

**Kennesaw State University – COM 4425 Gender, Race and Media (Wassmuth) – Fall 2007  
SYLLABUS**

**LOGISTICS**

Lecture: Wednesday 18:30 to 21:15  
Classroom: Social Sciences Building #2032  
Instructor: Dr. Birgit Wassmuth (say "Vass-moot")  
Office: Social Sciences Building #5106  
Office hours: By appointment only  
Phone: (770) 423-6298  
Fax: [770] 423-6740  
E-mail: bwassmut@kennesaw.edu  
Web site: <http://vista.kennesaw.edu>

**MISSION**

The Department of Communication at Kennesaw State University prepares its graduates to be effective, life-long communicators, pro-active leaders, and scholarly practitioners who create, design, deliver, and interpret the meaning of messages in interpersonal, organizational, and societal contexts. Our graduates will be prepared to actively contribute to the continuously evolving local and global communities while adapting to the constantly changing technological environment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

An examination of mass media portrayals of gender and race, from years past to present. Students will analyze media artifacts, identify recurring themes, and explore research about the societal effects of stereotypical media portrayals. (3 credit hours; prerequisite: COM 2230 Introduction to Mass Communication, or instructor's permission)

**RATIONALE**

A sensitive approach to gender, race, ethnicity and the media is no longer just the right thing to do, it is a matter of survival and success in modern business. Ethnic populations are growing faster than white populations, highlighting once ignored consumer markets and audiences. And, as technology expands, the world becomes more interconnected and fills the global village with a diversity of populations. This course focuses on the important role the media play in the coverage and portrayal of people from many sections of a diverse society.

**OBJECTIVE**

This course will help you identify bias in the media toward racial and ethnic groups, women, gay and lesbian members of the community, and other underrepresented populations. It will help you develop a working knowledge of the historical roles the media have played in creating awareness of racial, ethnic, and gender issues. It will offer insights into the pervasiveness of stereotyping in the media and will offer strategies to avoid stereotyping in an effort to prepare you for productive careers, active leadership, and responsible citizenship in a global community.

**WHAT YOU WILL ACCOMPLISH**

By the end of the semester you will

- be able to explain what stereotypes are and why bias exists
- better understand how images affect perception and behavior
- know how and why media images and reality conflict
- have examined several mass media theories
- have become a more observant and critical media consumer
- be more aware of how mass media have marginalized non-majority populations
- better understand your personal responsibility when working in or with the media
- be able to suggest solutions for more sensitivity toward "otherness" within your field of study, work environment, and career
- have become a change agent with the privilege and obligation to make a difference in the diverse world in which we live

### A FEW GROUND RULES

Active and meaningful class participation are essential to making this course a successful and rewarding experience. So is respect for the opinions of others. Gender, race and ethnicity are sensitive topics. We expect a calm and rational exchange of ideas and views even though we may strongly disagree. We will not tolerate shouting, name-calling, and other disrespectful behavior, neither in class nor online.

This course is designed to take you outside your comfort zone and will do so many times. It will also offer constructive ways to deal with and overcome your discomfort. Please, keep an open mind, always.

### TEACHING FORMAT

Illustrated lectures; class discussions; viewing of movie clips and documentaries; guest speakers; in-class exercises; presentations; critiques; dialogue, small group work.

### TEXTBOOK (required)

Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity across Audiences, Content, and Producers (2004), by Rebecca Ann Lind

### OTHER BOOKS (highly recommended)

Black Like Me (1996, 1960), by John Howard Griffin

Self-Made Man: A Woman's Journey into Manhood and Back Again (2006), by Norah Vincent  
Nickel and Dimed (2001), by Barbara Ehrenreich

### WEBSITE

All course-related information is available to you anytime and from anywhere on WebCT-Vista at <http://vista.kennesaw.edu>. Please check it on a regular basis as the information there evolves over the course of the semester. Some assignments may have to be completed online.

### INFORMATION LITERACY

Fact finding, evaluative research, and critical thinking will be an integral part of this course to complement the information gained from the lectures and the textbook. I expect you be all-inclusive in your information-gathering and critical in your selection of sources. This will prepare you better for a constructive discourse in class.

## MEDIA USE

To succeed in this course, you must keep up with current affairs, especially as they are "told" by the media. This can be accomplished by reading a mainstream daily newspaper (paper or online), regularly reading an alternative publication, watching TV news, listening to the radio, and "reading" the Internet. You should also look at Time or Newsweek each week (ideally both, for comparison).

It is a good idea to build a personal clip file of articles and advertisements dealing with gender, race and ethnicity or aspects of the lives of underrepresented populations. Include items that you find to be unbalanced, unfair, offensive, biased, inappropriate, etc. as well as examples of outstanding coverage as you perceive it. At every class meeting, you will be asked to discuss some of the things you have found or observed in the media.

## TOOLS AND MATERIALS

KSU notebook (dark blue, single subject) to be used as your journal

Ring binder (or notebook) for note taking and to hold handouts

Computer access

Word processing

Internet access

USB jump drive

Glue stick

Stapler

Scissors

Be prepared to pay for photocopies, color photo copies, and binding.

## EMAIL COMMUNICATION AND NETIQUETTE

You are expected to use your assigned KSU email account at all times as university-related information will only go to that address.

Please be respectful, courteous and professional in your email communication. Never write an email in anger or when upset. Take a deep breath or, even better, sleep over it first. I will ignore emotionally written emails that show disrespect.

To get my attention, make sure to include specific information in the subject line. Be clear in your writing to make it easy for me to respond. Always sign off with your full name. If this information is missing you risk that your email will be deleted because it may mimic a virus or Spam.

Usually, I will respond to your email within 48 hours, unless I am out of town at a conference.

Sometimes, I may hold my response until the next class meeting if I think that the answer can wait and will benefit everybody in the class.

## COMPUTER USE

It is crucial to back up your computer work on a regular basis. I suggest that you always store your personal files on a memory stick or jump drive or any other portable storage device.

Standard server maintenance or special repairs may sometimes cause files to be deleted. It is your responsibility to have back-ups of your work on a removable storage device. Neither Kennesaw State University nor the Department of Communication is responsible for "lost" or "damaged" files.

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Twice-weekly journal entries (30 @ 5 pts), 150 points

Newspaper/magazine clippings glued into journal (25 @ 2 pts), 50 pts

Outside your comfort zone paper #1 (self reflection), 100 pts

Outside your comfort zone paper #2 (authentic voice interview), 100 pts

Outside your comfort zone paper #3 (event attendance), 100 pts

Your turn #1: Discussion leader, 100 pts

Your turn #2: Community/civic engagement, 100 pts

Your turn #3: Letter to the editor (published), 100 pts

Final exam, 200 pts

TOTAL for undergraduate students: 1000 pts = 100%

Regular attendance and meaningful participation in class and online discussions are expected throughout the semester.

## DEADLINES

Due dates for assignments are either indicated on the course calendar, or they will be announced in class. The deadline is always at the beginning of class. Deadlines are absolute. Late assignments (late without a valid excuse) will receive a point value of zero.

## GRADING POLICY

Your course grade will be calculated from a cumulative point basis. No curve. Throughout the semester you can easily calculate your grade by dividing your "points earned" by the total points possible. Please see the online grade book for details on your performance evaluations.

## GRADING SCALE

90% - 100% = A (excellent)

80% - 89.99% = B (good to very good)

70% - 79.99% = C (average, acceptable, OK)

60% - 69.99% = D (weak, below average, disappointing)

less than 60% = F (doesn't meet minimum expectations)

## ATTENDANCE

This course is taught like a seminar, which requires active and meaningful participation by students at every class meeting. It covers an extensive amount of material and encourages original and critical thinking. Meaningful participation in discussions, presentations and critiques is essential for a successful completion of this class. So, please come prepared with your assigned readings completed before each class meeting.

Excessive absences will jeopardize your success in this course. Excessive, in this context, is defined by more than two recorded, unexcused absences. This means that three unexcused absences will drop your final grade by one whole grade (same as losing 100 points). Missing 50% of a class meeting counts as an absence. Attendance will be taken at every class meeting.

## EXCUSED ABSENCES

If you have to miss a regularly scheduled class meeting you must notify me in writing either in advance or within 24 hours after the missed class. Please send me an e-mail message to that effect. If you call, it is appreciated but not sufficient to count for a valid excuse. Acceptable

excuses are those concerning your own health or that of an immediate family member (life-threatening situations only!). Also acceptable reasons are legal obligations, and participation in university-sponsored out of town varsity sports competitions. Those excuses require proper written documentation to be considered valid. They may not be written by you, a roommate, a friend, or a member of your family.

#### INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PROTECTION

Lectures given in this course are the property of the instructor and Kennesaw State University. Class lectures may not be recorded in any form without prior permission from me or any guest lecturers that may speak to this class. Recordings, including class notes, may not be used for commercial purposes.

#### ACADEMIC HONESTY

Kennesaw State University and the Department of Communication are committed to the highest standards of academic and professional ethics. We expect our students to adhere to those standards. Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest independent of whether or not the effort is successful.

The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences ranging from losing points on an assignment to probation or expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, please consult with your instructor before you hand in an assignment.

Cheating or assisting to cheat, plagiarism, unauthorized possession of exams, hired help (Web papers), unauthorized copying of software, destruction or vandalizing of library material or lab facilities, such as computers, scanners and printers, or multi-media equipment are but a few violations of academic integrity. A student who has committed such an act has failed to meet a basic requirement of satisfactory academic performance. Please refer to the Student Conduct Regulations chapter in your KSU Student Handbook for more details.

#### INCOMPLETES

No incompletes will be granted in this course, unless there is a valid medical or family emergency which occurs after the 11th week of the semester. If that is the case, please send me a written request no later than two weeks before the end of the semester. The course will have to be completed by the sixth week of the following semester or summer term.

A missed assignment or class project will not automatically entitle you to get an incomplete. Also, note that an incomplete grade may only be granted if a student has reached at least a "C" average or better at that point.

#### SENSITIVITY AND RESPECT

As an individual and member of this academic community, I am strongly committed to sensitivity concerning gender, race, culture, age, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. Should you feel embarrassed or hurt by any sexist, racist or otherwise offensive remarks or behavior displayed by an instructor, guest speaker, teaching assistant or student in this class, please bring this matter to my attention right away. Always feel free to discuss issues of such

delicate nature with your instructor, adviser, or mentor.

#### STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you have a visible or invisible disability and will require academic accommodations in this course, I would be happy to discuss your needs. Accommodations are coordinated through Disabled Student Support Services. Please contact Carol Pope at [cpope@kennesaw.edu](mailto:cpope@kennesaw.edu) or call 770-423-6443.

#### CELL PHONES AND IPODS

As a courtesy to me and everyone around you, please turn off your cellular phones before class begins. Also, turn off your iPod or other entertainment device and the remove the ear piece(s) from your ear(s).

#### FEEDBACK

Because I believe in the importance of constructive feedback I encourage you to voice your reactions to this course not just on the last day of classes but at any time throughout the semester. That way, you will be the beneficiaries of your own suggestions for improvement.

#### THANK YOU AND HAVE A GREAT SEMESTER!

--Dr. Birgit Wassmuth, August 15, 2007

*"Virtually every minority characterization was designed to reinforce the attitude of White superiority."*

--- Clint Wilson & Felix Gutiérrez, Minorities and the Media