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## Critical Lessons on Media Industries: Editors' Introduction

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## Critical Lessons on Media Industries Editors' Introduction

**Elena D. Hristova and Heidi Zimmerman**

Helping students think critically about media industries is crucial for developing their media literacy skills and preparing them to understand the way in which ownership structures, regulatory policies, and profoundly unequal relations of economic power shape our media environment. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a handful of firms controlled the U.S. movie industry, to the large-scale conglomeration and consolidation of media firms that followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, to contemporary struggles over net neutrality and media convergence, to the liberalization of broadcast markets around the world, developments in media industry have had an extraordinary impact on content, access, labor, resource use, and more.

Much has been written on media industries. Contemporary scholars such as Robert McChesney (1999), Susan Crawford (2013), Eileen Meehan (2005), Janet Wasko (2003/2005), and Vincent Mosco (1996/2009), for example, have written extensively on the political economy of media. The proliferation of fake news during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election has once again raised questions about how to regulate in a radically deregulated media environment. Moreover, with new concerns about the fate of net neutrality under a new U.S. presidential administration, it remains as important as ever for media educators to develop and share effective strategies for approaching the subject of media industries with undergraduates. This issue of *Teaching Media Quarterly* presents lesson plans that critically engage the structures, theories, and histories of media industry.

In **Undrah Baasanjav**'s lesson, "The Media Convergence Blog," students gain practical skills in using Wordpress and other digital technologies while exploring a topic related to media convergence. Critical readings and lectures on the history as well as industrial and cultural politics of media convergence are followed by a three-part research and blogging assignment that takes place over seven weeks. First, working in pairs, students gain experience in developing a research topic and posing research questions in a proposal assignment. Second, they learn how to create a blog in which they synthesize scholarly readings and apply them to case studies. Third, students share their blogs and research findings with the class in a final presentation. The lesson includes lecture notes on media convergence and detailed handouts on using Wordpress.com.

"Elmo Everywhere: A Critical Analysis of Glocalization," a lesson by **Marissa Doshi**, teaches students about the international circulation of media products through a case study of the familiar *Sesame Street* program. Students explore how the format has been re-produced in diverse cultural and financial contexts across the globe, integrating elements of local control, often imperfectly. The clearly structured discussion activity is designed to be used in a single class period, with students preparing by watching the documentary *The World According to Sesame Street* outside of class.

**Andy Ruddock**'s lesson plan, "A Cultural Indicators Approach to Media Industries: Using Digital Archives and 'Old' Ideas to Ask New Questions," is designed for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students undertaking media industry research with the use of coding

software. The workshop series use Communications and Mass Media Complete database, NVivo software, and Australian-based Informat TVNews archive, hosted by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, which instructors can alter using the help of their library services. In three three-hour-long workshops, coupled with video tutorials, students are taught how to use NVivo software to develop literature-based research questions, conduct media industry research, and code media materials. Students learn how to access key players in the media communication process, locate pivotal moments in media communication processes, and use digital media content as evidence of how media industries create social ideas through production practices.

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## Biographies

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**Elena D. Hristova** is a Ph.D. candidate in Critical Media Studies, minoring in American Studies. Her dissertation examines women's work in mid-1940s media research, measurements of working-class male prejudice, the production of whiteness, and the development of women's professionalism. Her larger interests are in Critical Whiteness Studies, Critical Race Theory, Marxism, and gender, race, class and inequality.

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**Heidi Zimmerman** is a critical media studies scholar whose work focuses on environmental and food related media, and asks what such media can tell us about citizenship and governance in contemporary culture. She is particularly interested in how government, in this sense, is structured by larger power relations that are, among other things, racialized, gendered and classed. She holds a PhD in Communication Studies from the University of Minnesota where she has a joint-lectureship in the Departments of Communication Studies and Gender Women's and Sexuality Studies.