

Chapter 3

Establishing a Media Literacy Cognate at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Comparative Analysis of Existing Courses and Potential of Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the need as well as the feasibility of implementing a media literacy cognate at Historically Black Colleges and Universities nationwide. Of the approximately 40 colleges and universities with media studies or communications departments or schools, only three offer a named media literacy course. Similarly, of the communications and media programs with ACEJMC accreditation, only one, Howard University offers a media literacy course. Using diffusion of information theory to explore the knowledge of and eventual adoption of media literacy courses at HBCUs, the study seeks to provide an introduction to schools about their need to teach media literacy to students across the college and university curriculum.

MAIN FOCUS OF THIS CHAPTER

Media literacy training and education is paramount to the mission of HBCUs with their imperative to educate African Americans, promote a village like learning environment and provide a culturally relevant education for countless scholars who may not otherwise receive an education (Albritton, 2012; ASHE, 2010; Hale, 2006; Jones, 2013; Lovett, 2011). The implementation of media literacy at HBCUs can foster the beginning of the end to pejorative and stereotypical images in various forms of media, which have been prevalent since the dawn of the media age (Wilson, Guitierrez, & Chao, 2013). The full adaption of media literacy can usher in awareness among students and graduates about the various machinations

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of media, the intentions of media producers and creators, which in many cases, are designed to continue the subjugation and oppression of African Americans and other marginalized groups in U.S. society (Wilson, et al., 2013). With increased consciousness, the realization of individual agency becomes imperative as the alternative to the continued blind consumption of harmful media messages. Media illiteracy can dampen the full benefit of new media technologies including social media and its ability to equalize and address political and social ills. The benefits of new media will not be realized if end users lack complete awareness of the empowering potential of media literacy, (Mercea 2014; Nakagawa & Arzubaga, 2014; Thevenin, 2012).

Several scholars have noted that media literacy, often defined as the ability to access, analyze, produce and act upon media messages (Hobbs, 2010; Milhailidis, 2009; Potter, 2011) is a vital 21st century skill necessary for full participation and awareness in a democratic society (UNESCO, 2015, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/>). Additionally, media literacy is considered paramount in building critical thinking and fostering increased participation in the creation and production of media. Media literacy can also serve as an equalizing factor in media and educational institutions. Media literacy when realized is ripe with emancipatory potential and liberation for media audiences across racial, geographic and all other socioeconomic strata (Mercea, 2014; Thevenin, 2012).

Several educational organizations have touted the multiple benefits of media literacy in post secondary education. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU 2015, <https://www.aacu.org>) suggests a need for an updated approach to education in the 21st century with a focus on inclusiveness and diversity of ideas and educational approaches that change the dynamic of teaching and learning that allow for an interactive approach among other suggestions. The National Communication Association (NCA, 2015, <https://www.natcom.org/Tertiary.aspx?id=236&terms=media%20literacy>) formulated a list of Media Literacy Standards and Competencies for K-12 educators, and lists media literacy (along with mass communication) as one of its areas of concentration. The Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC, 2015, <https://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/>) has also touted the importance of media education assessment and a well-rounded and diversified curriculum in communication studies (ACEJMC, 2015, <https://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/>).

Given the need for increased media literacy among all populations in the United States today, this chapter seeks to explore the feasibility of implementing a media literacy cognate consisting of three media literacy courses at HBCUs. The research of van der Linde (2010) provides a rough outline of courses which may be implemented to include an introductory and theoretical course, a hands-on practicum/media production course and thirdly an advocacy and action-oriented course, which will teach students how to engage with the media and create campaigns to petition or to foster greater audience involvement in the production and discussion with media executives. This cognate would be implemented at HBCUs nationwide. The idea of instituting a media literacy cognate at HBCUs is synergistically aligned with fostering deeper engagement and retention for students and universities. The need for media literacy is a commonality every member of society shares via his or her participation and consumption of media (Byrne, 2009; Kellner & Share, 2005).

Previously, in industrialized societies, such as the United States, when knowledge was sought, one consulted a written text to gain information or to become enlightened about a particular topic. In the 21st century when knowledge or information is sought, individuals, more often than not, consult a media text first (Potter, 2011).

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