

## MCM 3000 Insights – June 2026

### Upcoming

#### Program Congratulations

Congratulations to Jocsan Rojas of the Harbor School, and to Professor Diggs, on Jocsan's selection for the 2026 Hearst High School Media Internship Program at The Paley Center for Media. The internship is a competitive, in-person opportunity at The Paley Center in New York City and runs from July 6 through August 6. This is a strong recognition of student talent, preparation, and the value of sustained media education.

#### Important: Call for Participation in the Fall TiP Pilot

We are inviting College Now Mass Media and Film instructors to participate in a Fall Semester pilot of Thinking in Public (TiP), a classroom routine designed to help students make their reasoning visible before they submit final work. Participating faculty will try one adaptable TiP activity in an existing lesson, discussion, project, or essay sequence and then share brief feedback on what worked and what needs refinement.

The pilot connects to a forthcoming essay scheduled to appear this summer in Faculty Focus. Faculty Focus is a higher education teaching-and-learning publication from Magna Publications that features practical, faculty-authored classroom strategies and best practices. Once published, the essay will be available at FacultyFocus.com and through the Faculty Focus newsletter/archive; faculty can search for "Thinking in Public" or Robert Nelson's author listing once the piece appears.

Interested faculty should complete the survey being sent in a forthcoming email.

## Focus Topic: Genre as a Media Literacy Tool

Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic approach gives students a practical way to analyze how media texts create expectations. Semantic elements are the visible and audible building blocks: settings, props, lighting, sound, costumes, technologies, bodies, and repeated images. Syntactic elements are the deeper patterns: conflicts, values, themes, character relationships, institutional pressures, and story structures.

The opening sequence of *Alien* is a strong shared model because students can first describe what they see and hear, then infer what kind of story the film appears to be. The same method also transfers well to news feeds, influencer posts, trailers, streaming thumbnails, and AI-generated videos: audiences read genre before they consciously analyze it.

### Current Trends to Track

**AI enters the production pipeline.** Film and television companies are experimenting with AI for development, storyboarding, dubbing, tagging, editing, archiving, and short-form content generation. This raises useful classroom questions about authorship, labor, copyright, and whether production tools change genre conventions.

**Social video becomes a primary news environment.** TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and creator-led commentary remain central to how younger audiences encounter news, public issues, pop culture, and crisis information. The classroom issue is not simply whether students use platforms, but how platform formats shape credibility and attention.

**Synthetic media complicates evidence.** Deepfakes and AI-generated video make media literacy less about spotting a single fake and more about asking how knowledge is verified, who benefits from uncertainty, and how audiences decide what to trust.

**Genre blending remains a dominant attention strategy.** Studios and platforms increasingly market films, series, and short videos through hybrid signals: comedy-horror, true-crime documentary style, prestige television aesthetics, nostalgia IP, biopic spectacle, and "elevated" genre storytelling.

**Audience measurement gets more granular.** New research and industry practice increasingly track attention, engagement, affect, and completion through platform data, biometric research, or experimental viewing labs. This trend invites discussion of the difference between audience response and artistic value.

## Suggested Lesson Topics for June

**Genre Across Media:** Compare a film opening, a movie trailer, a TikTok explainer, and a news segment. Students identify the semantic cues that signal what kind of text they are viewing and the syntactic patterns that organize the message.

**AI, Authorship, and the Moving Image:** Use current debates over AI filmmaking to ask whether a tool changes the meaning of a finished media text. Students identify which creative decisions remain human, collaborative, automated, or commercially driven.

**Platform Genre and News Credibility:** Treat the social video explainer as a genre. Students identify its conventions: direct address, captions, fast cuts, emotional framing, expert posture, humor, calls to action, and algorithm-friendly pacing.

**The Opening Scene as Contract:** Analyze how the first three to five minutes of a film establish expectations through setting, camera movement, sound, lighting, and implied conflict.

**Synthetic Media and the Crisis of Seeing:** Students evaluate why visual evidence is persuasive and what happens when realistic image, voice, and video manipulation becomes accessible and scalable.

## Suggested Readings and Resources

Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." Foundational genre theory; best used through a short instructor explanation or the Film & Media Studies video summary.

Pew Research Center, "8 Facts About Americans and TikTok" (2026). Useful for discussing social video, teen/adult platform use, and news consumption patterns.

Reuters Institute, Digital News Report 2025. Strong background for the movement from legacy news brands to platforms, creators, social video, and AI-assisted news encounters.

UNESCO, "Deepfakes and the Crisis of Knowing" (2025). Excellent for AI literacy, evidence, verification, and post-truth media discussion.

McKinsey, "What AI Could Mean for Film and TV Production and the Industry's Future" (2026). Industry-facing overview of AI across the production pipeline and attention-fragmented video markets.

Daniel Valdivia Alonso, "Imagining AI Futures in Mainstream Cinema" (AI & Society, 2026). Open-access scholarly reading on how mainstream cinema shapes public expectations about AI futures.

## Mini-Lesson for MCM 3000: Platform Genre and Media Expectations

### Objective

Students will identify how platform-based media creates genre expectations through visible/audible conventions and repeated message structures.

Opening prompt, 3 minutes: “How do you know what kind of media message you are watching before anyone explains it?” Students list clues: captions, host posture, music, pacing, setting, graphics, hashtags, headlines, thumbnails, comments, and calls to action.

Altman bridge, 5 minutes: Explain semantic clues as what students can see/hear and syntactic patterns as how the message organizes conflict, authority, evidence, and audience response.

Activity, 15 minutes: Show two short examples on the same issue: one legacy-news clip or article excerpt and one social-video explainer. Students create a two-column notes chart: “What do I see/hear?” and “What kind of story or argument is being built?”

Discussion, 10 minutes: Which format feels more credible? Which feels more persuasive? Which is easier to remember? What conventions produce that response?

Exit note: “One platform convention that shaped my interpretation today was \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Mini-Lesson for MCF 4000: Genre Recognition in the Opening of Alien

### Objective

Students will use Altman’s semantic/syntactic framework to infer genre expectations from the opening sequence without being told the film’s category in advance.

Before viewing, 3 minutes: Students copy two terms: semantic = what we see/hear; syntactic = how the story is organized and what it seems to mean.

First viewing, 5 minutes: Play the opening sequence. Students take only observation notes: space, ship interior, corridors, lighting, sound, silence, computers, machinery, sleeping crew, camera movement, and mood.

Second viewing, 7 minutes: Students add inference notes: What larger story patterns seem possible?

Examples: workers following orders, humans dependent on technology, isolation, exploration leading to danger, an enclosed space becoming unsafe, or contact with the unknown.

Pair/share, 8 minutes: Students identify three clues that shaped their expectations and decide whether those clues are semantic, syntactic, or both.

Class discussion, 10 minutes: Ask: “What kind of story does the opening appear to promise? Which details led you there?” Avoid naming the target genre too early; let students build the classification through evidence.

Exit note: “The opening made me expect \_\_\_\_\_ because of \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Cross-Course Connection

### Why This Works for Both Courses

The same analytic habit works in both Mass Media and Film Appreciation. In MCF, students learn that film openings teach audiences how to watch. In MCM, students learn that platforms teach audiences how to read credibility, urgency, personality, and authority. Altman's framework helps students move from recognition to analysis: first name the cues, then explain the pattern those cues create.

### Optional Discussion Prompts

What does a genre cue ask the audience to expect?

When does a familiar convention become a shortcut for interpretation?

How do platforms use genre signals to make information feel immediate, trustworthy, funny, serious, or alarming?

How does a film's opening guide viewers before the plot fully begins?

What happens when a media text borrows the look of one genre but the structure of another?