**General Education Course Inclusion Proposal**

**PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY**

*This proposal form is intended for departments proposing a course for inclusion in the Northern Michigan University General Education Program. Courses in a component satisfy both the Critical Thinking and the component learning outcomes. Departments should complete this form and submit it electronically through the General Education SHARE site.*

**Course Name and Number:** Intro to Mass Communications BC 165

**Home Department:** Communication and Performance Studies

**Department Chair Name and Contact Information** (Jim Cantrill, 227-2045, jcantril@nmu.edu)

**Expected frequency of Offering of the course** every semester (including summer 1 if it makes enrollment minimum)

**Official Course Status**: Has this course been approved by CUP and Senate? YES

**Overview of course** (please attach a current syllabus as well): *Please limit the overview to two pages (not including the syllabus)*

A. Overview of the course content

According to a recent Nielsen report, the average American adult spends over eleven hours each day with electronic media. Given how media consumption dominates our waking hours, it is important for students to examine the history and functions of mass media in our society and in their own personal lives.

Media history in this course is not so much about names and dates but about the conditions and actions that brought innovations to critical mass and what impact a particular medium has had on society and what future role it will likely play within society. Students will also learn about the daily practices and conventions for each major communications medium.

Students will be introduced to the study of media effects through major communication theories like agenda-setting, dependency theory and social cognitive theory. Students will also be challenged to develop methodologies for regulating their own media consumption (media literacy).

This course is broken down into six units. Four units provide students with an overview of specific media groups: 1) print media; 2) broadcast media and film; 3) interactive technologies (web and gaming); and 4) public relations and advertising. The other two units focus on communication and culture and social effects of media. Each unit addresses social and economic issues related to each communication medium and the text features media literacy segments for each chapter.

While the writing assignments may vary from one instructor to next, students will be required to write three to four thousand words each semester. This writing can come in the form of a research paper(s), written responses to discussion questions or responses to essay questions on exams. Writing will be assessed based on how well students formulate statements/arguments based on credible sources and sound reasoning. The following is an example of a discussion question that challenges students to synthesize and apply information learned earlier in the semester and addresses an important social issue suitable for analysis within the Perspectives on Society rubric.

*Earlier in the semester we covered a term known as "technological determinism." This concept suggests that technology can sometimes control our behavior rather than us controlling technology. Do you feel this is the case with the recent proliferation of video games? A significant portion of our population is spending time with gaming consoles and online gaming and critics argue gaming can displace participation in "real life" games or outdoor activities.*

*Also, in my lecture on gaming, I called attention to a web site that argues video games help us feel a sense of achievement and perhaps even self-actualization as highlighted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Do you consider this genuine achievement or virtual achievement?  The link for this site is:* [*http://www.werkkrew.com/2008/07/09/maslows-needs-and-gaming/*](http://www.werkkrew.com/2008/07/09/maslows-needs-and-gaming/)

*Please conduct additional research and post your comments on gaming within the context of technological determinism and Maslow's hierarchy.*

The course as it presently stands offers a mix of applied knowledge about particular careers in this field, media history and theoretical knowledge about social effects of media and issues of media literacy. The course will still retain some of the applied aspects, but more class time will be devoted to broader issues more suited to addressing the learning objectives for Perspectives on Society. The learning objectives for this course are formally stated in the syllabus (see Appendix A).

B. Explain why this course satisfies the Component specified and significantly addresses both learning outcomes

Critical Thinking Rubric

This course will offer an excellent opportunity to assess writing ability and critical thinking. More than half of the points available in this course require some form of writing and critical thinking skills. While assessment is different than grading, the structure is already in place for collecting and assessing data for this rubric. Multiple choice questions can also be framed in a way that require students to make connections rather than simply regurgitating facts.

*Evidence*

Students will be required to provide written responses to discussion questions and exam essays on a regular basis. They will also write at least one research paper. In their writing, students must support statements and arguments with evidence from credible sources (web articles, journal articles and government data).

*Integrate*

Written responses to online discussion questions, exam essays and research final papers must demonstrate the ability to synthesize major themes and resources from lecture, the textbook and other sources. Some of the assessment for integration could be done with selected multiple choice questions as well.

*Evaluate*

Written responses to online discussion questions, exam essays and research papers must demonstrate the ability to logically connect conclusions and/or opinions to an appropriate range of information.

Perspectives on Society Rubric

*Analysis of Society*

In this course we highlight social issues such as portrayal of female body types in media, media violence and portrayals of alcohol use. These types of issues are ideal for addressing the dimensions for Perspectives on Society. About fifty percent of lecture time and the majority of discussion questions tackle social issues related to mass media. As previously stated, students are not only required to learn about these social issues, they are asked to analyze these issues and apply media literacy skills (develop a methodology) for regulating their own media consumption.

*Ethical Issues*

Ethics will be featured throughout the semester with topics like whether journalists should be embedded with military units for long periods of time and the ethical and legal issues surrounding the publication of “classified” information. Students will be asked to identify ethical issues and their origins and explain what they perceive to be the impact of these issues within society and the impact on them personally.

*Development and Context of Society*

Social effects of media are not only viewed through the lens of theory, they are looked at through other themes like economics and media history. For example, it is impossible to comprehend why we get what we get from mass media institutions without first understanding large media oligopolies and their control over content and deployment of technology. For example, ninety percent of what we read, see and hear in American mass media is provided by six major corporations. In 1983, 50 different companies provided this same level of information and entertainment. Historical examples like RCA crushing the development of FM radio in the 1940s also reveals how large media institutions do not always opt for the best technology. Instead they often favor the most profitable technologies. Outcomes assessment can target whether or not students are utilizing these themes as a way to analyze trends and effects within human society.

C. Describe the target audience

BC 165 has typically been taken by CAPS majors, but it usually draws about ten percent of the class population from students in other majors. Because media plays such a large role in the lives of Americans, this course is certainly relevant to the entire student population as a general education course. The emphasis on media history, social effects, writing and critical thinking make it good option within the Perspectives on Society rubric.

D. Give information on other roles this course may serve

BC 165 is not currently a requirement for any majors outside of the CAPS department. It is required for most CAPS majors except those majoring in multimedia journalism, communication studies and theatre. It is offered as an elective for students pursuing the multimedia journalism major.

E. Provide any other information that may be relevant to the review of the course by GEC

Faculty teaching BC 165 will employ the same course objectives and choose the same textbook, but pedagogical approaches vary. Some may not use online discussion but rather choose to have students write short papers on similar topics. Regardless of their approach to the course or the different kinds of assignments they use, all instructors teaching BC 165 have agreed to coordinate activities so that at least 30% of the graded material will be subjected to learning outcomes analysis using the approved rubric. Historically, we have capped sections at 30 students though the course could be taught to larger numbers.

**PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
CRITICAL THINKING**

*Attainment of the CRITICAL THINKING Learning Outcome is required for courses in this component. There are several dimensions to this learning outcome. Please complete the following Plan for Assessment with information regarding course assignments (type, frequency, importance) that will be used by the department to assess the attainment of students in each of the dimensions of the learning outcome. Type refers to the types of assignments used for assessment such as written work, presentations, etc. Frequency refers to the number of assignments included such as a single paper or multiple papers. Importance refers to the relative emphasis or weight of the assignment to the entire course. For each dimension, please specify the expected success rate for students completing the course that meet the proficiency level and explain your reasoning. Please refer to the Critical Thinking Rubric for more information on student performance/proficiency in this area. Note that courses are expected to meaningfully address all dimensions of the learning outcome.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Evidence** | Assesses quality of information that may be integrated into an argument | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and research papers, and/or Projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least four times each semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 50%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect 75% of the students to demonstrate proficiency (see coding form below) in the Evidence dimension of the Critical Thinking rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will consider the extent to which students rely upon high quality support (i.e., source citations, quoted material, facts or figures, representative examples) for statements and arguments made in response to discussion questions, exam essays and ideas conveyed in research papers. The evidence presented in the student’s written work will be evaluated based on relevance to the topic, accuracy and logical consistency. Ultimately, good “evidence” should clearly support the inferences and conclusions made by the writer. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Integrate** | Integrates insight and or reasoning with previous understanding to reach informed conclusions and/or understanding | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and papers, and/or Projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least twice a semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 50%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect students in BC 165 to attain a proficiency of 75% in the Integrate dimension of the Critical Thinking rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will consider the extent to which students use information gained in the course or from prior experience (e.g., other courses taken, employment settings, personal lives) to provide a well-reasoned and insightful synthesis in addressing discussion questions, exam essays and research papers. For example, a discussion question might require students to respond to the assertion that mass media are dominant storytellers in our culture. They would be asked to respond in a manner that not only requires evidence but to consider this assertion in light of their own experiences with mass media. Students would also be asked to demonstrate how they might contest the influence of dominant media culture based on some of the contesting actions taken by other individuals and groups that were featured in the text or in lecture. |
| **Evaluate** | Evaluates information, ideas, and activities according to established principles and guidelines | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and papers, and/or projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least twice a semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 50%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect students in BC 165 to attain a proficiency of 75% in the Evaluate dimension of the Critical Thinking rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will consider the extent to which students rely upon established descriptive frameworks. For example, students will be asked to view technological developments in communications technology within the context of Marshall McLuhan’s theory of technological determinism. |

**PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Analysis of society** | Analysis of social issues, structures and processes or events | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and papers, and/or projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least twice a semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 30%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect students in BC 165 to attain a proficiency of 75% in the Analysis of Society dimension of the Perspectives on Society rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will routinely ask students to analyze social issues such as race, gender and age stereotyping in media. Students will not only be asked to cite examples but attempt to explain why such stereotypes are repeated and how these portrays fit within a larger theoretical framework of cultivation analysis and social construction of reality. |
| **Ethical Issues** | Addressing ethical issues in society | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and papers, and/or Projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least twice a semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 30%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect students in BC 165 to attain a proficiency of 75% in the Ethical dimension of the Perspectives on Society rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will ask students to write responses to discussion questions or exam essay questions relating to important ethical issues like news content being influenced by advertisers or media infringing on a person’s right to privacy. |
| **Development and context of society** | Explore themes in the development of human society | *Task Type*: Written responses to discussion questions, essay examinations and papers, and/or projects (subjected to rubric analysis independent of grading scale)  *Frequency*: At least twice a semester  *Overall Grading Weight*: 30%  *Expected Proficiency Rate*: We expect students in BC 165 to attain a proficiency of 75% in the Analysis of Society dimension of the Perspectives on Society rubric.  *Link Between Assessment Dimension & Assessment Plan*: Instructors will ask students to consider modern communications issues in light of major themes or significant historical events. For example, students might be asked to analyze present day news coverage in light of the progressive era of journalism in the early 20th Century. |