

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Communication Studies 601

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Communications Studies
Fall 2015

September 10 – December 03

Thursdays 3:00 – 5:45

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12-2, or by appointment

Course Description

What is communication, how did the field emerge and evolve, and to what extent are ‘old’ questions and theories of communication relevant to contemporary scholarship—especially in light of major recent developments in the media and social landscape? These are the key questions explored in this term’s COMS 601 course.

Focusing on some of the major theoretical approaches that have contributed to North American communication studies, this seminar explores the ‘idea’ and role of communication. We examine how communication has been variously understood to function in our lives, society and culture. In light of claims that mass media and canonical iterations of communication theory are dead (Galloway, Thacker & Wark 2014), that we have witnessed “the End of Mass Communication” (Chaffee & Metzger 2001) and that the term “new media” is “already past its prime” (Peters 2015, 5), we also consider the current state of communication scholarship and what future is imaginable for Communication Studies.

Course Objectives

- 1) Explore some of the theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches characterizing communication studies (this is by no means exhaustive)
- 2) Critically examine and contextualize these approaches, situate them in relation to other theories, and consider how contemporary scholarship and new visions of communication speak to previous texts
- 3) Examine some key terms/concepts that are part of the intellectual vocabulary of Communication
- 4) Initiate students in the process of locating themselves within the field (via the above-stated objectives) by having them identify and critically assess a “seminal” journal issue or communication concept (“seminal” to themselves personally and to communications studies), and consider what this issue or concept offers to the field—both today and moving forward.

Textbooks and Readings

Readings are available through the University of Calgary library website as ebooks or journal articles (unless otherwise noted with an *).

Peters, John Durham and Peter Simonson (eds.)(2004). *Mass communication and American social thought*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers ([ebook](#))

Mitchell, W.J.T. and Mark B.N. Hansen (2010). *Critical terms for media studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hartley, John (2011). *Communication, cultural and media studies: The key concepts*. 4th edition. New York: Routledge (ebook).

Internet and electronic communication device information

Please turn off all cell phones during class time. The goal of a seminar is to engage in active discussion of the course materials with your colleagues and to learn the material. Please do not use your laptop to distract (or detract) from this goal.

Assignments and Evaluation

This course has five evaluative components: participation (10%), key concept reviews (10%), a seminar presentation on the assigned readings (25%), assessment and evaluation of a 'seminal' journal issue (25%), and a take home exam (30%).

Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes, respect the start/finish times of the class, read the required readings and discussion pieces, and be prepared to identify and discuss issues emerging from these in a thoughtful and informed manner during the class. Students are encouraged to ask questions, probe issues, challenge assumptions and bring their experiences to the materials being engaged with. Participation marks are based on your full attendance and active participation in the class, demonstrating that you have engaged with all of the assigned readings.

Key Concept Reviews (2 Key Concepts)

Each class will begin with key concept reviews. These are fun, oral, think pieces designed to warm us up, to get us thinking and talking, and to bring current issues pertaining to communication studies into the seminar room. In the process, we introduce some of the terms/concepts that are part of the intellectual vocabulary of Communication, and see how they play out in light of your own interest areas. You will present on two key concepts throughout the term. (Sign up sheets will be circulated the first week of class.)

Presentations should be 15 minutes in length. Pick a key concept that is compelling, of interest, new to you or even commonplace (such as a term like "media" where we assume everyone knows what it means) out of either the Mitchell & Hansen (2010) or the Hartley (2011) book. Define this concept and explore it in light of a contemporary issue. The "definitions"/explanations provided in the Mitchell & Hansen or Hartley books are a starting point: you will want to supplement the information with extra research in order to point out gaps in the definitions/overviews provided, or further developments. (Some of the definitions in Hartley are excellent, others leave much to be desired). Then apply the concept and critically analyse it using an example. Or, if you choose, use the example to illustrate and define the core concept. The angle you take is up to you.

The key concept reviews need to be informative, but have some fun with these. Expose us to some interesting issues, examples or events, and invite us to think and discuss, probe the implications of what you are discussing, go on a rant, make us laugh – any approach is acceptable as long as it explains the key concept clearly and shows us you're thinking about it in a rigorous way.

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

Students 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 should consider the degree to which the assumptions are valid/applicable to illuminating contemporary society.

Students leading the seminars must come with two insightful questions to animate class discussion.

Critical assessment of 'seminal' journal issue or key concept

Due: December 3; Rough cuts presentation November 19

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

Background: 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 more or less 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’ or themed issues reflecting on their own scholarship (such as the *Journal of Communication*’s 1983 and 1993 issues titled “Ferment in the Field”, the *Canadian Journal of Communication*’s special issue on teaching critical communication studies (1985) and the special issue on critical communication research in *Media, Culture and Society*, among others.

This assignment asks the student to explore 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.) What kind of future can we imagine out of this ‘seminal’ issue moving forward (new questions?). Be sure to select the journal issue in light of your own personal research interests. Reading related or subsequent journal issues may be helpful in your analysis.

Option 2: Critical Assessment of Key concept

For this option, the 15-page assessment will interrogate a key concept or theory rather than a seminal issue. Along with explaining the key concept/theory and detailing its evolution and contributions to the field, the paper examine the concept (using a case study) and suggest what it has to offer in “imagining” the future of communication studies.

The length for either option: 15 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman font. Proper citations are essential. Please follow CJC journal style** for citations and formatting.

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

Rough cuts: Regardless of the option selected, on November 19 students will prepare a 10-minute presentation their ideas to the class. Please come with a one-page handout for the class to refer to, summarizing key arguments, ideas, rationale (what are you examining and why), and with appropriate references.

No grade will be assigned for the presentation. This is your rough cut of the paper; consider it a working group session where you can come with concepts, arguments and talk about stumbling blocks. This is your opportunity to get feedback without pressure, enjoy talking about your issue/concept, and to stake your claim to your vision of communication.

Take home exam: Due December 10

Distributed on the last day of class, the take home exam will evaluate students' analytic comprehension of the course materials. Students have one week to complete the assignment, and must not collaborate with others. As this is a final exam, the deadline for submission is firm. No late assignments will be accepted.

Note: Please hand in your take home exam no later than 4:00 p.m., December 10 to SS 236. I will be available from 1:00 – 4:00 to receive submissions. You may also email your exam to me prior to the 4:00 pm deadline.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your 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.

Note: 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

Extensions will not be granted for course assignments (except for exceptional circumstances). Late assignments will be penalized one half letter grade per day, up to 3 days (including weekends). Unless an extension is granted, assignments that are not submitted within 3 days of the due date will receive a grade of zero. As this is a graduate seminar, students must complete all assignments and exams to pass the course.

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_0.pdf.

Support Services

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 14 days after the start of the course.

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. For details see <http://commfilm.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. 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. However, assignments, exams, and other work in this course will be graded using a combination of letter grades and scores (letter grades for written course work, scores for participation grades and percentages for examinations).

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 Studies course requirements. A student who receives a grade of F will normally be required to withdraw unless the program recommends otherwise.
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1.0	
F	0.0	

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>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES	http://grad.ucalgary.ca/home or 403-220-4938
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calgary Police Service• Emergency Text Messaging• Emergency Evacuation & Assembly• Safewalk Program	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints 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/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IT help line	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	<p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</p>
<p>GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ombudsman 	<p>http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/</p> <p>http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/ombudsperson (403) 220-6420 or ombuds@ucalgary.ca</p>
<p>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps 	<p>http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html</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>