Course Proposal

COM 350: Popular Media in the Age of Convergence

Catalog Description:
Examines the relationships between media technologies, institutions, cultural forms and audiences within contemporary convergence culture. Focus on how traditional forms of mass media texts, particularly television, have been impacted by new technologies and how such shifts may reconfigure media audiences/consumers.

Rationale:

1. To address existing gaps in and help update the department curriculum
The proposed course centers on recent developments within the field of critical media studies and contributes to the department’s goal to develop course work in that field. While the department offers a course on the historical development of popular media, *Rise of the Electronic Media* (COM 375), and a number of co-listed courses on the forms and effects of mass media, there is not a course that is specifically designed to address more recent changes in both the practices of traditional forms of popular media and in the field of Media Studies. COM 350 will provide students an opportunity for in-depth analysis of contemporary trends in media culture as well as an understanding of the technological and social forces that shape that culture. Drawing the latest research in the field, the course focuses on the complex relationships between mass media texts, media technology and media audiences that lead to and support media convergence as a defining feature of contemporary media culture. The concept of convergence, a term that generally refers to the ways that digital technologies increasingly blur the boundaries between previously separated media forms and industries, and between producers and audiences, is one that is increasingly central to Media Studies and a key reality of our contemporary media landscape.

2. To enhance student understanding of mediated communication
As the contemporary corollary of COM 375, this course will explore the rise of contemporary convergence culture through social, political, economic and technological lenses. Emphasis will be placed on understanding how existing media institutions and textual forms have changed within convergence culture in ways that challenge and uphold existing structures of media ownership and rethink questions of active audience engagement. Students will be exposed to a variety of forms of mass media that emerged as a result of such convergence in order to understand the relationship between digital media technologies and changing cultural and social conditions of production and reception of traditional media forms. This includes a range of digital and online media forms that draw on and reconfigure existing media technologies (such as television). By focusing on the relationship between the development of new media technologies and the social use of those technologies, students will develop critical thinking skills necessary to understand the broader influence of technology on how mass media industries operate in contemporary culture.
POPULAR MEDIA IN THE AGE OF CONVERGENCE  
COM 350  
*Sample Syllabus*

**Instructor:** Erin Meyers, Ph.D

**Course Overview**  
The rise of new digital technologies has been hailed as an age of “convergence” in which old media platforms are replaced and reshaped by “new” media. This course examines the technological, economic and social implications that emerge from the collision of old and new media cultures. We will use a critical cultural approach to media that questions the relationships between media technologies, institutions, cultural forms and audiences within convergence culture. We will explore cultural changes in production and consumption of media as a result of the development of technologies like the digital television, DVRs, the Internet and social networking platforms, recognizing that technological shifts necessarily have social consequences that can be both positive and negative. The course will focus on how popular media industries, particularly television and film, have responded and adapted to convergence culture and examine the changing roles of audiences in this ever-shifting technological landscape. By placing convergence culture into social context, this course seeks to understand convergence as a dynamic phenomenon that continues to shape our media system. The goal is to use this critical lens to help us better understand our roles as media consumers and producers within convergence culture.

**Course Objectives**  
By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Trace the development and impact of various technological innovations on media cultures
- Articulate the complex and interdependent relationship between texts, producers and audiences within convergence culture with attention to issues of control and resistance
- Articulate various conceptions of audience practices within convergence culture, with attention to their technological and social influences
- Synthesize theoretical concepts and use them to analyze various media texts and platforms in class discussions and in written assignments

**Course Materials**  
**Note both books are available on reserve at Kresge and the Jenkins book is available as an e-book through the library website.**


Additional readings will be available via Moodle. These readings are marked (M) on the syllabus.

**Course Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Media Ethnography)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Current Issue)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Questions</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exams:** Exams will include a combination of multiple choice question and short answer/essay questions. Exams will cover material from class lectures and from readings. More details will be provided closer to the scheduled exam time.

**Papers:** Detailed instructions on paper topics will be provided in class and on Moodle no later than two weeks prior to the paper due date.

*Media Ethnography:* In this paper, students will reflect on how your own engagements with media are impacted by convergence. Students will draw on concepts about the technological and social changes engendered by convergence discussed in class readings and relate them to your own experience as a media consumer. This paper will allow students to analyze and synthesize scholarly arguments about convergence culture and apply them to experience within media culture. This paper will be 4-6 pages in length.

*Current Issue:* For this assignment, each student will choose a current industrial, economic or social issue facing the production, circulation and consumption of media within convergence culture. All paper topics must be approved by the instructor no later than week 13 and the paper is due on the last day of class. Each student will draw on course readings in order to analyze this issue and develop an argument about the impact of convergence on media and culture. A small amount of outside research will be required to describe/ground your current issue within the concepts of convergence culture, but theoretical grounding will come primarily from course readings/lectures. This paper will be 6-8 pages in length.

**Discussion Questions:** In order to facilitate class discussion, each student will be responsible for preparing 3-5 discussion questions about the course readings five times during the semester. These questions should aim to foster critical thinking and discussion, perhaps critiquing or challenging ideas presented in articles, not simply asking for basic definition of terms from article etc. Discussion questions must be emailed to the instructor no later than 24 hours prior to the assigned date, and the assigned question writers will also help lead class discussion on the assigned date by posing their questions in class. Students will be assigned dates by the instructor during the first week of class.
Attendance and Participation: This includes two components.

1. Attendance: You must attend class regularly and on time. Attendance will be taken by the instructor every class meeting. Absences will only be counted as excused in case of religious holiday, dire emergency or illness and with proper documentation (e.g. doctor’s note). DO NOT schedule meetings with advisors or other appointments, shifts at work, etc. during class time, as these are NOT excused absences. You should contact me as soon as possible (ideally in advance) if you have to miss class. Accumulating more than two unexcused absences will result in the reduction of your participation grade and will impact your final grade. If you arrive late/leave early (10 minutes) three times, it will be counted as an unexcused absence.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to catch up on material you missed. If you are absent on a given day, I am more than happy to answer questions during office hours or during another scheduled appointment. However, I will NOT send you my lecture notes, powerpoint slides, etc.

2. Participation: You must come to class prepared to participate in class discussions and activities in thoughtful and constructive ways. This includes coming to each class with the reading prepared and with you, answering and posing questions, listening respectfully to fellow students and the instructor, and contributing concretely to a positive classroom learning environment.

Technology policy: Participation also means turning off and putting away your cell phone (no texting) and refraining from using your laptop for anything other than course notes (e.g. no checking Facebook or other non-class related web sites). Students who do not follow this policy will receive one warning and future infractions will result in the loss of participation points and students will have to surrender their phones/devices to me during class time.

Grades

Grading for this course will be based on the following definition of grades:

A-range = for work which is outstanding, not just completing the assignment well, but going beyond—perhaps insightfully integrating ideas in the current section, perhaps drawing in readings from other parts of the course in interesting ways, or bringing something else special to the assignment.

B-range = for work which is good, not just meeting the minimum requirements necessary for completing the assignment, but also characterized by the inclusion of something more than the minimum.

C-range = for work which is adequate, meeting most but not all of the basic course/assignment requirements, or meeting the requirements at the bare minimum level without going beyond this.

D-range = for work which is worthy of some credit even though it does not satisfactorily meet the basic course/assignment requirements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90 – 100%</td>
<td>3.6 – 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80 – 89%</td>
<td>3.0 – 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 – 79%</td>
<td>2.0 – 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60 – 69%</td>
<td>1.0 – 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 60%</td>
<td>0.0 – 0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I return graded work, you should read my comments before coming to me with questions about your grade. If you are dissatisfied with any evaluation of an assignment, you must speak to me in person, not just over email.

*Extra credit*

In general, there will be no extra credit assignments. I might offer an extra credit opportunity to everyone in the class, but I will not assign any extra credit work on an individual basis.

**Course Policies**

*Late Written Assignments:* Deadlines for all assignments are stated on the syllabus and/or will be announced in class. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT PRIOR CONSENT OR DOCUMENTED MEDICAL OR PERSONAL EMERGENCY.** Assignment links on Moodle will close at the stated time the assignment is due. Hard copies will not be accepted unless previous arrangements are made. Please contact me as soon as possible (ideally in advance) if you cannot turn in an assignment on time.

*Student Integrity:* Students that cheat, fabricate, or plagiarize (which means misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another) will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and the Academic Conduct Committee. Possible repercussions range from 0.0 on the assignment to expulsion from the university. See the Student Handbook for more details on academic misconduct or contact the Office of the Dean of Students at [http://www.oakland.edu/deanofstudents/](http://www.oakland.edu/deanofstudents/) or 248-370-3352. The University’s policy on plagiarism is available here: [http://www.oakland.edu/?id=18235&sid=406](http://www.oakland.edu/?id=18235&sid=406). I am happy to help you with any questions or concerns related to plagiarism **BEFORE** an assignment is due. The library offers an online plagiarism tutorial here: [http://library.oakland.edu/tutorials/plagiarism/index.htm](http://library.oakland.edu/tutorials/plagiarism/index.htm)

*Students with Disabilities:* Students with disabilities are welcome in this class. However, I need to hear from anyone who has a disability so that appropriate arrangements may be made prior to their need (e.g. do not tell me on the day of an exam that you need extra time). The Disability Support Services Office is responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with special needs are encouraged to utilize these services and you must register with this office to receive necessary accommodations. For more information, contact the DSS office at 248-370-3266 (voice) or 248-370-3268 (TDD).
**Grievances:** Please feel free to contact me with any concerns you have about material covered in the class, questions or concerns about assignments or grades, or concerns you might have regarding events in the classroom.

**SPECIAL NOTE FOR COMMUNICATION MAJORS:** We strongly encourage you to be proactive about your future.

**Advising:** Plan to meet with Communication Advisor, Renee Ligeski, once each year. Schedule an appointment for advising by calling 248-370-4120.

**Career Services:** Begin visiting the OU Career Services Office in your freshman year to make an appointment with a Career Consultant and to start preparations for your career and future employment search. Schedule an appointment by calling 248-370-3250. Also, check out their website regularly: www.oakland.edu/careerservices/

**Graduate Study:** If you are considering graduate study, either at OU or another institution, please make an appointment to sit down with one of our faculty to explore your options.

**Facebook:** We post regular updates to the OU COM Facebook page. Please join the OU Network and then join the OU COM page.

---

**COURSE SCHEDULE (FOR T/TH CLASS)**

**WHAT IS CONVERGENCE ANYWAY?**

**Week 1**

Tuesday
Welcome and Introduction to the course

**ASSIGNMENT: READ THE SYLLABUS!**

Thursday
Jenkins, Introduction

**HOW “NEW” IS NEW MEDIA?: PUTTING CONVERGENCE IN CONTEXT**

**Week 2**

Tuesday

Thursday
Lotz, Introduction

**TV PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION UNDER CONVERGENCE**

**Week 3**

Tuesday
Lotz, Chapter 1
Thursday

**Week 4**
Tuesday
Lotz, Chapter 2

Thursday
Lotz, Chapter 3

**Week 5**
Tuesday
Lotz, Chapter 4

Thursday

**Media Ethnography paper due**

**Week 6**
Tuesday

Thursday
Jenkins, Chapter 3

**CONVERGENCE AND ADVERTISING: HOW DOES CONVERGENCE ‘SELL’?**

**Week 7**
Tuesday
**MIDTERM EXAM**

Thursday
Lotz, Chapter 5

**Week 8**
Tuesday
Jenkins, Chapter 2

Thursday
AUDIENCES AND CONVERGENCE CULTURE

Week 9
Tuesday
Lotz, Chapter 6
Mosco, V. & Kaye, L. (2000). “Questioning the concept of the audience” (M)

Thursday
Jenkins, Chapter 4

Week 10
Tuesday
Jenkins, Chap 1

Thursday
http://www.participations.org/Volume%204/Issue%201/4_01_graymittell.htm

Week 11
Tuesday

Thursday

INDUSTRY PRODUCERS VS. AUDIENCE PRODUSERS

Week 12
Tuesday

Thursday:
Jenkins, Chap 5

Week 13
Tuesday
**THURSDAY**
Lotz, Chapter 7

**CASUALITIES OF CONVERGENCE?: THE CASE OF DAYTIME SOAPS**

**Week 14**
Tuesday
Selections from S. Ford, A. De Kosnik & C.L. Harrington *The survival of soap opera: Transformations for a new media era*. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press. (M)

- Introduction: The crisis of daytime drama and what it means for the future of television. (pp. 3-21).
- Perspective: Scholars Barbara Irwin and Mary Cassata on the state of U.S. soap operas. (p. 22-28)
- Perspective: Scholar Nancy Baym on Soaps after the O.J. Simpson Trial (p. 104-105)

**Thursday**


**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

**Week 15**
Tuesday
Jenkins, Conclusion

**Thursday**
Lotz, Conclusion

**Current Issue paper due**

**Week 16:**
Finals period (final exam to be given during scheduled time)