UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Sociology of Culture and Communication (blended)

2122-2-F0101R021

Course title

Sociology of Culture and Communication (*blended learning*)

Topics and course structure

The class addresses the nexus between cultural forms and communication processes, which produce, convey and transform the categories used by the people to make sense of social reality. The power dimension will be systematically considered in order to address its relevance in mass communication, also in the social media era.

The lessons will use a multidisciplinary and multi-level approach, which deals with the big picture, daily routines performed by strategic actors, and linguistic practices, shifting from historical accounts to sociological enquiry and finally to discourse analysis.

Objectives

Students will learn key theoretical concepts and methodological for the understanding of the news media system, of its production routines, of its functions and effects. They will learn to examine the public construction of social problems, media representations, ideological strategies, and language as processes that produce and reproduce reality.

Their personal judgment and communication skills will be enhanced by several collective critical analyses of journalistic products and by the discussion of academic essays provided by the professor.

Students' potential for learning will be fostered by a dialogue between theoretical concepts, analytical tools, empirical data, and evidence presented by the professor and the students, who are always invited to actively participate.

Methodologies

The course is held in blended-learning mode.

Frontal lectures will be used for the presentation and contextualization of the main topics and for the introduction of analytical and theoretical concepts.

Students' assignments will be presented in class, with web conferences, essays, and forums. The assignments have the purpose of promoting learning-by-doing and of developing skills in oral presentation with audio-video support, in group discussion, in academic writing.

Online and offline teaching materials

Lessons are in Italian. Teaching materials for students attending the lessons will be uploaded as soon as they will be needed on the e-learning platform.

Programme and references for attending students

The course is divided into 4 parts, each consisting of lectures in person and online activities:

1) **The idea of "news" and its textual forms. The ritual and techniques of objectivity. The epistemologies of journalism.**

Lectures in person (9 hours)

- Introduction to the course and to the birth of the idea of "news"
- The ritual of objectivity vs. standpoint epistemology.

Online activity (6 hours):

Reading of the lectures and presentation in Powerpoint or similar software with a 15-20 minutes talk

2) The social organization of news production. Sources, PR, news management, informal relations

Lectures in person (9 hours):

- News-making, sources, PR, "primary definers" and consensus ideology
- News as a promotion of events. News as organizational accounts

- Reported speech. Embedding of voices. News-values and filters in the social construction of reality.

Online activity (6 hours):

Reading of the lectures, upload of a text with the analysis of two news stories, participation to a forum online to discuss the work with the other students.

3) The convergence between traditional and new media

Lectures in person (6 hours):

- Types of information
- Changes in the information environment in the age of new media
- Journalists' use of new media: opportunities and problems.

Online activity (4 hours):

Analysis of one's own online information experience on the ground of the concepts and scenarios previously presented. Web-conference and forum with discussion.

4) The construction of social problems and *media-hypes*.

Lectures in person (6 hours):

- A constructionist framework for the study of social problems
- Media-hypes and moral panics
- Media-hypes and moral panics: analysis and discussion.

Online activity (6 hours):

Presentation of an original case of moral panic in 10-15 minutes and discussion.

Programme and references for non-attending students

The course will deal with culture as a theoretical, pragmatic and political category that intersects with power. In order to explore this, we will draw on the thought of Stuart Hall and his ideas about the ‘popular’, ‘encoding/decoding’ ideology, and the politics of identity.

These and other concepts will be involved in the examination of one of the most important sites of production and reproduction of culture and ideology, the mass media. In particular, we will deal with the news culture, i.e. the forms, practices, institutions, and audiences of journalism that define the nature of mediatized reality.

Some in depths analysis will be dedicated to sexism and racism in media representations. Particular attention will

be given to online news, citizen journalism, war news, infotainment, the construction of social problems and mediatized rituals.

Bibliography:

1. Procter, James, *Stuart Hall e gli studi culturali*, Raffaello Cortina, 2007 (150 pages).

2. Allan, Stuart, *News culture*, Third Edition, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2010 (270 pages)

available at:
http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.unimib.it/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=466445&site=ehost-live&scope=site

or, as an alternative:

Castells, Manuel *Comunicazione e potere,* Milano: Università Bocconi, 2009, Capp. 2, 3, 4 (320 pages)

3. Handout “Potere, cultura, mass media”, which can be found on the e-learning platform (100 pagine).

Students not attending the class are kindly invited to contact the professor for an introductory meeting about the reading list and the exam format.

Assessment methods

Students attending class:

Students attending class will be evaluated considering their analyses of journalistic materials, their participation to discussions and presentations, their research of relevant materials.

Students not attending class:

Students not attending class will be given an oral exam to assess their critical understanding of the assigned texts and their ability to establish connections and to use the concepts they have studied.

Office hours

See the Professor's web page.

Programme validity

The course program is valid for two years.

Course tutors and assistants