

Communication Studies 601 – Seminar 01
Interdisciplinary Approaches to Communications Studies
Fall 2010, SS 202
M 16:30 – 19:20

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Course Description

This graduate seminar examines and critically assesses some of the major theoretical trajectories (and interdisciplinary approaches) that have contributed to North American communication studies, both as a field of knowledge and as a set of institutional structures.

Communications theorists have long been concerned about the function of public and private communication; scholars address a spectrum of issues pertaining to the role of communication and the mass media in history, society, culture and our lives. This course analyses some of the major approaches to communication and the ways in which they understand, theorize, defend—and sometimes denounce—human subjectivity and social organization.

Objectives of the Course

The course objectives are to:

- 1) familiarize students with some of the main theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches characterizing communication studies
- 2) critically examine these approaches with regards to their epistemological and ontological assumptions
- 3) contextualize the theoretical currents of thought and situate them in relation to other theories
- 4) initiate students in the process of locating themselves within the field via the above-stated objectives, and by having them identify and critically assess a seminal journal issue—“seminal” to themselves personally and to communications studies as a whole

Textbooks and Readings:

There is no required text for the course, although students may find one (or both) of the following texts useful in providing orientation to key concepts within the field of Communication.

Bennett, T., L. Grossberg and M. Morris. (2005). *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hartley, J. et. al. (2002). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge.

Weekly readings are available on reserve or online through the library databases.

Assignments and Evaluation

This course has four evaluative components: intellectual introduction (20%); a seminar presentation on the assigned readings (25%); assessment and evaluation of a ‘seminal’ journal issue (30%); and a take home exam (25%).

Intellectual Introduction: Due September 20

This assignment comprises an “intellectual biography” or introduction. Specifically, what are the ideas, and who are the writers and researchers that brought you to this point in your intellectual development? What is it about the kind of work they do or their chosen topics that captures your interest? How have they shaped your own intellectual engagement? How do you see their work influencing your work in the near future?

Paper length: 5 typed double spaced pages, 12-point Times New Roman font. The paper must: 1) have appropriate citations and references, and 2) follow the *Canadian Journal of Communication* style guide. ****Papers that do not follow this guide will automatically be penalized one half letter grade. Note that this style and citation format applies to all papers submitted in the course.**

Seminar presentation: Dates coordinated with weekly topics, to be assigned in class

Students (in pairs, depending on class size) will lead a seminar focusing on the theoretical readings assigned for that week. This entails preparing a well-researched presentation, which will provide the starting point for a critical discussion of the readings by the class. Seminar ‘leaders’ should presume that their fellow students have read the reading. Summary of the texts, therefore, should be kept to a minimum. Instead, the presentation should provide a focused socio-historical contextualization of the theories/issues/themes/scholars under analysis. This means drawing out core points within the readings, but more importantly using the presentation as an opportunity to: elaborate on the theorist/concepts at hand; assess its strengths, weaknesses and assumptions about communication, the individual and/or society; situate the work within the field of communication or with relation to other theories, etc. In short, the seminar is to be analytical, not descriptive. Students leading the seminars must come with two insightful questions to animate class discussion. A formal 6-8 page paper (with proper citations and bibliography – see criteria above) must be submitted the date of the presentation.

Critical assessment of ‘seminal’ journal issue OR journal analysis project: Due November 29

Students have two options for this assignment, although both approaches ask students to interrogate a journal in terms of its contributions to communication studies.

Backgrounder: Historically, when it came to keeping abreast of developments in the field, early communication scholars had it fairly easy. Only a few journals were dedicated to communication research, and so a focused reading of the *Journal of Communication* or *Journalism Quarterly* allowed one to remain pretty much up to date in terms of North American scholarship. Today, some 100 journals—ranging from the *Journal of Communication* and *Communication Inquiry* to *Visual Studies* and *Critical Studies in Media Communication*—‘speak’ to the field and shape it in some meaningful way. Established journals periodically publish special ‘seminal’ issues reflecting on their own scholarship (such as the *Journal of Communication*’s 1983 and 1993 issues titled “Ferment in the Field”).

This assignment asks the student to do one of the following two options.

Option 1: Critical Assessment of ‘Seminal’ Journal Issue

For this option, the 15-page assessment will critically interrogate an *issue* of a journal pertaining to communication in terms of its articles, its key concepts, innovative contributions to the field and historical significance. A focused analysis on *why* the journal issue should be considered seminal (rather than simply interesting) is core to this assignment. Where does the issue direct us or leave us? Additionally, if you feel the issue has missed the boat, then critically interrogate why. The journal issue should be selected in light of the student’s personal research interests (as per objective 4 of the course). Reading related or subsequent journal issues may be helpful in your analysis.

Option 2: Journal Analysis

For this option, the 15-page assessment will interrogate on a communication *journal* rather than a seminal issue. The paper will trace the development and contributions of a particular journal in the field of Communication Studies (i.e., the *Canadian Journal of Communication*, the *Journal of Communication*, etc.) or a journal closely associated with the field (i.e., *Cultural Studies*, *Theory*, *Culture and Society*, etc.). The paper will analyze the journal’s focus, interests, evolution in terms of focus, status as a scholarly or commercial venture (is the journal funded by a community of scholars or it is a niche product of a commercial publisher? Does that matter?), the quality of debates associated with it, and its overall contribution to the field of communications. In approaching this, students might want to consider the journal’s relation to academic associations (and how this might shape the research being conducted), the composition of the editorial board (who are they key players? Over time, how have changes in the board influenced the journal?), the ‘competing journals’ and how it seeks to distinguish itself, and the types of special issues being published.

The length for either option: 15 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman font. Citations are essential proper citations, again following CJC journal style for citations and formatting.

**Papers that do not follow this guide will automatically be penalized one half letter grade.

Regardless of the option selected, on November 29 students will prepare a 10-minute presentation their findings to the class. A one-page synopsis of your argument must be distributed to the class on this date.

Note that no grade will be assigned for the presentation. This takes the pressure off presenting, and provides the opportunity to both enjoy presenting on the issue you selected, and to stake your claim to your vision of communication. Depending on the size of the class, some presentations may also be scheduled on December 6.

Take home exam

Distributed on the last day of class, the take home exam will evaluate students’ analytic comprehension of the course materials. No outside research is required, and students will have one week to complete the take home exam. As this is a final exam, the deadline for submission is firm. No late assignments will be accepted.

Students may not collaborate on this assignment

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

Note: Please hand in your take home exam no later than 4:00 p.m., December 13 to SS 236. I will be available from 1 – 4 p.m. to receive submissions.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

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. You will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up any assignments or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.

Writing Skills Statement

Faculty 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: www.efwr.ucalgary.ca

Grading System

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent – superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
Note: The grade point value (3.0) associated with this grade is the minimum acceptable average that a graduate student must maintain throughout the program as computed at the end of each registration anniversary year of the program.		
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
Note: A student who receives a B- or lower in two or more courses will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average unless the program recommends otherwise. Individual programs may require a higher minimum passing grade.		
C+	2.3	
C	2.0	All grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate
C-	1.7	Studies course requirements. A student who receives a grade
D+	1.3	of F will normally be required to withdraw unless the program
D	1.0	recommends otherwise.
F	0.0	

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include automatic 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 if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

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 www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su

Graduate Students' Association

For details on the Graduate Students' Association, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/services/ombudsperson.html>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly Points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, please 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

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb>

Schedule of classes and readings

* Note: Readings available through the University of Calgary library database are marked with an *

September 13	Introduction Communication Theories, Theorists, and Theorizing
September 20	The problem of communication
September 27	Library Field Trip
October 4	Mass society, magic bullets and the effects tradition: The institutionalization of a field
October 11	Thanksgiving Day. No lectures.
October 18	Gatekeeping and Agenda Setting
October 25	Cybernetics & the Palo Alto School Science Communication
November 1	Performance Studies
November 8	Technology and the Canadian School
November 15	“Culture” at Issue I & II – The Mishmash Seminar: The Culture Industry <i>and</i> A Cultural Approach to Communication
November 22	“Culture” at Issue, III: Cultural Studies & Ideological Critique
November 29:	Seminal Issues in the Field
December 6:	A series of ‘posts’: Discourse, power, postmodernity & post-scripts