

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Communications Studies COMS 591 S01
Senior Seminar in Communication

Topic: Video Activism

Fall 2015

Thurs, Sept. 10 – Thurs, Dec. 3 (excluding Nov. 11-15)

Lectures: Th 12:30-3:20

Instructor: Samantha C. Thrift
Office: SS 210
Office Phone: 403-220-5320
E-Mail: samantha.thrift@ucalgary.ca
Web Page: D2L available through MyUofC portal
Office Hours: W 11:00am - 1:00pm (or by appointment)

Course Description

Often described as a “weapon” for political change, portable video technology has been used by individuals, organizations, and independent journalists to motivate, educate, shock and raise awareness and consciousness. This course examines video as a political tool from the 1960s onward, addressing its role in expressing dissent and mobilizing political resistance. Students will explore the advocacy potential of the production process as well as the product, and learn how to evaluate the political efficacy of video in different media contexts. Key topics to be covered include: the political aesthetics of early feminist video; bootleg video and underground networks of distribution; AIDS video activism; the rise of the witness-citizen; “copwatching” and video as evidence; digital storytelling practices; and transnational video advocacy.

A combination of lecture, class discussion, and in-class screenings will inform discussion of several case studies and student projects through the semester. Please note that we will study some challenging material in this course, including representations of sexuality, violence, and death. These are not included for shock value, but are legitimate investigations of controversial subject matters in video activism.

Additional Information

This is not a production course, although students will have the option to complete a video project for credit.

PREREQUISITE: COMS 369, 371, 381, and CMCL 313 or COMS 313 and admission to the BA with a Major in Communications Studies.

Textbooks and Readings

A digital course pack has been prepared and will be made available on the COMS 591 S01 course website.

Internet and electronic communication device information

The in-class use of computers for activities other than note taking purposes will not be tolerated. Therefore, cell phones and other electronic communication devices must be turned off upon entering the classroom and may not be used in the classroom or during class time. If you engage in non-course related online activity during class, the professor will confiscate the device for the duration of that class.

No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Email

When corresponding with the instructor via email, students should include the course number (COMS 591) and a clear statement of purpose in the subject line. If you do not include the course number in your email's subject line, your email may get lost in your instructor's overflowing inbox and go unread! Please maintain a respectful tone in your correspondence with the course instructor.

Email correspondence is most useful for short specific inquiries. If you have detailed questions on the course material or assignments please visit me during office hours.

I will return emails during the week, usually on a first-come, first-served basis. Emails sent in the evening or on weekends will not be read or replied to until the next working day.

NOTE: I do not accept email submissions of work.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Weight	Due Date
Participation	20%	Each class.
Short Essay	25%	October 1
Term Project Proposal	15%	October 15
Work-in-Progress Presentation	10%	November 5 & 19
Final Submission	30%	December 3

Participation (20%)

One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to form their own ideas and share them with their peers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion of ideas. Your participation entails coming to class having carefully read the day's assigned texts; being ready and willing to discuss issues raised in the readings; offering your informed, critical responses to screenings; listening to your classmates' remarks attentively and responding in a respectful and constructive manner.

Your participation will be measured with weekly in-class activities, such as written reflections on video screenings and assigned readings, quality contributions to discussion and the D2L discussion board.

Short Essay (25%) Due: October 1st

Each student is required to write an essay examining an organization's (or individual's) use of video to effect social change. Your analysis should address the advocacy potential of the production process (i.e., technique, distribution platform) as well as the product. Based on your analysis of a specific video, what do you conclude about the capacity of video to mobilize political resistance and/or effect political change?

Word count: 1200-1500.

Term Project

Throughout the semester, students will be working on a final project. This project can be undertaken individually or as a small group (no more than 3). There are two types of term project:

Option A: Research essay. Details to be provided in class. (8-10 pages)

Option B: Create a video* (ex. PSA, personal/political video such as family history, digital storytelling), accompanied by an essay relating the video work to course concepts and themes. (4-6 pages)

*Note: A video project completed for credit for another course will not be accepted.

The Term Project consists of three components:

- **Proposal (15%)** Due: October 15th
The proposal will offer a description of your proposed project, and whether you plan to undertake a research paper or the creative work option. In all cases, the proposal will be 2-3 pages, including a list of 5 secondary sources that are highly relevant to your analysis (three of which must be drawn from the course syllabus). Once your topic has been approved, you are committed to it until the end (though you may alter your argument or conceptual approach). Due: October 4.
- **Work-in-Progress Presentation (10%)** Due: November 5th & 19th
Class time will be given for presenting and discussing draft versions of your final projects. The goal of this exercise is to encourage you to work on your project throughout the term; to critically reflect on how the assigned readings and class discussions relate to and can be incorporated into your individual projects; and to get feedback from your peers.
- **Final Submission (30%)** Due: December 3rd

More details about the final submission will be provided in-class.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

All assignments and exams weighted more than 20% must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Submission of Assignments:

Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or 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.

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.

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

- letter grades
- percentage grades
- raw scores (e.g., a score out of 15 for an assignment worth 15 /100 of the final grade)
- GPA values (using any value on the 0 to 4.0 scale, including, e.g., 3.2 or 2.8)
- a combination of the above.

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 subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	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 (3rd 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>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca
CAMPUS SECURITY	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Services Mobile App 	http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
<p>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	<p>https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/ http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</p>
<p>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</p> <p>403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</p> <p>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.</p>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

The Schedule of Readings will be posted to D2L before the first class.