

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication, Media and Film**

**Communications Studies COMS 391 L01**  
***Introduction to Acoustic Communications and Acoustic Ecology***  
**Fall 2015**

**Thursday September 10 – Thursday December 3**  
**Thursdays 14:00 – 16:45**

**Instructor:** Dr. M. J. Epstein  
**Office:** SS 316  
**Office Phone:** 403-220-4848  
**E-Mail:** • epstein@ucalgary.ca  
**Web Page:** D2L available through MyUofC portal  
**Office Hours:** By appointment, Tuesdays & Thursdays

**Course Description**

In an increasingly noisy and visually-oriented culture, are we losing the ability to access information about the world through hearing? What are the implications of sound for communication and learning? What is a soundscape? *What is acoustemology???*

Acoustic Ecology (AE) studies the effects of sound -- including speech, music, noise, and silence -- in natural and human environments, as well as its effects on health, cognition and culture. It is an emerging interdisciplinary field which weaves together aspects of physical sciences, health sciences, communication theory, cognitive psychology, sociology, musicology and aesthetics.

The field of Acoustic Communications (AC) is concerned with the ways in which speech, sound, music and silence convey meaning.

This course will provide an introduction to selected concepts, techniques and applications from AE and AC.

**Additional Information**

-There will be some fieldwork required outside of class time and possibly off campus.

-There will be some continuity of material between COMS 391 and COMS 381, but historical content in 391 will be interpreted in a different context.

--Because this course is about sound and listening, *please let me know on the first day of classes if you have a significant hearing impairment.*

**Objectives of the Course**

Participants will be expected to demonstrate the following skills upon completion of the course:

- Ability to learn and use descriptive terminology and mapping techniques for environmental sound;
- Ability to perceive and describe a variety of acoustic environments;
- Demonstrable familiarity with concepts and issues presented in the course, including those related to acoustic communications and auditory culture;
- Ability to conceptualize, plan and complete individual and group assignments;

**Textbooks and Readings**

Stoker, M., *Hear Where We Are* (at Bookstore)

“Epstein Readings” posted on the course site in D2L

Articles available on the website of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology:  
<http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/index.html> (specific assignments will be given in the Course Schedule in early September)

Recommended listening:

Sound Blogs <http://soundexplorations.blogspot.ca/>

Earth Ear: <http://earthear.com/acousticecology.html>

**Internet and electronic communication device information**

Phones and pagers must be turned off during class unless you are a health care or law enforcement professional, or responsible for the care of a family member. Computers are welcome as long as they are used appropriately. Research and note-taking\* are appropriate during class. *Social sites, Twitter, games, YouTube, e-mail and texting are not.*

\*Be aware that recent research shows that taking lecture notes on a keyboard produces results that are inferior to handwriting:

[http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/?&WT.mc\\_id=SA\\_MB\\_20140604](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/?&WT.mc_id=SA_MB_20140604)

and

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/22/0956797614524581.abstract>

**Assignments and Evaluation**

Project Plan & Annotated Bibliography ----	20%	Oct. 1
Presentation or Paper -----	25%	Nov. 19 (paper); 19-20 or 26-27 (pres.)
Midterm Exam -----	25%	Oct. 15
Final Exam (in class) -----	10%	Dec. 3
Participation Exercises -----	10%	Sept. 24, Oct. 29
Participation in class or D2L-----	10%	

*Exams (closed-book) will consist of a combination of short-answer questions and speculative essay questions.*

Note:

-You will be graded on the results of your work. Hard work does not merit an A unless it produces outstanding results.

## **Instructions for Assignments**

**Fieldwork/Research Projects:** These must be done in groups of 2-4 members.

Each group will choose a focus in AE (fieldwork) or AC (research), and prepare:

- a plan of research with an annotated bibliography of preliminary sources; and
- a presentation to the class OR a research paper.
- All topics must be cleared with the instructor; specific advice will be given to each group about methodology.

*Topic areas for projects (topics will develop from these general categories):*

**Speech** – as carrier of information, emotion, identity, or means of discrimination

**Music** – as communication, inspiration, remedy and/or addiction

**Noise** – as celebration, territorial boundary, and/or hazard to health

**Silence** – as contemplation or restriction

### **Examples of topics presented in this class:**

**AE:** You may choose to describe and sound-map a place (e.g. business, neighbourhood, restaurant, rink). This usually involves a focus on environmental **Noise** or **Music**, or perhaps **Silence** (e.g. mapping the campus for quiet study spaces). Comparing two or more examples can be a feasible approach; so can interviewing employees or residents about their reactions to the soundscape.

**AC:** Research for **Speech** can be focused on history (e.g. radio in WWII), sociology (e.g. how the voice changes in gender reassignment), biology (e.g. how birds communicate). Research for **Music** will focus on music as communication (but not the merits of your favourite band, please). Research for **Silence** can involve historical or biological approaches (e.g. the effects of quiet environments on stress reduction).

Topics about film soundtracks –Music and/or Speech --require at least one Film Studies student in your group; topics about Music require at least one group member trained in music.

**-Project Plan & Annotated bibliography:** This is a preliminary plan for your research project, including a statement of what you are investigating, what sources and methods you will use, how you plan to divide and carry out the work involved, and how you will ensure that work is fairly divided and that all group members do their share.

The annotated bibliography will consist of *at least four* written and/or recorded sources that will enable you to start your work, cited with correct bibliographic format (APA or MLA) and annotated with concise descriptions of each source, the author's or artist's background, and how the source will be useful to your project. Annotations are usually sufficient at 1 or 2 paragraphs. Length: avg. 4-5 pages.

**-Presentation:** Each group that chooses to do a presentation will present to the class, explaining their research methods and findings and incorporating audio and visual materials that will enhance the class's understanding of the project. This can take the form of a live or videotaped performance: in either case, the group must be prepared to answer questions on the work.

**Both presented and prerecorded projects must be accompanied by:**

- a script and/or storyboard, or a *detailed* and orderly outline of contents;
- a bibliography of all written and “clipped” sources;
- a statement from each group member of what you learned from doing the project.

Presentation length: up to 30 minutes; depends on topic and number of presentations in schedule.

**-Paper:** Presentations are encouraged, but groups that choose some types of fieldwork projects may need to show their results in a research paper. Each group that does not present will hand in a research paper or equivalent comprehensive document on or before the deadline. Each paper or document must contain complete citations for all bibliographic sources, including audio and video clips, which may be included by means of URLs or recordings of 10 minutes or less. *If you use recordings, be sure that they are clearly associated with the document, in the same manila envelope or online file, and labeled with the course number and the name of at least one group member. This prevents losses.*

Length: Depends on topic and size of group; average 12-15 pages double-spaced for papers.

NOTE: All groups must hand in a document, whether script or formal paper. Each document must be *clearly written, proofread and corrected, and accompanied by full bibliographic details.*

**-Exercises**

1. **Listen for 20 minutes** to an auditory news broadcast – radio or podcast. Write a paragraph about how the words used, and the presenter's tone of voice, affected you. - Did you believe the stories? Did you have questions? After the broadcast finished, how did you feel?

Specify: The station or URL, the date & time. Length: 1-2 pages.

2. **Attend a live performance**, on campus or off, of music or theatre. (Concerned about ticket prices? Campus performances at the Music and Drama departments are free for students.)

Write a brief essay or review about what you heard, how it affected you (Memories? Emotions? Images? Ideas?) and how the experience relates to the content of this course.

-Integrate reference to a chapter of the textbook or an assigned article into your commentary.

-Prepare to concentrate on the sound, not on dancing, drinking, eating or socializing. You might enjoy the event in a completely new way.

*Specify: Title of event, date, venue. Attach ticket stub or screenshot of e-ticket. .*  
Length: 2-4 pages.

## **Participation grade**

Besides your in-class participation, the following exercise will be counted toward your participation grade:

**Commentary, posted on D2L, describing your thoughts about one presentation** given in class (not your own group). Comments should be kept sincere and polite: they will be available to the class. A sentence or two will do, a concise paragraph is fine. This assignment will not be graded, but will count for participation scoring.

## **Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No**

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

## **Submission of Assignments:**

Annotated bibliographies will be submitted in hard copy.

Papers and presentation scripts may be hard copy or electronic, depending on your topic: this will be determined for each group.

If submitting electronically, be sure to *title your file as follows:*

**COMS 391\_surnames of all group members** (alphabetical and separated by commas)

*Department Regulations:* Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox. In case of assignments authorized for online submission, use the Dropbox function of D2L.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

## **Policy for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. If you know that the assignment is going to be late for a good reason (Illness? University sports team travel? Extreme stress?), ask for an extension *before* it's due.

### Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

### Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. However, assignments, exams, and other work in this course will be graded using raw scores (e.g., a score out of 15 for an assignment worth 15 /100 of the final grade)

The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department. If letter grades are used for an assignment or other course component, the percentage equivalent in the final column will be used for calculating the final grade:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%

	subject matter.			
<b>1.70</b>		<b>C-</b>	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
<b>1.30</b>	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	<b>D+</b>	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
<b>1.00</b>		<b>D</b>	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
<b>0.00</b>	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	<b>F</b>	00 - 49.99%	0%

### **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people’s words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

### **Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

### **Research Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

If you plan to conduct any interviews with people or observations of them for your Project, see your instructor about Ethics clearance.

## Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calgary Police Service</li> <li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li> <li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li> <li>• Safewalk Program</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> 403-220-5333 <b>403-266-1234</b> <b>Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort ( <b>220-5333</b> ). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT help line</li> </ul>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a> 403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Support Services</li> <li>• Student Services Mobile App</li> </ul>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li> <li>• Student Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Health Services</li> <li>• Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</li> <li>• Online resources and tips</li> </ul>	<b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a> <b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a> If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.



## Schedule of Lectures and Readings

9/10 - Introduction of concepts; acoustics, auditory system, psychoacoustics, acoustic ecology, acoustic communications, auditory culture; speech, music, noise, silence.

Slide set 1

Explanation of assignments and expectations

9/17 -Hearing and Listening; noticing and describing sound, sound and silence

*Formation of groups for projects and sound-mapping*

Stocker, Introduction and chapter 1

WFAE website:

Copeland "Ten Questions"; Wrightson "An Introduction"

<http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/index.html>

-Sound and culture; how sound communicates, sound and silence, sound mapping

Slide set 2

Stocker, chapter 2

WFAE: de Geest, "The Negative Persona of Silence"

Westerkamp, "Listening to the Listening"

Preliminary discussion of projects

9/24 -Soundwalks / Project planning (class divided into groups)

### **Exercise 1 due**

-What we Hear: Science of Sound

Slide set 3

Stocker, chapter 3 pp 67-81

*The complete schedule will be posted on D2L before the course starts.*