Final Research Project

The Final Research Project for this class represents a self-directed extension of our work together, where you take the framework of the class and use it to guide you as you propose a detailed researched analytical project located within critical media studies. The Project is designed to give you an early experience doing the kind of detailed scholarly research that you will do much more extensively in Methods and Capstone.

The Final Research Project focuses on developing a specific analytical approach to a particular site of inquiry or "research object" within critical/cultural media studies (that is, a culturally and historically situated group of media texts, technologies, spaces, or practices) that contributes to our understanding of the interrelationship between media and culture. Implicit in these criteria is the need for an extensive "literature review" that critically engages a significant body of published scholarship pertaining to both your research object and the methodologies you will use to analyze it.

Therefore, the project focuses on 1) identifying a specific research object; 2) briefly describing and contextualizing your research object; 3) developing a specific set of research questions; 4) developing a brief literature review of published scholarly research that we have not encountered in the class already that is pertinent to your project; 5) critically engaging at least 15 outside peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, books, or book chapters that pertain to your research question and your methodology; and 6) producing a detailed design of the whole project, including a qualitative methodology for the actual analysis of your research object.

The Project process unfolds in stages. Ultimately, you will perform your final research Project in two outcomes at the end of the semester: a 5-minute Presentation to the class, and an 8-10 page, double-spaced Research Project Prospectus. Before you embark on your Final Project, you must first submit a formal Research Project Proposal (see Research Project Proposal handout). We will discus the parameters for the Presentations later in the semester, so our focus here is on the written Prospectus.

The Research Project Prospectus

A Research Project Prospectus describes in detail a research project you are working on but it is not a final representation of that work. If actually carried out to its full completion, your Project would take the form of a 30-page scholarly essay like many of the articles we have read for class and like the work you later will do in the Capstone Research Seminar. But unlike a Capstone project, which is fully complete, the Research Project Prospectus describes and frames a study that you would do if you had more time and resources to do such a project. Therefore, as you formulate your research questions, framework, and design for this Prospectus, remember that you are not required to do the analysis and actually complete your study this semester, only to precisely design it and carefully situate it within other scholarship.

The Research Project Prospectus will be subdivided into four separately labeled sections: **Introduction**, **Literature Review**, **Proposed Methodology**, plus an alphabetized

Works Cited section. The Works Cited section is not counted as part of the 8-10 page constraint. Note that the three main sections of the Prospectus are not likely to be divided equally. A general rule of thumb would be to make the Introduction around 3-4 pages, the Literature Review about 4-5, and the Proposed Methodology section around 1-2.

The Introduction Section

Here is the place to introduce, describe, and contextualize your proposed Project as a whole. To do that, you need to articulate your general topic, identify your specific research object within that topic, and lay out how you are framing the research object as well as the central research question(s) you seek to answer as you begin your research for the Project.

The first step is to describe and contextualize your research object itself. What media texts, practices, spaces, and/or technologies are you focusing on and what kinds of relationships between media and culture will you explore? What is your research object similar to and different from? How would you characterize it? Who is associated with its production, distribution/exhibition, and consumption? What is its history? When did it start? How long has it existed, and it what forms? If it is from the past, when did it stop? How was it originated? How do people encounter it, particularly through which media? What if any conversation is there about this object in popular media forms such as journalism, social media, etc.? What is the scope of the cultural conversation about it (among journalists, cultural critics and media critics, social media--not scholars, at least not yet), and what are some main ideas that keep coming up in media representations of your object? In short: what is your object, why is it significant, and where is it "located" culturally?

The next step is to articulate your research question(s) about your specific research object. What specific set of research questions drives the project? Good research questions for critical media studies research projects seek to answer complex, undetermined questions that demand interpretation and do not have simple yes or no answers. To address such questions, you would need to directly analyze something and you would need to frame your analysis within a larger scholarly conversation, while also mobilizing communication theory as well.

Here are some short examples of good research questions: How is the culture of production at Apple encoded into its products? How do race and gender intersect in reality TV shows? How is heteronormative, cisgender masculinity represented in men's fitness influencer content? How was television as a technology incorporated into suburban homes and family life in post-WWII U.S. culture, and how was this process represented in TV shows at the time? Which cultural discourses are encoded into recent debates about texting while driving and "distracted driving"? Where do interactive media such as video games fit within dominant models of mass communication theory? What discourses of consumer culture circulate in home and body makeover TV shows? How does posting on Instagram work as an economy of display and surveillance? Which cultural discourses have been mobilized as FOXNews has covered the most recent presidential election? How do Latina women construct their identities in relation to the media they consume? How has the masculine gaze operated in reporting on #MeToo? How do soldiers abroad use communication technologies to maintain their relationships with their families back home? How does hashtag activism

interpellate publics and/or counterpublics? How and why do people decorate their laptop computers? How and why have mobile phones been regulated in jails and prisons?

The Literature Review Section

To answer any research question, you need to think of what you are doing as joining a scholarly conversation already in progress so that you can contribute to it. The way to do that is to show that you know how other scholars have already asked and answered related questions in published scholarly research. The purpose of a literature review, therefore, is to account for that previous work and use it as a foundation for the claims that you make as you set out to do your own study. A good literature review describes specific scholarly work, analyzes general patterns of what has been done before, and identifies where to locate your own new lines of questioning within the existing critical conversation(s) so you can claim to be making a contribution. It accounts for the range and depth of approaches to the research question(s), the theoretical framework(s) you are engaged in, <u>and</u> the methodology or methodologies you would use to perform your analysis if you were to complete it according to the research design you articulate.

Your final project will explicitly critically engage <u>at least fifteen outside peer-reviewed, scholarly sources that we have not read in class</u>. Not all sources need to be engaged in the lit review section, however. You can assume that most scholarly journals and books published by university presses are peer-reviewed, but if you have any question about whether your sources are peer-reviewed, you should ask me or a librarian. While I encourage you to engage readings from the course throughout your Prospectus, they do not count towards your 15. Note also that especially if you are researching a contemporary media phenomenon that has not yet produced much scholarship specifically about it, you should augment your literature review with related scholarly work on similar objects already studied or theory you think is pertinent, work that is what we call "antecedent" or "adjacent" to your research object. Finally, the 15-source constraint is a minimum limit for <u>peer-reviewed sources</u>, not for your cited references overall. You will need to cite other sources to contextualize your research object in the Introduction section, and they might not be scholarly sources.

Keep in mind also that a Lit Review is not an annotated bibliography, which simply summarizes sources one at a time in a symmetrical fashion. A literature review establishes the patterns of the critical conversations pertinent to your research question and methodology as a way of contextualizing your work, and is <u>organized thematically</u> according to the key ideas <u>you</u> have identified as being central to your study (and ideally sub-sectioned according to those themes). Some sources will be more central to your study and some more peripheral; that means that you will be critically engaging some sources more extensively than others in your Lit Review. Remember that every scholarly reading we have read in class has included lit review, so use them as models. Remember also that your Works Cited section contains only works you directly cite in your paper (in the Intro, Lit Review, and/or the Research design section), either within in-text citations or in endnotes. Keeping that in mind should help make sure that you have made a direct reference to each source on the Works Cited page at least once in your Prospectus; otherwise it should not appear on the Works Cited nor count towards your 15 scholarly source minimum.

The Proposed Methodology Section

This section addresses the "how" question for your study in detail. Given your research question(s) and given the work that others have produced in relation to similar research questions or using similar methodologies, how exactly would you *analyze* your research object in concrete ways, such as archive research, reception ethnography, textual analysis, discourse analysis, etc.? In short: what would be your methodology?

Methodologies have two components: theoretical frameworks and analytical methods. A theoretical framework is a way of thinking and a method is a way of doing, so a methodology is a structured way of thinking through and with the things that you are doing to analyze a certain research object. Methodology = method + theoretical framework. How you define your research object affects which methodologies you can use, and vice-versa.

Different research questions demand different analytical methods; both are inflected by the theoretical frames within which you locate your study. For example, if you want to know how the race, gender, and class identities of media professionals may shape the media they produce, you have to do an organizational analysis of particular production sites (film studios, TV networks, publishers, etc.). You may also do textual analysis of the media they produce to show how production is articulated in the texts they produce, but if you do not study producers and their institutional and cultural situations, you would not generate analysis and evidence supporting your claim about production. Here's another example: one of the research questions I included above--"How was television as a technology incorporated into suburban homes and family life in postwar U.S. culture, and how was this process represented in TV shows at the time?"—is actually the subject of a book by Lynn Spigel titled *Making Room for TV*. To explore her research question, Spigel did archive research on late 1940s-early 1950s print media ads for TVs, articles in interior decorating magazines, and coverage of the phenomena in popular contemporary news media magazines like *Time*--analyzing all of these in relation to textual analysis of popular TV shows where characters interact with TV as part of the plot.

For another example, consider the article we read by Linsay Cramer about Cam Newton and Russel Westbrook's resistance to whiteness. There, Cramer does a textual analysis of the official conduct policies of the NFL and NBA and of multiple news stories and social media posts responding to the two athletes' behavior. Cramer could have used different theoretical frameworks than whiteness, surveillance, and "controlling images." Cramer also could have done a production study of editorial practices at the different news outlets, done a platform study of how people weighed in on social media, or done a reception study to see how readers responded to the news framing, but that would have been a different set of research questions tied to different methodologies. The central Lit review and context/description would probably stay pretty similar for all the projects, however.

Finally, remember also that one of the main things your Prospectus must accomplish is to explicitly show exactly how your framing, research question(s), theory, literature review, and methodology are interconnected and aligned. The more explicitly integrated and aligned your approach is, the better the project will be. The purpose is to show the design of your study