

**University of Calgary**

**Department of Communication and Culture**

**Communication Studies (COMS) 591 – S01  
Senior Seminar in Communication: New Media and Popular Culture  
Spring 2014  
Tuesday, Thursday: 12:00 – 14:45**

**Instructor:** Dr. Delia Dumitrica  
**Office Location:** SS344  
**E-Mail:** dddumitr@ucalgary.ca  
**Office Hours:** Thursday, 15:00 – 17:00

**Additional Information**

- This is a reading, writing and discussion intensive course.
- Students are expected to read two novels, watch one documentary and one anime ahead of class.
- Classes take a seminar format (no formal lectures), where students are expected to discuss the cultural text and the required reading assigned for that day.

**Course Description**

This course focuses on the representation of new media in popular culture. We will examine the iconic images and narratives through which new media have been popularized in magazines, documentaries, novels, anime and film. Our focus will be on questioning what these representations are able to tell us about the social anxieties permeating contemporary societies and the role that technology plays in creating and alleviating these anxieties.

To interrogate these representations, we will rely on a various theoretical frameworks: representation (Stuart Hall), discourse (Foucault) and the critique of technological determinism. Students will make use of these theories in developing a research project examining a cultural text.

Classes will take a seminar format, where students will be expected to discuss the required readings and the cultural texts under discussion. Two classes will take a conference format, where students will present on their research project.

## **Objectives of the Course**

By the end of the course, students will:

- be familiar with the theories examined in this course;
- be able to apply these theories in an analysis of popular culture;
- gain in-depth knowledge of the representation of new media in popular culture;
- develop a set of critical literacy skills that will enable them to analyze various cultural products.

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

All cell phones should be silenced for the entire duration of the class. The instructor strongly discourages the use of laptops, smartphones and tablets during class. Since participation in the seminar is a central component of the course, the use of these electronic devices outside of the scope of the course will impact your participation grade.

## **Textbooks and Readings:**

A list of required readings will be introduced during the first day of class. Workload: a maximum of two articles/ class.

You are expected to read two novels, and watch one documentary and one anime ahead of class:

- Novels: *Neuromancer* (1984), William Gibson; *Snowcrash* (1992), Neal Stephenson.
- Documentary: *The Machine That Changed the World* (1992) (Part 4) (57 min.)
- Anime: *Serial Experiments Lain* (Episode 1 - Weird) (24 min.)

Selections from the following documentaries, anime and films will be watched during class time:

- Documentary: *Erasing David* (2010); *Catfish* (2010).
- Anime: *Ghost in a Shell* (1995).
- Films: *Hackers* (1995); *Chatroom* (2010).

## **Description of assignments**

Students will be graded based on six components:

- Research project:
  - Proposal (10% of the final grade), *May 29, 2014*.
  - Annotated bibliography (20% of the final grade), *June 12, 2014*
  - Presentation (10% of the final grade), *June 17 & 19, 2014*.
  - Final paper (35% of the final grade), *June 26, 2014*.
- Response essay (15% of the final grade), *June 3 or June 10, 2014*.
- Class participation (10% of the final grade).

All assignments must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

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.

### **1. Research project:**

- **Proposal (10%), May 29, 2014;**
- **Annotated bibliography (20%), June 12, 2014;**
- **Presentation (10%), June 17 & 19, 2014;**
- **Final paper (35%), June 26, 2014.**

The research project consists of an analysis of a cultural text (e.g. a film, a novel, a documentary, etc.) dealing with new media. Your analysis engages with the social anxieties expressed in the representation of new media. The project consists of:

- A proposal, providing a brief explanation of why the chosen cultural text fits with the focus of this course; a preliminary list of social anxieties discussed in the text; a brief discussion of how the text will be analyzed; and four references. Length: 1-2 pages, double spaced.
- An annotated bibliography, consisting of 2 academic articles that are directly relevant to your final paper. For each article, you will include: full reference; a comprehensive summary; a discussion of how the article's argument/ theoretical framework/ findings help you advance your own analysis. Length: 4-5 pages, double spaced.
- A presentation during a mock-conference on June 17 or 19. In 10 minutes, you will present on your chosen cultural text, outlining the research question, the findings of the annotated bibliography, and evidence of preliminary analysis.
- A final paper consisting of a theoretical discussion (developed by consulting relevant academic sources) and an analysis of the cultural text driven by the theoretical discussion. Length: 10-15 pages, double spaced.

### **2. Response essay (15%), June 3 or June 10, 2014.**

This assignment should help you understand how to analyze a cultural text and develop an argument in light of the final paper. It consists of an essay engaging with the novel discussed on the date of submission. The essay will examine the ways in which new media is represented as the source and/ or the solution to one particular social issue/ anxiety.

### **3. Class participation (10%).**

This course takes a seminar format; as such, there will be no formal lecturing. Class time will be used for an in-depth discussion of the required readings and of the cultural texts assigned for that day. Some small, in-class activities may also contribute to your class participation grade.

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

### **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.

### **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://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: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### **Grading System**

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

	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 (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) 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 Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) 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.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

## **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/ethics/cfreb>

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

To be provided on the first day of class.