

Intro. To Mass Communication

MCOM 0101

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PURPOSE: Marshall McLuhan once said, “We don’t know who discovered water, but you can be damn sure it wasn’t the fish.” We all swim in mass media every day, exposed to thousands of media images and sounds, so much so that media have come to seem just part of the natural landscape of our lives. It is this very naturalness or “invisibility” which gives the media their power to influence how we see the world. We will attempt in this course to step out of the stream of mass media culture and look back at it critically, seeking to understand its structures, messages, and effects.

We will draw on books and other texts in a comprehensive survey and critical analysis of mass communication. You will also be able to draw on what you know from your life’s experience as a consumer of mass communication. You will be introduced, as well, to a number of the world’s leading scholars of mass communication through videos that critically examine different aspects of mass media.

Method: This course is an on-line course, which we will be taught through learning modules that correspond to the text as well as video and web-based material. There will be one actual class meeting at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. As we progress through the semester, we might decide on a voluntary mid-term in-person meeting, as well. I will also be available to meet during my regular office hours or by special arrangement if those don’t work for you.

Learn PLATO: To make sure you are up to speed with the technology for this course, please consult the following sites.

http://www.wsc.ma.edu/plato/Seven_Steps_To_Logging_Into_Vista.html

http://www.webct.com/tuneup/viewpage?name=tuneup_start

http://www.webct.com/tuneup/viewpage?name=tuneup_browser_troubleshoot

TEXT: *The Media of Mass Communication*, John Vivian, 8th. ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008).

I will post a full syllabus and class schedule by the first day of spring classes.

We will start, though, by getting to know each other a bit. So, in the first week, I will ask you to post some basic information about yourself (and a photo, if you wish – purely optional). Let us know your name, year in the college, hometown, major and minors if any, hobbies and interests, and anything else you want to tell us about yourself. At the first class, I will gather a bit more information on your media habits and preferences, as well.

As for my introduction, I will patch in a blurb that went with a recent book chapter that I wrote. These things

are always written in the third person.

Biographical Sketch

Tom Gardner is assistant professor of communication at Westfield State College, Westfield, MA.

He was, previously, managing director of the Media Education Foundation, the nation's leading producer and distributor of educational videos on media and culture. He researched and co-produced the MEF video, "Framing an Execution: The Media and Mumia Abu-Jamal." He has published in numerous national publications and has spoken at more than 100 campuses.

He earlier served as an editor and communications director at Harvard Divinity School, the Harvard Institute for International Development, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the Alabama State Employees Association. A native southerner, Tom was a leading activist in the southern civil rights and national peace movements of the sixties and seventies. He later became an award-winning senior political reporter and columnist at the Pulitzer-Prize winning *Montgomery Advertiser* in Alabama.

He holds a B.A. in sociology from the University of Virginia, an M.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Georgia, a Master in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His dissertation addressed the connections between mass media and the criminal justice system.

He is a director of the Men's Resource Center for Change and is active in a number of professional associations. He lives with his wife, Karen Levine, and 12-year-old son Koby in Amherst, MA. His daughter Sarah is in graduate school at Johns Hopkins in Washington, D.C.

I guess I should add that my favorite extra-curricular activity has been coaching my son's soccer team for the past few years. He is now playing in the premiere league (MAPLE) with Western United, which is one of the top five teams in the state in his age-group and has a real coach. So my coaching has been limited lately to an indoor team from Amherst. I should have been coaching swimming anyway, since that was my college sport, but he is hooked on soccer.



"Professor Gardner with son Koby (12) and daughter Sarah (25)"