

## **Sociology 106**

### **Freshman Seminar: Education in the Media**

**Fall, 2004: Thursday and Friday, 9-10:30 a.m.**

**Professor Stephen Plank**

In this course, we will examine schools and the media from a sociological perspective. After a few weeks of introductory and conceptual readings and discussions, we will switch to a mode of data collection and analysis. For several weeks, each student will be responsible for collecting all coverage of primary and secondary schools in one daily newspaper. As a group, we will develop methods of summarizing and coding the content of the various newspaper articles. By mid-semester, we will have a database covering (approximately, and if all goes as planned) three weeks and fifteen newspapers. From this database, students will conduct various basic analyses (of a qualitative or quantitative nature, as appropriate). Students will either test some hypotheses suggested by our early reading, or generate new hypotheses based on the amassed data. Three written assignments – spread throughout the semester – will give students the opportunity to synthesize their learning and articulate new ideas.

Some of the questions we'll be asking (and trying to answer) during the course include: With what "voices" or "tones" do newspapers report on schools? What interests or influences might shape media coverage of schools? If you were "Josephine Citizen" or "Joe Citizen," what view of schools would you form based upon reading your local newspaper? Would your emerging views differ according to where you lived? If so, what factors would be most salient in shaping your views – an urban versus suburban or rural setting; the ownership and editorial leadership of your local newspaper; the actual events and operations of the local schools; or broader social, political, and economic trends at that point in time?

#### **This is a writing course.**

This course is listed as a writing course (a "W" course), which will help you fulfill one of the important requirements of your undergraduate experience. As a "W" course, a student must write at least 20 pages throughout the semester. This page requirement will be met via the three assignments presented throughout the course. It is Professor Plank's obligation to provide critical comments and corrections on your written work; a single rewrite opportunity will be offered on each of the first two written assignments (but not on the third).

**The university has academic ethics policies. We will take them seriously. Please read the following:**

*The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.*

*Because this course will involve a combination of individual and collaborative work, we must take care to collaborate appropriately. Do not attach your name to a product toward which you have not contributed. Do not present another person's ideas or efforts without proper attribution. If you are feeling that another member of a working group is not contributing properly, address the issue early rather than late: Discuss the situation first with that group member and then with Professor Plank, if necessary.*

*Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student affairs and/or the chairman of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on "Academic Ethics for Undergraduates" and the Ethics Board Web site (<http://ethics.jhu.edu>) for more information.*

**Required books (available at the Gilman Book Center)**

Tyack & Cuban. *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Harvard University Press, paperback edition).

Downie, Jr., & Kaiser. *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril* (Vintage Books, paperback edition).

**Grading Criteria**

Writing Assignment #1 (with one revision permitted)	20%
Writing Assignment #2 (with one revision permitted)	20%
Final Paper (with no revision invited)	40%
Participation and successful collaboration	20%
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	100%

## **A bare-bones time line (subject to revision as the semester proceeds)**

9/2 & 3	Introductory lecture and viewing of video (“School: The story of American public education”).
9/9 & 10	Discussion of pp.1-84 of Tyack & Cuban book.
9/16 & 17	Discussion of pp.85-142 of Tyack & Cuban book.
9/23 & 24	Discussion of pp.3-110 of Downie & Kaiser book. LexisNexis session at MSEL with Ellen Keith (librarian).
9/30 & 10/1	Discussion of: * Marger’s “The mass media as a power institution” (copy provided by Professor Plank). * pp.195-273 of Downie & Kaiser book. * ideas of Gans, Gitlin, and other observers of media. <u>First writing assignment (4-6 pages) given.</u>
10/7 & 8	<u>First writing assignment collected.</u> Students will be assigned newspapers for comprehensive searching. We, collectively, will develop coding procedures for these newspapers. Data collection begins.
10/14 & 15	Week #1 of data collection concludes. Discuss progress and problems in class.
10/21 & 22	Week #2 of data collection concludes. Discuss progress and problems in class.
10/28 & 29	Week #3 of data collection concludes. Discuss progress and problems in class. <u>Second writing assignment (4-6 pages) given.</u>
11/4 & 5	<u>Second writing assignment collected.</u> Discussion of our database / refining coding / collaborative data analysis.
11/11 & 12	Further developing our database / refining coding / collaborative data analysis.
11/18 & 19	Further developing our database. Discussing final paper topics. <u>Final paper assignment (12-15 pages) given</u>
11/25 & 26	no class – Thanksgiving.
12/2 & 3	Discussion of final paper progress. Individual consultations with Professor Plank.
12/13	<u>Final paper (12-15 pages) due in Sociology Department office by 3pm.</u>

## **Office hours and contact information**

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