**An Intentional Media Diet**

*We are the first generation bombarded with so many stories from so many authorities, none of which are our own. The parable of the postmodern mind is the person surrounded by a media center: three television screens in front of them giving three sets of stories, fax machines bringing in other stories, newspapers providing still more stories. In a sense, we are saturated with stories; we’re saturated with points of view. But the effect of being bombarded with all of these points of view is that we don’t have a point of view and we don’t have a story. We lose the continuity of our experiences; we become people who are written on from the outside.*

—Sam Keen, American author, professor, and philosopher

*An intentional media diet is something I am constantly thinking about. How can I stay woke without being traumatized? Is it my responsibility to know about every terrible thing that happens on this earth? Am I being American when I scroll past videos of people in Syria crying out to the world? Am I becoming apathetic? All these things are running through my head 24/7.*
 —Uprep student

*Whether or not it draws on scientific research, technology is a branch of moral philosophy, not of science.* —Paul Goodman, *New Reformation*

It's not just that we are what we eat, it's that we are what we consume. In the same way that the food we eat becomes our bodies, the media we pay attention to and the conversations we choose to engage in become ourselves. The variety, quantity, and speed of media available to us has grown exponentially; our ability to intentionally choose how we participate in it, arguably has not. Using the lens that “the medium is the message,” we examine how changes in communications technologies have shaped society and culture, with particular focus on the effects of digital, networked technologies. Students will assess their own diet of media to better understand what they are "consuming" and how, and will round out the course with an exploration of ways we can be more intentional in our media consumption and participation.

Required texts, in print format

* *The Medium Is the Massage* [sic] – Marshall McLuhan
* *Amusing Ourselves to Death* – Neil Postman
* *Program or Be Programmed* – Douglass Rushkoff

Necessary supplies

* Paper, pen, pencil & digital file folder designated for this class
* Internet-enabled device and earbuds
* One folder or binder for keeping classwork and handouts
* A different folder or binder for keeping hard-copies of portfolio entries\*

\*See “Assessment” below for more information about portfolios

 **An Intentional Media Diet**

**1. Introduction:** Initial exploration into topics and questions of the course, including

→ Why and how we communicate

→ “Passive” vs “critical” consumption

→ Conceptual metaphors: media as a diet; technology as a tool vs technology as a relationship

→ How communications technologies have shaped human beings as individuals and societies

**2. Mural Timeline of Media History**

Individuals and small groups will create entries for a wall-sized mural timeline to include developments in communications technology as well as key figures, concepts, and vocabulary.

**3. Digital, Networked Technologies**

Introduction to a variety of critiques and analyses with a focus on the role of smartphones. Students will observe and collect data on their own habits of technology use.

**4. “The medium is the message”**

We will consider Leonard Shlain’s thesis (chapters 1-3) in *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess* as an example of “the medium is the message.”

**5. Digital, Networked Technologies, cont.**

We will return to the topic of digital, networked technologies applying the lens of “the medium is the message.” Explore the role of advertising, programming, “brain hacking,” addiction, social interaction.

**6. TAPS Writing Project**

Students will research a specific topic within the broad category of “digital, networked technologies” and create a writing project (4-6 pages) communicating what they have learned in a format of their choosing to an audience of their choosing.

**7. Amusing Ourselves to Death**

Beginning with a unit on epistemology, students will explore Postman’s thesis that television has destroyed reasonable public discourse. We will explore whether his thesis applies to our society.

**8. Contemplation and Reflection**

Students will engage in a variety of activities meant to stimulate reflection on their media habits and influences as well as provide opportunities to explore different habits. Students will compose a media manifesto after reading *Program or Be Programmed*.

**9. Final Project, Option 1: Independent Project**

Students will choose a topic to study further and create an artifact of learning of their own creation.

**10. Final Project, Option 2:**

The class will engage with daily seminars, using a different text at the beginning of each session. This will allow for further exploration of related topics: ethical critiques and the future of social media, artificial intelligence, data & security, news & information, literature related to these topics.

**Grading**

I use letter grades, check marks, and credit rather than points and percentages. This allows me to talk with you about your progress in terms of skills, process, and habits of mind instead of focusing on numbers. Numerical values and quantitative analysis only serve to obscure the real conversation, which in no way can be reduced to a number or the meaning carried by a single letter.

Nothing will be formally graded in the first three weeks of the course. During this time, we will be establishing our classroom community and engaging in a variety of activities meant to dust off your skills and get your engines revved up and ready to go.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| A … exceeds standardB … meets standard C … working towards standardD … does not meet standard | + … exceeds standard✓ … meets standard  - … does not meet standard | cr … credit½ … half creditnc … no credit |

**Portfolios**

Because we teach the same skills every single year in English (please refer to the [English Handbook](https://docs.google.com/a/universityprep.org/document/d/1O64djKU-y5IEq92L2EO3J9utcQgwMTFMyeDDW7sjuV8/edit?usp=sharing)), we can do portfolio-based assessment in this class. We will collect designated pieces of writing in a portfolio that will serve as a repository of your work over the semester. I will give you formative feedback throughout the semester, with recommendations for ways you can improve your skills and habits of mind. This portfolio will allow you to observe your thinking and writing over time and will provide a basis for self-reflection and an assessment of your skill development that you and I will undertake together, in individual student-teacher conferences. **It is your responsibility to keep all portfolio pieces and compile them in a professional manner at quarter and semester.**

The following skills and habits will contribute to the letter grade you earn in this course:

* Class participation, citizenship, and work ethic
* Critical reading and thinking
* Effective expression (in multiple forms)
* Progress, risk-taking, habits of reflection, cultivation of curiosity & intellectual engagement

**Class Expectations, Goals, and Policies**

 *We measure ourselves by our intent; we measure others by their behavior.*

* Seek to develop and maintain an open mind.
* We all wish to be valued. Let this understanding guide your interactions with all others. (You are going to read this statement and skim over it and maybe think, yes, yes, yes, but this really is important. It may be the most important…)
* Recognize that others can (and do) learn from you. Share of yourself. Be present.
* The class dynamic is created only in part by me. It is, in fact, largely determined by you, the community of students. If you are actively engaged, curious, playful, and willing to take risks, you will help to create a fun and enlightening experience for all. If you aren’t these things, then this class *can’t* be these things…

**Late Work**

Late work becomes a problem when it becomes a habit. Deal honestly and directly with those you are responsible to, and develop habits of timeliness and attention to detail. When you anticipate you won’t be able to complete something on time, the more advance notice you can give, the better; the more proactive you are in suggesting a new deadline, the better. I give everyone one “free” extension each semester. You can ask for this extension for any reason, including on the day something is due, and you will receive this first extension with no penalty and no questions asked. After that, it becomes a conversation.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**

Cheating includes (but is not limited to) representing someone else’s work as your own (even if you’ve changed the words around), giving your work to another to be copied, sharing assessment questions or answers, and putting your name on a group project you did not fully contribute to. If you’ve been lazy, just say you’ve been lazy. If you procrastinated, just say you procrastinated. If you’re feeling high-stakes stress, then stop, take a deep breath, focus on what right here, right now, and do what you can, one step at a time, even if that means your final product isn’t as good as you would have liked. If you are worried you don’t have the skills to complete something satisfactorily – ask for help in learning those skills! That’s what I’m here for.

Of course, there are institutional consequences for cheating, but the most lasting consequences are to you personally.

**Laptops in Class and Electronic Communication**

* Unless I indicate that you will need your laptop or phone in class, keep them stowed away. We will start each class period *without devices*, unless I’ve indicated otherwise.
* If your laptop distracts you in class, it doesn’t hurt just you. It hurts the dynamic of the whole class and can interfere with the learning of others. It’s important to keep in mind that even if you *can* multi-task well, your divided attention most likely will register to others as disrespect -- whether you intend that message or not. The bottom line is that multi-tasking means you are not fully with us. Being together with a group of people is much more pleasant when everyone in that group of people is … present.
* I expect you to check your Schoology messages, Outlook messages, AND physical
mailbox *daily*.
* You can expect me to check Schoology, school email, and my mailbox at least daily.
* Sometimes I check email in the evenings; sometimes not. Sometimes I check email over the weekend; sometimes only the night before we return to school. I don’t expect you to check email during these times, either.
* I will always reply to email, even if it is to simply say that I have received what you sent. If you do not receive a reply from me, then assume I have not received the email. **Without this response from me, it remains your responsibility to make sure I receive what you have sent.**

Here’s to a fun and productive semester!