

Communications Studies COMS 591 – S01
Senior Seminar in Communication: Internet and Popular Culture
Winter 2012
Monday, 9:00 – 11:50

Instructor: Dr. Delia Dumitrica
Office Location: SS344
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 9:00 -12:00 and 13:00 – 16:00 or by appointment

Additional Information

- This is a reading, writing and discussion intensive course.
- Students are expected to read four novels and to watch four movies outside class time.
- Classes take a seminar format, where students are expected to read the required readings and do some additional research prior to class, as well as participate in class discussions.
- This course makes use of Twitter and a public course blog (<http://imaginethenet.wordpress.com>). Guidance on the use of these applications will be provided by the instructor.

Course Description

This course focuses on the various ways in which the internet has been represented in popular culture, with an emphasis on novels and films. As 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, we will attempt to bring to light the anxieties, ideals and inequalities that permeate our personal and social imaginaries.

To interrogate these imaginaries, we will rely on a set of theoretical and methodological tools. In this course, we will rely on two theoretical strands: British cultural studies and the social construction of technology (SCOT). We will investigate some of the research methods that they recommend, and we will try to make use of them to develop our own research projects.

Classes will combine lectures with discussions. Three of the classes will take a conference format.

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 an 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 analyze various cultural products.

Internet and electronic communication device information

All cell phones should be silenced for the entire duration of the class. Laptops and iPads can only be used for taking notes. iPods, cell phones and gaming devices should be off during class.

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 four novels and watch four movies outside the required readings and prior to class:

- Novels: *Neuromancer* (1984), William Gibson; *Snowcrash* (1992), Neal Stephenson; *Microserfs* (1995), Douglas Coupland; *Makers* (2009), Cory Doctorow.
- Movies: *Tron* (1982); *Hackers* (1995); *Matrix* (1999); *Chatroom* (2010).

Assignments and Evaluation

Students will be graded based on six components:

- Research paper (40%) – *February 27 (proposal); April 16 (paper)*.
- Group project (20%) – *February 13, 2012*
- Reading response (15%) – *January 23 – March 26, 2012*
- Film/ Novel response (10%) - *January 23 – March 26, 2012*
- Short essay (5%) – *March 12, 2012*
- 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

1. Research paper (40%): Proposal (5%) – February 27, 2012; Paper (35%) – April 16, 2012

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 and methods discussed in this course to construct your project.

Note: If your research involves research with other human beings, you will need to obtain ethics consent. The instructor will help you with the application process.

The paper proposal (5%) will include a research question, a brief description of how the chosen theoretical model informs the project, and a short description of the research method. 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 15 - 20 pages (double spaced).

2. Group project (20%): February 13, 2012

The group project takes the form of a poster. 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.

3. Reading response (15%): January 23 to March 26, 2012

The reading response engages with one of the required readings. The response addresses 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 are expected 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).

4. Film/ novel response (10%): January 23 to March 26, 2012

The novel/ film response takes the form of a blog post on the public course blog. The assignment consists of your analysis of an aspect of the novel/ film which you feel exemplifies an idea from the required readings. You can write your novel/ film response in conjunction with your reading response.

Length: 2-3 pages (double spaced).

5. Short essay (5%): March 12, 2012

This assignment gives you the opportunity to: 1). express your opinions on a topic related to political processes and new media in Calgary; 2). critically engage with a newspaper article. Details of this assignment will be provided in class.

Length: 5 – 7 pages (double spaced).

6. Class participation (10%)

Class participation consists of a variety of elements, including: coming to class prepared (you have covered both the required reading and the novel/ film for that topic), actively participating in class discussions in a manner that shows your familiarity with the required readings and the novel/ film, doing some prior research on the topic under discussion (e.g. identifying relevant newspaper articles, blog posts, research etc.). Further details will be provided in class.

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. Assignments overdue for more than one week will not be accepted.

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

Distributed on the first day of class.