

MEDIA STUDIES

The media are everywhere. They feed us fact and fantasy, ideas and information, sign and symbol, truth and lies. Their influence is profound, and, ideally, painless. They are instruments of social and political power. They are peddlers of gossip and trivia. They shape our ideas, our identities, our language and our cultures. They define and re-define our experience, our memories, our values and our beliefs. We refer, and defer, to them on matters of justice, commerce, disaster, innovation, morality, community, triumph, and celebrity. In an endless chicken-and-egg tumble, we are the media and the media are us.

Media Studies is the systematic examination of both the traditional media (such as radio, newspapers and television) and the newer media (such as the Internet and electronic games). As a discipline it seeks to develop an informed and critical understanding of the ways in which the media influence social, political and economic areas of life, as well as the way they shape our perceptions, attitudes, desires and behaviour. It also explores and questions historical, political, industrial, cultural, and aesthetic aspects of media, through a variety of media forms, theories, and contexts. It examines how different media are produced and how they are used, received and understood by different audiences. There may also be a focus on how media products are constructed in response to a range of technological, institutional, creative, and cultural conditions.

THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

The media industry is effectively a global conglomerate, typically characterised as killingly competitive, but profitable, with luck, beyond your wildest dreams. This is partly true. World-wide, the industry comprises multinational corporations, various subsidiaries, franchises, government agencies, companies of many sizes in many countries and countless small businesses. Its people range from solitary creative geniuses working out of their bedrooms, to immensely powerful business moguls whose decisions can affect thousands of people at one go.

In general, the media industry makes media products that people want to buy. Media products include

newspapers, news bulletins, television programmes, films, advertisements, DVDs, videos, press releases, magazines, media training, web sites, podcasts, and electronic games. It is a technology-based industry, which means, increasingly, digital technology.

WHERE DO MEDIA STUDIES GRADUATES WORK?

The Big Players. A large section of the media industry in New Zealand is dominated by a few big international companies with multiple media interests. For example, Fairfax NZ Ltd. publishes nine daily papers (including the *Dominion Post* and *The Press*), two national Sunday papers, a stable of predominantly lifestyle magazines (including *NZ House and Garden*, *Cuisine*, and the *TV Guide*), and over sixty community newspapers throughout the country. It also runs a magazine publishing business and an Internet operation. Another division, Fairfax Advertising Network provides sales and communications solutions to clients. Another example; CanWest MediaWorks (NZ) operates TV3 and C4, and has a network of over a hundred radio stations broadcasting throughout NZ, including The Edge, The Rock, Solid Gold, and Radio Pacific. It broadcasts under the More FM brand and The Breeze.

Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Career Development and Employment.

Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.

The jobs contained within these organisations span a range of functions, principally editorial, design, production, presenting, advertising, and marketing. There are also technical roles such as sound and camera operators. Media jobs are highly competitive (there are a range of institutions that offer media-related courses) and some require specific skills. For example, the editorial function is largely journalism and the ability to write and work to deadlines is critical. Computer skills (eg MS Word) are essential and knowledge of other programs such as Cyber is useful. Design work is computer-based so knowledge of programs such as Quark, Illustrator, or Photoshop is recommended. There is often a strong corporate culture associated with large organisations and personal qualities of enthusiasm, passion, and commitment are often identified as essential. Occasionally internships are available and job vacancies are usually listed on company websites.

But wait, there's more! Advertising, marketing and public relations are also media operations. Many larger agencies are multinational operations and large companies are, in general, more likely to offer entry level jobs. Smaller agencies tend to look for experienced people who can be immediately productive. For example, Consultus NZ is affiliated with an international operation and sees value in Media Studies graduates, particularly for their media 'savvy' and overall academic background. An entry level position would typically be an account assistant, with potential to progress to account executive, and then account manager.

Action! The film industry in NZ is thriving, but sporadic. Production crews are assembled for a particular project and disband afterwards. Most jobs are word of mouth affairs and are based on previous experience and one's personal reputation. Typical entry level jobs are production assistant (essentially an office job), production secretary, runner, and possibly research assistant. Publicity roles are also a possibility for Media Studies graduates – if you can read the message, you can tell the message.

The Watchdogs. The influence of the media is huge and abuse is always a possibility. Although the industry is largely self-monitoring, official monitoring and regulatory bodies are still necessary, and include The Press Council, the Broadcasting Standards Authority, the Advertising Standards Authority, and the Office of Film and Literature Classification (the Censor's Office). These last three in particular are interested in Media Studies graduates as they are trained to 'read' media products and understand their context. A law degree is also highly desirable.

We are the Government. Most government departments and ministries have Communications Units, which typically employ just two or three people. They deal with enquiries from, for example, TV and radio journalists and members of the public. They may write publications and information leaflets, and maintain reference libraries. Generally these positions are filled by people with a few years' media experience.

TVNZ employs journalist/reporters, researchers and production assistants, which can be entry level roles appropriate for Media Studies graduates. Occasionally Journalist Internships are advertised. Promotions and marketing areas are also possibilities. Competition for any vacancy is high and finding a way to demonstrate your enthusiasm and suitability for television work can help your chances.

Radio NZ also employs journalists, reporters, presenters and producers. Although a background in journalism is usual, other qualifications and experience are not ruled out. Staff tend to be stable and recruitment is limited.

NZ Film Commission and NZ on Air are media-related government bodies that are largely concerned with funding provisions. Neither employs many people, and not at graduate level, but they do have publicity and communications functions. A good understanding of the industry and its governing bodies is necessary.

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa has a small marketing and publishing unit. A marketing communications co-ordinator may be a graduate entry position.

More than just rubbish collection. Local Authorities are complex, multi-function, community organisations, funded largely by ratepayers who like to see their money well-spent. Consequently communication, information and marketing functions are important. Although journalism training is generally preferred, a Media Studies graduate could be considered for an entry-level communications coordinator role.

Here to help. Community-based social agencies often have an educational function which may involve the production of information resources targeted at specific groups. They may also put in applications for funding. Both these tasks require information to be appropriate, both in language and presentation, to the objective. Media Studies develops skill and understanding in how to put a message across. Vacancies are random and often initiating some contact with agencies that are of interest starts to build a relationship that may result in employment.

If that isn't enough, there are possibilities within the music industry. There are a range of independent labels and distributors in NZ. The production side generally consists of record companies (multinational and independent), recording artists, producers and studios. The distribution and marketing side is dominated by multinational record companies. Jobs such as promotions assistant come along from time to time. Retail experience can provide a toehold. The website of the NZ Radio and Recording Industry News (www.radioscope.co.nz) is good for vacancies and general industry information.

The book publishing industry is another possible area for Media Studies graduates. Some of the larger publishers include Reed Publishing, Wendy Pye Group, Victoria University Press, Hodder Moa Beckett, Huia Publishers, and Harper Collins. The publishing industry has recently developed an audience and market development strategy which

requires sound research, promotional materials and communications. There is also a Publishing Intern Programme open to graduates of the Whitireia Diploma in Publishing.

The value of doing free work. Because media jobs are so competitive, any practical experience you can acquire may give you an edge. It will also bring you into contact with other people who share your interest. Personal contacts are an excellent basis for a career in the media. Word of mouth information can open up as many, if not more, opportunities than advertised vacancies. Getting involved in student magazines and radio are also good places to start.

WHAT SKILLS DO MEDIA STUDIES GRADUATES HAVE?

One of the great benefits of doing Media Studies is the understanding you gain of the process of communication. Surveys show that communication skills are often the most desirable skill set that employers look for. Good communication skills are also the basis for other important skills, such as relationship management and leadership.

Written Communication Skills

Media Studies graduates are trained to read between the lines and quickly become expert at differentiating between content and style. They are also tuned to the range of meanings that can be conveyed through variations in sentence construction and word choice. This generates accuracy and fluency in expressing ideas and summarising information in written form. Many jobs involve writing reports or case studies or strategic plans or proposals or simply emails about anything and everything.

Oral Communication Skills

Media Studies graduates appreciate how nuance, timing, pitch, and inflexion can alter the sense and emotional weight of the spoken word. All these qualities operate differently when, for example, giving an order, making a speech, telling a lie, or convincing someone you mean it. While some jobs in the media may depend on having good verbal skills or even the

'right voice', many others also require these skills, particularly roles that involve teaching, training, interviewing, presenting, commanding, or selling.

Relationship Skills

Because Media Studies graduates understand communication they also tend to understand the role of communication in building and maintaining relationships. Job descriptions of all sorts are increasingly identifying relationship skills as a distinct function of the position. They are particularly important in businesses where client confidence is paramount, such as banking, insurance, real estate, the legal profession, and public relations.

Leadership Skills

Again, because they understand communication, Media Studies graduates have the potential to assume leadership roles. Effective leaders are always effective communicators. Managers, team leaders and supervisors all require leadership skill.

Research Skills

Media Studies involves seeking out information, sometimes from somewhat obscure sources, such as archives. Increasingly many records - visual, sound and printed - are digitalised and Media Studies graduates are pretty good at accessing computer databases and other Internet sites. Many jobs deal in computerised information of one sort or another, both Internet and intranet, and knowing how to find things out from these systems is basic to roles which depend on keeping up-to-date, such as journalists and researchers.

Analytical Skills

Media Studies graduates have developed the ability to strip texts and images down to their component parts and work out how each part functions within the whole. They are also good at identifying trends, hidden meanings, covert messages and disasters waiting to happen. Jobs which draw on this kind of analytical skill include policy advice, health and safety roles, and roles that involve strategy, planning, and innovation.

Critical Judgement Skills

Media Studies deals, among other things, with issues of credibility and the acquisition and exercise of social power. Critical judgement requires an ability to identify what is valid and what is irrelevant. When options exist, any course of action which is, or appears to be, predicated on valid and relevant information will often be accepted as the best thing to do. Critical judgement, therefore, tends to be associated with authority and decision making, and is necessary in management roles and situations where power differentials exist, such as social work and probation officers

GRADUATE PROFILES

Eleanor Jack

Currently completing an MA in Media Studies

Part-time Research Assistant for Media Studies Lecturer

I began my studies at Victoria in 2001 with no firm idea of what I wanted to major in but a general feeling that I wanted to pursue a liberal arts education. Media Studies was being offered for the first time that year at Victoria and the general enthusiasm and spontaneity of the staff as well as interesting and stimulating subject matter made me to decide to major in the subject. I completed a BA in English Literature and Media Studies and then went on to do Honours in Media. In June of this year I started an MA in the area of television genre theory. I hope to pursue a career in the television industry as a programmer or commissioner for a television network.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of taking Media Studies is viewing and analysing the actual media texts themselves. In such a diverse field as Media Studies this can mean going to exhibitions, watching old television programmes, decoding advertisements or analysing the portrayal of gender in video games. Making meaning from your own observations and grounding them in the theory discussed in lectures and tutorials is satisfying and rewarding. Valuable skills such as analysis, research and writing are all sharpened when taking a subject that challenges you to question and think critically.

Media Studies is also useful in that it ties in well with other majors. Depending on what interests you in the field of media, it can have close links with Film, Politics, English and so on. There is a lot of scope within the media papers offered at Victoria to pursue areas of interest and this makes it particularly useful and appealing. I find Media Studies to be a rewarding and interesting subject to take at university. It has broadened my view of the world and challenged me



to think critically about the role of the media in our society.

Erena Hodgson

Library Assistant

Broadcast Communications Ltd

Tena Koutou katoa,
Ko Te Arawa te waka,
Ko Tongariro te maunga,
Ko Taupo-nui-a-tia te roto,
Ko Ngati Tuwharetoa te iwi,
Ko Tapeka te marae.

If you know what you want to do with your life - Congratulations. When I strolled into Victoria University, in the hope that I would find my calling, I had no idea that I would stumble upon three years of study and many hours of listening to other people's ideas.

Completing a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Media Studies and English Literature has helped me to get the position that I am in now and all future career prospects hinge on that precious piece of paper.

In my current position, the research that I provide for other colleagues about the telecommunications industry is centred on the knowledge that I obtained from my Media Studies background. Investigating issues in Broadcast and the symbiotic relationships surrounding images within the Media, has enabled me to analyse different services and interpret them into a consistent format for my colleagues. When I was in the interview, I was told the company was specifically looking for someone who had completed Media Studies because the position holders that had this background had slipped easily into the role.

The most important thing that I obtained from going through University was the way in which, finally, I had a creative channel that would allow me to organise the jumble of thoughts zipping around my brain and it actively made me think of the possibilities that past, present and future worlds may have on the people around me.



The lectures from Media Studies, especially toward the latter half, were thought probing and well constructed. Issues such as New Zealand's ongoing struggle with public service values and commercialism in broadcast, and the dramatic effects technologies have had and continue to have on corporations, policies and moreover societies, are pivotal to the industry I am employed in at present. I mean – Who knows what's next?

If these issues and explorations through the technological effects of New Zealand and the world have captured your imagination, then you have just walked straight into Media Studies.

James Robinson

Editor

Salient

I decided to study Media Studies for one simple reason, something that one might deem inappropriate. Media Studies 101 had the best screenings with the coolest films. Was this what 'University' papers were like? I was aghast. This course was fantastic. I learned a little and loved the paper. But then something hit me. I was developing skills. Understanding things I didn't before. I was noticing wrongs and discrepancies in the media I used to just take for granted. Media Studies 102 was a lot more challenging and political and from there I knew I was hooked. I loved the analysis, the breakdown of media forms to show what was hidden beneath the surface of film, TV show or news article. I loved getting to these undercurrents and realising that even if they weren't meant to be there, they still represented what was ingrained in our society. Media Studies gave me a far improved ability to recognise injustice, it gave me the skills to pick up a morning paper and see the unfairness and inequality right underneath my own nose. Media Studies also gives you an understanding of the New Zealand media industry, lets you in on



how things work in New Zealand and teaches you to appreciate how so much is often done with so little in this country.

Media Studies didn't really lead me into my role as the editor of Salient. I couldn't really have done it without my Media Studies training though. To be honest, I just stumbled into Salient looking for some way to get 'involved' and a different vein of people, and ended up writing reviews. But as I passed up the chain at Salient, Media Studies helped me be so much better. The skills I had gained helped me examine my own integrity as a journalist, and helped me look beneath the surface of my writing to see how objective I was really being. Media Studies gives you such an increased perception of the media around you, and shows you how we are surrounded by the media - almost every minute of every day. So when I became even a small part of this all encompassing 'media' it helped me examine what I was actually doing, and why. It helped me become a far better writer than I ever could have imagined.

My advice to anyone thinking about studying Media Studies? Try a paper. Dip your toe in, and see if you like it. If you have a strong sense of justice, and an interest in the way things work in the media world - I can't see you not having a blast. If you are not afraid of getting involved, it can lead to some great things.

Ngairé Shepherd

Currently enrolled in a BA (Hons) Media Studies

I fell into Media Studies quite by accident in my first year of university. While I was still at school I was convinced that I would be doing a science degree, but after the experience of the Victoria open day I realised that I should really look at studying what I truly loved and what I was truly interested in rather than what I thought would give me the best "career". After serious consideration I



enrolled in a BA and took an assortment of papers including English, classics, politics, history, and one media paper. Unfortunately for my other majors nothing captured my attention quite like Media Studies. That one paper opened my eyes to how influential the media is in all facets of life.

While Media Studies covers a very wide range of industries, television has always held a particular interest for me, the way that TV programmes could dictate conversations, trends, language and generally exist as such a pervasive medium. There are two things about me that have always been fairly constant, I have always enjoyed watching TV and I have always had a mild shopping addiction. Media has allowed me to be completely self centred and study both. This is what has brought me to my current research interest, television advertising and identity. Being able to analyse people and why people identify with certain products and the influence that an advertisement can have in the way we see ourselves, at this stage is endlessly fascinating.

My honours year has been by far the most interesting and also the most demanding. Being able to research independently and really get an understanding of how academia and research works has been an eye opening experience, at times ridiculously frustrating, but for the most part a wonderful challenge. I know that this year in particular has equipped me with some useful life skills. I have undertaken a research project that has required me to work entirely independently which has meant very honest goal setting and being self-reliant in achieving these goals in a maze of other deadlines and in depth assignments. Media has taught me research and analytical skills, the ability to understand the context in which something was produced and the effect this has on the finished product, and the ability to look past face value and really understand how something that seems as fleeting as an advertisement or a column in a newspaper can really have an impact on an audience. The ability to constantly question, while annoying for those you live with, is a beneficial skill.

At this stage of my degree I am enjoying the challenge of research and writing and I hope to continue doing this in the immediate future. I am sure that wherever I end up the skills I have learnt will follow. The downside is that even in all my work on advertising, I still haven't managed to cure my shopping addiction – I guess there are some questions that just can't be answered.

Margaret Howie

*Academic Representative –
Higher Learning*

Thomson Learning



When I took my first class in the subject, I didn't have a clue what this Media Studies business was. There was the persistent popular opinion that all you did in class was watch movies and television. Sad to say, it proved to be a little harder than that. Still, by the time I'd taken a few classes in the subject, I had re-worked my English degree into a joint major with Media. Did I have any better idea of what this discipline involved? That's doubtful, but by that point I was already an insufferable media bore and too far gone for a few assignments and the actual work of analysis and understanding to faze me.

I think what attracted me to this subject was the relevancy of what we were learning. What we were learning about was the processing of information, and it was as directly applicable to the workings of the 6 o'clock news as it was to legal transcripts, economic policy, washing powder adverts or Horace's Odes. Around assignment time, the old joke went that you could never find your materials in one section of the library, because the subjects that you were working on always crossed disciplines.

When you study the media, get used to being asked if you're going to be a journalist. If you're not, don't worry – I can't think of another subject with the same level of relevance across such a wide range of subjects.

I've always been a print junkie, and studying print culture with Sydney Shep at the Wai-te-ata press remains one of the highlights of my time at Victoria. Since graduating, I've been able to work with books, moving from retail into the publishing industry. I now work as a representative for an academic publisher, which means that I promote our titles and maintain our contacts among academics. I find that I draw on many of the skills I developed during my studies, not least being the ability to navigate the academic landscape. I get to travel widely and meet fascinating people, and the demands of the role are in many ways similar to the pressures of studying. You still have to manage many different tasks, and communicate clearly and concisely with people about complex topics.

MEDIA STUDIES AT VICTORIA

The Bachelor of Arts (BA) major in Media Studies looks at the central role played in society and culture by media such as newspapers and broadcasting, television, film, and the Internet. Media Studies courses at Victoria analyse the way these media work, what they assume about their audience, and what their audiences assume about them. Media

Studies courses may also be taken as part of an English Studies major.

After the first year of Media Studies, one of five important areas can be followed up: Media, Society and Politics; Visual Media Culture; Popular Media Culture; Journalism; or New Media. Students will be equipped with a critical understanding of the way the modern world constructs itself. Rational, problem-solving and analysis skills are developed, setting students apart in a media-saturated world.

Media Studies is a useful complement to many other courses including English Literature and Language, European Studies, Gender and Women's Studies, Film, History, Law, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology and Theatre.

At the Honours level, an advanced programme includes courses in Media Theory and Research Methods; Media Policy; Television Drama; Diversity Reporting (Journalism); Media, Subjectivity and Identity; Postmodernism and Visual Culture; Mass Media and Popular Culture; and Film, Culture and Society. There is also the opportunity to take a research project.

Postgraduate studies can also be pursued at the Masters level (MA) and Doctorate level (PhD).

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