

The recipient for the best paper in Communication in the Liberal Arts curriculum is also one of Professor Murray's students

Michael Bovard was also a student in my Persuasion course this past fall, and his research project for the course was titled "Product Placement In Film And Television." I'm sure many of you have seen *Extreme Home Makeover*, which is a conspicuous example of this common and growing practice, which blurs program content and advertising. In addition to his extensive historical review of this powerful persuasive technique -- ranging from the appearance of Gordon's Gin in the 1951 Bogart classic, "The African Queen," to BMW paying \$3 million to have James Bond trade-in his Aston Martin -- Mr. Bovard also evaluated its ethicality. This practice is particularly concerning because "many consumers . . . are entirely unaware that they are viewing an advertiser's message during the performance itself." Just as children cannot distinguish between programming and paid advertising when the Cookie Monster is followed by Oreo Cookies, product placement flies under the viewer's radar by insinuating itself into the programming itself. And perhaps most troubling of all is that product placement threatens to have a profound and deleterious impact on the selection of content -- how does one, for example, place a can of Coca-Cola or a Ford Explorer into a biographical film about Magellan? Product placement is indeed deserving of close critical scrutiny, and Mr. Bovard's research is an excellent example of such socially-engaged and principled scholarship. Congratulations!