

**Communications Studies (COMS) 591- S01**  
**Senior Seminar in Communication**  
**New Media and Citizenship**

**Fall 2013**  
Thursday 12:30-15:15

**Instructor:** Maria Bakardjieva  
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**Office Hours:** Thursday's 15:30-16:30 or by appointment

**Additional Information**

This is an inquiry-based course. Class activities and responsibilities will be organized on the model of the research lab. This means that students will take the role of novice researchers working in close collaboration with supervisor and colleagues. For her part, the instructor will act as an advisor and resource person directing and supporting students in their learning endeavours. Course work will include both individual and group assignments the goal being to balance out the opportunities for individual creativity and expression with the power of collective intellectual effort.

Students should have reliable access to the Internet as well as valid UofC e-mail addresses. The course will involve regular use of Blackboard. Ideas will be shared and discussions carried out through personal blogs, webpages and online forums.

**Course Description**

The media environment of contemporary societies is undergoing substantial change. One of the key elements of this transformation is the use of new media by citizens, acting as individuals and groups, for putting out their concerns to the attention of the larger public and the policy-makers of their respective countries as well as the international community. The most glaring recent examples come from the Middle East. However, the capacity of citizens to mobilize new media for political discussion and action has been demonstrated in less 'revolutionary', but nevertheless profound ways in the rest of the world.

Looking from the top down, states, municipalities and political institutions of all kinds have been at pains to make use of new media in fulfilling their mandates. They have

strived to build new openness and accessibility into their existing practices. To what extent have these efforts resonated with citizens' expectations and demands? Have they connected with the bottom-up impulses and trends described previously? Have they contributed to enhancing citizens' participation in making the decisions that affect their lives? What uncertainties and challenges does this situation present?

This course focuses on the concept of citizenship in a society characterized by the thorough penetration of digital information and communication technologies in all spheres of life. Citizenship, broadly defined, includes any form of democratic participation in social institutions – political, technological and cultural. How is such participation possible in a digital society? What opportunities for involvement do citizens have in a densely mediated polis? Can technological development itself be democratically steered? The goal of the course is to critically explore the new forms of democratic participation that the pervasive presence of digital media in contemporary societies affords and requires.

### **Objectives of the Course**

The objective of this course is to allow students to formulate and investigate issues concerning the democratic opportunities, but also the challenges, that new media pose to citizens, civic organizations (such as NGOs) and public bodies. The course material to be presented and discussed in class will provide an introduction to various concepts and approaches that have been applied to the understanding of concrete developments in this area. Students will be expected to use this material along with their existing knowledge in Media Studies to articulate and frame a specific research topic and explore it with the help of additional readings and observations. The desired learning outcomes include improved academic research and writing competence, critical understanding of the role of new media in contemporary democracies and awareness of the choices faced by communication professionals. In contemporary society it is essential to understand the ways in which citizens can participate in all spheres of public life. Analytical and professional skills related to these processes could be an important asset to a graduating communication student.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

The use of cell phones during class is strictly prohibited. Laptops, iPads and similar devices can be used for note-taking purposes only. If the instructor finds that you are using such a device for a different purpose (Facebook, web-surfing, messaging, etc.), your participation grade will be affected.

### **Textbooks and Readings:**

Dahlgren, Peter (2009). *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Additional required readings will be made available through Blackboard, the Internet or library databases. More sources will be suggested by the instructor to individual students and working groups depending on their specific topics.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

1. Research paper: The paper (10 pages double-spaced, 12 p, Times New Roman) should represent a thorough investigation of a case or issue related to the theme of the course. It should be based on literary sources identified and selected by the students and should present an original perspective and/or argument concerning the topic. Empirical observations conducted by the author can also be included to strengthen the argument. These observations have to be carried out rigorously and systematically in accordance with a stated methodology. In some cases an ethics approval might be necessary. Paper topics should be selected in consultation with the instructor. Paper proposals of 500 words articulating the paper's topic, research question, structure, main points of argument and at least four references should be submitted to the instructor by October 31. Students are expected to make at least one office-hour appointment with the instructor during the semester to discuss their paper topic and/or proposal. Papers will be presented in a public, conference-like mode in the last two sessions of the course (November 28 and December 5). Papers should be handed in to the instructor in her office SS334 between 1:00 and 4:00 pm on Thursday, December 9 AND submitted in electronic form through the Digital Dropbox in Blackboard on the same day. Papers completed before that date can be submitted in SS320 clearly addressed to the attention of Dr. Maria Bakardjieva AND in electronic form through the Digital Dropbox in Blackboard. **Weight: 40%. Note: 5% of the grade will be determined by the quality of the paper proposal.**
2. Group research project and presentation: Students will form research groups by the end of the first class session. Each of these groups will be assigned one of the week's topics to investigate and present in class based on the required readings and additional research. This research should go beyond the assigned class material to include additional sources and practical examples. The teams will have the responsibility to set up a meeting with the instructor to discuss their topic and research plan. The presentations will be up to 1 hour long and will involve all members of the group. The presenters are expected to lead a class discussion on the topic following their exposition. The use of visuals is required. Supporting materials (Power Point presentations, notes, webpages, blogs, links, images, videos, etc.) should be posted online following the presentation. Unless students have created their own web site or blog, the presentation files should be posted in the Blackboard discussion forum for the respective week. **Weight: 30%**
3. Weekly quizzes: At the beginning of four of the classes there will be a short quiz (multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks and short-answer type questions) that will address the required readings for that week. The exact dates of the quizzes will be

announced. Students are expected to be familiar with all readings so that they could participate productively in class discussions. **Weight: 20% (total)**

4. In-class participation: Since this class has a seminar format, in-class participation in the discussion through questions, statements, reflections, responses, examples and comments on other people's thoughts is essential. Familiarity with the readings for each class session is a necessary condition for adequate class participation. The evaluation of in-class participation will be done in four categories: 'inadequate' – attending class, but not making a meaningful contribution, 'adequate', 'very good' – regular, informed and insightful, 'outstanding' – enthusiastic, original and strongly beneficial to the learning process. Each category carries 2.5 points of the overall participation grade. Students regularly absent from class will receive a participation grade of 0%. **Weight: 10%**
5. Conference response. For the public presentation of class papers, a respondent will be assigned to each student paper. The respondent will have to provide comments on the paper briefly addressing its strengths and the points where in her/his view improvement is needed. She or he is also expected to pose questions to the presenter. **Required, no grade.**

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 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.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

Please note: If your class is held in the evening, the Registrar's Office will make every attempt to schedule the final exam during the evening; however, there is NO guarantee that the exam will NOT be scheduled during the day.

### **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://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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) 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/cfreb>

### **Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

To be distributed in the first day of classes.