

# Comm 5231: Media outlaws

Fall 2017

Prof. Gil Rodman (rodman@umn.edu)

office hours (Ford 284): TuTh 10-11a, 1:15-2:15p and by appointment

## 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 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:

- Anonymous
- computer hackers
- copyright pirates
- media pranksters
- “Occupy” protests
- open source software
- performance artists
- punk rockers
- pornography
- slash fan fiction

Our goal will not be to romanticize these “outlaws” as latter day Robin Hoods, nor will we 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 be active political agents, innovative creators, and powerful critics -- even in the face of seemingly unassailable corporate media power.

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.

- Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*
- Stephen Duncombe (ed.), *The Cultural Resistance Reader*
- Negativland, *Fair Use*
- The Yes Men, *The Yes Men*

Other required readings will be made available via the course Moodle site.

Students who choose to pursue a Capstone Project are *strongly* encouraged to use the *recommended* book (also available at the University Bookstore) to help conceive, plan, research, and write their final papers:

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

## Moodle

If you’re on the course roster, you should already have access to the course’s Moodle site. Log in to the U’s main Moodle page (<https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/>) and select the “COMM5231\_001F17” link from the “My Courses” menu in the “Navigation” box. We will use Moodle for several things this semester:

- a graded course blog where you will contribute posts and comments about the course material
- access to our required non-book readings/videos
- a repository for various media examples relevant to our required readings
- occasional business-related announcements about the course

More information on Moodle can be found at <http://it.umn.edu/course-management-system-moodle-related/students>

## Graduate students

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

- Unless we make an explicit agreement to the contrary, you are required to attend all regular class meetings and do all the assigned readings.
- We will hold extra meetings every 3-4 weeks (dates and times to be determined) to discuss additional graduate-level readings (also to be determined). These extra meetings and readings are both required.
- Your major written work for the course will be to research and write a paper that (a) fits the course theme, (b) is *at least 6250 words* long and (c) is suitable for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal. You must meet with me no later than 3 Oct to discuss your proposed paper topic, submit a formal topic proposal no later than 10 Oct, and submit a final version of your paper by 10:00 am on 16 Dec.

- You are *not* required to complete any of the writing assignments described below.
- I assume that grad students are more invested in the course's core issues than in grades -- to the point where grades are potentially counterproductive. As such, successfully completing the graduate-level requirements above will earn you an A for the course. That said, if you are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades.

Undergraduates who believe they can handle the extra work of the graduate-level requirements are welcome to meet with me to discuss the possibility of taking the course with those rules. That meeting must happen no later than 19 Sep, and you should come prepared to convince me that you can perform at graduate student level.

## 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: "signifies that the work was . . . completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit."

Final course grades will be calculated using the following schedule:

- Attendance/participation: 25 points maximum
- Course blog: 25 points maximum
- Discussion questions: 20 points maximum
- Thought paper: 10 points
- Critical Essays (CEs): 10 points each

You may submit multiple CEs to help cover shortfalls in other portions of your course grade.

Point totals at the end of the semester will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93+	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

- There will be occasional opportunities to earn points via in-class quizzes and/or extra assignments. Such opportunities will be the exception, rather than the rule, and they will not be offered on an individual basis.
- "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).

## Attendance/participation (A/P)

Our class meetings will be structured around discussions, and so you will need to:

- attend class regularly,
- do the required readings carefully, and
- come to class prepared to discuss those readings in thoughtful fashion.

I will do my best to make sure that everyone gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you if you have been exceptionally quiet or, alternately, that I will ask you *not* to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and other students have not been heard from.

Days when you are "present in name only" (PINO) will result in a 1-point penalty to your A/P grade. As the name implies, PINO days happen when you are physically present for our scheduled class meetings, but you do not contribute to our discussions in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not limited to) days when:

- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading, and/or
- you are primarily a passive spectator in our in-class activities.

Decisions about what counts as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance, and I will email you about any such decision within 24 hours of the class meeting in question.

There are no excused absences in this course. If you're not in class -- regardless of the reason -- then you can't contribute to our discussions, and so you can't earn A/P points for that day. Significantly late arrivals and/or early departures will result in lower A/P scores for the relevant class meetings.

There are 26 regular class meetings scheduled this semester, each of which allows you to earn up to 1 point toward your A/P grade. The maximum number of A/P points you can earn is 25.

## Course blog participation

The blog is an interactive online forum where the class will discuss the major issues raised by the course readings and our in-class conversations. Blog contributions will typically be shorter and less formal than the major writing assignments, but they should still stake out clear positions on major issues related to the course content, and they should still present persuasive arguments in support of your position.

- Access the blog via the “Course blog” link on the main page of the course Moodle site.
- Start a new thread via the “Add a new topic” button.
- Comment on a thread via the “Discuss this topic” link at the lower right corner of that thread’s box.

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 lengthy tangents about minor facets of the material in question, (3) focus heavily on issues outside of the course content, and/or (4) offer nothing more than statements of simple agreement/disagreement will not count towards your grade.

Blog contributions will be graded every course week: i.e., the seven-day cycle that begins each Tuesday at 11:15 am. (N.B.: For grading purposes, the last course week of the semester begins at 11:15 am on 12 Dec and ends at 10:00 am on 16 Dec.) For any given course week, there are two ways to earn points:

- You create a post of at least 300 words of thoughtful commentary about the assigned readings and/or our in-class discussions/exercises. You can earn a maximum of 1 point each course week for such posts.
- You create a comment of at least 300 words of thoughtful response to one of your classmates’ posts or comments. You can earn a maximum of 1 point each course week for such comments.

For grading purposes, only your own words count: e.g., quoting 300 words from other people alongside 75 words of your own counts as 75 words, rather than 375. Similarly, if your posts/comments include large amounts of filler prose, only the substantive words will count toward your grade. Any given comment must be substantially different from both your own posts and your other comments: i.e., you don’t earn bonus points for rephrasing claims and arguments you’ve made elsewhere on the blog. Posts/comments shorter than 300 words will not earn points.

There are 15 course weeks in the semester, each of which allows you to earn 0-2 points toward your Course Blog grade. The maximum number of Course Blog points you can earn overall is 25.

### Tips

- There are no reading-related deadlines for the blog: i.e., you can still earn points for “late” posts/comments on “old” readings, as long as you’re adding something new to the conversation.
- Your comments should be respectful and constructive -- *especially* if you are disagreeing with something one of your classmates has written.

## Discussion questions (DQs)

DQs are intended to help insure that you have done the required reading *in advance* of our class meetings *and* that you are prepared to participate in a thoughtful and productive conversation about that reading.

Any given DQ must focus on the assigned reading for the appropriate course date. A good DQ should clearly demonstrate that you’ve done the relevant reading, and it will be suitable for use as a conversation starter for a thoughtful class discussion about the major issues in that reading. You should avoid the following:

- simple “yes” or “no” questions
- factual or definitional questions
- contextual or background questions requiring knowledge that most (or all) of the class won’t have
- questions that can be answered simply by quoting or summarizing the reading
- questions that don’t relate to the reading in any clear or direct fashion
- questions that engage with the reading only superficially or tangentially
- “questions” that aren’t actually questions

In some cases, you may need to preface your actual question with a brief statement that sets your question up.

All DQs *must* be submitted via email to rodman@umn.edu, and they *must* have a subject line that *clearly* indicates that the email in question is a DQ. You should submit DQs as regular email messages. Do *not* submit your DQs as file attachments or in printed form. DQs are due by 11:15 am on *the day before* the relevant reading is scheduled to be discussed in class (i.e., on Mondays and Wednesdays). *No* late DQs will be accepted.

DQs will be graded on a  $\sqrt{+/\sqrt{-}}$  basis ( $\sqrt{+}$  = 1.0 points,  $\sqrt{-}$  = 0.75 points,  $\sqrt{-}$  = 0.5 points). DQs that fail to meet the basic terms of the assignment will earn a zero (0). You can only earn points for one DQ per class period.

There are 25 days where we have assigned reading, each of which allows you to earn up to 1 point toward your DQ grade. The maximum number of DQ points you can earn overall is 20.

## Thought paper

In a well-crafted and thoughtful essay of *at least 1000 words*, address *both* of the following questions:

- Pick *one* form of social/cultural/political protest engaged in by *ordinary* people that you feel is clearly effective and, in as *persuasive* a fashion as you can, explain *why* that form of protest is effective.
- Pick *one* form of social/cultural/political protest engaged in by *ordinary* people that you feel is clearly ineffective and, in as *persuasive* a fashion as you can, explain *why* that form of protest is ineffective.

This assignment will be *ungraded*. Assuming you turn the paper in, you should receive full credit (10 points) for doing so -- though I reserve the right to assign lower grades (including zeros) to papers that fail to meet the assignment's requirements. This paper is due by *11:15 am on 12 Sep*. No late papers will be accepted.

### Tips

- This essay is more than just a chance to state your opinions. Simply sharing an opinion doesn't require much thought, especially in the absence of a rationale for why you believe what you do. You should approach this essay as an opportunity to *change* your audience's opinion about the form of protest in question.
- Think carefully about how your answers to the two pieces of this assignment relate to each other. If I can swap your two forms of protest with your two rationales and find your argument to be just as persuasive, then your arguments aren't as strong as they should be.

## Critical essays (CEs)

Any given CE must (1) be *at least 1000 words* long, (2) consist of a *persuasive argument* that doesn't duplicate your other written work for this course, and (3) engage in substantial fashion with our required readings.

There are three possible types of CEs:

- Replacement Reading (RR)
- Most Valuable Reading (MVR)
- Least Valuable Reading (LVR)

You are *not* obligated to submit CEs from all three categories. You are free to submit as many RRs as you like, but you can only submit one each for the other two options. Exactly how many CEs you should submit will vary but, as a rough guide, most students will need to submit *at least* 3 CEs in order to pass the course.

Each CE is worth a maximum of 10 points. CEs that earn grades of D or F will be worth a fixed number of points on a sliding scale: the first such CE you submit will earn 5 points, the second will earn 4 points, and so on. Otherwise CEs will be worth points on a scale proportionate to the grading schedule on page 2 of the syllabus: e.g., a C- paper is worth 7 points, a C paper is worth 7.3 points, and so on.

Each CE requires you to engage directly with one of our assigned readings. For purposes of this assignment, you should treat each assigned chapter from the reader and each of the assigned page ranges from the Coates book as separate readings.

The final deadline for all CEs is *10:00 am on 16 Dec*. Because that deadline coincides with the official final exam date/time for the course, it is firm and non-negotiable. The only *potential* exceptions to this rule involve situations where you have a *documented* major life emergency of some sort.

### Replacement Reading (RR)

Find a reading (N.B.: for purposes of this CE, audios and videos count as “readings”) to add to a future version of this syllabus that replaces one of our current readings. Your essay needs to make a persuasive argument for how/why your chosen reading significantly improves the course in comparison the one you would like to see replaced. N.B.: this argument needs to be more substantial than simply explaining that you don’t like the existing reading, or that your suggested reading covers topics that aren’t present on the existing syllabus.

Any replacement reading you submit must:

- have a clear and direct connection to the course theme,
- be at least 1000 words long (for printed sources) or 5 minutes long (for audio/video sources),
- not be written/created by an author who’s already on our syllabus, and
- not appear on syllabi from previous versions of this course (see <http://www.gilrodman.com/syllabi>)

Along with your essay, you must submit a complete copy of the relevant replacement reading. If your reading is freely available online (e.g., it’s not behind a paywall), you simply need to provide the URL. If you are able to send a PDF copy via email, that works as well. In some cases, however, you will need to provide a photocopy of your reading. Copies (digital or otherwise) that are missing pages or illegible will not be accepted.

Some helpful advice for RRs:

- Think about your argument in relational terms. How does your new reading fit into the rest of the syllabus? What does it add to the course that is an improvement over the reading you want to replace? Why should your new reading replace the current reading you’ve chosen better than it does some other reading? Etc.
- A course with a theme as broad as this one will never be able to include all the major topics/issues that fit that theme. As such, any argument you make in favor of a new reading needs to do more than simply point out that there’s nothing about topic A on the current syllabus, and that your chosen reading fixes that problem. In such cases, you will want/need to make a persuasive case for why topic A deserves to be on the syllabus in place of topic B (i.e., the topic of the reading you’d like to see replaced).
- New readings should match the size/scope of the readings you would like to replace. You’ll have a hard time making a convincing argument that (for instance) a 1200-word personality profile from a celebrity gossip magazine will work well to replace a 5000-word historical analysis from an academic journal.

### Most Valuable Reading (MVR) / Least Valuable Reading (LVR)

[N.B.: Except for the difference between “most” and “least,” the requirements for these two options are identical.]

Pick the one required reading from the syllabus that you found to be the most/least valuable, and write an essay that explains, in persuasive detail, why your chosen reading is the most/least important one in the course. You can only submit one MVR and one LVR, and each of those must select only one reading as the most/least valuable.

Some helpful advice for MVRs and LVRs:

- As with the RR option, think about your argument in relational terms: i.e., don’t just discuss the particular strengths/weaknesses of a given reading, but make a case for how well it worked (or didn’t) in the context of the course as a whole and/or in relation to the rest of the readings on the syllabus.
- Do not base your argument on questions of personal taste. The fact that you found a given reading to be easy, difficult, funny, boring, etc. doesn’t necessarily affect how valuable it was to the course as a whole.
- This is not a popularity contest. The reading that generated the liveliest discussion isn’t necessarily the most valuable, and the reading that prompted the least engagement isn’t necessarily the least valuable.

### General CE advice

- There is no single “right” answer that I look for when I grade CEs. The overall quality of the argument you make in any given CE matters more than the specific position you take. That said, some positions are much harder to defend successfully than others. Whatever position you take should be well supported by (a) the available facts and (b) a persuasive, well-constructed argument.
- Remember that your goal isn’t simply to demonstrate that you have an opinion: it’s to persuade your reader why your position on the issue at hand is the best one (or, at the very least, a better one than most others). CEs that merely assert a position without arguing it will not meet the requirements of this assignment, and the highest grade they will earn is a D. That same grade ceiling also applies to CEs that focus on extended summary and/or paraphrasing of readings/sources, rather than on making an argument of your own.

- Focus on the *main* argument(s) in the readings/sources in question. A CE built around a single paragraph from a 20-page article (for instance) will only work well if that paragraph is absolutely central to the article as a whole. If it's a side issue, or if the author's main argument still holds up without that paragraph, then it's not important enough for you to put it at the center of a CE.

## Capstone project (optional)

In order to fulfill the Capstone Project requirement in connection with this course, you must write a well-researched, argumentative essay of 2500+ words on a topic that fits the course's main theme. Because this project results in a separate grade and earns you an extra credit hour, it involves work *above and beyond* the course requirements.

There are several *mandatory* deadlines built into the project that should (1) prevent you from procrastinating too much, (2) allow me time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) give you time to act on that feedback:

19 Sep	Register for Comm 3995W-008
26 Sep	Meet with me to discuss your project
3 Oct	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
17 Oct	Thesis paragraph draft
7 Nov	Rough draft
16 Dec	Final paper and verification pages

Except for 16 Dec (when the deadline is 10:00 am), all the deadlines above are at 11:15 am. They are also all "drop dead" deadlines: i.e., failing to meet *any* of them (which includes failing to meet their minimum requirements) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Capstone Project requirement in this class. Further details about the Capstone Project are available on a separate handout.

## Paperless (mostly) assignments

With two exceptions, *everything* you'll submit for a grade this semester *must* be submitted digitally. Contributions to the course blog can (obviously) only happen online. All other written assignments should be submitted *via email* to rodman@umn.edu. DQs must be submitted as plaintext emails (i.e., *not* as file attachments). All other assignments must be submitted as attachments in one of the following file formats: LibreOffice/OpenOffice (.odt), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), Rich Text Format (.rtf). Except as noted below, assignments submitted in other formats (including PDFs and paper) will *not* be accepted.

Exception #1 involves the copy of any reading you submit in connection to an "Replacement Reading" CE:

- Readings that only exist online should be submitted by including their URLs in your annotations.
- Readings that are readily available as PDFs should be submitted as PDFs.
- All other readings should be submitted as clean, complete photocopies.

Exception #2 involves Capstone Project verification pages, which *must* 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., using the same work to earn more than one grade -- including attempts to reuse work that you have submitted for a grade in some other course)
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment for you
- deleting and/or re-editing blog posts/comments after they've been placed on the course Moodle 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. Put 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 course grade of C into a C+). More pragmatically, 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 do the assignment in question the honest way.

Some helpful resources to avoid academic dishonesty include:

- <https://communitystandards.umn.edu/avoid-violations/avoiding-scholastic-dishonesty>
- <http://www.gilrodman.com/2015/03/01/how-to-plagiarize-well-tips-for-my-undergraduates-rerun-sunday/>

## Miscellaneous

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion. I don't expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about those topics, but I do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable; 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, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you 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 written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with enough lead time for accommodations to be arranged.
- University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the December 1998 policy statement (see <http://policy.umn.edu/hr/sexualharassment>). Questions or concerns about sexual harassment should be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (274 McNamara).

## Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed prior to the dates listed. Readings with asterisks can be found on our Moodle site.]

5 Sep	no reading
7 Sep	***this syllabus ***"How to Do Well in This Course" Duncombe, pp. 1-15, 35-41 (Duncombe, Williams)
12 Sep	<b>Thought paper deadline</b> ***Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture"
14 Sep	***McLeod, "On Pranks" ***McLeod, "Political Pranksters" ***Harold, "Anti-Logos"
19 Sep	<b>Capstone Project deadline #1 (register for Comm 3995W-008)</b> Duncombe, pp. 327-332 (Hoffman, Rubin) Yes Men, pp. 7-49
21 Sep	Duncombe, pp. 333-346 (Epstein) Yes Men, pp. 50-147
26 Sep	<b>Capstone Project deadline #2 (meeting)</b> Duncombe, pp. 316-327 (Frank) Yes Men, pp. 148-190
28 Sep	Duncombe, pp. 358-378 (Grote, Boyd) ***Mönkedieck, "The iPhone 4 <sup>CF</sup> (Conflict Free)"
3 Oct	<b>Capstone Project deadline #3 (topic proposal/bibliography)</b> <b>Graduate Student Project deadline #1 (meeting)</b> Duncombe, pp. 89-96, 135-149, 185-192 (Scott, Hobsbawm, Hall)
5 Oct	Duncombe, pp. 157-182 (Cosgrove, Hebdige, Clarke, Riot Grrrl, Hanna)
10 Oct	<b>Graduate Student Project deadline #2 (topic proposal)</b> Duncombe, pp. 113-118, 347-357 (Bey, Jordan) ***Todd & Scordelis, "No Pants! Subway Ride"

- 12 Oct** Duncombe, pp. 82-88 (Bakhtin)  
 \*\*\*Kipnis, "Preface"  
 \*\*\*Kipnis, "Disgust and Desire"
- 17 Oct** **Capstone Project deadline #4 (thesis paragraph draft)**  
 Duncombe, pp. 259-267 (Radway)  
 \*\*\*Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture"
- 19 Oct** **NO CLASS**
- 24 Oct** Negativland, pp. i-97
- 26 Oct** Negativland, pp. 99-190
- 31 Oct** \*\*\*Lessig, "Piracy"
- 2 Nov** Duncombe, pp. 67-81 (Benjamin)  
 \*\*\*Lessig, *Remix* [selections]
- 7 Nov** **Capstone Project deadline #5 (rough draft)**  
 \*\*\*Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar"  
 \*\*\*Vaidhyathan, "Open Source as Culture/Culture as Open Source"
- 9 Nov** **NO CLASS**
- 14 Nov** \*\*\*Mirzoeff, "Why I Occupy"  
 \*\*\*DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, "Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media"
- 16 Nov** Duncombe, pp. 379-396 (Dominguez)  
 Coleman, pp. 1-51
- 21 Nov** \*\*\*Norton, "Inside Anonymous"  
 \*\*\*Klein, "Vigilante Media"  
 Coleman, pp. 53-79
- 23 Nov** **NO CLASS**
- 28 Nov** Coleman, pp. 81-176
- 30 Nov** Coleman, pp. 177-236
- 5 Dec** Coleman, pp. 237-315
- 7 Dec** Coleman, pp. 317-375
- 12 Dec** Coleman, pp. 377-426
- 16 Dec** **Final deadline for CEs, blog posts/comments, and Capstone Projects**  
 (10:00 am)