Communications Studies COMS 401 - L20
Internet and Popular Culture
Spring 2011
Wednesday, 16:00 - 19:50

Instructor: Delia Dumitrica
Office Location: SS 209
E-Mail: dddumitr@ucalgary.ca
Office Hours: Wednesday, 15:00 - 16:00

Course Description
This course will examine the representation of the internet in popular culture. We will rely on two theoretical strands: a range of cultural studies theories and the social construction of technology (SCOT). These theoretical models will help us approach and analyze the ways in which the internet is presented in our contemporary popular culture. We will explore iconic images and texts, interrogating them in terms of the implications they raise for the ways in which we come to know the world, understand ourselves and relate to each other.

Students are expected to read the required novels as well as watch the required movies. In addition to that, students will have to do the required readings for each class, participate in class discussions, and engage in independent research. Classes will combine lectures with student presentations and group work.

Objectives of the Course
By the end of the course, students will:
- be familiar with social construction of technology and cultural studies approaches;
- be able to apply these theories in the analysis of popular culture;
- gain in-depth knowledge of the representation of a particular technology in popular culture;
- develop a set of critical literacy skills that will enable them to analyse various cultural products.

Internet and electronic communication device information
All cell phones should be silenced for the entire duration of the class. No text messaging during class. Laptops can only be used for taking notes. Using a laptop or a cell for any activities not related to the course will affect your participation mark.

Textbooks and Readings:
A list of required readings will be introduced during the first day of class. Workload: two articles/ class.

You are expected to read two science fiction novels and watch three movies outside the required readings and prior to class:
- Novels: *Neuromancer* (1984), William Gibson; *Snowcrash* (1992), Neal Stephenson.

- Movies: Tron (1982); Hackers (1995); Matrix (1999).

Assignments and Evaluation
Students will be graded based on five components:
- Research paper (40%) - *May 15 (proposal); June 22 (paper).*
- Group project (20%) - *June 15 & June 22, 2011*
- Reading response (20%) - *May 18 - June 22, 2011*
- Film/ Novel response (10%) - *May 18 - June 22, 2011*
- Class Participation (10%)

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.
Note: 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.

Description of assignments

Research paper (40%): Proposal (10%) - May 25, 2011, Paper (30%) - June 22, 2011
For this research project, you will pick any popular culture product (e.g. an episode of a TV show, a novel, a movie etc.) and you will examine the representation of the internet (or an internet-related application or hardware) in that context. You will rely on the theory discussed in this course to construct your project.

Paper proposal (10%) will include a research question, as well as a brief description of how the chosen theoretical model informs the project. The proposal will also include three academic references (books or journal articles) which you plan to use in your paper. For each reference, you will provide a brief summary and you will indicate how it fits your research project.
Length: Proposal 2-3 pages (double spaced); Paper 10 - 15 pages (double spaced).

Group project (20%): Poster (15%), Blog entry (5%) - June 15 & June 22, 2011
Groups of maximum 3 students will choose one of the following two types of projects:
- Fact vs. fiction: In this assignment, you will discuss a particular novel, movie, show etc. by evaluating how much of the representation of ICTs is factual and how much is fiction. You will assess the social anxieties or dreams that drive the fictionalization of your chosen technology.
- History of technology: Using one of the SCOT models, you will explore the historical development of a computer related technology (e.g. 3D goggles) or application (e.g. social networking sites, email) used in a movie, novel, TV show, etc.
All posters will be exhibited and discussed in class. You will also summarize the contents of the poster in the form of a blog post.

Reading response (20%): Anytime, May 18 - June 22, 2011

You will write a response to one of the required readings. The response should primarily answer the following questions: What are the main concepts used in this article?; What is the main argument?; What are the main points/ suggestions the author makes? In the end of the response, explore your own understanding of these concepts/ arguments, trying to identify what remains unclear to you or what resonates with you and why.
You will be required to present a summary of your response in class and to propose a set of questions for further discussion.
Length: 2-4 pages (double spaced).

Film/ novel response (10%) - Anytime, May 18 - June 22, 2011
You will make short notes on one aspect of the readings for a specific class you were reminded of while watching the assigned movie/ reading the novel. In your notes, you are expected to engage with both the reading and the movie/ novel, by making connections between them (and, where applicable, between other readings, movies and novels), explaining how they support or depart from each other. This assignment will also take the form of a blog post. You can write your film/ novel response in conjunction with your reading response.

Class participation (10%)
You are expected to be present for all classes and actively participate in class discussions. Opportunities to do small in-class or online activities will count toward your participation mark.

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.

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: www.efwr.ucalgary.ca

Grading System

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

(Revised, effective September 2008)

	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 (MacEwan Student Centre 4th floor, efwr.ucalgary.ca) 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.su.ucalgary.ca/services/student-services/student-rights.html

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/cfreb

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Class	Date	Topic	Novel/ Movie	Deadline
1	May 11	Introduction Questioning the human/ technology divide.	Serial Experiments Lane - Episode 1 (to be watched in class)	
2	May 18	Theoretical Framework (Representation; SCOT) Assignments Workshop	Stuart Hall: Representations and the Media (to be watched in class)	
3	May 25	Technology versus society? Real/virtual: Cyberspace and the end of reality.	Tron (1982) Snowcrash	Research paper proposal Reading response Film/ Novel response
4	June 1	Group projects & Research papers		
5	June 8	Social anxiety, apprehension and moral (dis)order. From thought to information: the repository of knowledge.	Hackers (1995) Snowcrash BBC Documentary (1986): The Thinking Machine (to be watched in class)	Reading response Film/ Novel response
6	June 15	The disappearance of the body Poster conference	Neuromancer	Group Projects Reading response Film/ Novel response
7	June 22	Agency & Structure: Where is freedom? Poster conference	The Matrix (1999)	Group Projects Research paper Reading response Film/ Novel response