

Media outlaws

Comm 5221

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

Syllabus

Fall 2012

Course description and objectives

This is a course about media subversives: people working outside of mainstream media institutions who nonetheless find creative and provocative ways to use the media as a space for cultural, political, and/or economic critique and resistance. Over the course of the semester, we will examine a range of “alternative” media phenomena, including:

- computer hackers
- copyright pirates
- digital sampling
- digital filesharing
- mashup artists
- media pranksters
- open source software
- performance artists
- punk rockers
- pornography

Our goal will not be to simply romanticize these “outlaws” as latter day Robin Hoods, nor will we merely condemn them as criminals or troublemakers. Instead, we will study how and why such figures struggle against the global “media monopoly” so that we might come to a richer understanding of (a) the nature of the media’s considerable political and cultural power, and (b) the ways that ordinary people can engage with powerful cultural institutions, not as passive consumers, but as active participants and creators.

Bear in mind that few (if any) of the questions we’ll address this semester have easy answers. Soundbite approaches to these issues (e.g., “can’t we get rid of copyright law completely?” or “people should just do the right thing”) will not serve you well at all, and a crucial part of your task this semester will be to think critically and complexly about issues of media, culture, politics, and resistance.

Readings

The following required books are available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- Stephen Duncombe (ed.), *The Cultural Resistance Reader*
- Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged*
- Lawrence Lessig, *Remix*
- Kembrew McLeod, *Freedom of Expression*
- Negativland, *Fair Use*
- *The Yes Men, The Yes Men*

Please note that there is an earlier edition of the McLeod book. If you choose to acquire your books from alternate sources, make sure to get the right edition.

Other required readings will be made available via the course website.

Students who choose to pursue a Senior Project in addition to the required course work are strongly encouraged to use the following recommended book (also available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union) as a helpful guide for how to conceive, plan, research, and write their final papers:

- Wayne C. Booth *et al.*, *The Craft of Research* [third edition]

Course website

If you were on the official course roster as of 3 Sep, I've given you access to the course website, and you should already have received an email invitation to that effect. If you haven't received such an email, create your account by pointing your web browser to the following address: <http://join.lore.com/SJ4EE7>

You will be asked to enter your first name, your last name, your email address, and to create a password. When doing so, it's important that you do two things:

- (1) Use your real name. Nicknames are acceptable, as long as I can match them up with actual names on the official course roster. I will block access to the site for people whom I cannot readily identify as legitimate students in the course.
- (2) Use an email address that you check with some regularity. This doesn't have to be your UMN address, but since Lore is configured to email you when there are updates to the course website, you don't want to use an address that you only check once every few months.

Once you've created your account, you can access the site here: <http://lore.com/umn.comm5231.fa12>

The site is deliberately configured so as *not* to be publicly accessible -- which means that you will *always* need to be logged in (which you can do using the email address and password you provided in the steps above) to see the site, access the non-book readings, contribute to the course blog, etc.

When you log in to the site, you'll land on the "Timeline" page, which works a lot like Facebook's "Timeline." You can do most (if not all) of the major things you'll want/need to do (e.g., access the required readings, post to the blog) from this page. Clicking on any given date in the calendar will provide information about readings, deadlines, and other class-related events scheduled for that date. You can post to the Timeline by clicking on the "Share something with the class..." box, entering the text of your post in the space provided, and then clicking "Post Now."

Graduate students

If you are a graduate student, the basic rules outlined in this syllabus vary slightly:

- Unless we make an explicit mutual agreement to the contrary, you are required to attend all regular class meetings, do all the assigned readings, and make weekly contributions to the course blog.
- We will hold extra meetings roughly every 3-4 weeks (places, dates, and times to be determined) for the discussion of additional graduate-level readings (also to be determined). You are required to do these extra readings and to attend and participate in these extra sessions.
- You are *not* required to submit Critical Essays or Student-Provided Readings. Instead, you must research and write a final paper that is (a) 6250-7500 words long and (b) suitable for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal. You should meet with me no later than 4 Oct to discuss your proposed paper topic, submit a formal topic proposal no later than 11 Oct, and submit a final version of your paper by 3:30 pm on 20 Dec. You are *not* required to submit "verification pages" or to meet any of the other intermediate deadlines associated with the Senior Project.
- As a graduate student, you are presumably motivated to be in this class because you have a genuine interest in the subject matter, rather than because you need to fulfill distributional requirements of some sort, or to pad out your schedule with "empty" credit hours. As such, I'm willing to assume that grades are *not* a terribly meaningful incentive for you. If anything, grades may be counterproductive, since they encourage you to focus on numbers (e.g., how do I turn an 89 into a 90?), rather than on the substantive issues at the core of the course. With this in mind, you should assume that successfully completing the graduate-level requirements for this course will earn you an A as a final grade. That said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades.

Undergraduates who truly believe that they can handle the extra work (and higher expectations) of the graduate-level requirements are welcome to meet with me to discuss the possibility of completing the course in such a fashion. If this describes you, that meeting needs to happen no later than 13 Sep.

Grades

This course follows the University's published standards for A-F grading:

- A: "achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- B: "achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- C: "achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect"
- D: "achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements"
- F: "represents failure . . . and signifies that the work was . . . completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit."

In practical terms, these standards translate as follows:

To earn an A for the course:

- You must submit at least 5000 words worth of Critical Essays (CEs) and, if need be, you must revise all your CEs until I deem them to be "outstanding" with respect to the minimum requirements of the assignment (which may take more than one round of revision).
- You must submit at least 4 Student-Provided Readings (SPRs).
- You must accumulate no more than 2 absences (excused or otherwise).
- You must have no more than 1 "present in name only" (PINO) day.
- You must miss no more than 1 course week of gradeworthy blog contributions.

To earn a B for the course:

- You must submit at least 5000 words worth of Critical Essays (CEs) and, if need be, you must revise all your CEs until I deem them to be "significantly above the level necessary" to meet the minimum requirements of the assignment (which may take more than one round of revision).
- You must submit at least 2 Student-Provided Readings (SPRs).
- You must accumulate no more than 4 absences (excused or otherwise).
- You must have no more than 2 "present in name only" (PINO) days.
- You must miss no more than 2 course weeks of gradeworthy blog contributions.

To earn a C for the course:

- You must submit at least 5000 words worth of Critical Essays (CEs). Should any of your CEs fall short of meeting the minimum requirements of the assignment, you must revise them until they meet such requirements (which may take more than one round of revision).
- You must submit at least 1 Student-Provided Reading (SPRs).
- You must accumulate no more than 6 absences (excused or otherwise).
- You must have no more than 3 "present in name only" (PINO) days.
- You must miss no more than 3 course weeks of gradeworthy blog contributions.

Falling short of any one of the requirements to earn a C will result in a D for the course. Falling short of more than one of the requirements to earn a C will result in an F for the course.

You can "buy back" shortfalls with respect to absences, PINO days, and blog contributions by submitting extra SPRs. Each extra SPR will make up for 1 absence, 1 PINO, or 1 missed week of blog contributions. There is no "buy back" option for shortfalls related to either SPRs or CEs.

With respect to final grades:

- "S/N" grades will only be given to students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis.
- "I" grades will only be given under extraordinary circumstances (i.e., major life emergencies).
- I reserve the right to adjust B or C final grades upwards to a B+ or C+ in cases where individual performances are noticeably stronger than the minimum requirements for the grade in question, but not quite strong enough to meet the standard for the next higher grade. Because the University does not award final grades of A+, this upgrade isn't available for final grades of A. Please note that this is a discretionary, rather than an automatic, upgrade and that it requires more than just a marginal level of additional achievement above the listed requirements.

Attendance/participation

Our class meetings will typically be structured around discussions rather than lectures, and so this is not a course where passive spectators will do well. I expect you to (1) attend class regularly, (2) do the required reading, and (3) come to class prepared to discuss those readings in a productive fashion.

On any given day, I will make every reasonable effort to make sure that everyone in class gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you by name (even if you have not raised your hand to speak) if you have been significantly quieter than your classmates. This may also mean that I will tell you not to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and there are other people in the room who have not yet contributed as much as you have.

Days when you are “present in name only” (PINO) will factor into your final grade. As the label implies, PINO days are days when you are physically present for our scheduled class meetings, but where you do not contribute to our discussions and/or exercises in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not necessarily limited to) days when:

- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading,
- you are primarily a passive spectator, rather than an active participant, in our in-class activities, and/or
- your contributions to our discussions are superficial enough to make me believe that you have not done the required reading with the proper level of care and attention.

If, in my estimation, you have a PINO day, I will inform you of such via email within 24 hours of the class meeting in question. Please note that final decisions about what does (and doesn't) count as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance.

As a word of friendly advice, you are much better off not coming to class than you are trying to bluff your way through discussions for which you are not actually prepared. If you're lucky, you might get away with such a bluff once. Maybe. It's more likely, though, that your attempt to pretend that you know what you're talking about will be obvious to everyone else in the room who has actually done the reading -- but especially to me.

Blog participation

Your contributions to our course blog will be measured every course week (i.e., the seven-day cycle that begins each Tuesday at 11:15 am). In order to receive credit for any given week, you must post at least 500 words of thoughtful commentary during that week about (1) the assigned readings and/or (2) our in-class discussions/exercises. Acceptable contributions can include new posts and/or comments on existing posts, and they can be spread over multiple posts/comments. For assessment purposes, only your own words count: e.g., quoting 500 words from one of the readings and following it up with 75 words of your own counts as 75 words, rather than 575. Similarly, I reserve the right to deal with cases of word-count padding by only counting the substantive words in your posts/comments. 500 words is not a lot of prose -- it's roughly two double-spaced pages -- so if you actually need long, fluffy preambles and/or extended quotations to reach that word-count, then you don't actually have enough substantial to say to earn credit for that contribution.

In order to meet this requirement, your blog contributions need to engage -- clearly, directly, and significantly -- with the major issues raised by our required readings and/or our in-class discussions. Posts/comments that (1) are primarily summaries of those readings/discussions, (2) veer off on tangents about minor facets of the material in question, and/or (3) offer nothing more than simple statements of agreement/disagreement will not count towards your fulfillment of this requirement. These sorts of significant problems with the quality of your contributions will trump simple (or even exceptional) fulfillment of the quantitative requirements: e.g., 1000 words of pure summary will not earn you blog credit, even if the summary in question is excellent.

Critical essays

You will need to write at least one (and probably more than one) essay that engages in a critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) fashion with the major issues raised by one or more of our required readings. Any individual CE must be at least 1000 words in length. You will need to accumulate at least 5000 words of CEs in order to pass the course. It is entirely up to you whether you reach this goal with five 1000-word essays, one 5000-word essay, or some other combination that adds up to the required total.

There are no formal deadlines for CEs besides the unavoidable one associated with the end of the semester. That said, please bear two things in mind. First, for any given CE, I will hold you accountable for our required readings and in-class discussions up to the date when you actually submit that CE. So while you are free to wait until November to turn in a CE about a reading assigned in September, I will assess that CE with a different set of expectations about what you should rightfully know than I would if you turn in the very same CE six weeks earlier. Second, if you intend (or need) to revise your CEs, you should pay careful attention to the “Revisions” section of the syllabus below so that you can submit your CEs early enough to guarantee that you will have the opportunity to revise them properly.

You have two major options for what to write about in your CEs.

Option #1 involves writing a critical response to one (or more) of our required readings. In general, there are three basic types of responses that can work well for this option:

- Argue against a particular position expressed in a given reading. Explain why the authors in question are wrong to make the claims they do and what a more appropriate way of looking at the issues might be.
- Take an argument from a given reading that you agree with and extend it further than the authors who made the original point do (e.g., “if what X says is true, then it follows that . . .”).
- Make a critical “compare and contrast” argument about two (or more) readings (e.g., how might author X respond to the arguments made by author Y? how might author P’s argument have been different if they had read author Q’s essay?).

Option #2 involves using one (or more) of our required readings as a way to make a critical response to an outside source (e.g., a journal article, a blog post, a news report) related to the main themes of the course. Any outside sources you use must meet all the following criteria:

- it must have been published in 2011 or 2012
- it must be at least 500 words long
- it must be publicly accessible (e.g., no unpublished essays, no blog posts hidden behind “paywalls”)
- it cannot be written by anyone who is currently a University of Minnesota student or employee, or who is a member of your immediate family
- it cannot be written by the same author(s) who wrote the required reading(s) you are using for your essay
- it must directly and substantially engage with a significant social, cultural, and/or political issue related to the course theme

You are free to draw on more than one outside source as long as they all meet the criteria above. You must provide full and accurate citations (in either APA or MLA style) for all outside sources you use. You cannot use the same outside source for more than one CE.

Some helpful tips:

- The goal of this assignment is to get you to take a stand on a significant issue related to the course material and then to make a persuasive argument in support of your chosen position. In the end, (and this probably can’t be emphasized enough) your grade depends less on what position you take than it does on how well you argue it.
- Focus your CEs on the main argument(s) in the readings/sources in question, and make sure that your paper does something more than simply summarize or rephrase those arguments. CEs that are primarily summaries or paraphrases of those readings/sources will not meet the requirements of this assignment.
- When writing your CEs, do not ignore opposing viewpoints. Instead, take them into account and explain why you’re right and they’re wrong. Regardless of what position you take, it may be helpful to imagine that your readers already disagree with your position and that you have to convince them to change their minds.

Revisions

As the “Grades” section above suggests, you can revise CEs in order to improve your chance for a higher course grade. Also, if you submit a CE that falls short of the minimum standards for the assignment, you will be required to revise that essay so that it meets those standards.

Any revised CEs you submit should take into account the feedback you received on the previous draft(s). You should assume that your revised CEs will require you to re-organize and re-structure your existing prose and to engage in fresh writing. Do not limit your revisions to mere proofreading or to tacking an extra paragraph or two that attempts to address the feedback I gave you on your first draft. Note as well that it is possible to make revisions that don’t improve upon your first draft -- or even that make it worse.

I will make every reasonable effort to return your graded CEs quickly, but I can not (and will not) guarantee a turnaround time shorter than three weeks for any given CE. In particular, CEs submitted after 21 Nov will almost certainly not be returned to you soon enough for you to revise them successfully before the end of the semester.

Student-provided readings

You need to locate and provide at least one reading that will potentially become part of the required readings for the entire class. For each reading that you provide, you need to submit two things:

- A clean, complete, legible copy of the reading. If you already can provide a PDF version, that is ideal. In most cases, however, you will need to provide a photocopy (single-sided and on white 8.5”x11” paper). Copies (whether PDF or paper) that are missing pages, that are excessively marked up, or that are otherwise illegible will not be accepted. If your reading is an online document of some sort (e.g., a blog entry, a podcast, a YouTube video, etc.), then the URL should be enough. [N.B.: Any online reading you submit must be available for free, and it must not be located behind any password barriers (with the exception of the ordinary UMN X.500 ones). The URL that you provide must point directly to the reading in question, and your classmates should need no additional instructions to figure out which piece of the linked material is actually required.
- A 300+ word annotation. Your annotation must include three things: (1) a full and proper citation (in APA or MLA style) for the reading in question, (2) a brief summary of the reading’s major claims/arguments, and (3) a brief, persuasive argument for why the reading in question is worth making the whole class read.

Please note that submissions that do not meet all the requirements above will not count towards your final grade.

Readings (and their accompanying annotations) are due no later than 2:30 pm on 6 Nov. Because I will need to read your submitted readings/annotations, select which readings will actually be added to the syllabus, and then make those readings available in a timely fashion, absolutely no late submissions will be accepted for this assignment. This deadline applies to “extra” SPRs as well.

Any reading you submit for consideration should clearly fit the theme of the course and it should also serve as a useful starting point for a lively in-class discussion. This means that, as a general rule, argument-driven readings are much better choices than purely fact-driven readings. The following types of readings are officially “off limits” (i.e., they will not be accepted at all):

- works by authors that are already represented on our syllabus
- readings that appear on syllabi for other courses that I’ve taught (e.g., you don’t get to simply copy what I’ve assigned to previous classes)

Each annotation must be at least 300 words (this word-count does not include the required citation). The summary portion of your annotation must consist primarily of your own words: i.e., extended quotes from the actual reading are not appropriate. The argumentative portion of your annotation should be longer than the summary portion, and it should offer a detailed rationale for adding the reading in question to the syllabus. Vague “rationales” such as “this is a very smart article” or “this essay offers important information” are not appropriate.

The assigned reading for our final five meetings (27 Nov-11 Dec) will be selected from the various SPRs that the class submits. I will select suitable readings and post them to the course website no later than 20 Nov.

Senior project

If you hope to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in connection with this course, you will need to research and write an argumentative paper (~2500-5000 words) on a topic appropriate to the course's central theme. Because this project results in a separate grade for an extra credit hour, it entails work above and beyond the regular requirements of the course.

There are several mandatory intermediate due dates built into the process that should (1) prevent you from procrastinating too much, (2) allow me enough time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) give you ample time to act on that feedback. Those due dates are:

13 Sep	Inform me in writing that you intend to complete a Senior Project
17 Sep	Register for Comm 3995W
27 Sep	Meet with me to discuss your project
4 Oct	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
13 Nov	Rough draft
20 Dec	Final paper and verification pages

Except for 20 Dec (when the deadline is 3:30 pm), all the deadlines above are 11:15 am. They are also all “drop dead” deadlines: i.e., failing to meet any of them (which includes failing to meet the minimum requirements for each) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in this class.

Further details about the Senior Project are available on a separate handout.

Paperless (mostly) assignments

With two potential exceptions, everything you'll submit for a grade this semester must be submitted digitally. For (hopefully) obvious reasons, blog contributions can only happen online. CEs, annotations for SPRs, and (almost) all Senior Project work must be submitted as file attachments via email to rodman@umn.edu. Acceptable formats are LibreOffice/OpenOffice (.odt), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), and Rich Text Format (.rtf). Except as noted below, assignments submitted in other formats (including PDFs and paper) will not be accepted.

Potential exception #1 to this requirement involves the copy of any suggested reading you're submitting. If and only if a given reading is not readily available in digital format (e.g., it's not a website, or it's not already available online as a PDF), you can (and should) submit a clean, complete photocopy of the reading in question. If you're able and willing to turn a paper reading into a PDF yourself, that is also acceptable.

Potential exception #2 applies only to the Senior Project, where the verification pages that are due with your final draft can (and should) be submitted in hard copy format.

Academic dishonesty

The following is a partial list of examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) produced by other students
- “double-dipping” (i.e., trying to use the same prose to fulfill multiple requirements)
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment
- deleting and/or re-editing blog posts/comments after they've been placed on the course site
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is a zero for the assignment in question. To put it bluntly, the risks are high (most plagiarism cases are very easy to identify), the penalties are higher (as severe as expulsion from the University), and the potential benefits are usually trivial (e.g., you get a “free” blog post that might turn a C into a C+). More to the point, the time and effort it takes to engage in “good” (i.e., undetectable) plagiarism is probably more time and effort than it would take to actually do the assignment in question the honest way.

Further information about the University's policies on academic dishonesty can be found at: <http://www.oscai.umn.edu/integrity/student/index.html>

Miscellaneous

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion within our group. I don't expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about the issues under discussion, but I do expect all of our conversations to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strongly expressed opinions are acceptable in this class; verbal bullying and personal attacks, on the other hand, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter -- may result in grade penalties.
- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students' needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for such accommodations to be arranged.

General tips

(1) Read your syllabus and handouts. These documents contain the basic ground rules by which this course works. And while, under exceptional circumstances (e.g., life and death emergencies), I may be willing to bend the course rules, ignorance of those rules on your part is not such a circumstance.

(2) Do the required readings as scheduled. This should be self-explanatory. But to drive the point home: almost everything you'll do for a grade this semester will depend on how thoroughly and thoughtfully you've done the assigned readings. If you blow them off, it will hurt your grade.

(3) Think about what you read. None of the assigned readings are intended to be consumed passively. If you're only reading to absorb facts or to be entertained, you will not do well. And while it's cool if you learn new facts and have fun, it's more important that you approach the assigned readings in a critical and thoughtful fashion.

(4) Attend class. Our meetings will be spent discussing the assigned readings, not summarizing them. Those discussions will often address issues that won't necessarily be obvious from the readings, and I will assume you have a basic familiarity with those issues when I grade your written assignments.

(5) Come to class prepared to discuss the readings. This means more than simply scanning your eyes across the assigned pages in the texts while you concentrate on something else. It means paying careful attention as you read, and then coming to class having thought about what you've read with some care.

(6) Take advantage of my office hours. If you don't understand why you received a given grade, if the reading has you baffled, if you're not sure whether an idea you have for a CE or SPR is suitable, or if you just want to chat, come to see me during my office hours (or make an appointment to meet with me at some other time).

(7) Do not overburden yourself. You may be someone who thrives on pressure, or someone who doesn't feel challenged by carrying 18 credit hours while holding down a full-time job and being a single parent. If so, that's a true gift -- and you should use it wisely. Mere mortals, however, should either respect their own limitations (and not try to take on too much at once) or they should recognize (and accept) that trying to juggle too many time- and energy-consuming tasks will cause their performance in at least one (and often more than one) of those to suffer.

(8) Plan ahead. Bear in mind that the work required of you this semester takes time. This is not a course where simply memorizing a long list of names and dates right before finals week will earn you an acceptable grade. The semester will go by much faster than you think, so plan accordingly.

Writing tips

(1) Meet the assignment's basic requirements. One of the most common mistakes that students make is to ignore some vital piece of what an assignment specifically calls for. They turn in a descriptive essay instead of an argumentative one. They submit only one part of a two-part assignment. And so on. This is a sure-fire way to earn a low grade.

(2) Present your work as if it matters to you. Spellcheck it. Proofread it. Copy-edit it. If you don't care enough about what you've written to make it as polished and presentable as possible, you shouldn't expect it to earn a good grade. "Clean copy" doesn't guarantee that your prose is smart or persuasive, but an abundance of spelling mistakes, typos, and/or basic grammatical errors usually indicates that you haven't put much time or energy into crafting your prose -- which, in turn, usually means that your argument is much weaker than it should be.

(3) Trim the fat. Padding out the word-count of an essay with unnecessary description, extra descriptive detail, and/or needless repetition is not a recipe for success. In most cases, such padding will dramatically lower the quality of your essay, since it will distract from (and sometimes even undermine) your actual argument.

(4) Know the difference between a topic and a thesis. "I will explore some issues related to Topic X" (for example) is merely a topic statement -- not a thesis statement -- and it doesn't necessarily set you up for the sort of argumentative essay that you will need to produce. "Through a careful analysis of the relevant facts, I will demonstrate that Author Q's argument about Topic X is completely wrong," on the other hand, is a proper thesis statement: i.e., it presents a significant claim that needs to be supported with solid evidence and sound logic.

(5) Argue your points. Don't merely assert them. For example, simply saying that you think that Author Q is wrong is far less convincing (and receives far less credit) than explaining *why* you think so. Similarly, if the main point of what you're writing boils down to "I agree with what the author says" or "This reading taught me something new" (or comparably descriptive claims), you will not do very well.

(6) Argue your points well. Get the facts straight. Make sure the facts support your case. Know the difference between correlation and causation. Craft an argument that builds on itself meaningfully (rather than an essay that simply strings together loosely related ideas in a seemingly arbitrary order). And, perhaps most importantly, anticipate counter-arguments to your position -- *especially* if your argument runs contrary to ideas we've already covered. You *don't* have to agree with our readings, but if you take a contrary position to the course material, you *do* have to explain *why* you're right and the material in question is wrong.

(7) Show your evidence. Use quotations and citations from the required readings as necessary to support the claims you're making. Know when a claim you're making needs to be supported with outside sources. And, if you're drawing on outside sources, make sure to cite those sources properly.

(8) Don't overstate your case. Sweeping generalizations about what "everyone" knows (or believes, or does, or needs, etc.) or about what has "always" been true will rarely (if ever) be accurate. More likely, they will weaken the strength of your argument. Similarly, overblown claims will also hurt you more than help you. If there are important grains of truth in your more hyperbolic statements, you want to find a way to present them with appropriate doses of nuance and context-based qualifications.

(9) Avoid the passive voice. There are circumstances when the passive voice is appropriate -- and even necessary -- but a persuasive, argumentative essay is usually not one of those moments. In most cases, passive sentence constructions weaken your argument by taking people and institutions who are absolutely central to whatever claim(s) you're trying to make and then erasing them from your essay.

(10) Be cautious about personal anecdotes. Used properly, stories from your own life can provide valuable support for a good argument. But make sure any such stories actually deliver the evidentiary support you need. Anecdotes that merely provide another example of a phenomenon described in the reading ("this happened to me too!") will *not* serve you well. Similarly, remember that your personal experiences may not be representative of the population as a whole.

And finally...

(1) Your grade is based on your performance, not your effort. Trying hard is a good thing (it's certainly better than not trying at all), but it's not the same thing as succeeding. Hard work will probably improve your grade but, by itself, it does not guarantee that you'll earn the grade you want.

(2) Your grade is additive, not subtractive. Contrary to popular belief, you don't begin the semester (or an assignment) with a perfect grade that subsequently gets whittled away as you "lose" points. Rather, you begin with a grade of zero and you need to earn points in order to bring your grade up.

(3) You have to earn your grade; I don't simply give it to you. To get an A, you need to do A-level work. You will not earn a passing grade simply because you've paid your tuition, because you're graduating, because you're on the tennis team, because you've never gotten a bad grade before, etc. If you need a particular grade to graduate, keep your scholarship, stay in school, etc., you need to do the work that will earn you that grade.

(4) The semester lasts sixteen weeks -- and they all count. Your course grade is based on the work you do all semester long, not just part of it. Writing amazing blog posts will not get you an A for the course if you earn Cs on everything else, doing B-level work on your CEs will not save your grade if you fail to turn in any SPRs, etc.

(5) The time to worry about your grade for this course is now. Do not wait until December to try and earn whatever grade you need/want. And definitely do not wait until after final grades have been turned in. Turning up after the semester is over to plead for a better grade will not work -- especially if you seem to be working harder to "earn" a grade change than you worked to earn your original grade.

(6) Your chance to earn your grade ends when the semester does. The only exceptions to this rule involve the sort of major life emergencies (e.g., extended hospitalization, death in the family, etc.) that cause you to miss large portions of the semester. In such cases, you will be required to provide independent verification of the emergency in question, and you will receive a final grade of "I" pending the completion of the work that you've missed.

(7) There is no "extra paper" option to boost your grade. The syllabus spells out the work required for this course, and I will not deviate from those requirements to meet the "needs" of individual students. Do not ask if you can do extra work to bring your grade up: the answer will be "No." Guaranteed.

(8) Your life outside this class is your responsibility. Your wedding anniversary, your mother's birthday, your workplace's annual employee softball tournament: all of these things and more may distract you from your work for this course. If you decide that your internship for the *City Pages* (for instance) matters more to you than this course, that's your prerogative -- but you need to recognize that your coursework (and thus your grade) will suffer if you put this class too low on your list of priorities.

Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed. Readings marked with asterisks (***) are available on the course website.]

4-6 Sep

Duncombe, pp. 1-15, 35-41 (Duncombe, Williams)

***Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture"

11-13 Sep

Senior Project deadline #1 (notification): 13 Sep

Senior Project deadline #2 (registration): 17 Sep

Duncombe, pp. 42-67, 185-192 (Marx & Engels, Arnold, Gramsci, Hall)

***Bagdikian, "Common Media for an Uncommon Nation"

McLeod, pp. 1-61

18-20 Sep

Duncombe, pp. 67-81, 89-96 (Benjamin, Scott)

McLeod, pp. 62-225

25-27 Sep

Senior Project deadline #3 (meeting): 27 Sep

Duncombe, pp. 135-149, 369-378 (Hobsbawm, Boyd)

McLeod, pp. 226-338

Lessig, pp. xiii-50

2-4 Oct

Senior Project deadline #4 (topic proposal/bibliography): 4 Oct

Graduate Student Project deadline #1 (meeting): 4 Oct

Duncombe, pp. 113-118, 347-357 (Bey, Jordan)

Lessig, pp. 51-224

***Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar"

9-11 Oct

Graduate Student Project deadline #2 (topic proposal): 11 Oct

Duncombe, pp. 327-346 (Hoffman, Rubin, Epstein)

Lessig, pp. 225-294

Yes Men, pp. 7-76

16-18 Oct

Duncombe, pp. 316-317, 358-369 (Frank, Grote)

Yes Men, pp. 77-190

***Mönkedieck, "The iPhone 4^{CF (Conflict Free)}: The Yes Men Address the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo"

23-25 Oct

Duncombe, pp. 157-182, 379-396 (Cosgrove, Hebdige, Clarke, Riot Grrrl, Hanna, Dominguez)

Negativland, pp. i-186

***Norton, "Inside Anonymous"

***Gournelos, "Breaking the News: Power and Secrecy in the Age of the Internet"

30 Oct -1 Nov

Duncombe, pp. 82-88 (Bakhtin)

Negativland, pp. 187-266

Kipnis, pp. vii-63

6-8 Nov

Final deadline for SPRs: 6 Nov

Duncombe, pp. 215-231, 240-248 (Levine, Woolf)

Kipnis, pp. 64-160

13-15 Nov

Senior Project deadline #5 (rough draft): 13 Nov

Duncombe, pp. 259-267 (Radway)

Kipnis, pp. 161-206

[NO CLASS on 15 Nov]

20-22 Nov

Last date to submit CEs that you intend to revise: 21 Nov

[NO CLASS on 20-22 Nov]

27-29 Nov

Student-provided readings

4-6 Dec

Student-provided readings

11 Dec

Student-provided readings

20 Dec (3:30 pm)

Final deadline for CEs, revised CEs, blog posts/comments, and Senior Projects