

MDIA 207 News Analysis

Thursday 2:10- 4:00 PM—EA LT006

Term 2 2006

Coordinating Instructor: Dr. Douglas A. Van Belle

Office: KP42-205

Office Hours: 1-3PM Tuesdays and Thursday immediately prior to or following lecture.

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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 generation of 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, students are 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 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

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.

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 2-2006 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	35%
Take Home Test	25%
Term Paper (3000 Words)	35%
Tutorial Assignments	5%
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Total	100%

**Mid-Term Test, Thursday August 17, 2006: 2:10- 4:00 PM—EA
LT006**

The Mid-Term test is focused on the student’s ability to meet Objective 5 and it is designed be completed in just over an hour, but students will be given the full two hours to finish. The test will be held in the lecture theater. Other 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.

Term Paper, Due Thursday 5 October, 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 tests must include a 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 being turned in after Monday October 9th, 2006. The specific topic of the essay will be announced during the term, but the Term Paper is intended to evaluate Objectives 1-4.

Take Home Test, Due Monday 16 October, 11:59 AM

The take home test will be handed out at the end of lecture on Thursday 12 October, and it must be turned in before Noon on Monday 16 October. 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 cover sheet. Late tests will not be accepted. The take home test is designed to evaluate the student’s master 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 assignments are intended primarily as exercises to enhance tutorial discussions and student engagement with lecture material and are marked on an acceptable/not-acceptable basis. They will address all five of course objectives. Students failing to attend 70% of tutorials or failing to complete 50%

of tutorial assignments will fail to complete this assessment and 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 to make a new copy available to your tutor.

All text should be double-spaced. This means leaving an empty line between the lines of your own writing and becomes important when a tutor is marking your work. 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.

Assignments must, include a Media Studies cover page. They must be stapled and each page numbered. Do not use plastic covers or binders.

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. Your tutor will be happy to discuss your grade with you and she will become down right giddy if you ask her 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 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%)

This category implies that the essay is well below the achievement minimum (in a range of respects) for work at this level. A E essay will demonstrate not one, but several of the 'D' essay's deficiencies - it may be well short or far in excess of the prescribed length, badly written, poorly conceived, ill structured, hastily prepared, full of technical or other inaccuracies, and/or lacking in even a basic understanding of the concepts. E's are bad.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

The coordinating instructor for MDIA 207 has no tolerance whatsoever for academic dishonesty. Any act of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for this course and the vigorous pursuit of all possible penalties available including suspension or expulsion from the university. Also note that the coordinator primary area of research is the computer assisted content analysis of text and he often uses automated analysis programs designed to detect plagiarism and students who "share" work.

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. Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria.

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals or any other printed source, the work of other students or staff, information from the Internet, software programs and other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material.

Plagiarism is not worth the risk.

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct (www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct) and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

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

Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, on the University's website at: www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html.

Student Services

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 Maori, Manaaki Pihipihinga or Victoria International. 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.

General University Requirements

Students should familiarize themselves with the University's requirements, particularly those regarding assessment and course of study requirements, and formal academic grievance procedures, contained in the statutes in the Calendar. The requirements documented in this course outline should be considered in that context. The Calendar also contains the Statute on Conduct, which ensures 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 contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps can be taken if there is a complaint.

Grievance Procedures

If you have any academic or other problems in or with this course, you should talk to the tutor concerned as soon as possible. If you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, or if there is reasonable justification for involving a higher authority please consult the Coordinating Instructor. If necessary, a problem can be brought to the attention of the Director of Media Studies, Head of SEFT or the Associate Dean (Students) of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Class representatives are available to assist you with the process.

Contacting the Coordinating Instructor

The 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 Schedule

Attendance at all lectures is mandatory. 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.

Section 1 Creating the News

Week 1: 12-13 July 2006

Tutorial Activity: No Tutorial

Lecture Topics: The news professional--The working environment, beats, assignments, deadlines, journalistic norms and expectations, the journalist as generalist, education backgrounds of journalists, Guest Lecture by Verica Rugar.

Tutorial signups and course introduction

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 (half page single 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: 19-20 July 2006

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

Lecture Topics: Agreement reality, news as a representation, not a reflection of reality, thinking in terms of the construction of news.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 3: 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 suitable for a children's audience. From these and only these viewings, write a brief (half page single spaced) definition of what makes something dramatic.

Readings For Week 3: Harrison Chapter 3

Week 3: 26-27 July 2006

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of assignment.

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

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, 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 4: Harrison Chapter 4

Week 4: 2-3 August 2006

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

Lecture Topics: The Business of News--The Audience, Niches, Advertising, Costs,

Tutorial Assignment for Week 5: 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 5: Harrison Chapter 5

Week 5: 9-10 August 2006

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of selected stories.

Lecture Topics: Imperatives and limitations on the news-Gatekeeping and logistics

Tutorial Assignment for Week 6: None, try studying.

Readings For Week 6: None, you really should consider studying.

Week 6: 16-17 August 2006

Tutorial Activity: Term Paper Assignment handed out and discussed.

Lecture Topics: Mid-Term test

Tutorial Assignment for Week 7: None.

Readings For Week 7: 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 7: 6-7 September 2006

Lecture Topics: Mutual exploitation model of the news, Three social/political communicative roles of the news- Top down, lateral, bottom up.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 8: Sources in the news. Students will take the front pages of the dominion post from Two days during week 11 and list all identified or quoted sources of information. This list should be organized by story, and typed.

Readings For Week 8: Harrison Chapter 6 (Note: chapter read out of order)

Section 2 Engaging the News

Week 8: 13-14 September 2006

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of tutorial assignment.

Lecture Topics: Elite dominance of the sources of news-Framing, indexing,

Tutorial Assignment for Week 9: 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 single spaced press release for it.

Readings For Week 9: Harrison Chapter 8

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

Week 9: 20-21 September 2006

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

Lecture Topics: Elite dominance of the sources of news 2- -strategies, taking advantage of the business imperatives of the news, psuedo events, controlled news environments, spin, back to framing

Tutorial Assignment for Week 10: 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 10: 27-28 September 2006

Tutorial Activity: Return and Review of Test 1, discussion of protest coverage assignment.

Lecture Topics: Protest, and the disadvantaged voice, Investigative journalism, Classic concept of Agenda Setting, the drama of scandal and the myth of conspiracy

Tutorial Assignment for Week 11: 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: 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 11: 4-5 October 2006

Tutorial Activity: In class analysis of Television and Newspaper coverage of the same event.

Lecture Topics: Education or monitoring? Rethinking the dominant paradigm, television versus print- Differences in structure and format, audience response

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: Tumber Chapters 13, 14, 15, 22

Week 12: 11-12 October 2006

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of take home exam.

Lecture Topics: Race and the news, gender, the news, and the ideals of beauty. Take home final handed out.

**Take home final Due Monday 16 October
2006 at 11:59 AM**