

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication, Media & Film**  
**Communication and Media Studies COMS 591 SEM 04**  
**Visual Culture**  
**Winter 2018**  
**Thurs., Jan. 11 – Thurs., Apr. 12 (excluding Feb. 22)**  
**Classes: Thurs. 14:00-16:45**

**Instructor:** Annie Rudd  
**Office:** SS 312  
**Office Phone:** (403) 220-5458 (email preferred)  
**E-Mail:** annie.rudd@ucalgary.ca  
**Web Page:** D2L available through MyUofC portal  
**Office Hours:** Wed. 14:30-15:30, or by appointment

**Course Description**

This course offers an introduction to visual culture studies for advanced undergraduate students in communications. In it, we will ask how practices of looking, and conditions of visibility and invisibility, are bound up with power relations, and what roles visual objects and experiences play in knowledge production, identity construction and performance, social discipline, political participation, and consumer culture.

This course will engage participants in the critical analysis of canonical and contemporary writings on visual culture, and will provide opportunities to bring these writings to bear on a broad array of visual artifacts. It will also engage students in a diverse set of techniques of visual analysis. Participants will apply these theoretical lenses and practical techniques to the artifacts or visual phenomena of their choosing, and will produce their own works of visual culture analysis.

**Objectives of the Course**

This course has four connected aims:

- To acquaint you with influential theories of visual culture that will be relevant to your advanced studies in communications, media studies, and related fields;
- To engage you with scholarly debates and cultural discourses surrounding visual culture, both in the present day and in the past;
- To enable you to develop techniques of analysis as they relate to visual material, including formal analysis, semiotic analysis, psychoanalytic techniques of visual analysis, discursive analysis, and historical and archival analysis, among others;
- To involve you directly in the practice of visual culture analysis, with writing assignments and activities that require you to interpret and critique visual materials as well as intervene in scholarly and popular debates surrounding visual culture.

## Readings

All required readings will be posted on D2L. Please be sure to bring the assigned readings with you to each class, as close reading will be an important part of this course and in-class assignments will require you to make reference to the assigned readings.

An important note: all readings and dates listed on the course outline are subject to change—so please check D2L regularly for the most up-to-date version of the course schedule.

## Internet and Electronic Communication Device Information

Laptops and tablets are permitted in this class provided that they are used solely for note-taking and other in-class activities, and they do not present a distraction to you or others. The use of smartphones is not permitted in class—they must be silenced and placed in your bag during class, but can be used during the break. Failure to adhere to this rule will result in a participation grade deduction. Note that the unauthorized use of electronic devices for audio and video recording or transmission is prohibited in class as well as in office hours.

If distraction due to electronic devices is impeding class participation, a policy prohibiting the use of all electronic devices may be introduced. Therefore, it's in your best interest to ensure that you are using laptops exclusively for class work.

## A Note on Email Communication

When emailing me about the course, please include the course code (COMS 591) in your subject line. Please do not use email to ask questions that can be answered by looking at the course outline or D2L. I aim to answer emails within 48 hours of receiving them—if you have emailed me and have not heard back within this timeframe, please feel free to send a follow-up message. You are welcome to address me as Annie, Prof. Rudd, or Dr. Rudd—whichever you prefer.

## Assignments and Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be determined based on the following:

Weight	Assignment	Due
20%	Reading response posts	Throughout semester
15%	Image study 1	February 5
15%	Image study 2	March 5
30%	Research essay (8-10 pages)	April 5
20%	Participation and in-class assignments (includes class presentation)	Throughout semester

## Reading Response Posts

Starting during the second week of classes, you will be asked to write brief weekly responses to the assigned readings and post them on D2L. These responses must be posted no later than 8pm on Wednesdays. There is no minimum or maximum length for your responses; the only requirement is that you demonstrate engagement with at least one of the readings assigned that week. You can do this in any of the following ways:

- Reflect on any aspect(s) of the assigned readings you found most interesting, compelling, problematic or perplexing, and demonstrate that you have thought critically about what you've read.
- Pose questions the readings raised for you as you read, or suggest a question related to the readings that you think might spur interesting class discussion.
- Apply ideas or concepts from the readings to one or more images or visual culture examples, reading this visual material through the lens of the text. If you do discuss specific images, be sure to include them with your post.

Your responses will be read and they will inform our class discussions, so please consider them an important part of your contribution to this class, and an opportunity to help orient the discussions we have each week toward topics you found particularly interesting or important.

Weekly participation is expected, but in recognition of the fact that life happens, you have two “mulligans”—two opportunities to miss a post, on the weeks of your choosing, before your grade is affected.

### **Image Studies**

You will be required to write two image studies; the first can be submitted any time before February 5 and the second can be submitted any time before March 5, and they should be submitted using the D2L Dropbox. With these writing assignments, which should each be at least 500 words in length, you will choose one or more images and offer a critical analysis of them with reference to course readings and, if you like, class discussions. Further details will be provided early in the semester.

### **Research Essay**

Your major assignment for this class will be a final essay of 8-10 pages, due on April 5 via the D2L Dropbox. Building on your image studies and reading responses completed throughout the term, you will craft a well-researched, thoughtfully argued essay that offers critical analysis of one or more images or developments in visual culture, with reference to course readings as well as credible and thoughtfully chosen external sources. In addition, you will be required to offer a brief presentation of your essay findings on the last day of class, April 12. More details will be provided well in advance of the essay deadline.

### **Participation and In-Class Assignments**

As this is a small seminar class, regular participation is expected and will be essential not only to your success, but to the experience that each student has in the class. Your participation will be assessed based on the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussions, your participation in in-class activities, and a presentation that you will give to the class. (More details on presentations will be provided in class.) Note that your participation is not assessed based on the frequency of your contributions alone—you are expected to contribute in a way that enhances the discussion, and this means coming to class with the readings completed and in hand, ready to discuss them, and interacting with others in the class in a respectful, productive way. Given the importance of participation, regular attendance is mandatory. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade in the course. If you are unable to attend class due to illness or family emergency, please notify me via email in advance of the class.

## **Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No**

**Note:** All assignments and exams weighted more than 10% must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

**Submission of Assignments:** All writing assignments must be submitted to D2L by the stated deadline.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that the proper version is submitted (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission). Including a version date in your file name may be useful.

## **Policy for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. Brief extensions may be given by the instructor provided the student has a compelling reason to request one, and the request is made well in advance of the deadline.

## **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/](http://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.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

## **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. 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. Letter grades will be used for essay assignments, while percentage grades will be used for exams and quizzes.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, letter grades will be converted to the midpoint of the percentage range, as shown in the final column of the table below.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations* *
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	0- 49.99%	0%

\* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

\*\* 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.

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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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>

### Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, or observations) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

### Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calgary Police Service</li> <li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li> <li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li> <li>• Safewalk Program</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> 403-220-5333 <b>403-266-1234</b> <b>Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort ( <b>220-5333</b> ). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT help line</li> </ul>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a>

	403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Support Services</li> <li>• Student Services Mobile App</li> </ul>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li> <li>• Student Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Health Services</li> <li>• Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</li> <li>• Online resources and tips</li> </ul>	<b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a> <b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a> <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>

### Schedule of Topics

Listed below is the anticipated schedule of class topics. A full reading schedule will be provided on D2L before the first week of classes.

Date	Topic
January 11	Introduction: What is visual culture?
January 18	The field of visual culture studies: some theoretical frames
January 25	Caught looking: spectatorship, objectification, and gender
February 1	Gazing down, gazing up: visibility and power relations
February 8	Decolonizing visual culture
February 15	Pictures that sell: images and promotional culture
February 22	Reading week—no class meeting today.
March 1	Selfies, self-presentation, subjectivity
March 8	Fragments of the real? Photographs, realism, and objectivity
March 15	Framing war: global conflict and visual culture
March 22	Visualizing race: stereotyping and self-possession
March 29	Picturing politics: imagery, agency, and activism
April 5	Cutting images: visual culture, bodies, manipulation
April 12	Essay presentations and conclusion of the class