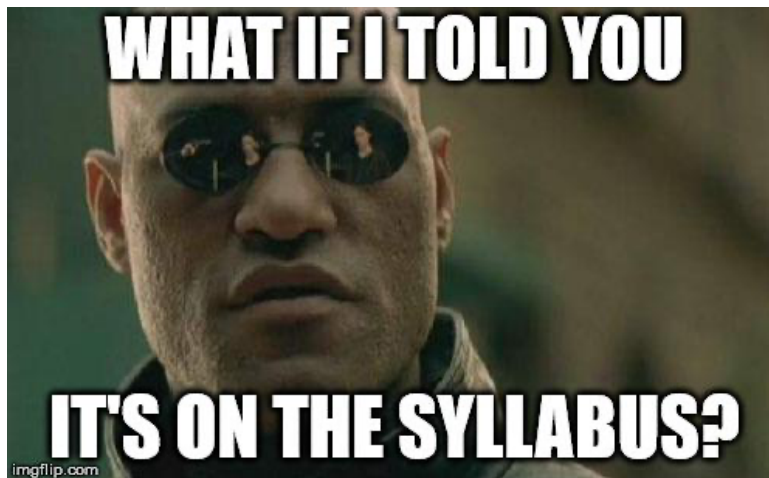


Introduction to Communication Studies
COMS 210, Fall 2021—Covid Edition, Mark] [#getvaxxed
W/F 1:05pm-2:25pm Montreal time, live!
Location: a lot of servers in a lot of places, and Montreal¹
Zoom links in MyCourses

COMS 210 is a course in media civics. It is designed to help you become a better citizen of reality. It also offers an introduction to the field of Communication Studies as it is practised at McGill. We live in a media-saturated world, yet, despite the constant talk *about* media *by* media institutions, technologies, and personalities, most people know surprisingly little about how and why these systems work the way they do. You will learn about media economics and institutions; ecological impacts of media systems; and media practices and ideologies. Throughout the term we will attend carefully to questions of power, justice, and inequality.



Professor **Jonathan Sterne** (he but they is ok—and “me” and “I” on this syllabus)
Email: jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (list “COMS 210” as the subject of your message)
Office Hours: 11:30-12:30 Weds and by appointment.
Office Location. Hahahahahaha. <https://mcgill.zoom.us/my/jsoffice> (password: kittens)

Teaching Assistant: **Sadie Couture** (she/her/hers)
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Teaching Assistant: **Andy Stuhl** (he/him/his)
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¹ McGill University is situated on unceded Indigenous lands in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). The Kanien’kehà:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are recognized as the traditional custodians of these lands and waters. Zoom’s headquarters are located on Muwekma Ohlone territory. Desire2Learn’s headquarters are located on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie. The actual servers we will be using may or may not be located in Quebec, but are very likely to benefit from water rights expropriated from Indigenous peoples.

TA office hours will be announced on the course website.

We check email every weekday (minus vacation). If you write before we check, you'll get a reply that day. If you write after we check, you'll get a reply the next day. If you don't get one after 24 hours or at the end of a Monday after a weekend, feel free to resend with "resend" in the subject line. We won't be mad. We do not guarantee email replies on weekends or holidays.

Hey! Yes, you! Read this part!

Please read these scorching hot tips (tl;dr: write to us like we are people):

[How to email your professors \(works for all professors in all courses, also TAs\).](#)

We would like to reserve our email time for helping you learn. **Answers to questions about requirements, deadlines, etc. that are not covered on the syllabus or assignment sheets will be posted in course announcements:** Please visit that section of the course first. If your email asks a question that can be answered by looking at the syllabus, announcements, or MyCourses site, we will return a very short reply indicating the location of your answer.

Delivery Plan

As of today, you can take this course completely online; there is no required in-person component. My intention is to keep it that way. Depending on my judgment of how safe it is and depending on levels of student interest, some of us may also offer some optional in-person learning opportunities. It is also possible that the province or McGill's central administration will mandate a change to this plan as it currently stands. That is beyond my control.

Class will take place live, synchronously, on Zoom, 13:05-14:25 on Wednesdays and Fridays (except where noted on the schedule). We will provide bad live automatic transcription via Zoom/Otter.ai, and after class recordings of class will be posted. Wednesdays will mostly be lecture, though with plenty of opportunities for questions. Fridays will vary, but the goal is to be more interactive; we will engage with the work of artists, activists, and others who are challenging or rethinking our media systems; we will do conceptual activities related to class assignments, and we will take quizzes. We will also use Fridays to pick up slack if we somehow get behind in the material. If there is another lockdown and all classes go online, we will assess the situation and decide if we need to change, in consultation with you, the students.

Most Fridays will also feature the "weekly bullshit"² where we consider outlandish claims made from within or about media industries. Once students get a sense of how this works, you will be encouraged to submit candidates for future weeks.

² Yes, sometimes it's ok to swear in formal writing. But first, you have to level up.

Most weeks will involve 1-3 assigned readings. You are expected to arrive at the Wednesday class having done the assigned readings; ideally you would do them sometime on Tuesday, or on Wednesday morning. No readings will be due for Wednesday 1 September. For Friday 3 September, you will be expected to arrive at class having read this syllabus and the course guide.

All materials for COMS 210 will be available through MyCourses. Students will not be asked to purchase any textbooks.

Requirements and Grading



Comprehension/Coercion



Creation/Application



To pass this class, you must complete two projects and three quizzes.

Quizzes: [40%] Three times during the term you will take a timed, multiple-choice quiz during a predetermined 24-hour period. Quiz dates are on the course schedule. The quiz is open-everything. You can look at your notes, refer to readings, and ask your friends. But it is timed. After the last day of class, there will be an optional fourth quiz. If you take it, your score will be added to your average. Your total quiz grade will be cumulative: if quiz 1 has 10 questions, quiz 2 has 14 questions, and quiz 3 has 18 questions, your total score will be out of 42 as a percentage. Further explanation of quizzes is in the Course Guide.

Discussion Posts: [10%] By 6pm Montreal time on Wednesday of each week, you will make a post in the relevant class discussion board on MyCourses (each week has a different board). The post should discuss something from the lecture or readings. Responses can be a question about something you don't understand, a request for information, a challenge to a point made in the readings, or a response to another student's post (but it must substantially engage with the readings or lecture). Another option will be to write a multiple-choice question. Responses will be graded pass (1)/fail (0), and your two lowest marks will be dropped. Further instructions are in the Course Guide.

Projects: [50% of total, 25% each] During the semester, you will be asked to complete two projects. The default form of the project is a short, written academic paper of approximately 800 words, but other formats for the project (podcast, video, infographic, very short graphic novel, etc.) are certainly welcome. The projects are designed to be individual, though you may collaborate with up to two other people if you like. The assignments are both in the Course Guide.

Flexible Assessment. Last year I began an experiment with flexible assessment. During add/drop, you will be given an opportunity to select alternative weightings for some of the assignments. If you simply want to stick with the weights given to assignments, you don't have to do anything. If you want to change the weights given to the assignments, you must make your selection on a form (<https://bit.ly/3zgmVgV>) by the end of add-drop. Making no selection is equivalent to selecting the weights given on the syllabus. After add-drop, no changes will be

allowed, no exceptions. WARNING: only do this if you are absolutely certain you want to do it. Some students find the quizzes to be harder than they expect; other students find the papers to be harder than they expect. Marks earned in high school or CEGEP are not always a good predictor of performance in this course. I recommend you talk it over with someone else before you do this.

Disabilities and Access Needs: Online learning has proven to be advantageous for some students and professors with disabilities. It has raised new issues for others (it depends on the person and the disability!). To discuss an access need or request a specific accommodation, send an email to me before the end of add-drop with the subject line “COMS 210: Access Needs,” and include a paragraph discussing what kind of access needs you have. You are also welcome to just come meet with me in online office hours. Students are welcome and encouraged to work with the Office for Students with Disabilities at McGill (514-398-6009 voice, 514-398-8198 TTY, <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>). BUT: you are *also* welcome and encouraged to just approach me directly regarding any disability issues, without prior contact with the OSD or a medical professional. I teach a course on disability, have a few of my own, have published on disability and impairment, and am generally very comfortable talking about the subject. You are welcome to attend my office hours and discuss it “in person” over Zoom if you prefer. However, any access arrangement will need to be formalized in writing.

Class Credos

More than one thing can be true: cultural analysis only works if it is possible to hold onto apparently contradictory ideas at once, and explain how they can both be true in specific circumstances. A contradiction is not a paradox: human beings are complicated and culture is messy.

No bullshit: we will avoid easy, prepackaged explanations of complex phenomena, and we will greet the claims of interested parties as open to interpretation and analysis. We will also not bullshit one another. We will, however, have a feature on Fridays called “weekly bullshit.”

You have the right to be wrong: part of learning is changing one’s own perspective. This is only possible where ideas can be expressed and challenged, and people are allowed to change their minds. But: no “devil’s advocates” will be allowed—if you present a position, it will be interpreted as honest advocacy for that position.

It is everyone’s job to imagine a better world: any critique of how something is raises the question of how it ought to be. You will be asked to think carefully and imaginatively about alternatives to the way things are.

Follow the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated.

Resources

I. You: “There are those who think that the speaker has a function to perform, and the hearer none. They think it only right that the speaker shall come with his lecture carefully thought out and prepared, while they, without consideration or thought of their obligations, rush in and take their seats exactly as if they had come to dinner, to have a good time while others work hard. Those people bite.” – Plutarch, Greek Philosopher

Although this is a large lecture course, your participation is essential. Listen carefully. Take lots of notes on lectures and readings. Take advantage of opportunities to participate. Make friends with your classmates and help one another. Use our office hours.

II. Your prof and TAs: See page 1.

III. Readings: All required readings will be available on the MyCourses site. Additional, supplemental readings and links will also be made available.

IV. Your classmates: You are strongly encouraged to work together and support one another.

V. Additional University Resources:

The University has some additional resources to help you out. The academic resources are not remedial programs, and often the best and most advanced students use them. The cultural resources are broadly defined and inclusive.

The Writing Centre offers individual consultation on all aspects of writing. Appointments are required. Highly recommended if you want to work on your writing. 514-398-7109, <https://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/>

The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) provides a broad range of support and services to assist students with disabilities. 514-398-6009 (voice), 514-398-8198 (TTY), <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>

Counseling Services provides personal, academic, and career counseling to undergraduate and graduate students. They also offer workshops on study skills, multiple choice exams, test anxiety/stress management. Visit the Wellness Hub for more information: 514-398-6017, <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>

If you need support as a survivor of sexual violence, harassment, and/or discrimination on campus, you can contact McGill’s Sexual Violence Response Advisor, Émilie Marcotte, at 514-398-4486 or by email at: osvrse@mcgill.ca. For more information on survivor support and reporting options, visit: www.mcgill.ca/saap. The Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students’ Society (SACOMSS), is a volunteer-run organization committed to supporting survivors of sexual assault and their allies. 514-398-8500, <http://www.sacomss.org/> The SSMU website also contains additional information on a number of resources available to survivors (<https://ssmu.ca/resources/sexual-violence/>).

Queer McGill provides social, political, and informational support for queer students by queer students. 514-398-6913, <https://www.mcgill.ca/engage/support/queer-mcgill>

First People's House provides a "home away from home" for Indigenous students, promoting academic success as well as community connection. 514-398-3217, <https://www.mcgill.ca/fph/>

Black Students' Network provides support for black students, and also works to raise awareness of black people's issues at McGill, and to make the campus safer and more accessible for black students. <https://www.mcgill.ca/engage/support/black-students-network>

McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life is a nondenominational religious and spiritual hub on campus. <https://www.mcgill.ca/engage/support/mcgill-office-religious-and-spiritual-life-morsl>

Rules and Expectations (aka "The Business End")

Be kind to one another. Be kind to your teachers.

0. The most important rule in the course: your right, our rights

Everyone in COMS 210 has a right to their data and their privacy. Audio and video recordings, and other materials that we provide are for your use only and are not to be distributed beyond MyCourses (for instance, by posting online or elsewhere in the public domain). Students may not produce or circulate recordings of their teachers or classmates without the prior, explicit, written consent of the people being recorded. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Students are encouraged to freely share materials they make with one another. However, no one may sell study aids to the course without the prof's prior, expressed, written consent.

Please refer to McGill's [Guidelines for Instructors and Students on Remote Teaching and Learning](#) for further information.

1. Just be honest with us: we do not want to be the police

Has something gone wrong? Did you miss an assignment? Just be honest with us about what's going on and talk to us early while something can still be done.

You will never be asked for a doctor's note or some other official documentation to justify yourself. We don't want you waiting all day at a doctor's office just to get a piece of paper for our class. In exchange, we ask for your complete honesty about what's going on. That can include things that are entirely your fault. Everyone makes mistakes.

Nobody gets into teaching because they want to enforce rules. Our course policies are designed to maximize the amount of time we spend helping people learn and minimize the amount of time we (and you) spend on managing problems with the course policies. There are 4 of us and 200 of you, so our course policies are set with those limitations in mind.

The only behaviors we will be judgmental about are a) lying to us and b) grade grubbing.

2. We are not technical support

We cannot troubleshoot your computer or internet connection. If there are systemic problems with MyCourses or Zoom (it happens), please do let us know. We will deal with them in a way that does not penalize students for issues beyond their control. If you have an IT issue, please contact McGill IT support. <https://www.mcgill.ca/it/>

3. Class discussion and conduct

Respectful dialogue and behaviour is expected of everyone. Everyone always has the right to change their mind, to learn and grow. We do not expect you to arrive with all the answers and we don't want you to expect that of one another. We especially do not want people worrying about whether their ideas or the ideas of others are "pure." While disagreements are expected, they should not shut down dialogue. Learning is a process; we make mistakes, we change our minds, we sometimes even regret some things we've said earlier. Our aim is to work together to learn and *unlearn* some of the things we take for granted, and to sharpen our analytic skills.

Please grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not. Avoid attacking someone's character or personhood if you disagree with something they have said; what someone thinks or says is not reducible to who and where they are. Our goal in talking with one another is to understand the texts we read, the concepts we use, and the media examples we encounter, and how they might be useful to us. As much as possible, let's work to avoid purely negative critique in comments and responses. Let's also extend the same consideration to classmates. Consider what other people say in their comments and discussion forum posts and think about how you can build on them and respond as generously as possible.

Personal experience: while you each bring interesting experiences to the course, you should consider whether you really want to bring them up in discussion. If you do bring up your own experience, recognize that it becomes a topic for discussion and others may provide other interpretations. Ask yourself what point you want to make by talking about yourself. Do you want others to know this about you? You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

Difficult subject matter: we will never do anything intentionally to shock or traumatize students. At the same time, it's our job to discuss difficult subjects in class, and nobody can predict the effect some materials may have on someone. If you are having difficulty dealing with a class discussion or a reading or recording, you may raise the issue as part of the discussion, or you may simply discretely leave class. A note to us would be helpful after the fact so that we know what happened and don't think you just got up and left.

Zoom etiquette: the short version is that all the normal rules of good classroom conduct apply. If you wouldn't do it in a class, don't do it on Zoom. Make our class a nice place for others: listen intently. if you don't understand something, ask. Don't interrupt people; stick to the

subject at hand; don't be distracting for others. Plus: mute your mic when you are not talking; do not use a distracting or offensive background (humorous is ok). If you have your camera off, please post a picture as your avatar—it's nicer to look at than just a blank screen.

Technology use: pay attention to how you are using technologies for class. Don't multitask. When you're in class, do that. Don't shop or text your friends.

4. Deadlines, extensions/late/missed assignments and exams

Everyone is expected to do all of the assignments. Students who join the class during add/drop will be given additional time to complete assignments from the beginning of term, but are not excused from doing them.

Flexible assessment allows you to influence the relative weight of different work on your assignments, but it may not be used retroactively.

If you miss a quiz, you can take the last quiz at the end of term to replace it. If you miss more than one quiz, something is really wrong and you should be talking with us anyway.

Major assignments will have two deadlines: an official deadline and an extension deadline (in other words, you won't need to request an extension). This will be explained in class.

6. Grade Appeals

You can find your most up to date grades on MyCourses.

Calculation errors happen sometimes. Just let us know and we can fix it.

Should you wish to dispute a mark, it must be done according to the grade appeal policy on the course website. Keep in mind that "A" grades are awarded for superior (and not merely sufficient) performance. You begin an assignment with a 0, not a 100, so it is impossible to "lose" points; you can only earn them. Meeting with your prof or TA and doing what we tell you also does not guarantee an A on a project. Although there is no quota, an A is a truly superior grade in this course. Most years, 20-25% of the enrolled students earned an A or A- semester grade. Also keep in mind that if you ask for your assignment to be regraded, the grade can go up or down.

7. Language

The language of instruction at McGill University is English. However, you are allowed to submit your work in French. In discussions, Francophone students are welcome to use the French word if they can't think of the English word and we can help one another out.

8. Nondiscrimination Statement

Your teachers value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. In accordance with University policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex,

sexual orientation, social condition, age, appearance, size, personal handicap or the use of any means to palliate such a handicap. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher, the assigned readings, or the majority of your classmates in order to do well in this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it*. If there is something we can do to make the class more hospitable, please let us know.

9. Cheating, Plagiarism and Exam Conduct

We've designed our assignments so that they will be timely and engaging. Cheating will either be next to impossible because you are supposed to look things up, or it will be more work than just doing the assignment. We planned it that way! But here is the required official language from McGill. Please do not bullshit us.

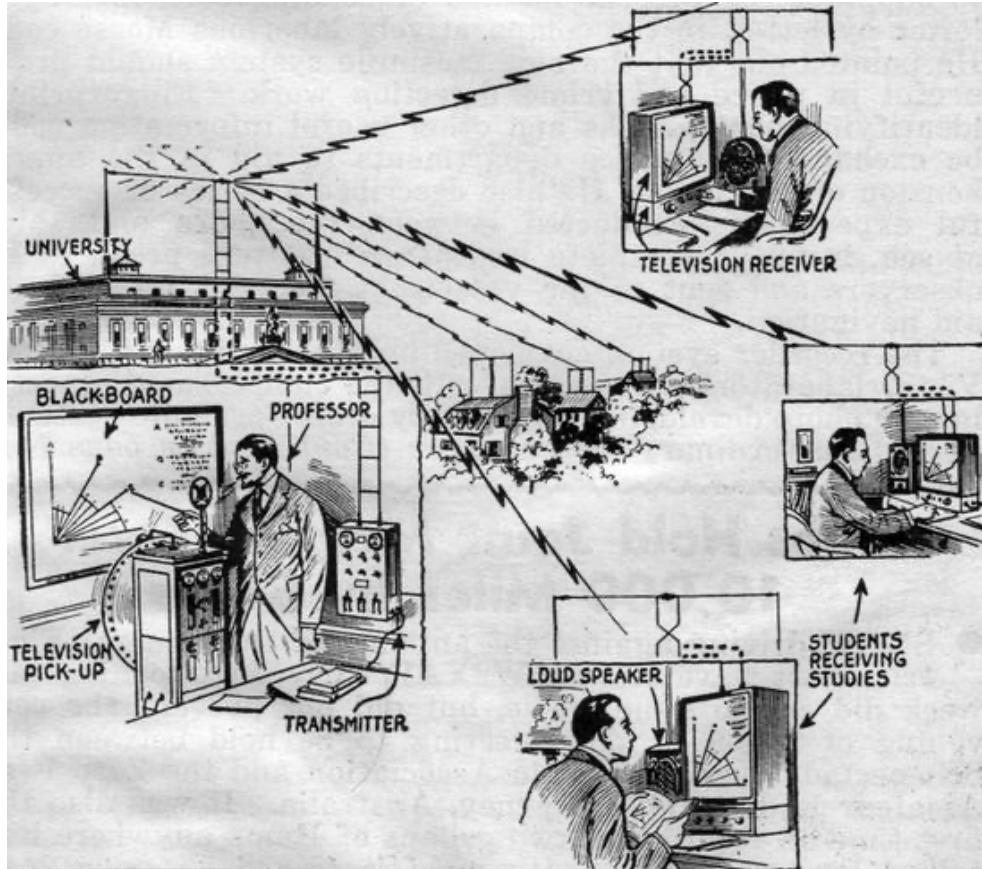
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

10. Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. [This seems to happen a lot.]

11. What This Class Was Predicted to be Like in 1935



Thanks: Carolyn Samuel.