Department of Media Studies
College of Media, Communication and Information

Mission Statement

The Department of Media Studies is dedicated to providing students with a liberal arts education for the twenty-first century that encompasses humanistic, social scientific and artistic approaches to the study of the material means of mediated communication. Communication media constitute some of the most ubiquitous and powerful social formations of the modern world. Dense communication networks are essential to vital social processes, the development of communities of interest, the maintenance of ethnic and religious identities, and much else.

Contemporary media practitioners, both professional and amateur, influence the values and behaviors of national and global populations, challenging and shaping the authority, legitimacy and control exercised by governments and other powerful social institutions. Because of this, media and cultural studies are central to research about the complex intersections of culture, politics and economics from the local to the global levels. Appropriately, the Department of Media Studies emphasizes the history, nature and impact of mediated sounds, images and texts from a wide range of inter- and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Educational Goals

As storytellers, technologies, public forums and industries, the media have become an essential part of our social and cultural experience. We simply cannot evade their ubiquitous presence. Our students are deeply immersed in this rich media landscape not only as consumers but also as creative producers of their own media. This rapidly shifting media landscape requires a dynamic curriculum that is adequately attuned to the nature and scope of this influence in contemporary society.

The Department of Media Studies examines ways of thinking about and conducting research into the intersection of media, communication and cultural practices in historical and contemporary perspective. Encompassing humanistic, social scientific and artistic approaches to the study of media and culture and interdisciplinary in its theoretical and methodological approaches, the degree spans traditional boundaries between theory and practice. It fosters media “literacy” in the broadest sense by providing students with critical skills to analyze contemporary media and culture, along with technical, aesthetic and intellectual principles that facilitate strong media practices.

In addition to courses about the forms, practices, institutions, economics, politics and social implications of media (i.e., radio, film, television, photography, print, digital and electronic), the Department of Media Studies benefits from and contributes to the curricular porosity of CMCI by offering media studies students a wide range of courses in media design, digital storytelling, digital art/textuality, information science, documentary filmmaking, journalism and
video production.

Degree Programs

Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies

The goal of the media studies BA is to prepare students to become intellectually engaged critics of their media environment through a commitment to rigorous scholarship and creative media practice. Students will exit the program with a vital edge as innovative, critical professionals and well-rounded, independent thinkers.

A vital component of this degree is a course that teaches undergraduates not only to navigate and critically evaluate the value of messages in a complex web of information, but also to learn how to effectively participate in the media as an exercise in responsible citizenship in a democratic society. Using a critical pedagogy approach, this course leads students to scrutinize their media experiences and acquire new competencies in researching and clearly articulating their thoughts in an evolving multimedia environment.

Required Courses and Semester Credit Hours

Students pursuing the BA in Media Studies complete 13 courses, for 39 credit hours.

Four required courses comprise the MDST core:
- **Media Literacy** (3 hours)
- **Media Research** (3 hours)
- **Media and Communication History** (3 hours)
- **Digital Culture and Politics** (3 hours)

Students would then take the following courses offered by MDST, other departments or programs in CMCI, or departments outside CMCI:
- **Advanced Research Methods** (3 hours)
- **Media Practice** (6 hours)

The Media Practice component consists of courses involving hands-on work in the CMCI Departments of Advertising, Public Relations and Media Design; Journalism or Media Production Studies; or in the Technology, Arts and Media program in ATLAS.

Students will additionally explore an area of emphasis by taking 4 courses (for 12 credit hours) in one of the following:
- **Media and Culture**
- **Media and Politics**
- **Global and International Media**
- **Multimedia Practice: Design and Production**
- **Media History and Archaeology**
- **Media Leadership: Management and Entrepreneurship**
- **Media Technology and Society**
Images and Screen Studies
Self-Designed Emphasis (requires faculty approval)
Courses meeting this requirement could come from anywhere within CMCI or across the CU-Boulder campus curriculum.
MDST requires an internship (3 hours) in a field of the student’s choice, and a capstone project (3 hours), both usually completed in the senior year.

Masters of Arts in Media and Public Engagement

The MA in Media and Public Engagement (MAPE) is a theme-based course of study that emphasizes a proper balance between academic excellence and social responsibility. Using an innovative curriculum, the MAPE program offers a critical study of the history, institutions, economics and social implications of the media, nationally and globally, combined with a practice-based media training geared toward civic engagement and community building. MAPE students learn how to apply skills of critical learning, media criticism and technological innovation to exposing social problems and bringing awareness to public issues that are poorly or never addressed by mainstream media and politics. The program accepts students based on the quality of their project and their commitment to social change and the public good.

With an interdisciplinary critical curriculum and a high-quality technical training in media production, the MAPE program offers students a unique opportunity to select and study in depth a specific social, political or cultural issue. In addition to completing courses in media theory and other fields of interest, students learn how to create thoughtful and engaging projects using a variety of media practices including documentary film, multimedia websites, interactive video installations and other online tools. In the course of two years, students will collaborate with faculty, community leaders, nonprofit organizations and socially engaged corporations to devise innovative pathways to the study, commentary and presentation of social issues.
PhD in Media Studies

Media Studies doctoral students may choose from six areas of concentration. Each concentration is served by a range of courses offered by the department. A number of courses in the department serve more than one area of concentration, reflecting some degree of beneficial overlap among the concentrations, but each concentration has its own unique intellectual center of gravity. Students are expected to take a minimum of 72 hours to complete their degrees, although they may take additional course work if there is a justified need. Students are expected to complete their course work and defend their dissertations in 4–5 years. Students may take up to 15 credit hours of course work outside the Department of Media Studies, through a required Outside Emphasis (9 hours), which complements the student’s plan of study, and through Advanced Methods in Media Research and Practice, (6 hours), which may include relevant courses offered either inside or outside of the department.

Media Technology and Society:
The study of technology as a political, economic and cultural force is a central area of study in contemporary media scholarship. Within this concentration students can focus on philosophical, ethical, social and political dimensions of information and communication technologies, old and new; the social transformations of society due to the widespread availability of multiple screens, from the stationary cinema and home entertainment center to highly mobile tablets and smartphones, and of innovations in sound design and acoustic technologies; the history of technological devices and forms of mediation, including media archaeology and the study of “dead media”; the legal and political implications of technological regulation and change; copyright and intellectual property; uses of information technologies as tools of surveillance and related privacy issues; technologies of the built environment; new and emerging forms of media technology convergence, and the impacts on traditional media institutions (for example, transformations and reorganization in the film, music recording, newspaper, magazine and book publishing industries); and the significance of social media as tools for cultural expression and social mobilization.

Media Industries, Politics and Policy: This emphasis enables students to explore relationships of power involved in the creation, distribution, and consumption of mediated communication. Areas of inquiry include the political economy of the media and cultural industries (including advertising, public relations, journalism, the music recording industry, film, radio, television and the Internet); political communication, including electoral politics, grassroots activism and political protest, along with government efforts to influence news reporting and public opinion; public policies governing media and culture, and the efforts by advocacy groups to influence media policy; professional practices and organizational forms in the media and cultural industries; communication rights, particularly those related to issues of media access, censorship and surveillance; the politics and cultural significance of media globalization; the sociology of news; and the influence of technological changes in the media on the public understanding of politics.
Critical Theories of Media and Communication: The study of media and communication requires engagement with a variety of theoretical traditions, including cultural studies, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, political economy, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, Frankfurt School critical theory, feminism, gender and queer theory, critical race theory, postcolonialism, critical legal theory, Bourdieusian field theory, structuralism and post-structuralism. The department approaches critical theory from the perspective of ongoing critical self-examination of how knowledge and culture are created, acquired, maintained and transmitted. In its core courses and elective seminars the graduate program seeks to train doctoral students to be flexible yet rigorous practitioners of critique in its many forms.

Media, Religion and Culture: The department offers courses and faculty expertise to train students to explore the intersection of media and religion as they influence one another and our daily lives, focusing on the practices and experiences that define religion and spirituality today, the way media represent religions and spiritualities, and on how the media interact with religion in the public sphere, how media are used by formal and informal groups and movements, and the implications for religious institutions and authority.

Global and International Media Studies: This area of concentration focuses on the influences of transnational media, including critical theories of globalization, transcultural flows, international development and postcolonial studies, comparative media systems, cross-national comparative research design, global social movements, international and intra-national media and culture treaties and policymaking, critical cultural geography, alternative modernities and global ethnography.

Theory and Practice of Public Scholarship and Public Engagement: Scholars from many disciplines are attracted to finding ways to use the means of popular communication to reach beyond narrow audiences of fellow specialists. But gaining mastery over the means to public engagement requires both technical skills and an understanding of the inherent risks and rewards of doing so. To achieve this, students can focus on the role of the intellectual in public life through courses that survey concepts of the public sphere; the role of public opinion polling as a means of generating political consensus (sometimes problematically); the problems of anti-intellectualism as an impediment to public reason; the idea of “public culture” as an arena in which complex ideas and information (e.g., about history, art, science, the environment, finance and international affairs) are presented in accessible ways; how intellectuals increasingly use new means of communication, including online “pre-publication” venues, blogging and social media, to widely disseminate and discuss their ideas; and uses of the means of communication to disseminate complex ideas in the process of mobilizing and sustaining social movements.

In general, course offerings toward the PhD in media studies emphasize the following cross-cutting themes that are treated in each of the areas of concentration listed above:

- sophistication in the treatment of theoretical issues;
- rigor and high ethical standards in the collection, analysis and presentation of research;
• thorough knowledge of the historical context of media institutions and practices; and
• sustained focus on issues of social and cultural diversity (race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexualities), and on issues arising due to the increase in transnational media and information flows and influences.