

Term Paper

Intro to Communication Studies – Fall 2009

Date Due: A paper copy is due at the beginning of class on Monday 16 November. If you arrive late to class, do not interrupt class; just turn in the paper at the end of the class meeting.

Purpose: For you to 1) demonstrate an understanding of key concepts from the readings across multiple sections of the course; 2) to apply those ideas to something in the real world, and 3) to get you to synthesize ideas from different sections of the course.

Product: A typed paper of approximately 5-8pages (1250-2000 words), double-spaced with an additional page for works cited if you cite materials from outside the course reader or lectures. Typeface should be Times or Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1” margins. Pages should be numbered, and your name, time of conference, and name of your TA should be in the upper right hand corner of the first page. You do not need a separate title page. The paper should meet the standards of academic style. Keep electronic and paper backup copies of your paper for your records. We do not accept papers sent via email.

Collaboration: You may choose to collaborate with one other person currently enrolled in Intro to Comm Studies. If you do so, make sure both your names and conference times appear on the first page of the paper. A collaborative paper is subject to the same requirements as a paper you write by yourself, but both authors will receive the same grade. Please submit only ONE copy of your paper.

YOUR TASK:* Select a “media artifact” that is no more than a year old. Your artifact could be a specific online video, web page, TV episode, boxed set of DVDs, movie, song or CD, magazine, or it could be an event (for instance, a performance you attended or for that matter a failed flash mob event). Particularly creative choices will be noted and appreciated if they are used well in the assignment. Just make sure your choice of artifact allows you to apply the relevant course material. Once you have selected your artifact:

1. **Analyze the cultural dimensions of your artifact.** What concepts from the Part 1 of the course (see the course outline) help you to understand the important cultural dimensions of your artifact? *How* do they help you to understand it?
2. **Analyze the structural forces that shape your artifact.** What concepts from the Part 2 of the course (see the course outline) help you to understand the important institutional forces that shape your artifact? *How* do they help you to understand it?
3. **Explain the relationship between the two.** This question requires a little more thought, but it is the point of the assignment. To what extent and in what ways have the institutional forces that shaped your artifact affected its cultural characteristics? Or, you can turn the question around and discuss how the cultural dimensions of the object affect its institutional life. For instance, if the artifact was produced for profit, how has the drive for profit affected it as a cultural form (or if it wasn't produced for profit, how might that matter)? If you focus on intellectual property laws, how have the laws shaped or conditioned your artifact, its circulation or your experience of it? Feel free to be creative with this question: the important thing is for you to have something significant to say about the relationship between your artifact's cultural and institutional life.

* See p2 for an alternative.

You must cite at least four readings from the course. You may cite a single lecture in place of one of your four required references. You are welcome to build upon your conference paper for this assignment, or to start afresh, and you are welcome to use outside sources.

Related Documents on the website: “Term Paper Grid,” “Paper Tips,” and “Understanding Your Marks in COMS 210.” A few outstanding term papers from last term will also be posted on the course website.

Tips: Be sure to check the grading grid posted on the course website. We are looking for you to make clear and cogent claims about your artifact and the course material. Although you are allowed to do research for this paper, it is not primarily a research paper. It is an interpretive paper. We want you to apply concepts from the course, though of course it is helpful to know something about your artifact or example. If you do research, keep in mind that definitions and concepts should come from academic sources and not everyday sources such as dictionaries or encyclopedias (unless they are particularly academic in nature, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*). Yes, this means you can't cite wikipedia (feel free to use it in any other way you like though). If you have questions about how to conduct proper academic research, please make an appointment to see your prof or TA well in advance of the due date.

AN ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

If you would like to do some other kind of paper or project to fulfill this part of the course requirement, you will need to submit a written proposal of 1-2pp to the professor by 2 November and email to arrange a follow-up meeting to discuss your idea. Your proposal should include your rationale, a description of the project, and if it cannot be evaluated according to the standard grid, suggested criteria for evaluation.

Good luck and have fun!