

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film
COMS 591 (S02): Capstone Seminar in Communication and Media
Visual Culture Studies

FALL 2022: September 6 to December 6 (excluding Nov. 8)

Lectures: T 14:00-16:45

This course is offered in-person.

Instructor:	Dr. Annie Rudd
Office:	SS 312
Email:	annie.rudd@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
Office Hours:	Mondays, 10:30-12:30 via Zoom (please make an appointment by sending me an email)

Course Description

Seeing is often treated as a strictly biological capacity, but visual culture studies holds that the operations of spectatorship—how we look, what we look at, what is hidden from view, how we see ourselves, and how we are seen—are socially and politically bound, shaped by power relations and cultural norms. Visual culture studies is a field of inquiry that looks critically at these practices of looking and conditions of visibility. This course offers an advanced introduction to this field, intended for upper-level undergraduate students.

This course will engage participants in the critical analysis of canonical and contemporary writings on visual culture, and it 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 interpretive techniques to the visual culture artifacts or phenomena of their choosing, and will produce their own works of visual culture analysis.

Additional Information

The weekly schedule of topics and readings can be found on D2L. Students are responsible for reading and following all course and university policies discussed in this outline.

Objectives of the Course

The objectives of this course are:

- To acquaint you with influential theories of visual culture that will be relevant to your advanced studies in communications, media studies, and related fields, and will (hopefully) inform your ways of seeing the world beyond your undergraduate degree;
- To engage you with scholarly debates and cultural discourses surrounding visual culture, both in the present day and in the past;
- To help you to develop robust capacities for the analysis of visual material; and
- 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 and phenomena as well as intervene in scholarly and popular debates surrounding visual culture.

Textbooks and Readings

There is no textbook for this course; all required readings will be posted on D2L. Please be sure to bring the assigned readings with you to each class, whether on paper or digitally, as close reading will be an important part of this course and in-class assignments will often 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.

Learning Technologies and Requirements

In order to complete courses, University of Calgary students are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security and malware updates, with current antivirus software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection, and a current and updated web browser;
- A webcam (built-in or external), and a microphone and speaker (built-in or external) or headset with microphone (for online synchronous courses only).

If you need access to other software programs to complete assignments, your instructor will provide relevant information and links.

If you have technical difficulties, contact IT support services. See <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/student-campus-services-information-technologies-it.html>

Policy on the Use of Electronic Communication Devices

Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for course-related purposes, and only if their use is not distracting others or negatively impacting the learning environment. The use of smartphones is not permitted in class—they must be silenced and placed in your bag during class, except during breaks. Failure to adhere to this rule will result in a participation grade deduction and you may be asked to leave. Note that the use of electronic devices for audio or video recording or transmission is strictly prohibited in class as well as in office hours, unless you have received prior permission from the instructor.

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 electronic devices exclusively for class work.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's policy on the recording of lectures, which is outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html>, and carefully review the section on Instructor Copyright at the end of this outline.

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, excluding weekends—if you have emailed me and have not heard back within this timeframe, please feel free to send a follow-up message.

Assignments and Evaluation

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

Weight	Assignment	Due
20%	Reading response posts	Throughout semester
20%	Image study	October 21
5%	Research essay proposal	November 4
30%	Research essay	December 2
5%	Research essay lightning talk	December 6
10%	In-class participation	Throughout semester
10%	Class presentation	Throughout semester (presentations to be scheduled in class Week 2)

Details on Assignments

Reading Response Posts

Starting during the second week of classes, you will be asked to write short weekly responses to the assigned readings and post them on our class's D2L Discussion Board. These responses must be posted no later than 2pm on Mondays (24 hours before the start of class). Responses should be at least 150 words long and should demonstrate critical engagement with the readings assigned that week. You can do this in any of the following ways:

- Reflect on whatever 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 one or more questions that you had as you read, or present questions about the readings that you think might spur interesting class discussion.
- Apply the readings to one or more specific images or visual culture examples. If you do discuss specific images, please include them with your post, or link to them.
- Respond to one of your classmates' posts from the current week, demonstrating thoughtful engagement with their ideas as well as familiarity with the week's readings.

Weekly participation is expected, but in recognition of the fact that life happens, you have three "mulligans"—three opportunities to miss a post, on the weeks of your choosing. In addition, you won't be required to write a post during reading week or during the final week of class.

Image Study

You will be required to write one image study. With this writing assignment, 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. Image studies will be required to be at least 800 words in length. Further details on this assignment, as well as a grading rubric, will be provided early in the semester.

Research Essay, Proposal, and Lightning Talk

Your major assignment for this class will be a final essay of at least 1800 words. With this assignment, 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 preparation, you will be required to submit a research essay proposal consisting of a minimum-150-word description of your research topic and a list of three peer-reviewed sources beyond the course readings that you intend to incorporate into your paper. In addition, you will be required to offer a brief, engaging lightning talk no more than 5 minutes in length in class on December 6. More details on each of these components will be provided well in advance of the essay deadline.

In-Class Participation

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 and your participation in in-class activities and assignments.

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. This said, please do not come to class if you are sick, or if you have been exposed to a communicable illness like Covid. Please do your best to email me in advance of missing class to have your absence excused.

Class Presentation

Each student will be asked to deliver a presentation in class. Presentation dates will be chosen during Week 2 of classes. These presentations are expected to be 15-20 minutes long, with at least half of that time dedicated to class discussion. Presentations should include brief discussion of key themes, terms, and/or passages from the assigned reading, application of the reading to at least one example/image, and thoughtful questions that will spur class discussion. An assignment sheet and grading rubric will be provided on D2L.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Note: You must complete the following course components in order to pass the course: image study, research essay.

If you miss a required course component, please contact your instructor as soon as possible.

Submission of Assignments

Please submit all assignments by uploading them to the designated D2L dropbox. Include your name and ID number on all assignments. Be sure to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to submit the proper version. Note that it is your responsibility to ensure all assignments have posted properly to the D2L dropbox by the deadline.

Private information related to individual students is treated with the utmost regard by University of Calgary faculty. Student assignments will be accessible only by the authorized

course faculty, and personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. Please note that instructors may use audio or video recording for lesson capture, assessment of student learning, and self-assessment of teaching practices.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a partial letter grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. Brief extensions may be granted at the instructor's discretion if they are requested well in advance of the due date and the student has a legitimate reason for making the request.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. For the full policy on Student Accommodations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-accommodation-policy>

Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should provide supporting documentation to support their request; however, instructors may not require a medical note. For information on the use of a statutory declaration, see the *University Calendar*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html>

Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses 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 and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

Grading & Department of Communication, Media and Film Grade Scale

The following table outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. Final grades are reported as letter grades. For components graded using percentages or numerical scores, those values will be used directly in calculating the final course grade, while for components graded using letter grades, the letter grades will be converted to the midpoint values listed in the final column of the table below in calculating the final course grade.

In this course, percentage grades will be used for all assignments and class work.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations*
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%

3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	F	0 - 49.99%	0%

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: 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. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

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.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support>

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including lectures, course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed, or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term

may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

To ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes & electronic versions of textbooks), all students are required to read the *University of Calgary Policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright* at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-material-protected-copyright-policy> and the requirements of the *Copyright Act* (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

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, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics>

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferral of term work, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

For information about deferrals of final examinations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>

For information about requesting a reappraisal of course work or of a final grade, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

Student Support Services and Resources

Please see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk. For resources on D2L, Zoom, Yuja, etc., see <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/resources-for-students/>. (Find the topic menu under the icon to the left of the ELEARN banner.)

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

Please see the course D2L site for the full schedule of lecture topics and readings.