

University of Calgary

Department of Communication, Media and Film

COMS 491 L01: *Introduction to Acoustic Communications and Acoustic Ecology*

Fall 2020: Tuesday September 8 – Tuesday December 8

(excluding Oct. 12th and Nov. 9-13)

Lecture: T/Th 11:00-12:15.

Synchronous on Tuesdays and asynchronous on Thursdays except for Oct. 1 and 22, and Dec. 3; see the weekly schedule for detailed information

IMPORTANT NOTE ON COURSE DELIVERY FOR FALL 2020:

This Fall 2020 course will be offered entirely online as part of the University's plan to ensure everyone's safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. Please read the outline carefully to see which course components will be offered synchronously (where you are expected to participate at the usual scheduled course time) and which components will be offered asynchronously (to be completed on your own time). Synchronous course sessions will normally be hosted on Zoom, a video-conferencing program. To access scheduled Zoom course sessions, go to D2L, click on the COMMUNICATION tab, and select Zoom 5 or 10 minutes before class is scheduled to begin.

If you will not be able to participate in scheduled synchronous class sessions owing to time differences, then you should arrange to take this course when it is offered in person in the future.

Note that the time indicated on course outlines for all timed quizzes and exams in CMCL, COMS, and FILM courses includes 50% extra time to allow for technical difficulties.

Instructor: Dr. Marcia J. Epstein

E-Mail: epstein@ucalgary.ca

Web Page: D2L available through MyUofC portal

Office Hours: Virtual: On Zoom at ends of classes or by appointment

Course Description

In an increasingly noisy and visually oriented culture, are we losing the ability to access information about the world through hearing? What are the implications of sound for communication and learning? What is a soundscape? What is acoustemology?

Acoustic Ecology (AE) studies the effects of sound -- including speech, music, noise, and silence -- in natural and human environments, as well as its effects on health, cognition and culture. It is an interdisciplinary field which weaves together aspects of physical sciences, health sciences, communication theory, cognitive psychology, sociology, musicology and aesthetics.

The field of Acoustic Communications (AC) is concerned with the ways in which speech, sound, music and silence convey meaning.

This course will provide an introduction to selected concepts, techniques and applications from AE and AC.

Additional Information

- Some class time on Zoom will be allocated for project group meetings
- Because this course is about sound and listening, please let me know on the first day of classes if you have a significant hearing impairment.

Objectives of the Course

Participants will be expected to demonstrate the following skills upon completion of the course:

- Ability to learn and use descriptive terminology and observation techniques for environmental sound;
- Ability to perceive and describe a variety of acoustic environments;
- Demonstrable familiarity with concepts and issues presented in the course, including those related to acoustic communications and auditory culture;
- Ability to conceptualize, plan and complete individual and group assignments;
- Ability to write clearly and cogently

Readings

- "Epstein Readings" posted on the course site in D2L
- Articles on the website of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE):
<http://ecoeear.proscenia.net/wfaelibrary/library/articles/index.html>

Recommended listening:

Sound Blogs <http://soundexplorations.blogspot.ca/>

Earth Ear: <http://earthear.com/acousticecology.html>

Internet and electronic communication device information

You will need access to Zoom through D2L on any device available to you. Zoom can be glitchy for everyone: it works best if participants mute the audio when not speaking. If there are technical problems, please contact itsupport@ucalgary.ca.

| Assignments (see instructions below) | Due | Value |
|--|---------------|-------|
| Listening Assignment 1 | 6 Oct. | 10% |
| Essay 1 | 16 Oct. | 20% |
| Group Project Plan | 5 Nov. | 5% |
| Listening Exercise 2 | 1 Dec. | 20% |
| Group presentation posts (Ppt or video) | 26 Nov-1 Dec. | 20% |
| Group project document (sources, comments) | 3 Dec. | 10% |
| Essay 2 | 9 Dec. | 15% |

Note: You will be graded on the results of your work. Hard work does not merit an A unless it produces outstanding results.

Instructions for Assignments

Midterm and Final essays: These must be started at a time that suits the student's needs and completed within a 24-hour time period. Thus, the essay will be due in the **D2L Dropbox** 24 hours after the topics are posted (there will be a choice of topics). It is advisable to start early so that if you experience connectivity problems there will be time to wait for them to resolve. Length: 3-5 pages for each, in Word files (no pdfs!)

Group Projects must be done in groups of 3 or 4 self-chosen members. Group formation will take place October 29 and November 3-5 (see Schedule) on Zoom: Breakout rooms will be arranged by topic interest for the purpose on October 29; the D2L group formation tool will arrange 'group lockers' if needed; otherwise Google Docs can be used. in November. Anyone unable to choose by November 5 will be automatically assigned to a group.

Topics will be chosen by each group in consultation with all members of the group and cleared with the instructor. Each group will choose a focus in AE (fieldwork) or AC (research), and prepare:

- a plan of research or investigation with an annotated bibliography (AC) or detailed list (AE) of preliminary sources; and
- a virtual presentation to the class followed by a written document (see below)

Topic areas for projects (topics will develop from these general categories):

Speech – as carrier of information, emotion, identity, or means of discrimination
Music – as communication, inspiration, remedy, relaxation, and/or addiction
Noise – as celebration, protest, territorial boundary, and/or hazard to health
Silence – as contemplation or restriction

All topics must be cleared with the instructor; specific advice will be given to each group about methodology.

Examples of topics:

AE: You may choose to describe and sound-map a place (e.g. business, neighbourhood, restaurant, rink). This usually involves a focus on environmental Noise or Music, or perhaps Silence. Comparing two or more examples can be a feasible approach; so can interviewing employees or residents about their reactions to the soundscape. *Unfortunately, during the pandemic many topics of this type will not be possible* – but there might be creative workarounds with recorded material or with entirely outdoor research.

AC: Research for Speech can be focused on history (e.g. radio in WW2), sociology (e.g. how the voice changes in gender reassignment), or biology (e.g. how birds communicate). Research for Music will focus on music as communication (but not the merits of your favourite band, please). Research for Silence can involve historical or biological approaches (e.g. the effects of quiet environments on stress reduction).

Topics about film soundtracks –Music and/or Speech --require at least one Film Studies student in your group; topics about Music require at least one group member with some training in music as a performer or student.

-Project Plan: This is a preliminary plan for your research project, including a statement of what you are investigating, what sources and methods you will use, how you plan to divide and carry out the work involved, and how you will ensure that work is fairly divided and that all group members do their share. Each group member should contribute at least two entries to the list of sources.

Length: avg. 3-4 pages.

-Virtual Presentation (asynchronous): Each group will post in the **D2L Discussion Board** to the class, explaining their topic-related findings, research methods, and audio and visual materials that will enhance the class's understanding of the project.

Formatting options:

Video, or Powerpoint (or equivalent) with narration; Powerpoints may include written commentary for slides. Sound files must be included in any case, with all items credited to sources. *Length of presentation:* 15 minutes on average. Variants can be arranged.

*Each posted project must be followed by a Project Document, submitted separately within 2 days to the **D2L Dropbox**.* It will contain:

-a bibliography of all written and “clipped” sources, including audio, video, and film sources.

-a statement from each group member of what you learned from doing the project.

Document length depends on topic and size of group. Please label your file with the surname of one group member: (COMS 491-Maftabandysak Group). The names of *all* group members must be on the first page of the document in alphabetical order by surname (for convenience: it speeds the recording of scores).

Listening Exercises 1 and 2

See the Schedule at the end of this outline for instructions

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

All assignments and exams must normally be completed to pass the course. If you become ill, exceptions can be made by individual arrangement.

Submission of Assignments:

All submissions are through D2L, either Discussion Board or D2L Dropbox. Please know which one to use (see instructions). Please *do not use email* for submitting assignments, as they can get lost in the avalanche.

Department Regulations:

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

If you know that the assignment is going to be late for a good reason (Illness? Disabling stress? Pandemic home-schooling responsibilities?), please ask for an extension before it's due, if possible.

Late submissions *without an extension*, and those submitted after a granted extension deadline, will have 2 points deducted from their scores for each weekday late. For example, a 20-point assignment with an initial score of 18 points submitted a week late would be down to 8 points.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation 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) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors. If the illness is symptomatic COVID-19, let your instructor know immediately so that an extension can be arranged.

Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses 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 and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. However, assignments will be graded using raw scores (e.g., a score out of 15 for an assignment worth 15 /100 of the final grade)

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 | Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents* | Letter grade % equivalent for calculations* |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 4.00 | Outstanding performance | A+ | 96 - 100% | 98.0% |
| 4.00 | Excellent performance | A | 90 - 95.99% | 93.0% |
| 3.70 | Approaching excellent performance | A - | 85 - 89.99% | 87.5% |
| 3.30 | Exceeding good performance | B+ | 80 - 84.99% | 82.5% |
| 3.00 | Good performance | B | 75 - 79.99% | 77.5% |
| 2.70 | Approaching good performance | B- | 70 - 74.99% | 72.5% |
| 2.30 | Exceeding satisfactory performance | C+ | 65 - 69.99% | 67.5% |

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|-------------|--|-----------|-------------|-------|
| 2.00 | Satisfactory performance | C | 60 - 64.99% | 62.5% |
| 1.70 | Approaching satisfactory performance | C- | 55 - 59.99% | 57.5% |
| 1.30 | Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject | D+ | 53 - 54.99% | 54.0% |
| 1.00 | Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject | D | 50 - 52.99% | 51.5% |
| 0.00 | Failure. Did not meet course requirements. | F | 0 - 49.99% | 0% |

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: 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. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

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.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, please consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, 3rd floor, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success?utm_source=ssc&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=redirect

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual

property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

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>

If you plan to conduct any interviews with people or observations of them for your Project, see your instructor about Ethics clearance.

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferrals of exams and course work, requests for reappraisals, and other matters, please see the relevant sections in the *University Calendar*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html>

Student Support Services and Resources

Please visit <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk.

For resources on D2L, visit <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students>. IT support is available at itsupport@ucalgary.ca or by calling 403-220.5555.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

NOTE: Readings and virtual-lecture material will be posted on or before Thursday of each week. We will meet on Zoom on Tuesdays (11-12:15 MST) to discuss readings and questions, both in full-group mode and in Breakout Rooms. This will give you time to encounter the information if you're in a different time zone from the scheduled class, have limited computer time, or have too many responsibilities to keep everything on schedule at once. For the same reasons, all synchronous material will be recorded and posted on D2L for the benefit of students who cannot attend the sessions. It is preferable to attend whenever you can in order to participate in discussions.

*Synchronous meetings will be held on three Thursdays: **October 1 and 22** and **Dec. 3***

Some lecture material will be posted in the form of Power-points and written commentary, and/or links to video clips. Some will be pre-recorded as voice-over with Powerpoint. Some may be recorded "live" on Zoom.

9/8 – Virtual Meet-Up for explaining course plans, checking in with questions about the course, tech, how the schedule will work, and what to do when Zoom is finicky. Also for just meeting up: what's your interest in the course? What do you notice when you're listening without distractions?

9/10 (post for discussion 9/15) Introduction of concepts; acoustics, auditory system, psychoacoustics, acoustic ecology, acoustic communications, auditory culture; speech, music, noise, silence.

9/17 (post for 9/22) Hearing and Listening; noticing and describing sound, sound and silence, how sound communicates

On WFAE website: Copeland "Ten Questions"; Wrightson "An Introduction" , Westerkamp, "Listening to the Listening"
<http://ecoeear.proscenia.net/wfaelibrary/library/articles/index.html>

9/24 (post for 9/29) What We Hear and How We Hear it: Science of Sound

Basic acoustics and human auditory system
WFAE: Ferrington, "Keep your ear-lids open", Epstein Reading 1

10/1 Speech and its Anatomy: synchronous class

How we breathe, speak, sing, and generally produce vocal sound.

Also: **Listening assignment 1 – Soundwalk – Due** Tuesday 10/6

Take a 20-minute walk in a place of your choice, alone and without any devices in or over your ears (earbuds, etc.). Make a list of what you hear, what the source of each sound is (if you can identify it), and how it makes you feel (Emotions? Memories? Annoyance? Pleasure? Surprises?). Pausing with closed eyes can help clarify the sounds. **Write a report**, submit on D2L Discussion Board (open for sharing). **Length:** 1-2 pages, double or 1.5 spaced. **Title** your report with: Your surname – Listening 1.

10/6 Instructions for initial formation of groups for projects, preliminary discussion of possible topics.

10/8 (post for 10/13) What We Don't Hear: Studying silence

WFAE: de Geest, "The Negative Persona of Silence", Epstein Reading 4

10/13 Discussion, Review, and instructions for completing Essay 1

10/15 Essay 1 (Due 10/16, 10 am MST). *A choice of focused questions will be posted 24 hours in advance.*

Also: **(post for 10/20) Noticing Noise**

WFAE: Westerkamp, "Noise control, Acoustic...Listening", Epstein Readings 2 and 3

10/20-27 Project Planning (synchronous classes 11-12:15)

10/29 (post for 11/3) Listening to Music with New Ears

What makes music work? How does it carry messages apart from words?

11/5 Project plan due 11/5 in D2L Dropbox (5%). Class time available for consultation on Zoom (optional).

(11/9-13 Reading Week)

11/17 Checking in about project plans: *Each group will be scheduled to get feedback about project plans at approximately 6-minute intervals, 11-12:15*

11/19 (post for 11/24) Sound, Health, and Natural Soundscapes

WFAE: Krause, "The Niche Hypothesis"

11/26 – 12/1 Post projects to D2L Discussion Board for sharing

Listening Assignment 2 -- Due 12/3

Listen to a recorded or broadcast performance of music or theatre on a livestream or YouTube (dance is good, too, if you concentrate on how the dancers work with the music). **Write a report** on what you noticed, based on the skills acquired in this course and your prior experience (raving about your favourite band or hip-hop artist is discouraged: try something new to you). Referring to material in the course readings will help (*hint!*). **Post the report** on D2L Discussion Board (for sharing). **Specify:** Title of event, date, source or URL if available. **Length:** 1-2 pages, double or 1.5 spaced. **Title** your post with your surname – Listening 2.

12/3 Review; Deadline for submitting Project documents to **D2L Dropbox**

12/8 Final Essay *A choice of focused questions will be posted in advance. (15%)*

Due 12/9 at 10 am MST.