

STS288/388: Science and the media

Autumn session, 2004

These notes, plus additional information, are posted at
<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/classes/>

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Making contact. You sometimes can find me in my office, especially in the afternoons. You are welcome to contact me by phone (if you ring me at home, please do so after 8am and before 9pm), fax or email, to discuss any issue or make an appointment.

Subject description

Science increasingly frames social debates, and is itself socially directed. The media play a central role in both processes, a role often subject to criticism, especially from scientists. This subject examines the complex social dimensions of the relation between science, media and the 'public.' Topics may include: scientific knowledge in political debates; public understanding of science; media portrayals of science and scientists; science journalism; science as 'public knowledge'; and pro- versus anti-science 'movements.'

Subject objectives

At the end of this subject, students should have demonstrated, on the basis of written work, oral presentations and other contributions to tutorials, that they: can describe and comment critically on some key issues in the public understanding of science and technology; can explain some of the relations between key elements involved in the public reception of scientific and technological issues, such as forms of presentation, arenas of debate, forms of participation, the authority of scientific expertise, and the perception of risks; can identify and evaluate different theoretical approaches to explaining these issues and relations; can deploy relevant theoretical concepts from social analysis in the examination of a case study; have developed their skills in finding and using arguments and information in critically evaluating such material; and in essay writing and seminar presentation.

Additional information

The *Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Handbook 2004* is a supplement to these subject notes. See in particular:

- Staff consultation, student representation, p. 11
- Assignments, assessment, pp. 70-72
- Plagiarism, pp. 72-76 [Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For more information, see <http://www.uow.edu.au/handbook/courserules/plagiarism.html>]
- Sub-Dean matters, pp. 77-78.

See also Code of Practice—Teaching and Assessment,
http://www.uow.edu.au/about/teaching/teaching_code.html

You are not required to pass every component of assessment to pass the subject. I reserve the right to hold an additional oral examination for any piece of assessment.

Classes

Wednesdays, 8.30-11.30, room 19.2002

Classes will include discussions, debates, guest lectures, student presentations and activities, a field trip, snack breaks and other activities to be decided.

Week 2 class:

- bring along something from the media for discussion (see class participation, below)
- look at some writings about science and the media (for example, Jane Gregory and Steve Miller, *Science in Public*, or the journal *Public Understanding of Science*) and bring along your ideas for a topic for your presentation/activity.

Assessment

Attendance (see notes below)

Class participation, 10%

Presentation/activity, 25%

Two media reviews, 20%

Research project, 45%

Attendance

You are expected to attend at least 80% of scheduled classes. (Classes are omitted from the calculation when you provide certificates showing that absence was on medical or compassionate grounds.) If you are present for only part of a class, that counts as fractional attendance. For those with less than 80% attendance, a corresponding percentage will be subtracted from the overall mark. For example, with 72% attendance, $80\% - 72\% = 8\%$ will be subtracted.

Group work

You are encouraged to work in groups on any of the assessment items. However, no more than 30% of total assessment can be for collective submissions. For example, you might work in a team for the research project but submit separate reports.

Class participation

On designated weeks, beginning with week 2, you should bring to class relevant items from the media — articles, video or audio clips, emails, etc. — and introduce them to the class in a few sentences.

Class participation will be assessed using these criteria

- relevance of the media items to themes covered in the subject
- diversity and originality of items
- insight offered in introductions of items

Presentation/activity

You can either make a formal presentation to the class or design an activity to help others understand the topic in its social context. To deal with the “social context,” you can either explicitly use a theory (such as political economy of the media, social construction of scientific knowledge, participatory democracy or semiotics) or show how your topic fits into a “big picture” of science and the media (namely how it relates to other topics and perspectives in the field).

For the activity, you can use participatory techniques such as debates, quizzes, role plays and small group exercises.

Consider using overheads, handouts, tapes and videos. Try to relate your topic to the experiences of class members. You should also include some method to evaluate how well everyone has understood what you are trying to get across. Time allocated for each class presentation/activity will be at least 20 minutes per person, e.g. 60 minutes for a three-person group.

Presentations/activities will be assessed using these criteria

- knowledge of topic
- speaking performance (presentation only)
- quantity and quality of audience involvement (activity only)
- aids (handouts, overheads, posters, videos, etc.)
- methods of evaluating how well class members have understood your message.

Media reviews

On two occasions, you should bring an item from the media to class and analyse it. You can bring in short written handouts (for all class members) if you wish.

Media reviews will be assessed using these criteria

- selection of items to discuss
- understanding of the items
- use of a conceptual framework for assessing the items
- drawing of conclusions based on values and experience
- quality of expression

Research project

You are encouraged to work in a group. Pick an issue involving science and the media. (This could be a current issue or, through detailed records, an historical one.) Collect first hand and secondary information relating to the issue, for example through analysis of media content, observations of conversations or behaviours, formal interviews, questionnaires, articles, books and statistical data. Analyse the information you obtain using a theoretical framework such as political economy of the media, social construction of scientific knowledge, participatory democracy or semiotics. If necessary, obtain ethics clearance.

Include in your essay:

- information about the issue (include at least 3 references);
- discussion of the theoretical framework used (include at least 3 references);
- how you obtained information about the issue;
- your analysis of the issue and your recommendations or assessments.

Form: essay (2500 words), report and/or poster, video or other format as agreed by me.

You are welcome to submit a draft for comments.

Due date: noon Monday 7 June

Where: under the door to my office (19.2016) or in my mail box in room 19.1048. Alternatively, mail the essay to me by express post no later than noon of the due date.

Resubmission Anyone whose project report does not receive a mark of 50 or more will have the option of resubmitting it.

Project reports will be assessed using these criteria

- understanding of the topic
- understanding of the theoretical framework
- application of the framework to the topic
- use of information obtained
- quality and originality of the form of the report

Extra project report requirement for STS388 students

Option A Use a second theoretical framework in your project report (include at least 2 additional references). Compare and contrast the theories in terms of how they do and/or don't provide insights into the issue, and comment about what insights studying the issue provides into the strengths and weaknesses of the theories.

Option B Apply your chosen theory to a second, distinct issue in science and the media (include at least 2 additional references). Compare the insights (and/or lack of insights) provided by the theory for the two issues, and comment on what insights studying the two issues provides into the strengths and weaknesses of the theory.