

COMM 306
The Communication Revolution, Entertainment & The Arts
Spring 2006

Professor Jonathan Taplin
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The revolution in communication technology brought about by the rise of digital networks is only 25 years old, but it has already changed every facet of the entertainment business. This course will attempt to take a fresh look at the rise of the Age of Entertainment from 1980 to the present. It focuses on the global strategies of companies across a variety of industry sectors: broadcasting, film, telecommunications, the Internet, video games, and the music industry. Employing film, music, art as well as texts from authors ranging from Thomas Frank to Robert McChesney, this course will examine how the communications revolution is affecting the interaction of entertainment and culture. The focus will be on the American entertainment and communications industries. However, given the historical and continuing cross-fertilization of cultures in this country, and accelerating trends toward globalization, conglomeration, convergence, and synergy, international aspects will be an important part of the course. We will use both written texts and various films viewed in class as reference points.

CAREER RELEVANCE

As the revolution in communication technologies creates truly global markets, the ability to understand both the domestic and international dimension of the commercial decisions with which organizations are confronted has become a critical managerial skill. The success of the American knowledge economy rests on the confluence of entertainment, technology and artistic merit. An understanding of how these three forces interact is a prerequisite to a deep knowledge of the contemporary culture. The course should be of relevance to both those interested in a cultural critique of modern entertainment as well as those interested in where the entertainment business of the future is going.

REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS:

There is one required book available online or at the USC bookstore:

Vogel, H. (2001). Entertainment Industry Economics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Sixth Edition

The rest of the readings are in a course reader available at the USC bookstore, plus some online material.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are four requirements for the course:

1. **Class participation.** Students are expected to make informed contributions to class discussions and in-class activities. Students are expected to attend every lecture and screening. Attendance will be taken and missing more than three classes will result in an automatic reduction of a full point from your grade. Missing more than six classes will result in an incomplete grade.
2. **Take-home mid-term.** There will be a take-home mid-term exam. It will be handed out on Wednesday, March 1st and will be due on Wednesday, March 8th. No late mid-terms will be accepted.
3. **Group Project.** Students will work in groups of 5 to prepare a 30-minute (PowerPoint) presentation on one of the core areas of course study (Movies, Music, Broadcast TV, etc.). The presentations will be geared towards looking at the future growth prospects and business hurdles faced by managers in each of the business sectors. The first presentation will take place on week four (January 30th). Each member of the team will be expected to give five minutes of the presentation to the class.
4. **Take-home Final Exam** –There will be a take-home final exam handed out on April 24. It will be due one week later at noon on May 1st. No Late finals will be accepted.

EVALUATION:

Midterm Exam: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Group Project: 30%

Class Participation: 10%

A brief announcement from the Office of Civil Rights: Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from the DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DPS is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

The School of Communication is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the SCampus policies and procedures detailed in the section titled "University Sanction Guidelines." These policies, procedures, and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting a paper to more

than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone but yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course and be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. If you have doubts about any of these policies, you must confer with the professor.

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SCHEDULE AND AGENDA
(Some lectures will include screenings of films)

WEEK 1

Jan. 9 & 11

**Introduction to the Course
Entertainment in American Culture**

WEEK 2

Jan. 16-Martin Luther King Day- No Class

Jan. 18

The Digital Revolution

- Shapiro, C., & Varian, H. (1999). *Information rules*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. Chapter 1: The information economy (pp. 1-18).

WEEK 3

Jan. 23 & 25

Communications Technology & Entertainment

- Cairncross, pp. 1-39 (chapters 1 and 2).
- Garnham, N. (1996). Constraints on multimedia convergence. In W. Dutton (ed.), *Information and communication technologies: Visions and realities*. New York: Oxford University Press.

WEEK 4

Jan. 30 & Feb. 1

The Movie Business

- Vogel, 35-99
- Wolf, M., *The Entertainment Economy*, New York, Times Books, pp.155-191

Screening: *Easy Riders & Raging Bulls*

WEEK 5

Feb. 6 & 8

The Music Business

- Vogel, p.148-172
- Kusek, D, *The Future of Music*, Boston, Berklee Press, p.1-55

Screening: *The History of Rock and Roll*

WEEK 6

Feb.13 & 15

Broadcast Television

- Vogel, pp 173-196
- McChesney, R. *The Problem of The Media*, New York, Monthly Review Press, pp.252-297

Screening: *Century of the Self*

WEEK 7

Feb.20- President's Day- No Class

Feb. 22

Cable & Satellite Television

- Vogel, pp.201-234
- Robichaux, M., *Cable Cowboy*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, pp.177-224
- Gertner, J., *Our Ratings, Ourselves*, New York Times Magazine p.1-13

Screening: *Pulp Future*

WEEK 8

Feb. 27 & Mar. 1

Journalism & the Communications Revolution

- Vogel, pp. 236-249
- McChesney, pp.57-137

Screening: *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*

WEEK 9

Mar. 6 & 8

The Internet

- Cairncross, F. *The death of distance*. Boston: Harvard University ,pp. 75-98
- Werbach, K. (1997). Digital tornado: The Internet and telecommunications policy. Available at:
http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OPP/working_papers/oppwp29pdf.html.

Screening: *Dot Con*

Spring Break- Mar. 13-18**WEEK 10**

Mar. 20 & 22

IP-TV

- Taplin, J, *The IP TV Revolution*, pp. 1-19
- Wolzien, T, *Pipe Dreams: Media's Exploding Capacity*, pp.9-93

WEEK 11

Mar. 27 & 29

Video Games

- UK Department of Trade and Industry (2002). From exuberant youth to sustainable maturity: Competitiveness analysis of the UK games software sector. Available at:
http://www.dti.gov.uk/industry_files/pdf/computergames_main.pdf

Screening: *The Video Game Invasion***WEEK 12**

Apr. 3 & 5

Marketing & Entertainment

- Frank, T, *The Conquest of Cool*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp.1-86

Screening: *The Persuaders***WEEK 13**

Apr. 10 & 12

Entertainment, Art & Fashion

- Gabler, N., *Life:The Movie*, New York, Vintage Books, pp.11-95

Screening: *Unzipped***WEEK 14**

Apr. 17 & 19

Digital Consumer Culture

- Cairncross, pp. 99-165

Screening: *Is Wal-Mart Good For America?*

WEEK 15

Apr. 24 & 26

Final Exam handed out April 24**Is Entertainment Taking Over Culture?**

- Gabler, pp. 96-156

Week 16

May 1 & 3

Exam Week

Final Exam Due May 1