

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Communication and Media Studies COMS 371 L01
Critical Media Studies

Fall 2016

Monday, Sept. 12 – Friday, Dec. 9 (excluding Nov. 10-13)

Lecture: Thursdays, 12:30 pm-2:20 pm

Tutorials: Fridays, Group 1: 12-12:50pm

Group 2: 1-1:50pm

Group 3: 12-12:50pm

Group 4: 1-1:50pm

Instructor: Dr. Jessalynn Keller
Office: SS 304
Office Phone: 403-220-8728
E-Mail: jessalynn.keller@ucalgary.ca
Web Page: D2L available through MyUofC portal
Office Hours: Mondays 1pm-3pm or by appointment

Course Description

This course emphasizes major critical approaches in communication and media studies with the intent of introducing students to the theoretical foundations of media and mass communication 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 communication and media. Areas to be covered include: the culture industry, political economy of the media, cultural studies, feminist media studies, and critical race theory.

Additional Information

Prerequisite: COMS 201

Objectives of the Course

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Critically evaluate and discuss a range of theoretical and empirical approaches to media
- Understand the development of media studies theories in relation to their historical, social, and political context
- Articulate the relevance of power, agency, identity, and representation to media, communications and culture
- Apply key critical theories to primary research examples and case studies
- Develop both verbal and written analytic skills needed for undergraduate study

Textbooks and Readings

Mills, Brett and David M. Barlow. 2012. *Reading Media Theory: Thinkers, Approaches & Contexts*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 7th edition. New York: Routledge.

Additional reading will be supplied through D2L.

Please note that required readings should be read prior to the lecture for which they are assigned. Recommended readings serve as supplemental resources and will be useful for completing your assignments.

Internet and electronic communication device information

I encourage you to bring your laptop or tablet to lectures and tutorials for note-taking purposes. Occasionally, you may be asked to use your device for an in-class exercise. However, students who are distracting their peers through the use of their computer/tablet/phone for purposes not related to class will be asked to leave.

No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the permission of the professor.

Email policy

Before emailing me, please check that the answer to your question is not in the course syllabus! I aim to answer all email inquiries as soon as possible, but will not reply to emails in the evening or over the weekend. When sending me an email, please specify what course you are in (COMS 371) and include a clear statement of purpose in the subject line. Always be professional and courteous in your emails to me and your teaching assistants.

If you want to discuss an assignment or a concern about the course I prefer to meet in person during office hours, as these meetings are often more fruitful than a lengthy email exchange. I encourage you to use my office hours, and hope to meet many of you there throughout the semester.

Assignments and Evaluation

Weight	Course components	Due
25% (5x5%)	Five "mini" reading response papers (1-2 pages each)	Ongoing: 3 must be completed by Oct. 27, remaining 2 by Dec. 8
30%	Culture jam (5-6 pages)	Oct. 27
5%	Proposal for critical media analysis (1-page based on provided template)	Nov. 17
35%	Critical media analysis (8-10 pages)	Dec. 8
5%	Tutorial participation	Weekly in tutorials

“Mini” reading response papers (5 x 5% each = 25%) Due: Ongoing

Over the course of the semester, you are required to submit a written response to five course readings. Each response paper (1-2 pages each, approx. 300-500 words) will be worth 5% of your final grade. You will be provided a prompt for each week there is assigned reading which will help you to construct your response. You may choose which five prompts you respond to, however, you must have three response papers completed by week 7 (October 27th). This will ensure that you will not be overwhelmed with writing in the second half of the semester.

Response papers are due at the start of the lecture for which they correspond and will be returned the following week in tutorial. Late response papers will not be accepted.

Reading responses will receive a grade out of 5 based on a rubric (this will be passed out in class on the first day), but no written feedback. However, students are invited to see the professor or their seminar tutor for verbal feedback during office hours.

The purpose of this assignment is to sharpen your critical reading skills and ability to evaluate key course theories through writing. Response papers will provide you a solid foundation from which to complete your culture jam and critical analysis assignments. Further information about the expectations for this assignment will be provided on the first day of class.

****Opportunity for Bonus Marks**** If you'd like the opportunity to boost your grade, you are invited to complete a sixth mini response paper, after the completion of your required five. The sixth paper will be graded out of 3 points (percentages), which will be added to your final grade. When turning in your bonus response paper, please clearly mark that the paper should be considered for bonus points. This will be the only opportunity to receive “bonus marks” or “extra credit” throughout the semester.

Culture Jam (30%)

Due: Thursday, October 27

Drawing on class discussions, readings and the in-class screening of *Culture Jam*, you are required to produce your own culture jam and written analysis (5-6 pages). This assignment has three components: First, you will describe and analyze the original advertisement/media text, referring to at least one course reading in your analysis. Remember to include a photo of the original media text. Second, you will produce your own original culture jam, modifying the original media text chosen. Feel free to be creative here – cut paste, add glitter, use markers, etc.! You can also do this digitally if you have the skills, but please print out your final product so that you can include it with your assignment. Third, you will analyze your culture jam, drawing on course concepts and at least one course reading in your analysis.

The purpose of this assignment is to allow you the opportunity to apply course theories and readings to your own example of media activism. It will also provide you experience with producing a written media analysis and receive some credit for your creativity.

Further information about this assignment will be distributed in class on September 29th.

Proposal for Critical Media Analysis (5%)

Due: Thursday, November 17th

In preparation for your critical media analysis, you are required to complete a proposal in which you will outline your object of analysis, theories you'll use in your analysis, and key sources. You will be provided a template for the proposal in October.

Critical Media Analysis (35%)

Due: Thursday, December 8

In the final assignment for this course you will be required to demonstrate both your knowledge of course theories and the ability to apply them to an original media example. For this essay you will choose a media text (television show, film, website, magazine, etc) and analyze it, using key theories and ideas we've explored throughout the semester. For example, you may critique *The Lion King* from a political economy perspective or use critical race theory to explore an episode of *Homeland*.

This assignment requires that in addition to the use of course materials, you also must conduct some original secondary research. Your essay must draw on a minimum of three academic sources from outside of course materials.

Further information about this assignment will be provided in late October.

Tutorial participation (5%)

Your weekly tutorials are an important component of this course and regular attendance is required. Because tutorials are structured around student discussion and activities, you are expected to actively participate in these sessions. Students will be evaluated on quality contributions, which should be informed, thoughtful, and demonstrate a familiarity with the assigned readings.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Note: All assignments and exams weighted more than 25% must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Submission of Assignments: Assignments must be submitted in hard copy directly to the professor in lecture. 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. **Please note that assignments will not be accepted via email.**

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at marked final exams in SS 320. 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

Mini response papers will not be accepted late. You must submit the paper at the end of the lecture to which it corresponds in order to receive credit.

Other assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. This includes weekends (e.g. if an assignment is due Thursday and you submit it on Monday you will be penalized four grades).

Late work will not be accepted one week past the original deadline without appropriate documentation (i.e. doctor's note). Late work will not receive written feedback.

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.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. However, assignments in this course will be graded using raw scores (for example, an assignment worth 30% will be graded out of 30).

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, final raw scores (out of 100) will be converted to percentages and then letter grades using this chart.

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%

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>

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 . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca
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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/ http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds

<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>
---	--

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

Week 1 Thursday, September 15: Welcome: What is Critical Media Studies?

Required reading:

None.

Recommended reading:

Mills & Barlow – What is theory? (pgs. 7-22)

Mills & Barlow – What is reading? (pgs. 22-35)

Week 2 Thursday, September 22: Marx and Media Studies: Ideology, Hegemony and Political Economy

Required reading:

Storey – Ideology (pgs. 2-5) and Marxisms (pgs. 61-64, 83-86)

Engstrom – Unraveling The Knot (on D2L)

Recommended reading:

Storey – Althusserianism (pgs. 74-83)

Reading response prompt: Based on today's readings, is Marx and his ideas still useful for media studies? Support your argument by specifically referring to today's readings and an original example.

Week 3 Thursday, September 29: The Culture Industry: The Frankfurt School and their Critics

Required reading:

Mills & Barlow – The Frankfurt School (pgs. 84-102)

Recommend reading:

Storey – The Frankfurt School (pgs. 66-74)

Reading response prompt: According to the scholars from the Frankfurt School, what is the culture industry? How does their critique relate to Marxist ideas discussed previously?

Week 4 Thursday, October 6: *Culture Jam: Hacking Commercial Culture* (in class screening)

Required reading:

Carly Stasko – (r)Evolutionary Healing (on D2L)

Christine Harold – Pranking Rhetoric: Culture jamming as media activism (on D2L)

***Please note: Today's screening is essential viewing in order to complete your Culture Jam assignment. Attendance is mandatory.**

No reading response prompt, instead, please begin working on your Culture Jam assignment.

Week 5 Thursday, October 13: Cultural Studies: The Birmingham School

Required reading:

Mills & Barlow – The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (pgs. 225-259)

Storey – Raymond Williams: 'The Analysis of Culture' (pgs. 45-50)

Recommended reading:

McRobbie and Garber – Girls and Subcultures (on D2L)

Reading response prompt: In your opinion, what is the key contribution that Cultural Studies makes to the study of media? How does a cultural studies perspective challenge the arguments made by the Frankfurt School?

Week 6 Thursday, October 20: Semiotics, Barthes and Structuralism

Required reading:

Storey – Structuralism (pgs. 116-131)

Hall, Evans and Nixon: Excerpt from The Work of Representation (pgs. 20-26)

Recommended reading:

Mills & Barlow – Texts (pgs. 574-599)

Reading response prompt: What is semiotics and why is it useful for studying media?

Week 7 Thursday, October 27: Power, Governmentality and Poststructuralism

Required reading:

Storey – Post-structuralism (pgs. 131-138)

Hall, Evans & Nixon – Excerpt from The Work of Representation (pgs. 26-36)

Ouellette & Hay – Makeover Television, Governmentality and the Good Citizen (on D2L)

Recommended reading:

None, since assignment is due!

Reading response prompt: What is discourse? According to the readings, how does it relate to power? Why might discourse be an important concept for media scholars?

Culture Jam due

Week 8 Thursday, November 3: Feminist Media Studies

Required reading:

Storey – Gender and Sexuality (pgs. 140-174)

Joseph – Tyra Banks is Fat (on D2L)

Recommended reading:

Mills & Barlow – Feminist media theory (pgs. 384-425)

Reading response prompt: According to the readings, what does a feminist approach to media studies entail? Why is it important for media scholars to consider gender and other identities?

Week 9 Thursday, November 10 READING DAYS – NO LECTURE/TUTORIAL

Please use this week to work on your critical media analysis proposal.

Week 10 Thursday, November 17: (Active) Audiences, Fandom and Convergence Culture

Required reading:

Storey – Convergence culture (pgs. 221-222)
Mills and Barlow – New Media (pgs. 460-487)
Murray – Saving Our So-Called Lives (pgs. 221-235)

Recommended reading:

Mills & Barlow – Audiences (pgs. 600-623)
Mills & Barlow – Audiences as producers (pgs. 624-651)

Reading response prompt: What is meant by the term “convergence culture?” According to the readings, how has convergence culture changed the relationship between media audiences and texts? Give an original example to support your discussion.

Week 11 Thursday, November 24: Critical Race Theory and Media Studies

Required reading:

Storey – Race, racism and representation (pgs. 175-190)
hooks – Eating the Other (on D2L)

Recommended reading:

Hall – The Spectacle of the ‘Other’ (pgs. 215 - 270)

Reading response prompt:

Drawing on both of the required readings, explain what Orientalism is and why it is an important concept for media scholars.

Week 12 Thursday, December 1: Critical Approaches to Digital Life

Required reading:

Stark & Crawford – The Conservatism of Emoji (on D2L)
Mark Andrejevic – The Work of Being Watched (on D2L)

Recommended reading:

Gillespie – The Politics of ‘Platforms’ (on D2L)

Reading response prompt: Focus on one of the required readings: what key themes does the author/s highlight? In his/their opinion, what is the relationship between capitalism and digital culture?

Week 13 Thursday, December 8: Course Wrap Up & Evaluations

*** Critical Media Analysis essay due***

No reading.