

**Department of
Communication and Culture
Communications Studies (COMS) 371 - L01
Critical Media Studies
Winter 2013
M 14:00 – 16:50**

Instructor: Kerry McArthur
Office Location: SS307
E-mail: kjmcarth@ucalgary.ca
Web page: Blackboard
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

The course focuses upon major critical approaches in communication studies to introduce students to the theoretical foundations of media- and mass communication-related research. The course explores the contexts in which these theories arose, identifies their major strengths and weaknesses, and provides an appreciation of how critical theory engages the social world through research on communication and media. Areas to be covered include: the problem of communication; the culture industry; the Canadian school; structuralism and semiotics; Cultural Studies; and postmodernism.

Additional Information

This is a reading and writing intensive course that assumes basic familiarity with communication theories (COMS 201). Some course content may contain material that is sexually explicit, violent or otherwise offensive. If you have concerns about this, please make them known to the instructor in advance.

Objectives of the Course

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with the major critical theories relevant to media studies. By the end of this course, students will be enabled to:

- Recognize and contrast the major authors, concepts and ideas within the critical traditions
- Apply these theories to analyze media content and practices
- Develop a critical awareness of media content and practices
- Produce academically rigorous written and oral communication assignments, while developing research and critical thinking skills

Internet and electronic communication device information

Cell phones, iPods and gaming devices should be off during class; laptops and iPads may be used for taking notes.

Textbooks and Readings:

Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Douglas Kellner (Eds.) (2012). *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. Second Edition. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Assignments and Evaluation

You will be graded on five components:

1. Group presentations (15%): January 28 through April 8, 2013
2. Quizzes (20%): February 11 and March 25, 2013
3. Final essay with Annotated Bibliography
 - a) Annotated bibliography (10%): due February 25, 2013
 - b) Final essay (25%): due March 18, 2013
4. Take-home exam (20%): April 15, 2013
5. Participation (10%)

All assignments must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor. It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor when 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.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

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.

Description of assignments

1. Group presentations (15%): January 28 through April 8, 2013
Students will work in small groups to produce a 20-minute presentation on one of the text readings (usually a chapter on a theorist and his/her contribution to the field.) Each member of the group will contribute to the research behind this project and take an equal part in its presentation.
2. Quizzes (20%): February 11 and March 25, 2013
These two quizzes will test understanding of the required readings and material covered in class. Each quiz will last approximately 30 minutes and comprise multiple choice and/or short-answer questions.

3. Final essay with Annotated Bibliography (35% altogether): February 25 and March 18, 2013

This assignment will allow the student to focus by means of a theoretical model upon a contemporary media form or issue (i.e.: Facebook as Barthes might have seen it, 3D cinema as viewed by McLuhan, etc.). Topics for this final essay must be cleared with the instructor first.

a) Annotated bibliography (10%): due February 25, 2013: The annotated bibliography will reference five academic articles in the field of media studies that draw upon or critique your theoretical model and media issue. The bibliography will comprise five separate reviews of the chosen articles, each of them 250- to 300-words in length.

b) Final essay (25%): due March 18, 2013: This paper will introduce the important points of the selected theory and its key theoreticians, then apply it to a chosen field of study. Paper length: 8 to 11 pages, including References section.

4. Take-home exam (20%): April 15, 2013

The take-home exam will challenge the student to compare, critique and contextualize the various theoretical models examined throughout the course. The exam will provide a list of approximately 7 to 8 questions; students will choose three questions from this list and write short-essay-length responses to each; this response should be 9 to 11 double-spaced pages in length.

5. Participation (10%)

Students are expected to contribute insights on readings, theorists and their experiences with media during classes: this will require regular attendance and a close reading of assigned chapters from the textbook. On occasion, students will be asked to convey personal insights into media theory via written responses; these contributions will not be graded *per se* but used to help determine individual participation grades.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, **students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**

For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. 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 System

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

	Grading Scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99
A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, A- would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. F will be converted to zero.

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. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

Academic Misconduct

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

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see
<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

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

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:

<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

A detailed schedule of lectures and readings will be provided in the first day of class and posted on Blackboard.