

COMMUNICATION 215: DECONSTRUCTING DISNEY



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Office: 327 Higley, 587-8512
Office Hours: Monday, 1:30-2:30; Wednesday, 10:00-11:00; or by appointment
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Course Summary

This course will serve as an advanced introduction to media studies, including units on political economy, ideology, industry studies, audience reception theory, and more. Our case study will be the multifaceted media empire that is the Disney corporation, a storied company that has grown up with the modern media—and that generations of Americans have grown up with as well. Disney represents some of the best-loved media products of all time, but also some of the most problematic, and also engages in a wide range of positive and not-so-positive business and political practices, making it an ideal exemplar of the power and potential of the media in society.

As a liberal arts course, this class has been designed to help you move (in Barry Kroll's words) from ignorant certainty to intelligent confusion. In other words, you have ideas and feelings about the media generally and Disney specifically, possibly passionately-held ideas and feelings in many cases. My goal in this course is to complicate those ideas and leave you appreciating the complex processes through which stories and ideologies get produced and consumed, as well as the political, economic, and social implications of those stories.

This course will not be "hating on" Disney, nor will we speak often of the "genius" of Disney, although Walt Disney himself and thousands of people who have worked for the Disney corporation over the years can legitimately claim that distinction. It's best not to think of this as a class about Disney at all; it's a class about how we can understand the stories that we as a society tell ourselves. Disney merely provides an especially important example of those stories, their origins, and their consequences.

Required Text

Thornham, Sue, Caroline Bassett, and Paul Marris, eds. *Media Studies: A Reader*, **3rd Edition** (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Late assignments will be penalized ½-grade per day (e.g. B+ to B). Reading summaries may not be handed in late for credit.

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|-------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Reading Summaries | 10% | Final Exam (12/16) | 20% |
| Teaching Session | 10% | Class Engagement | 10% |
| Midterm Exam (10/20) | 20% | Final Paper Revision | 10% |
| Final Paper (due 11/19) | 20% | | |

Screenings

Screenings for both sections are Monday evenings, 7-9 p.m. in the Higley auditorium. They are a required part of the course; think of them like a lab time in the natural sciences. If you miss a given screening, the DVD will be on reserve in the library every day except Mondays, so you will be able to make it up. However, I **strongly encourage you to attend the screenings**, since a). I will be setting up the viewing and letting you know what to look for; and b). these films were mostly intended to be viewed collectively, and the audience response is an important part of how they work. You will gain maximum benefit from the course if you attend screenings regularly.

Policies and Expectations

Attendance: Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of the course as well as your own personal achievement. I will be taking attendance daily, and missing class or failing to participate constructively will definitely impact your class engagement grade.

Lateness: Be in your seat and ready to begin class at the scheduled start time. I am much more strict about lateness than absenteeism: I would rather you not come to class at all than interrupt your classmates by showing up late.

Preparation: Always bring that day's readings to class with you. The syllabus will always state clearly what you should read prior to each class, which assignments you should hand in, and what else you must do or bring for a given day. Late assignments will be penalized by a half-grade for each 24 hours of lateness (e.g. from B+ to B). If you know that you will have difficulty completing an assignment on time, let me know before the deadline and I will try to work with you if possible.

Written Work: All written work must be typed (double-spaced), spellchecked, and proofread. Failure to run your work through a spellchecker (one more time before printing is a good idea) will automatically result in a 5% deduction from your grade for that assignment. Multiple-page documents must be stapled—I will **not** accept unstapled work (please note that paper clips and dog-ears are *not* staples).

Grades: All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. The calculation of your grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale, and the weight of each assignment is listed above. If you are concerned about your grade, come talk to me as early as possible.

Email Policy: I will regularly use email to send out announcements, changes in the syllabus, reminders about tests or due dates, etc. It is your responsibility to check your email regularly to keep up-to-date with these announcements. I will use the email address you have listed with the university; therefore, please make sure that this is indeed the correct address. I promise to answer all email from students within 24 hours (36 hours on weekends) and will hold you responsible for any announcements made via email within 24 hours of the announced change (36 hours on weekends).

In-Class Behavior: You may not eat in class unless you bring enough for everyone (beverages are okay). You may not use computers in class without prior approval. Your cell phone or PDA must be turned off and put away during class. If you absolutely need to have your phone on during class for some reason, talk to me at the beginning of the semester or the class. NOTE: TEXTING OR WEB-SURFING IN CLASS WILL RESULT IN AN **AUTOMATIC ZERO FOR CLASS ENGAGEMENT** FOR THE SEMESTER. THIS IS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE INSTRUCTOR AND THERE IS **NO APPEAL**: IF I THINK YOU'VE DONE IT, YOU'VE DONE IT. SO DON'T EVEN GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF SNEAKING IN A TEXT OR A QUICK CHECK OF YOUR EMAIL.

Accessibility and Special Accommodations: It is important that the course be accessible to all students. If you need any alternative accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to be able to participate fully in the course, or if there are any external issues that may affect your work in this course, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. I rely on the Academic Support & Enrichment Center in 102 Doane to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on documentation on file in that office.

Academic Honesty: You may not turn in substantially similar work to two classes without the express consent of *both* instructors. All sources in your written work must be properly cited; if you have any doubts about correct citation, contact the Writing Center or any of the many paper and online guides to academic citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated, and students found to have committed plagiarism, **regardless of whether or not the plagiarism was committed intentionally and knowingly**, will face severe grade penalties and will also be reported to the university to face further academic discipline. You are encouraged to use the resources available in the library system and the Writing Center to guide your research. In addition, I call your attention to Denison's current statement on academic integrity:

"Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty, and it requires that cases be heard by the Academic Integrity Board. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which integrity is violated.

"Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly.

"For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity see <http://www.denison.edu/about/integrity.html>."

Peer Assessment

I will be experimenting with peer assessment this semester and need your input and cooperation to make it an effective approach. My desire to try this was inspired by an article that appeared in *Inside Higher Ed* in which a Duke professor found it to be a highly effective teaching tool (the article is on Blackboard under "Peer Assessment").

Several of you contacted me over the summer with ideas, suggestions, and concerns, and based on that feedback I have developed strategies for how to incorporate peer assessment into this course. Here are my guiding principles:

- Since this is an experiment, I'll be **starting small**, asking the class to assess only reading summaries, class participation, and one draft of the final paper.
- Assessment necessarily includes constructive criticism, but where possible, I have structured the peer assessments to be **based on positive rather than punitive feedback**.
- To the extent possible, the peer grading will be **anonymous**. I want you to be as honest in your assessment and separate your feedback from the individual you are assessing (or being assessed by).
- Peer evaluations will be important data that I rely on for the participation and reading summary grades, but your **grades will be determined by me** and me alone. In other words, you are being *assessed* by your peers but you are being *graded* by me.

How Task Assignment Works

On the first day of class, I will randomly assign you a number; that will be your number for the semester and determines when you will write or assess reading summaries, assess class participation, or teach the class.

- If you are assigned to write a reading summary (“RS” on the daily schedule), you must email it to peerreview@billkirkpatrick.net by midnight the night before class (Sec. 02: noon the day of class). Criteria are below.
- If you are assigned to assess the reading summaries (“Assess RS” on the schedule), you must email me your assessments by 5:00 p.m. the day after class (Sec. 02: 8:00 p.m.). Criteria will be on Blackboard.
- If you are assigned to assess class participation (“CP” on the schedule), I will provide assessment sheets for you to fill out during class and hand in at the end of class. Criteria will be on these sheets.
- If you are assigned to do a teaching session (“Teach” on the schedule), you should meet with your group to discuss what you want to do, then email me a brief (one-paragraph) teaching plan no later than 48 hours before you are scheduled to teach. Criteria for teaching sessions will be handed out separately.

Reading Summaries

For most class sessions, a group will be assigned to write summaries of the reading(s) for that day. These summaries should be emailed as a Word document attachment to peerreview@billkirkpatrick.net by **midnight the night before class (Sec. 02: noon the day of class)**. The guidelines for these summaries are as follows:

- Your summary should be between **250-300 words** long. These word limits are strict in both directions.
- Your summary should clearly **identify the thesis** of each reading: what, exactly, is the author arguing? It’s important to give the author’s largest claim(s) in your own words. Do not just parrot back the author’s own language, and don’t just make vague statements about the argument.
- Your summary should clearly state **why you think the author’s thesis matters**: what’s the “so what”?
- If there is more than one reading, your summary should not only give the thesis and “so what” for each but also **put the readings in dialog** with each other. How are they reinforcing or contradicting each other? How are they approaching the same issue from different angles? If you see (NS) next to a reading on the daily schedule, do not include that reading in your summary.
- The strongest summaries will give **an original thought** based on considering the readings: what new insight or understanding did the reading provide *you*?
- Finally, your summary must be **well written**: grammatically correct, almost entirely typo-free, and stylistically polished.
- For a sample of strong reading summaries, see Blackboard under “Peer Assessment.”
- Each summary is worth 30 points, or 3% of your total grade. You will also have 10 points, or 1% of your grade, awarded for doing all of the reading summary assessments.

Daily Schedule

Readings should be completed by that day's class, and you should come prepared to discuss them. Those from the Thornham book are marked (TBM); all others will be on Blackboard (BB). Full citations for all articles will be available on Blackboard. **Every single thing on this syllabus is subject to change, so check Blackboard or your email for announcements and keep on your toes.**

| Date | Topic | Assignment | | RS | CP | Assess RS | Teach |
|---------|----------------------|------------|--|-----|-----|-----------|-------|
| Aug. 30 | Introduction | | | | | | |
| Sep. 1 | Why Study the Media? | Read: | Silverstone, “The Texture of Experience” Jenkins et al., “Defining Popular Culture” | 1-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | |

| Date | Topic | Assignment | | RS | CP | Assess RS | Teach |
|---------|----------------------------|------------|---|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Sep. 6 | The Media Industry I | Read: | Thompson, "The Media and Modernity," pp. 19-27 Hesmondhalgh, "Ownership, Organization, and Cultural Work" | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Silly Symphonies</i> | | | | |
| Sep. 8 | The Media Industry II | Read: | Gomery, "Disney's Business History: A Reinterpretation" Wasko, "Corporate Disney in Action," pp. 89-99 | 7-9 | 10-12 | 13-15 | |
| Sep. 13 | Political Economy I | Read: | Marx & Engels, "The German Ideology" Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" (TBM) Althusser, "Ideology" | 10-12 | 13-15 | 16-18 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>The Incredibles</i> | | | | |
| Sep. 15 | Political Economy II | Read: | Dorfman & Mattelart, "Introduction" Giroux, "Disney, Militarization, and the National-Security State After 9/11" | 13-15 | 16-18 | 19-21 | 22-24 |
| Sep. 20 | Authorship & Adaptation I | Read: | Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence" | 16-18 | 19-21 | 22-24 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarves</i> | | | | |
| Sep. 22 | Authorship & Adaptation II | Read: | Grimm & Grimm, "Little Snow-White" (NS) Perrault, "Puss In Boots" (NS) Lessig, "Creators" Wasko, 83-89 Zipes: "Breaking the Disney Spell" | 19-21 | 22-24 | 1-3 | 4-6 |
| Sep. 27 | Stereotypes & Coding I | Read: | Lippmann, <i>Public Opinion</i> (excerpt) Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes" (TBM) | 22-24 | 1-3 | 4-6 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>The Jungle Book</i> | | | | |
| Sep. 29 | Stereotypes & Coding II | Read: | Miller & Rode, "The Movie You See" Brode, <i>Multiculturalism and the Mouse</i> , pp. 100-111 | 1-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 |
| Oct. 4 | Audiences & Decoding I | Read: | Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" (TBM) Fiske, <i>Understanding Popular Culture</i> , 142-146 | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>The Little Mermaid</i> | | | | |
| Oct. 6 | Audiences & Decoding II | Read: | Sun and Scharrer, "Staying True to Disney" | 7-9 | 10-12 | 13-15 | 16-18 |
| Oct. 11 | Text/Social Context I | Read: | Deiss, "Do You Understand Your Child's Secret Language?" Spock, <i>Baby and Child Care</i> (Excerpt) Mead, <i>Childhood in Contemporary Cultures</i> (Excerpt) Disney, "What I've Learned From the Animals" (NS) | 10-12 | 13-15 | 16-18 | |
| | | Turn In: | Paper Topic/Preliminary Bibliography | | | | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Vanishing Prairie, Seal Island</i> | | | | |

| Date | Topic | Assignment | | RS | CP | Assess RS | Teach |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|---|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Oct. 13 | Text/Social Context II | Read: | Sammond, "Raising the Natural Child" | 13-15 | 16-18 | 19-21 | 1-3 |
| Oct. 18 | NO CLASS OR SCREENING: Fall Study Break | | | | | | |
| Oct. 20 | MIDTERM EXAM | | | | | | |
| Oct. 25 | Feminism I | Read: | Kuhn, "The Power of the Image" (TBM) McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture" (TBM) | 16-18 | 19-21 | 22-24 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> | | | | |
| Oct. 27 | Feminism II | Read: | Craven, "Beauty and the Belles" | 19-21 | 22-24 | 1-3 | 7-9 |
| Nov. 1 | Queer Theory I | Read: | Doty, "There's Something Queer Here" (TBM) | 22-24 | 1-3 | 4-6 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Ferdinand the Bull, The Reluctant Dragon</i> | | | | |
| Nov. 3 | Queer Theory II | Read: | Griffin, "Mickey Mouse--Always Gay!" | 1-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | |
| | | Turn In: | Draft of Thesis Statement and Bibliography | | | | |
| Nov. 8 | Orientalism I | Read: | Said, "Introduction to <i>Orientalism</i> " (TBM) | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Pocahontas</i> | | | | |
| Nov. 10 | Orientalism II | Read: | Kutsuzawa, "Disney's Pocahontas" | 7-9 | 10-12 | 13-15 | 19-21 |
| Nov. 15 | Writing Workshop | Bring: | Two copies of draft of paper | | | | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Toy Story</i> | | | | |
| Nov. 17 | | Read: | Guizzo, "Who's Afraid of the Uncanny Valley" Telotte, "Better Than Real" | 10-12 | 13-15 | 16-18 | |
| | | Email: | Final Paper by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, 11/19 | | | | |
| THANKSGIVING BREAK, NOV. 20-28 | | | | | | | |
| Nov. 29 | Post-modernism I | Read: | Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" Jameson, <i>Postmodernism</i> pp. 1-19 | 13-15 | 16-18 | 19-21 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Weddings of a Lifetime</i> | | | | |
| Dec. 1 | Post-modernism II | Read: | Grossberg et al., pp. 55-63 Levine, "Fractured Fairy Tales" Sec. 02: Evals 2:30-2:50, 028 Higley | 16-18 | 19-21 | 22-24 | |
| | | Email: | Paper Assessment by 5:00 p.m. | | | | |
| Dec. 6 | Globalization I | Read: | Wise, "Culture and the Global" | 19-21 | 22-24 | 1-3 | |
| | | Screening: | <i>Mulan</i> | | | | |

| Date | Topic | Assignment | | RS | CP | Assess RS | Teach |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------|---|-------|-----|--------------|-------|
| Dec. 8 | Globalization II | Read: | Wang & Yeh, "Globalization and Hybridization in Cultural Products" Fung & Lee, "Localizing a Global Amusement Park" Sec. 03: Evals 8:30-8:50, 028 Higley | 22-24 | 1-3 | 4-6 | 13-15 |
| Dec. 13 | Summary | Email: | Revision of Final Paper by 5:00 p.m. | | | | |
| Dec. 16 | FINAL EXAM | 9:00 a.m | Section 03 (8:30 section) | | | | |
| Dec. 18 | FINAL EXAM | 2:00 p.m | Section 02 (2:30 section) | | | | |