

# MSCM 3372, Spring 2024

## Critical Analysis of the Media

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:00-11:50 a.m.

### Instructor Information:

Dr. Michael Dreher  
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Office Hours: TR 9:30-12:00, MW 1:00-2:00

I'm typically around far more frequently than these office hours. The best place to check each week is on my door, as I may have various meetings that pop up. But honestly, I encourage you to come by -- part of the reason I'm at a school like Georgia College & State University is because I enjoy working with students.

### Course Description:

This course is aimed at equipping students with tools to understand, analyze, and evaluate media, including news, movies, television shows, video games, Twitter\*, Facebook, and other forms of social media.

\*This course description was created before the rebranding of Twitter/X. By the time we can get it changed, it's possible Elon Musk will rename it again.

### Course Objectives:

There are always two types of course objectives... the objectives that should be accomplished no matter who teaches the course (the department objectives), and the objectives each individual instructor brings to the course. Here they are for this class:

#### Department Objectives:

1. Demonstrate an ability to evaluate various forms of media using a variety of analytical tools.
2. Demonstrate an ability to analyze various forms of media in their historical contexts.
3. Demonstrate an ability to analyze how aesthetics contributes to media message-making.

#### My additional objective:

1. To successfully write a media analysis that makes a consistent, effective argument and demonstrates understanding of a particular theoretical framework.

### Textbook:

Ott, Brian L. and Robert L. Mack. *Critical Media Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019. Available in E-book, printed, or Kindle edition.

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## What I'd like you to know about this class:

Also known as "Please read this section. You'll learn about me and how I approach this class."

- *I look upon this class as an introduction to the critical analysis of media. I see this course as a "upper-level survey course." Considering that many of the subjects we will cover have in some cases full-length books and journal articles written about them, it's hard to cover everything in-depth. There are lots of different topics that we can and arguably should cover. I look at this class as both a theory course (what are some theories that you need to know?) and a genre course (what are some key media genres that we can analyze?).*
- *Why should you care about the first bullet point above? I want you to be excited about the course... and not disappointed because we can't do everything in this class. My colleagues are planning courses that deal more in-depth with specific genres, and of course, the English department also teaches some genre-based courses as well. But for those of you who like a variety of different forms of media, I think you'll enjoy what we do.*
- *There are a variety of approaches and theories with which you should have some passing familiarity. The way I view this class, you'll be both a generalist and specialist -- you'll learn a bit about a variety of theories, but you'll also really delve deeper into at least one particular theory.*
- **You'll learn by doing in this class** - *the theories and the perspectives are designed to give you a critical vocabulary to help you better articulate your arguments and to provide backing to support your ideas. You should expect that our time together will consist of reviewing those perspectives and putting them into practice. I recognize that not everyone will feel the same comfort level discussing in class. But our in-class time will give you practical ways about thinking about the effects of media.*
- *We'll learn from each other. There are forms of media that each of us are more interested in as opposed to others. That doesn't make one form necessarily less relevant than another. We've learned about the importance of Twitter in journalism and political communication, and TikTok when it comes to cultural trends and even social activism. **My hope is that you'll grab onto a form of media (if you haven't already) and find some text that makes you curious... and that you'll share that curiosity and what you learn with the rest of us.***
- *As we discuss in Media Literacy, media convergence is a real issue that impacts how we view communication. How and why does it matter that a movie is viewed on a computer screen vs. a large TV screen vs. a movie theater? Does it impact the way in which we analyze the movie? Should it?*
- *If you've had me before, you should know that I've rethought my attendance policies, and I'm moving toward a less lenient policy. I'm doing so because I've noticed people missing class more frequently over the last couple of semesters, and I really do want to see you in class!*
- **What should you take away from this course?** *What I want to do for you is to provide you tools, examples, and ways of thinking so that you can better understand the influence of particular media texts and their relationship to other media texts.*

## Assignments and Weighting

Assignment	Weight
Attendance and Reacting to Class Discussion	25%
Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	15%
Final Paper	30%
In-Class Reviews/Quizzes	15%

### Attendance and The “React to Class Discussion” Assignments:

*Let's be real with each other. In discussion-based classes that otherwise don't have an attendance policy, it's easy for two things to happen:*

- *IT'S TEMPTING TO SIMPLY NOT SHOW UP TO CLASS.*
- *IT'S TEMPTING TO NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE DISCUSSION.*

*Both of those make discussion courses less fun for you and for me.*

*Honesty time: I love having each of you in class. I love learning from each of you, because you experience media differently than I do. But we can't learn together when we're not all here. I hate having attendance policies that require you to be here a certain number of days or else you get penalized. But when some people literally don't show up for half of the semester, it's time for me to change. I prefer the carrot to the stick. We'll try the carrot first.*

*So I've come up with a new idea that helps reinforce what we've just learned, gives you an incentive to come to class even without tests (something I'm not also fond of because their timed nature does negatively impact some people more than others), and serves as a way of tying together the things we do. That's what the “react to class discussion” assignments are for. If you want to think of them as a journal entry (similar to past classes some of you might have had with me), go for it. But here are the requirements for these assignments:*

- 1. After each class, you'll pick one (or more) of the major ideas we talked about during the class. It could be our analysis of a media clip, it could be about a theory, or something else.*
- 2. You tell me what you think: do you agree with what was said/discussed, or do you disagree? More importantly, why do you feel that way?*

*I'll have them in Georgia View, with a specific “board” for each of you. I may or may not respond individually on the board, or I may bring up ideas in class (attributed only if you want to be attributed). But I'll read them!*

*They will be due **at 12:01 a.m. the day of the next class.** That way I can read them in the morning before the next class. So for a Monday class, the entry is due at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday.*

*I may also choose to have an online “backchannel” set up in class (think YikYak, but without all the nastiness and more academic in nature). If that's something that y'all would like, I have a service that I could institute for our class. We'll talk about this the first week of class.*

*Should this fail to bring attendance rates higher, I reserve the right to institute a policy that does penalize for unexcused absences, and to make changes accordingly.*

## **Guidelines for Paper 1, Paper 2, and the Final Paper**

*The three papers are designed to allow you to study a media text in more detail by applying one of the theories that we'll discuss to that particular text. Most criticisms follow a similar format:*

*Part 1: Your argument for your topic. In this part of the paper, you'll describe and explain the specific media text you've chosen, and why it's worthy of study. Essentially, you'll answer the question: "So what?" Why is this worth examining?"*

*Part 2: You'll incorporate a literature review that includes at least six different sources that talks about your media text and your theoretical framework.*

*Part 3: You'll describe the rhetorical approach you wish to take, and why that approach is an appropriate one. You'll also tell me how you've limited the topic - what specific part of the topic are you going to explore? (You can't study the entirety of *Friends*, but you could study a particular episode or character, just as an example.)*

*Part 4: Conducting the analysis. You'll apply your method to your topic. This will be a significant portion of the paper. This is where you'll include parts of the text that you're analyzing, such as dialogue, scene, etc.*

*Part 5: Implications/conclusion: You'll consider the implications of your analysis. In other words, "So what? Where do we go from here?"*

*Part 6: The final version of the paper. The final paper will be 12-15 pages, while the individual papers may end up closer to 4-6 pages.*

**How does the final paper differ from the other two papers?**

- *The final paper will have all six parts mentioned above.*
- *The first and second paper will skip the second part. I look at those papers as a chance to practice your analysis skills in a written form for the final paper and presentation.*

*The final presentation will be 6-8 minutes, and will focus primarily on the analysis of the text that you've chosen. Think of this as a practice for a presentation at a conference. I do expect that the final project would be of sufficient quality to present at a local, state, or regional conference, and I do hope that some of you will consider this option.*

*Expect that shortly after Spring Break, I'll start asking you about the final paper, and that we'll have a check-in that we'll decide together.*

**Rubric for assignments....**

	Outstanding 4	Good 3	Fair 2	Poor 1
<b>Explanation of issues</b>	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
<b>Evidence</b> Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.
<b>Influence of context and assumptions</b>	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.
<b>Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)</b>	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
<b>Control of syntax and mechanics</b>	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language used has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.

# GCSU Official Policies...

## Religious Observance Policy

Georgia College values the religious diversity of our students. Major religious holidays that will be observed on class days are included on the academic calendar for each term.

Students are permitted to miss class in observance of religious holidays and other activities observed by a religious group of which the student is a member without academic penalty. Observance is limited to the date(s) of the holiday; supplemental time (e.g., travel time to go home to observe the holiday with family) is not eligible for accommodation. Exercising one's rights under this policy is subject to the GC Honor Code.

Students who will miss class in observance of a religious holiday or event are required to notify each instructor in writing within the first week of class of the semester in which the observance occurs and to make up the coursework missed as a result of the absence. The Religious Observance Faculty Notification Form may be used to facilitate this notification. The nature of the make-up assignments and the deadline for completion of such assignments are at the sole discretion of the instructor. Given the time limitations inherent in completing end-of-semester assignments and final exams, this policy does not apply during finals week. Students are expected to take final exams at the scheduled times and complete end-of-semester work by the deadlines set by each instructor.

Form: <https://www.gcsu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/Religious%20Observance%20Policy%20Notification%20Form%202022-10-17.pdf>

Failure to follow the prescribed procedures voids all student rights under this policy. Students may appeal actions taken by an instructor under this policy through the [GC academic grievance process](#).

## Assistance for Student Needs Related to Disability

If you have a disability as described by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, you may be eligible to receive accommodations to assist in programmatic and physical accessibility. The Student Disability Resource Center can assist you in formulating a reasonable accommodation plan and in providing support in developing appropriate accommodations to ensure equal access to all GC programs and facilities. Course requirements will not be waived, but accommodations may assist you in meeting the requirements. For documentation requirements and for additional information, we recommend that you contact the Student Disability Resource Center located in Russell Library 109 at 478-445-5931.

## Student Mental Health

In order to best meet the needs of students and their mental health, GCSU provides on-campus Counseling Services (478-445-5331). Additionally, the GCSU 24/7 Emotional Support Line (833-855-0085) is available for students to speak to a counselor for in-the-moment support for large or small concerns. Online counseling is available through the University System of Georgia (USG) at LiveHealth Online (<https://usg.startlivehealthonline.com>) by using the service key GCSUSTUDENT and selecting the "University System of Georgia LiveHealth Online StudentTeletherapy" tile.

## Academic Honesty

The integrity of students and their written and oral work is a critical component of the academic process. The submission of another's work as one's own is plagiarism and will be dealt with using the procedures outlined in the GC Catalog. Remember that allowing another student to copy one's own work violates standards of academic integrity.

## Student Rating of Instruction Survey

Given the technological sophistication of Georgia College students, the student opinion survey is being delivered through an online process. Your constructive feedback plays an indispensable role in shaping quality education at Georgia College. All responses are completely confidential and your name is not stored with your responses in any way. In addition, instructors will not see any results of the opinion survey until after final grades are submitted to the University. An invitation to complete the online opinion survey is distributed to students near the end of the semester. Your participation in this very important process is greatly appreciated.

## Student Use of Copyrighted Materials

As a student your ability to post or link to copyrighted material is governed by United States copyright law. The law allows for students to post or link to copyrighted materials within the course environment when the materials are pertinent to course work. Students are expected to adhere to the stipulations of the Georgia College Honor Code, which addresses plagiarism. Violations are subject to disciplinary action. Policy recognizes that exclusive rights of copyright holders are balanced by limitations on those rights under federal copyright law, including the right to make a fair use of copyrighted materials. The absence of a copyright notice or symbol on a work does not denote a lack of copyright. Failure to comply with this policy, including federal copyright laws, may result in restriction or loss of university network access and/or disciplinary action through the Office of Student Life. For questions involving copyright issues, please consult the GC Office of Legal Affairs. Refer to the USG Policy on the Use of Copyrighted Works at <https://www.usg.edu/copyright>.

## Electronic Recording Policy

Electronic video and/or audio recording is not permitted during any class unless the student obtains permission from the instructor and every student present. If permission is granted, any distribution of the recording is prohibited. Violation of this policy is grounds for removal from the class and referral for disciplinary action. Students granted specific electronic recording accommodations from Disability Services do not require special permission; however, the instructor must be notified. Any distribution is prohibited.

## Academic Grievances or Appeals

An academic grievance or appeal is an allegation by a student of substantial and/or unjustified deviation, to the student's detriment, from policies, procedures and/or requirements regarding admission, grading policies, special agreements, instructor's requirements and academic requirements of the University. Students shall have the right to file academic grievances or appeals according to the procedures approved by the University and outlined in the University Catalog.

## Fire Drills

Fire drills will be conducted annually. In the event of a fire alarm, students will exit the building in a quick and orderly manner through the nearest hallway exit. Learn the floor plan and exits of the building. Do not use elevators. If you encounter heavy smoke, crawl on the floor so as to gain fresh air. Assist disabled persons and others if possible without endangering your own life. Assemble for a head count on the front lawn of main campus or other designated assembly area.

## Course Schedule

We may change parts of the schedule based on our progress and/or student interest. Any such changes will be noted in class and through an updated course schedule. Assignments (or readings) will be due on the date listed. *Please note: I am taking the chapters out of order for thematic reasons.*

We'll decide the different media texts that we'll use on our analysis days. For now, they're listed as "Analysis Day 1," "Analysis Day 2, etc." We'll decide these texts at the end of the first week, and the syllabus will be updated accordingly. (When I say "text," I mean something that we can analyze. Movies, TV shows, etc., are texts.)

Date:	Day	Class Topics	What should you take away from today?	Assignments
<b>Mon. 1/8</b>	<b>1</b>	Introduction to class		
<b>Wed. 1/10</b>	<b>2</b>	Introduction to media criticism	What does it mean to do criticism instead of just giving opinions? And how do we do criticisms anyway?	
<b>Fri. 1/12</b>	<b>3</b>	Critical Media Studies	What does it mean to examine media, and how does media convergence impact how we critique media texts?	Chapter 1
<b>Mon. 1/15</b>		Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (No Class)		
<b>Wed. 1/17</b>	<b>4</b>	Audience Reception Theories	Take away the theoretical successors to the hypodermic needle, uses and gratification theory, cultivation theory and even agenda setting. What role does the audience play in determining meaning? (Potential Swiftie alert!)	Chapter 10
<b>Fri. 1/19</b>	<b>5</b>	Polysemy	You'll learn what the word means and why it's so important to what we study!	Chapter 10
<b>Mon. 1/22</b>	<b>6</b>	Third Wave Media	Media Literacy meets this class. In other words, why does the means of distribution matter? We won't talk about medium theory as much - I assume you've had it, but we'll touch on it just in case.	Chapter 13
<b>Wed. 1/24</b>	<b>7</b>	Marxist/Economic Theories	Don't worry: we're not going super liberal here.... rather, what does the economics of the media industry have to do with its content? And why should we as critics care?	Chapter 2
<b>Fri. 1/26</b>	<b>8</b>	Analysis Day 1	Today, like all other analysis days, we'll be critics who look at a specific text (or a part of one) and analyze it. I want you to focus on the thought patterns and the questions that we ask of the texts on each of these days. The reasoning and argument strategies will help you with the papers you'll do later in the semester.	

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Class Topics</b>	<b>What should you take away from today?</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Mon. 1/29</b>	<b>9</b>	Cluster Analysis	It's our friend Kenneth Burke! Some of you have heard of him, but don't worry if you haven't. We'll talk about another theoretical approach Burke created and how it can help us analyze media.	Chapter 5
<b>Wed. 1/31</b>	<b>10</b>	Genre (Part 1)	You've heard about genres... today is part 1 of a 2 part approach to genres. Today, we'll take a more content-oriented approach (i.e., what are some of the types of media that we can analyze?)	Chapter 5
<b>Fri. 2/2</b>	<b>11</b>	Genre (Part 2)	We'll look at genres more from aesthetic and value approaches. What does it mean when a media text seems like another, yet different type, of text?	Chapter 5
<b>Mon. 2/5</b>	<b>12</b>	Analysis Day 2		
<b>Wed. 2/7</b>	<b>13</b>	Dr. D. was sick - No class	Get rest and stay well!	
<b>Fri. 2/9</b>	<b>14</b>	Narrative theory	We tell stories, right? Media is about stories? A basic theoretical approach that you should know.	Chapter 5
<b>Mon. 2/12</b>	<b>15</b>	Aesthetic approaches	Yet another term you'll know how to define after today. This moves us much more toward "traditional" film and English studies.	Chapter 5
<b>Wed. 2/14</b>	<b>16</b>	Organization analysis	More about why media organizations produce the type of content that they do, with a bit of focus on journalism.	Chapter 3
<b>Fri. 2/16</b>	<b>17</b>	Pragmatic and regulatory approaches	We won't focus on everything in chapter 4, but we will get into the question of how laws and regulations impact content and storytelling. Steamboat Willie, anyone?	Chapter 4 Paper #1 due
<b>Mon. 2/19</b>	<b>18</b>	Analysis Day 3		
<b>Wed. 2/21</b>	<b>19</b>	Review of Chapters 2-5	This is a chance for you to demonstrate what you've learned in the class so far...but in typical atypical Dr. Dreher style. (in other words: an activity where you'll get notes and your book)	Why, there might just be a quiz today.
<b>Fri. 2/23</b>	<b>20</b>	Ideological Criticism	There is a LOT to unpack in chapter 6 (you'll see how many days we'll cover that chapter). So we'll start slowly and just focus on the role of ideology in how stories get told. There's an interesting anecdote in your text about how the basic health story you learned in 6th grade is wrong. If you take away the "why" from that story and can apply it, you'll be on the right track!	Chapter 6



<b>Date:</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Class Topics</b>	<b>What should you take away from today?</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Mon. 2/26</b>	<b>21</b>	Analysis Day 4	We'll use theory here to talk about an important aspect of criticism: "reading between the lines" (to quote the cliché). How does camp help us to understand polysemy?	
<b>Wed. 2/28</b>	<b>22</b>	Mythic Analysis: The American Dream	How does myth operate in media texts? We'll start with one myth today...	Chapter 6
<b>Fri. 3/1</b>	<b>23</b>	Other types of myth	... and then expand to consider other kinds of myth during this class session. We'll also talk about how we tap into myths.	Chapter 6
<b>Mon. 3/4</b>	<b>24</b>	Analysis Day 5		
<b>Wed. 3/6</b>	<b>25</b>	Issues of class and race	We'll spend two days on the last portion of the chapter, but honestly, we could spend a lot more. We'll talk about some traditional and some non-traditional topics as we do... what I want you to take away from both days is what happens when we <i>start</i> by examining class and race as opposed to finding it as we go along.	Chapter 6
<b>Fri. 3/8</b>	<b>26</b>	Issues of class and race	Same as 3/6	Chapter 6
<b>Mon. 3/11</b>	<b>27</b>	Analysis Day 6		
<b>Wed. 3/13</b>	<b>28</b>	Feminist Analysis	Know about the various waves of feminism, as well as what the assumptions are with regard to feminist analysis.	Chapter 8 Paper #2 Due
<b>Fri. 3/15</b>	<b>29</b>	Post-Feminist Analysis	How have assumptions about feminist criticism changed given the era we're in now?	
<b>Mon. 3/18 - Fri. 3/22</b>		SPRING BREAK - No Class		
<b>Mon. 3/25</b>	<b>30</b>	Queer Theory	Again, a theory that could be talked about for a full semester but we only have a couple of days. Today's takeaway: what happens when media chooses to challenge norms, and how those challenges surface among competing forms of media.	Chapter 9
<b>Wed. 3/27</b>	<b>31</b>	Research Day	We won't meet as a class, but you will be expected to attend 1 or more Research Day activities. Details forthcoming when we get the schedule.	
<b>Fri. 3/29</b>	<b>32</b>	Review: Chapter 6, 8	I (Dr. D.) should have a better sense of what you've learned over these last few weeks. You should have a better understanding of what you know and don't know.	Why, this sounds like a good day for a quiz.... especially since I would have done it the day after we got back.

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Class Topics</b>	<b>What should you take away from today?</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>Mon. 4/1</b>	<b>33</b>	Queer Theory: Camp	We'll use theory here to talk about an important aspect of criticism: "reading between the lines" (to quote the cliché). How does camp help us to understand polysemy?	
<b>Wed. 4/3</b>	<b>34</b>	Analysis Day 8, Check in on final papers	Do you know what you're doing for your final paper? Today, we'll spend some time analyzing a text and the other part of our time talking about what y'all want to do with your final papers.	Be ready to discuss your final paper in class today.
<b>Fri. 4/5</b>	<b>35</b>	Frame Analysis	How the framework of different media producers is revealed through the texts they produce.	Chapter 11
<b>Mon. 4/8</b>	<b>36</b>	"Equipment for Living"	I hate the subheading. But it does come from Burke's idea of symbolic action. You should take away how tragedy/comedy and the purification style recur in media.	Chapter 11
<b>Wed. 4/10</b>	<b>37</b>	Analysis Day 7		
<b>Fri. 4/12</b>	<b>38</b>	Intertextuality	How do texts refer to other texts, and why does it matter?	Chapter 12
<b>Mon. 4/15</b>	<b>39</b>	Bakhtin and the Carnival	The use of folk humor and rituals to poke fun at the status quo. Expect a couple of late night talk shows to be talked about today...	Chapter 12
<b>Wed. 4/17</b>	<b>40</b>	Review post-Spring Break	No quiz here, but rather, a day to make sure that we have a common understanding of the last few chapters we've discussed.	
<b>Fri. 4/19</b>	<b>41</b>	Tying the course together	What did we learn from the semester?	
<b>Mon. 4/22</b>	<b>42</b>	Presentations	The beginning of the presentation of the final papers. Given how many we have in this class, it'll take us some time to go through them all...	
<b>Wed. 4/24</b>	<b>43</b>	Presentations		
<b>Fri. 4/26</b>	<b>44</b>	Presentations		
<b>Mon. 4/29</b>	<b>45</b>	Presentations		
<b>Thur. 5/2 10:30-12:45</b>		Final Exam: Presentations		Final papers due at the final exam time.