

# IDS 2935: Messages, Media, and the Social Self

## Quest 1: The Examined Life

### I. General Information

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#### **Class Meetings**

- [Semester Year]
- [Course Format & Enrollment Capacity]
- [Days, Periods, and Location (if applicable)]

#### **Instructor**

- Todd Best
- 2013 Farrior Hall
- tbd
- e: [tabest@ufl.edu](mailto:tabest@ufl.edu), p: 352-392-1521

#### **Course Description**

*Essential question:* Considering the vast amounts of messaging and information delivered through all forms of media, how might we collectively understand and discuss perceived reality and its imprint on our humanity?

What is true, what is false, what is not so clear, and what is the meaning of anything at all? This course seeks to understand our engagement with the information and messages we encounter through our media landscape, including focus on perceptions of truth, public discourse, and the "social" self. We will especially probe the questions that arise in our efforts to make sense of digital environments and the human quest for understanding in social spheres like politics, journalism, religion, education, and more. We will explore the tools of media literacy to wade through information overflow and mis/dis-information. Finally, we will explore the individual and social implications of living in the midst of the media-saturated culture in which we find ourselves. Drawing broadly on the humanities and social sciences, we will explore four main sub-questions:

- 1) How might we make sense of the constant stream of "content" we encounter, when it is increasingly offered in a context of skepticism?
- 2) Is it possible to pursue healthy public discourse in different cultural spheres amidst a cacophony of mixed messages oriented by deep ideologies?

- 3) What does it mean to explore the question of what is true/real, what is not, and what might we find along the way? (Is “the truth” possible?)
- 4) How does our entwinement with digital devices and especially with social media help or hinder our humanity?

\*As a General Education course, any class topics that touch on identity politics or topics of discrimination will be covered objectively without endorsements of viewpoints, observed from multiple perspectives, and taught as objects of analysis within a larger course of instruction. Furthermore, all viewpoints are welcome in class discussions.

## Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities

*This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.*

## QUEST 1 OBJECTIVES

Quest 1 courses address the history, key themes, principles, terminologies, theories, or methodologies of various arts and humanities disciplines that enable us to ask essential questions about the human condition. Students learn to identify and analyze the distinctive elements of different arts and humanities disciplines, along with their biases and influences on essential questions about the human condition. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and evaluation of essential questions about the human condition from multiple perspectives. Students reflect on the ways in which the arts and the humanities impact individuals, societies, and their own intellectual, personal, and professional development.

### Humanities (H)

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a Humanities discipline or the Humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases, and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

## Required Readings and Works

Textbooks to purchase or obtain:

*\*W indicates resource draws on or engages ideas and works from the Western Canon*

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Penguin. (W)

Zac Gershberg and Sean Illing, *The Paradox of Democracy* (W)

All other readings and works are available in Canvas and include:

article: Edmundson, [It's Complicated](#) (W)

short film: [Balloonfest](#)

video: A very short intro to Hermeneutics (Zimmermann) (W)

podcast: <https://www.sceneonradio.org/s4-e11-more-truth/>

short film: [Drive-in Jesus](#)

article: Defilippo, [Drive-in Jesus](#)

essay: Orwell, [Politics and the English Language](#) (W)

article: McMurtrie, [Teaching in the Age of Disinformation](#)

essay: Wellmon, [Google Isn't Making Us Stupid or Smart](#) (W)

video: [TEDx: Stephen Addcox - Storyscreens...](#)

short film: [The Price of Certainty](#)

article: Bennett, [Endangered Habitat](#) (W)

podcast: TED Radio Hour - ["Attention"](#)

essay: Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" (W)

article: Haslam and Baker, ["Why Social Media Makes You Feel Bad..."](#)

podcast: Invisibilia: "Our Computers, Ourselves"

essay: Sullivan, "I Used to Be a Human Being"

select chapters: Baudrillard, from *Simulacra and Simulation* (W)

essay: Jacobs, [Injured Parties: Considering the Wider Effects of Harmful Speech](#) (W)

article: Haidt and Rose-Stockwell, [The Dark Psychology of Social Networks](#)

article: Breakey, ["Is Cancel Culture Silencing Open Debate?"](#)

podcast: The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling

essay: Pasquale, "The Algorithmic Self" (W)

essay: Rosen, "Expose Thyself" (W)

essay: Jacobs, "Tending the Digital Commons" (W)

poem: Berry - [Enemies](#) (W)

poem: Frost - [Mending Wall](#) (W)

films for film reviews will be selected by students, but recommended films:

Feels Good Man

Whose Streets

Boys State

Bad Press

The Amazing Jonathan

The Overnights

Welcome to Chechnya

Possibly:

Podcast series: The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling

Podcast series: selections from The Last Archive

\*Note where films are listed for weekly assigned work below, they are to be viewed outside of class, prior to the class meeting.

## II. Graded Work

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### Description of Graded Work

#### Assignments and Grades:

Weekly Reflections 20% (12 x 30 = 360 points)

Film/Creative Review 25% (3 x 75 = 225 points)

Mid-term Essay 20% (300 points)

Final Essay/Project 25% (300 points)

Attendance and Participation 10% (150 points)

#### Weekly Reflections, due weekly, 100-250 words

-short blogpost style reflections of summary and personal response:

Students will write response to the assigned content that is brief, personalized, grounded in something of substance. It is not merely a summary, though there may be a single summary statement to kick things off. Top priority is to discuss one's own experience with the material.

Questions to prompt thinking:

- Which of the author's thoughts most captured your attention this week?
- What do you find confusing or troubling in them?
- What do you find most compelling?
- How would you push back on the author's thought? (basing your critique on reasons)
- What other ideas does this spark for you? Does this relate to other things you find interesting?

#### Film Review Essays, due roughly every three weeks, 500-750 words (experiential)

-students will view films, discuss with others, and write a brief 500 word review:

1. Watch the film, engaging reflectively along the way.
2. Summarize the film's story - What is the story and how is the story told? ¼ of essay.
3. Explain/interpret the film's story - what is the film about at a deeper level? What ideas does the story point to beyond itself? ¼ of essay.
4. Offer student's own unique perspective and analysis – "make something" of the film. ½ of essay.

Midterm essay, due midterm, 1000 words

- essay prompt will be given that focuses on processing important questions covered so far
- essays will require the student to demonstrate their own engagement with the salient issues of the class conversation.

Final essay/project, 1000-1250 words (experiential)

- a creative salon project where students curate a public discourse event and write about it
- students will select a topic and relevant media content, host a salon where they invite 3-5 others to participate in viewing or listening to content, craft a discussion with participants, then write a reflective essay on the experience.

Attendance and Participation

This class is designed for and will work best when students are present for each session and actively engaged in discussion-based conversation. This is a seminar-style course and not a lecture-based class. We hope to foster a small-scale community of learning about a topic that is timely, relevant, and intersects most of our lives in personal ways. Missing class or not participating in the discussion will certainly impact a student’s experience of the class.

### Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

## III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

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***Understanding Our Media Landscape: History and Philosophy***

Week 1

Question/topic: What is media literacy? How does the communication of messages in our current context present a problem for meaning-making? What are the right questions we need to ask? What is the current state of our shared discourse?

Day one: intro class – syllabus

Day two: set up the framework for the discussion:  
 assigned content: -Postman Intro/Forward (14 pgs)

-Edmundson, [It's Complicated](#) (on state of public discourse) (7 pgs)

### Week 2

Question/topic: How does the medium act like a metaphor when conveying messages or stories? In what ways do metaphorical media shape how we know things?

Postman: Ch. 1 Metaphor, Ch. 2 Epistemology (26 pgs)

+short film: [Balloonfest \(6 min.\)](#)

+[A very short intro to Hermeneutics](#) (Zimmermann) (4 min.)

Assignment: Reflection 1

### Week 3

Question/topic: How did we get here? How should we understand the historical development of message communication in America and how do the changes along the way affect our communication and our interpretation of communications?

Postman, Ch. 3 Typographic America, Ch. 4 Typographic Mind (33 pgs)

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Assignment: Reflection 2

Film Review 1 assigned

### Week 4

Question/topic: Where does the trajectory of message communication history leave us as Postman sees it? How do we envision this trajectory leading in the current moment, nearly 30 years after Postman wrote? What is the "show business" reality that Postman describes? Is it relevant now?

Postman, Ch. 5 Peek-a-Boo World, Ch. 6 Show Business (34 pgs)

Assignment: Reflection 3

Film Review 1 due

### Week 5

Question/topic: How does the news do in delivering reliable information about our world? Is there truth in news/journalism? Does it give us an ability to act in response to the news? How does religion as a realm of public discourse fair in the lens of our analysis? Can religion provide a critique?

Postman, Ch. 7 Now This (News) (14 pgs)

+podcast: <https://www.sceneonradio.org/s4-e11-more-truth/>

Postman, Ch. 8 (Religion) (10 pgs)

+short film: [Drive-in Jesus](#) (9 min.)

+[director article](#)

Assignment: Reflection 4

### Week 6

Question/topic: Is there any hope for accurate or helpful information in the realm of politics? How might education be a locus of media distortion? Is it possible to teach and learn with regard to getting accurate information?

Postman, Ch. 9 – Politics (pp. 16 pgs)

Orwell, [Politics and the English Language \(10 pgs.\)](#)

Film Review 2 assigned

Education - (do NOT read Postman ch. 10)

[Teaching in the Age of Disinformation \(7 pgs.\)](#)

+Wellmon, [Google Isn't Making Us Stupid or Smart \(15 pgs\)](#)

+[TEDx: Stephen Addcox - Storyscreens... \(14 min.\)](#)

Assignment: Reflection 5

Film Review 2 due

### Week 7

Question/topic: Who was right: Orwell or Huxley? What is Postman's solution to the problem he has been explaining? What do you think is the solution?

Postman, Ch. 11 - Huxleyan Warning – conclusion (9 pgs)

Assignment: Reflection 6

Midterm Essay assigned

### ***Assessing Public Discourse in our Current Situation***

#### Week 8

Question/topic: What are the biases of our current technologies and how are they impacting "democracy"? What do we mean by democracy, anyway?

Gershberg and Illing, Intro + Ch 1 (28 pgs)

+short op-doc: [The Price of Certainty \(6 min.\)](#)

Begin podcast series: The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling Ep1(50 min/episode)

Assignment: Reflection 7

Midterm Essay due

#### Week 9

Question/topic: What do we really mean by "free speech", and what will it cost us? How does news-print factor into the equation?

Gershberg and Illing, Ch 2-3 (42 pgs)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep2

Assignment: Reflection 8

Film Review 3 assigned

#### Week 10

Question/topic: How should we understand "liberal" democracy in relation to the problem of truth-seeking and life together? What is fascism and how might it impinge on democracy?

Gershberg and Illing, Ch. 5-6 (63 pgs)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep3

Assignment: Reflection 9

Film Review 3 Due

#### Week 11

Question/topic: What happens if democracy falters? How can our democracy survive?

Gershberg and Illing, Ch. 7-8 (83 pgs)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep4

Assignment: Reflection 10

### ***Considering the Social Quest for Reality and the Self: Media Literacy Tools***

#### Week 12

Question/topic: Where is the self in our digital engagement with “reality”? How is the mediated self a different kind of self?

-Bennett, [Endangered Habitat \(4 pgs.\)](#)

+podcast: TED Radio Hour - [“Attention”](#) (the digital self) (50 min.)

Possibly: Christine Rosen, “Expose Thyself”, *The Hedgehog Review*

Assignment: Media Inventory

[“Why Social Media Makes You Feel Bad...”](#), *The Conversation* (3 pgs.)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep5

Film Review 4 assigned

#### Week 13

Question/topic: How might we collectively think about and pursue knowledge of the real (aka “truth”)?

Baudrillard, from *Simulacra and Simulation* (20 pgs.)

+article on bias: [“Misinformation and Biases...”](#) (3 pgs.)

+video: [Endless Curiosity](#) (embedded in article) (2 min.)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep6

Film Review 4 Due

Final Essay Assigned

#### Week 14

Question/topic: What problems emerge in the social self in the digital or post-truth landscape?

Alan Jacobs, [Injured Parties: Considering the Wider Effects of Harmful Speech \(8 pgs.\)](#)

Frankfurt, “On Bullshit” (16 pgs.)

Haidt and Rose-Stockwell, [The Dark Psychology of Social Networks \(5 pgs.\)](#)

[Is Cancel Culture Silencing Debate? \(3 pgs.\)](#)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep7

#### Week 15

Question/topic: What does unfettered digitized engagement do to the self/our-selves?

Frank Pasquale, “The Algorithmic Self”, *Hedgehog Review*, Spring 2015 (12 pgs.)

Andrew Sullivan, “I Used to Be a Human Being” (13 pgs.)

+podcast: Invisibilia: “Our Computers, Ourselves” (56 min.)

Podcast: Witch Trials JKR Ep7

#### Week 16



Question/topic: Is there a viable alternative? Can we develop a vision of the common good that can overcome the problems of digital framing of life?

Alan Jacobs, "Tending the Digital Commons", *Hedgehog Review*, Spring 2018 (12 pgs.)

Poem: Berry - [Enemies](#)

Poem: Frost - [Mending Wall](#)

Final Essay Due

## IV. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

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At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

**Content:** *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the historical development of media technologies and the way different media shape their messaging.
- Identify, describe, and explain various public forums for discourse, culturally relevant conversations that can happen there, and ways that our media participation can hinder or help.
- Identify, describe, and explain the social dimension of our media participation and its implications for public discourse.

**Critical Thinking:** *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyze and evaluate ideas and arguments made by authors and scholars on the problems we encounter in our current media landscape and public discourse.
- Analyze and evaluate how different media forms shape the meaning and frame the content of messages and information.
- Analyze and evaluate proposed suggestions from authors and scholars for tending public discourse in restorative direction.
- Analyze and evaluate how one's own participation in media communications and forums for public discourse can be problematic as well as beneficial.

**Communication:** *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Communicate clearly that students are processing and engaging with the historical, philosophical, social, and personal components of the questions posed by the class.
- Communicate about how their own engagement with the material pushes their own understanding and practices beyond the mere content of the course material.
- Communicate with peers about the importance of the course content and to curate their own conversation about how we might move forward in our engagement with media and our participation in various arenas of public discourse.

**Connection:** *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect and reflect on the ways in which media participation can be adjusted to be more humanizing to themselves and for conversation with others.
- Connect and reflect about how their own field of study is a venue for applying ideas that emerge in the class.
- Connect and reflect on how our own deliberate curation of media and thoughtful consideration of particular areas of public discourse might spur toward responsible civic engagement.

## V. Quest Learning Experiences

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### 1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

Students will set up and host a creative salon project where students curate a public discourse event and write about it. Students will select a topic and relevant media content, host a salon where they invite 3-5 others to participate in viewing or listening to content, craft a discussion with participants, then write a reflective essay on the experience.

### 2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

Self-reflection is a core component of this course in the form of encouraged personal engagement and response. Students will submit weekly Reflection pieces that ask them to move from summary information of the week's content to personal reflection on the way the content intersects their lives. A midterm essay assignment will not only assess the student's learning of the material, but more importantly will show their processing of the ideas discussed. Also, in a grand culmination of the class, students will plan and execute a salon discussion with peers about a topic centered on the class's main questions.

## VI. Required Policies

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### Attendance Policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

### Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

## **UF Evaluations Process**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

## **University Honesty Policy**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

## **Counseling and Wellness Center**

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

## **The Writing Studio**

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

## **In-Class Recordings**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation,

assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.