

**Communications Studies (COMS) 371 L02**  
**Critical Media Studies**  
**Winter 2011**  
**Tuesdays 14:00-16:50**  
**SB 144**

**Instructor:** Dr. Dawn Johnston

**Office**  
**Location:** SS 234

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday 11:00-13:00 or by appointment (and if the door is open, drop in anytime)

### **Additional Information**

Because this course critically examines media and popular culture, it is entirely possible - quite likely, in fact - that some of the material will manifest coarse language and/or violence, may be sexually explicit, and may challenge your comfort level with regards to portrayals of gender roles, sexuality, and sexual orientation. This material is crucial to the course, so please consider your course selection carefully if you are concerned about your response to the material.

### **Course Description**

This course emphasizes major critical approaches in the field of communication studies with the intent of introducing students to the theoretical foundations of media related research. The course explores the contexts in which these theories arose, identifies their major strengths and weaknesses, and provides an appreciation of how critical theory engages the social world through research on communications and media.

### **Objectives of the Course**

1. To offer students a first approach to the theoretical foundations of critical media research.
2. To encourage students to develop critical awareness of media strategies and content.
3. To help students develop analytical skills necessary for communication research.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Laptops are permitted for note taking only. iPods, cellphones and gaming devices should be turned off during class. Laptops may not be open during video screenings. Please respect the

lecturer, teaching assistant and your fellow students by avoiding distracting uses of technology.

### **Textbooks and Readings:**

O'Shaughnessy, Michael & Stadler, Jane. *Media and Society*. Fourth Edition. Australia: Oxford University Press, 2008.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

Essay (My Critical Media Studies)	15%	January 25
Essay (My Family Photo)	15%	February 15
Midterm Exam	20%	March 1
Group Project (Culture Jamming)	20%	March 15 or 22
Term Paper	30%	April 12

The first two essays are critical reflections on your own relationship with media products and processes. These are short essays – between 600-800 words, each worth 15% of your course grade. Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class.

The midterm exam, on March 1, will consist of short answer questions based on key concepts from the first half of the course, as well as an essay-style semiotic analysis of an advertisement. This exam will be worth 20% of your course grade.

Your group project is a culture jamming exercise. In groups of five (you may form your own group, or be assigned to a group, if you prefer), you will choose a media text (for example, a print advertisement, a political campaign, a magazine cover, a television ad, a website) and re-create it to alter the meaning. Your finished product, along with an analysis of both the original product and your re-created product, will be presented to the class on either March 15 or March 22. Unless there is compelling evidence to indicate otherwise, all group members will receive the same grade on the assignment. This assignment will be worth 20% of your course grade. Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class.

Your term paper is a critical research essay, combining analysis of a media text with traditional scholarly research. You will be expected to ground your analysis in one or more of the theories and concepts from the latter half of the course, including postmodernism, globalization, and theories of gender, ethnicity, and class. This assignment will be worth 30% of your course grade. Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class.

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.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

Please note: If your class is held in the evening, the Registrar's Office will make every attempt to schedule the final exam during the evening; however, there is NO guarantee that the exam will NOT be scheduled during the day.

**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.

**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](http://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 4<sup>th</sup> floor, [efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://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/cfieb>

## **Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

To be posted on Blackboard in the first week of classes.