

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

Communication and Media Studies COMS 591 S01

Senior Seminar in Communication

Topic: Video Activism

Spring 2017

Mon., May 15 – Tues., June 27 (excluding May 22)

Lectures: M & W 9:00-11:45

Instructor: Dr. 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: Mondays, 12:00-2:00 (or by appointment)

Course Description

In this course, students examine how video has been engaged as an activist tool by individuals, grassroots movements and nonprofit organizations. Students will explore the use of video as an alternative news source, as a process that empowers, and as a means to document evidence. Each of these approaches to studying video activism are illustrated by historical and/or contemporary case studies, including AIDS video activism, the NFB Challenge for Change program, feminist video chainletters, human rights organization, WITNESS, and bystander footage of police violence. Students will critically examine the history of video as an activist medium, from the celebratory discourses welcoming the camcorder revolution of the 1960s to contemporary critiques of YouTube as an individualizing and potentially de-politicizing platform for dissent.

A combination of lecture, class discussion, and in-class screenings will inform discussion of these topics and student projects through the semester.

Additional Information

Please note that we will study some challenging material in this course, including representations of sexuality, violence, and death. Some material may include coarse language.

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

PREREQUISITE: 78 units, including Communication and Media Studies 313, 369, 371, 381, or Communications Studies 313, 369, 371, 381, and admission to the BA in Communication and Media Studies.

Objectives of the Course

1. To integrate communication knowledge and skills gained from formal and informal learning at the postsecondary level.
2. To understand the historical impact, evolving aims, and diverse methods of video as an activist form.
3. To analyze the (feminist, queer, critical race, human rights) praxis of specific activist videos produced by individuals and organizations.
4. To learn dominant communication and cultural studies frameworks of analysis for activist video.
5. To build communication skills and understanding through project design, presentations, peer feedback, and (optionally) video creation.

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 set to mute upon entering the classroom and should not be used in the classroom or during class time. If students engage in non-course related online activity during class, the professor will request that they power down their device for the remainder of class time. 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 name (COMS 591) in the subject line. If you do not include the course name in your email's subject line, your message may get overlooked in the instructor's inbox and go unread! Please maintain a respectful tone in your correspondence with the instructor.

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

The instructor will respond to 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: Email submissions of work will NOT be accepted unless arrangements have been made with the instructor.

Assignments and Evaluation

Weight	Course components	Due
20%	In-Class Reflections	May 24, May 29, June 5, June 12
20%	Video Chainletter Project	TBD (sign-up)
15%	Project Proposal	May 31
15%	Work-in-Progress Presentation	June 14, 19, 21
30%	Final Submission	June 26

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.

Participation (20%) due: May 24, May 29, June 5, June 12

Your participation will be evaluated with 4 in-class written reflections on video screenings and assigned readings. These written responses will be held at any time during the class on the specified dates. Each reflection will be worth 5 points. A detailed, thoughtful reflection that shows accurate understanding of the material will receive full marks, while a reflection that addresses the day's work in a superficial manner will receive 2.5 marks. A reflection that demonstrates significant errors in understanding course material will receive 1 point.

Please note:

- The instructor will not provide a copy of the day's readings
- Normally, a missed reflection cannot be made-up or rescheduled for any reason
- Normally, missed reflections will receive 0 points

In the case of documented illness, the grade for a missed reflection will be added to the grade for the final project. See the accommodation policy later in this outline.

Video Chainletter Project (20%) due: TBD (sign-up required)

One purpose of a seminar like this is to encourage 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. To this end, students must come to class having carefully read the day's assigned readings, be ready and willing to discuss issues raised in the readings, offer informed, critical responses to video screenings, listen to classmates' remarks attentively and respond in a constructive, respectful manner.

For this assignment, you will work in groups of five to record a "video chainletter" that discusses/reflects on the issues raised during a particular class. One person will record the first reflection and pose a question for the next person in the chain to answer (and so forth). Each person's "reflection" should be 45 seconds to 1 minute in duration, creating a final video of (approximately) 5 minutes. Creativity is welcomed, so long as the videos maintain focus on the issues relevant to that day's reading/screening/discussion. The video chainletter must be submitted as a single video file (via email attachment, USB, or Dropbox), not five individual videos.

More details will be provided in class.

Term Project

Throughout the semester, students will be working on a final project. Students will select one of two options for their project.

Option 1: Research or analysis essay (10 pages). Individual project.

Option 2: Digital storytelling video* (with 4-5 page essay relating the video's creation and content to course concepts and themes). Individual or partner project.

*NOTE: A video completed for credit in another course will not be accepted.

The term project consists of three components:

Project Proposal (15%) due: May 31

The proposal will clearly indicate which project option will be undertaken, provide a detailed description of the project and its conceptual underpinnings, including specific reference to three course readings. Must include a properly formatted bibliography.

Word count: 500-750.

Work-in-Progress Presentation (15%) due: June 14, 19, 21 (sign-up required)

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 solicit feedback from your peers. Details about the format for the WiP Presentations will be provided in class.

Final Submission (30%) due: June 26

Details to be provided in class.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor. 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 marked final exams in SS 320. 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 and to ensure that the proper version is submitted (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission). Including a version date in your file name may be useful.

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.

Student Accommodations:

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

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. 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. In this course, raw point scores will be used to evaluate written assignments and in-class participation assignments, while letter grades will be used for presentations.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, letter grades will be converted to the midpoint of the percentage range, as shown in the final column of the table below.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF 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	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%

	the same subject			
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	0- 49.99%	0%

* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

** These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

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 (e.g., surveys, interviews, or observations) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve 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 	<p>403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</p> <p>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/</p>
<p>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	<p>http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</p> <p>403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca</p>
<p>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	<p>http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</p>
<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/</p> <p>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</p> <p>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 Lecture Topics and Readings (posted on D2L)