

Your seminar attendance grade will be based on a quantitative count of how often your name appears on the attendance sheet that is distributed each week. I reserve the right to reduce your grade if you arrive late for class, if you return late from a break, or if you leave at the break and do not come back. I also reserve the right to reduce your grade if you engage in inappropriate behaviour while the class is in session (e.g., while I am lecturing, showing films, or leading discussions). It should be fairly obvious, for instance, that it is unacceptable to play with a smartphone in front of me or eat in front of me while I am teaching you. For more information and additional examples of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, see the section below on “Classroom Behaviour.”

Verbal Responses to Discussion Questions

You are expected to complete *both* of the assigned readings for *each* week of the course. During each class in the course, you are also expected to participate in meaningful discussions that are based on the assigned readings.

In order to facilitate discussion, I will post some discussion questions on Avenue to Learn about a week before each class that focuses on readings. You *must* access the discussion questions on Avenue, consider these questions as you do the assigned readings for that week, and jot down some thoughts or ideas to bring up during the class discussion. Since everyone will know in advance the major questions that I will raise and have time to consider them in advance, there will be no excuse for not offering viewpoints during the class. It is extremely important that you develop speaking skills, and that is why emphasis is being placed on verbal responses to discussion questions.

Your grade for verbal responses to discussion questions will be based on my observation of the *quantity* and *quality* of your *knowledgeable* contribution to weekly discussions (e.g., how often

you say something about the required readings or the films shown in class and the degree of understanding you display of such course material). If you say nothing throughout the term, please be aware that I will be forced to give you a grade of zero for this component of your grade. If you say very little, I will be forced to give you a very low (failing) grade for this component. Please note that you will *only* get credit for making contributions that show knowledge and understanding of the material. For example, if we are discussing an article about video games, you will get credit for articulating some of the author's points and articulating some thoughtful reactions to these points. Such commentary would have much value, but simply talking about your personal experiences with video games (because you did not read the article) would have little value (and you would not get credit for it).

Active Learning Activities

There will be *at least* eight active learning activities spread throughout the course, and you are expected to complete six of them. Each of the six active learning activities will be worth 5% of your final grade (for a total of 30%).

The dates of the active learning activities will *not* be announced in advance. An activity may be held at the very beginning of a class, somewhere in the middle of a class, right after a break, or even at the very end of a class. Therefore, you will forfeit your opportunity to complete an activity if you do not show up on a day that an activity is given. You will also forfeit your opportunity to complete an activity if you are late for class or if you leave at the break and do not come back. There will *not* be an opportunity to make-up a missed activity. However, since you only need to complete six activities, you are essentially being allowed to miss a few additional activities without penalty. If you complete more than six active learning activities, I will take the six highest grades that you achieved and drop the lower ones.

Most of these active learning activities will require you to show knowledge of either the assigned readings or the films shown in class. A few activities may not be specific to the readings or films and instead require you to utilize your deepening understanding of media issues in a more general way. Some of the activities will be completed individually, and some of them will be completed in pairs or small groups. Members of pairs or groups will each receive the same grade. In most cases, you will *not* have access to the readings as you do activities that focus on the readings (since I am trying to assess your recollection and understanding of the readings).

Active learning involves recalling course material, thinking about the material, and grappling with issues raised by the material. Active learning activities to be completed individually may include (but are not limited to): writing short recollections of readings or short but thoughtful reactions to readings; writing answers to specific questions about readings; or completing brief quizzes about readings. Active learning activities to be completed by pairs or groups may include (but are not limited to): discussing and writing answers to specific questions about reading or films; arguing as teams for one side of a debate about media issues; or participating in team-based games that are connected to readings, films, or media issues.

Research Paper

The issues associated with Part II and Part III of the course can be investigated through empirical study. Consequently, you will be required to do research and complete a paper (8 to 10 pages long) that addresses a specified topic connected to critical political economy or critical cultural studies. Detailed instructions for completing the research paper will be provided fairly early in the course.

You are *strongly encouraged* to work on the research paper in pairs or in groups of three, but you are welcome to write a paper individually if you wish. If you decide to work with friends in the class, each member of a pair and each member of a group will receive the same grade for the paper.

Take-Home Examination

For the purpose of assessing your overall learning in the course, you will be required to write a take home examination. The examination will cover all three parts of the course, but the emphasis will be on Part II and Part III. You will have a choice between two or three questions, and you will have to prepare an answer (8 to 10 pages long) that synthesizes course material. In order to successfully answer a question, you will have to display substantial understanding of the following: the required course readings associated with the topic of the question; any film presentations related to the topic of the question; and possibly points that I made when formally or informally lecturing on the topic of the question. Detailed instructions for completing the take home examination will be provided at the end of the course.

You *must* work on the take home examination individually. As with any examination, you will *not* get extra time. Therefore, please be aware that a take home examination will *not* be accepted after a specified deadline (the final *day* and *time* for submission).

McMaster Policy on Accommodation for Missed Academic Work

McMaster University has a policy on “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work.” This policy is explained in the Undergraduate Calendar, but the following is a summary of the policy (along with my stipulation that you may be required to enter into a written, contractual agreement with me for completing the missed work).

The appropriate approach for requesting relief due to missed academic work depends on the value of the missed work as well as your specific situation. *As described below, please be aware that the university has introduced new rules regarding the McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF):*

1. For medical or personal situations lasting *up to three calendar days* and affecting academic work *worth less than 25%* of the final grade, students must use the MSAF online self-reporting tool. No further documentation is required. Students may submit requests for relief using the MSAF once per term. An automated email will be sent to the course instructor, who will determine the appropriate relief. *Students must immediately follow-up with the instructor.*

Failure to do so may negate the opportunity for relief. I will likely require you to enter into a written, contractual agreement that sets out conditions for completing the missed academic work. The MSAF cannot be used to meet a religious obligation or to celebrate an important religious holiday. The MSAF cannot be used for academic work that has already been completed or attempted. ***An MSAF applies only to work that is due within the period for which the MSAF applies, i.e., the 3-day period that is specified in the MSAF. However, all work due in that period can be covered by one MSAF.*** The MSAF cannot be used to apply for relief for any final examination or its equivalent. See McMaster’s policy on “Petitions for Special Consideration.”

2. For medical or personal situations lasting ***more than three calendar days***, and/or for missed academic work ***worth 25% or more*** of the final grade, and/or for any requests for relief in a term where the MSAF has been used previously in that term, students must report to their Faculty Office to discuss their situation and will be required to provide appropriate supporting documentation. If the reason for a request for relief is medical, the approved McMaster University Medical Form covering the relevant dates must be submitted. The student must be seen by a doctor at the earliest possible date, normally ***on or before the date of the missed work***, and the doctor must verify the duration of the illness. If the reason is non-medical (e.g., a death in the family), appropriate documentation with verifiable origin covering the relevant dates must be submitted, normally ***within three working days*** of the date of the missed work. ***Students must immediately follow-up with the instructor. Failure to do so may negate the opportunity for relief.*** I will likely require you to enter into a written, contractual agreement that sets out conditions for completing the missed academic work.

Disability Accommodation Letters

If you have a disability, and if you intend to get an accommodation letter from Student Accessibility Services (SAS), you ***must*** inform the instructor of this by the end of the Drop and Add period. Please do this by sending a message from your McMaster email account to my McMaster email account.

Once your accommodation letter has been prepared, you ***must*** see me *in my office (preferably during office hours)* to discuss your accommodations. Please visit my office as soon as possible; do ***not*** delay. Please also understand that it is ***not*** appropriate to ask me to deal with your letter immediately before or after a class. SAS policy calls for you to see me in my office in order to protect your privacy and ensure the confidentiality of your information. According to SAS, it is also important to see me in my office so that I have the time necessary to discuss accommodations with you. In most cases, these meetings last for about ten minutes.

Grading Schemes

This course may utilize two different marking schemes. Percentage grades will be used for any multiple-choice or true/false testing. Letter grades will be used for any written work. Letter grades are preferred since a numerical scheme implies that it is possible to produce a perfect piece of writing. However, for purposes of interpretation and calculation of a final course grade, the numerical mid-point of a letter grade (or the approximate numerical mid-point) will also be

provided. In the case of a failing grade (i.e., an F), the numerical equivalent (between 0%-49%) will be the decision of the marker.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (the notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy (specifically Appendix 3) located at: www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1) plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained; 2) improper collaboration in group work; 3) copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Important Note: Students are expected to carefully read the course handout “Referencing Style and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty.” Students are also expected to follow *all* of the instructions in that handout when preparing *any* written work for the course.

Use of Turnitin.com

In this course, we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a hard copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., an online search).

If you do not wish to submit your work to Turnitin.com, please be aware that I will need time to perform the laborious task of checking your work manually for signs of academic dishonesty. Consequently, I reserve the right to withhold your work until I have had a chance to check it manually. This means that you will *not* get your paper back on the same day as those students who did submit their work to Turnitin.com. You will have to wait several weeks longer.

If you do submit your paper to Turnitin.com, and if Turnitin.com suggests that there *may* be a problem with your paper, I reserve the right to withhold your paper until I can carry out a further investigation. A high Turnitin.com score does *not* necessarily mean that plagiarism is present in

your paper, but it does mean that I have to take a closer look at your work. Please understand that Turnitin.com identifies *how much* material was copied from sources rather than *how* the material was copied. Consequently, there may be no problem at all as long as the material was copied appropriately (e.g., placed in quotation marks with citations indicating author, year, and page number). Nevertheless, when Turnitin.com indicates that a lot of material was copied, I may need time to look at your paper and consider the *possibility* of plagiarism by examining *how* the material was copied. In most cases, this check is a formality and the paper is cleared.

Use of Laptop Computers in the Classroom

Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. University policy indicates that, at the discretion of the instructor or TA, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

If you want to use a laptop computer to take notes, you *must* use a battery in your computer or sit directly beside a wall and wall outlet. If you are seen stringing a cord to reach an outlet, you will be told to disconnect the cord. This policy is being adopted to ensure safety in the classroom. Please understand that other people could get hurt by tripping over your cord (if it is lying on the floor) or walking into it (if it is left hanging).

Departmental, Faculty, and University Policies

Do not fax assignments. In this course, you are also *not* permitted to submit written work by email or email attachment. Only a hard copy of written work will be accepted.

The Sociology staff do *not* date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers.

Students should check the university's website as well as the white board and the Undergraduate Bulletin Board outside the Sociology Office (KTH 627) for notices pertaining to Sociology classes or departmental business (e.g., class scheduling information, location of mailboxes and offices, tutorial information, class cancellations, TA job postings, etc.).

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to

the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Readings

All of the weekly required readings for this course have been assembled in a Custom Courseware package that is available for purchase through the Campus Store.

Classroom Behaviour

It is your responsibility to attend all classes in this course, to be on time for the classes, and to stay for the duration of the classes. The instructor bears no responsibility for difficulties experienced by students who do not attend, who are late, or who leave early. If you miss a class, or a portion of a class (for *any* reason), you are advised to borrow notes from a student who was present. You are also advised to consult this student about any announcements that may have been made. If you do not know anyone in the course, you are advised to get to know someone early on and exchange contact information so that you can share notes as well as information about announcements. It is *not* the responsibility of the instructor to provide students with lecture notes or to brief students on any announcements they have missed.

It is your responsibility to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner during the classes in this course. Please do *not* talk to another student; eat food; read a book or magazine; put your head down or sleep; write and pass comments to someone; do work for another course; surf the Web or watch videos; use a smartphone or other personal electronic device; speak to me from your seat – or speak up during class discussions – without raising your hand; or engage in any other activity which is rude, disrespectful, or distracting. Please show consideration for me as well as you classmates.

Reference Letters

Please note that I will *not* write reference letters for students I do not know personally. I need to recognize you by both face and name in order to adequately comment on you, and I need sufficient opportunity to observe your performance in the classroom. Consequently, if you are doing very well in the course (i.e., you have an A range grade), you are advised to make contact with me and make sure that I know who you are (e.g., by dropping in for several casual chats during my office hours). Reference letters are assessments of skills, behaviour, and attitude. Therefore, I will also *not* write reference letters for students who do not attend class regularly, who are habitually late for class, who frequently leave class early, or who do not conduct themselves appropriately during class. See the two paragraphs directly above for more information.

Course Schedule

The course schedule below identifies the course topics, the dates when the topics will be addressed, and the required readings for the topics. You will be given reasonable notice if any significant changes have to be made to the course schedule.

**Part I:
Theoretical and Methodological Issues**

Introduction to Sociological Analysis of the Media (Jan. 6)

Lecture

Critical Perspectives on the Media (Jan. 13)

Vincent Mosco (1989), "Communications Studies in North America: The Growth of Critical Perspectives"

Sheryl N. Hamilton (2010), "Considering Critical Communication Studies in Canada"

**Part II:
Critical Political Economy**

Ownership of the Media (Jan. 20)

Dwayne Winseck (2008), "The State of Media Ownership and Media Markets: Competition or Concentration and Why Should We Care?"

Jack Bishop (2005), "Building International Empires of Sound: Concentrations of Power and Property in the 'Global' Music Market"

Globalization of the Media (Jan. 27)

Robert W. McChesney (2001), "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism"

John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney (2011), "The Internet's Unholy Marriage to Capitalism"

The State and the Media I: Policy and Regulation (Feb. 3)

Paul Nesbitt-Larking (2007), "Sticks, Carrots, and Party Favours: State and Political Regulation of the Media"

David Young (2004), "The Promotional State and Canada's Juno Awards"

The State and the Media II: Public Broadcasting (Feb. 10)

Marc Raboy and David Taras (2005), "The Trial by Fire of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: Lessons for Public Broadcasting"

David Young (2005), "The CBC and the Juno Awards"

Mid-Term Recess (No class on Feb. 17)

Struggles Over Media Policy (Feb. 24)

Robert W. McChesney (2008), "The U.S. Media Reform Movement: Going Forward"

Robert A. Hackett and Steve Anderson (2011), "Democratizing Communication Policy in Canada: A Social Movement Perspective"

Part III: Critical Cultural Studies

Media Representation I: Labour Unions and the Working Class (Mar. 2)

Shane Gunster (2008), "Listening to Labour: Mainstream Media, Talk Radio, and the 2005 B.C. Teachers Strike"

Richard Butsch (2005), "Five Decades and Three Hundred Sitcoms about Class and Gender"

Media Representation II: Women (Mar. 9)

Kaitlynn Mendes (2011), "Reporting the Women's Movement: News Coverage of Second-Wave Feminism in UK and US Newspapers, 1968-1982"

Sumi Kim (2008), "Feminist Discourse and the Hegemonic Role of Mass Media: Newspaper Discourse about Two South Korean Television Dramas"

Media Representation III: Minorities (Mar. 16)

Janet C. Dunlop (2007), "The U.S. Video Game Industry: Analyzing Representation of Gender and Race"

David Young (2006), "Ethno-Racial Minorities and the Juno Awards"

Reception of Representation in Mainstream Media (Mar. 23)

Minelle Mahtani (2008), "Racializing the Audience: Immigrant Perceptions of Mainstream Canadian English-Language TV News"

Belinda Flores Espiritu (2011), "Transnational Audience Reception as a Theatre of Struggle: Young Filipino Women's Reception of Korean Television Dramas"

Struggles Through Alternative Media (Mar. 30)

Christian Fuchs (2010), "Alternative Media as Critical Media"

Sian Sullivan, André Spicer, and Steffen Böhm (2011), "Becoming Global (Un) Civil Society: Counter-Hegemonic Struggle and the Indymedia Network"

Wrap-Up of the Course (Apr. 6)