

STSC/HSOC 311
Science, Medicine, and the Media
Fall 2008, University of Pennsylvania
T, 1:30-4:30

THIS SYLLABUS IS A DRAFT AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Instructor:

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Office hours (on campus) TBD

Additional office hours will be available by appointment at my office at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, 315 Chestnut Street.

Course Description:

Public understanding of science, technology, and medicine (STM) is critical to a society that must make informed decisions about health, the environment, and economic growth. In STSC/HSOC 311, we will explore the complex relationship between science and its publics through the lens of contemporary media. The course explores not only how books, newspapers, television, films, podcasts, and blogs have shaped our understanding of science and scientists, but also the contexts in which these media are created.

This course is a seminar, which means that your participation is a crucial element to the success of the course. We will learn from each other and share examples of successful – and not so successful – appearances of science and medicine in both nonfiction and fictional modes. Students will have an opportunity to meet professionals from a variety of STM media fields and build their portfolios of professional work.

Texts:

There are no required textbooks. All course readings will be made available on Blackboard. To access Blackboard, go to <https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu/>. Although readings have not yet been finalized, students should expect to read about 50–100 pages of scholarly articles or books each week.

Class Format

In general, we will spend the first half of each class in discussion of the week's reading. After a short break, the second half will be more varied, with lectures, film and audio clips, guest speakers, and more discussion. You should come to each class prepared to discuss the readings. The conversation will continue beyond our class time through postings to our Blackboard site – please check it frequently.

Assignments and Grading

Students will be evaluated in five areas:

In Class Participation. Attendance and classroom participation are key elements of STSC/HSOC 311. You should come to class prepared to speak and engage with your peers. Although you will receive partial credit for simply attending each class, you cannot receive full credit for participation unless you speak up. I will call on those who are quiet, but in this class it's much better to take a chance saying something you're unsure of than not speaking at all. (20%)

Online Participation: To help those who are shy, we'll get the conversation started online: each week you will be required to post at least two comments to the course blog. The first post should be longer (around 250 words) and respond directly to discussion questions I will post on the blog. The second post should be a comment on someone else's post. You are encouraged to include outside links, audio, and video clips in your posts. Your initial post must be posted by the **Sunday night** before our class meeting; the second post must appear before **noon** the day of class. (15%)

Ongoing Reading and Journal. Besides the assigned reading, students are expected to engage with current trends in science media by reading, watching, or listening to at least three pieces of science media each week. You will keep an online journal of your reflections on these materials that includes what you think the piece is trying to accomplish, who the audience is, sources used, and whether it accomplishes its goals. These entries may be relatively short (just a few sentences) or up to 250 words. Each entry should include the piece's title, author, publication name and date. Although I will offer informal feedback on your journals throughout the semester, I will provide formal assessments on September 30, October 28, and November 25. *The class will decide collectively whether these postings will be publicly posted to the blog or submitted to me privately.* (20%)

Written Assignments. This class includes two short media reviews (750 words). In your reviews, you will apply the course readings to a book or feature-length film. The first review will deal with a nonfiction book or documentary; the second review will look at the role of science in a fictional work. Your topic must be approved in writing (via e-mail). Review 1 is due **September 30**; review 2 is due **November 4**. (20%)

Projects. There are two projects. In the first project, you play science reporter and translate some scientific information into lay format. You have a choice of preparing a 1,000-word magazine or newspaper article or a 2-minute video or audio clip. Video and audio media will be presented to the class; those who chose a writing assignment will explain their process to the class in 2-minute presentations. (10%) The second presentation is a group project in which teams prepare a longer analysis of media coverage of a particular scientific or medical issue. Again, the format is flexible: teams may choose to prepare a series of blog postings, a long article, or audio or visual commentary. While both projects are

aimed a lay audience, the first actively “translates” scientific information; the second offers commentary – a sort of “On the Media” project. The second project should reference at least 5 pieces of media. All teams will present their materials to the class in 10-minute presentations. (20%)

There is no final exam.

Grading Summary:

In-class participation	20%
Online participation	15%
Journals	20%
Review 1	10%
Review 2	10%
Project 1	10%
Project 2	20%

Expectations

Attendance is mandatory. You are permitted one excused absence (meaning approved in advance). Punctuality is important – repeated and excessive tardiness will result in penalty. Late work is not permitted except under extraordinary circumstances, approved in advance. Please remember that all blog posts, journal entries, etc., are official writing assignments. Proofread carefully, as errors in facts, grammar, and spelling will impact your grade. Attribute your sources (including images). Plagiarism and fabrication will not be tolerated.

Course Schedule

Wk 1: September 9

Orientation and Introduction

Wk 2: September 16

A Brief History of Science and Medical Journalism

Wk 3: September 23

Models: Popular Science, Popularization, Public Understanding, and Public Engagement

Wk 4: September 30

Nuts and Bolts: From the Lab to the Page or the Airwaves

Initial assessment of online journal

Review 1 due.

Wk 5: October 7

Does the Medium Make the Message? What Gets Covered and Why

Wk 6: October 14

Fall break – no class

Wk 7: October 21

Old News? Science writing versus science journalism

Project 1 presentations

Wk 8: October 28

Controversy and “Fringe” Science

Wk 9: November 4

Blockbuster Science

Second assessment of online journal

Wk 10: November 11

The CSI Effect

Wk 11: November 18

Advocacy Journalism

Review 2 due.

Wk 12: November 25

Public Participation and Public Engagement

Final assessment of online journal

Wk 13: December 2

Presentations 2