

COMM 050: COMMUNICATION & CULTURE IN MAIN SOUTH

Clark University/Fall 2005
Class Sessions: Tuesday/Thursday 9:00-10:15 am
Discussion Groups: Thur./Fri. 3-5
PLA: Hila Bernstein

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office hours: Tues-Thurs:12:30-2:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class is the introductory course in the Communication and Culture major and minor. As a broad, “entry-level” survey, it is a foundation for the study of communication as a cultural process. We will examine a wide range of theories and models with the purpose of understanding systematic properties of communication, differences and similarities between communication processes, and ways in which the concepts of culture are integrally related to communication. Communication spans a range of communicative media and forms — art, music, television, film, everyday language, journalistic outlets, literary expressions of culture, advertising, interpersonal interaction, and the Internet. We will explore a wide variety of perspectives: psychological, anthropological, sociological, historical, sociolinguistic, technological, aesthetic, cinematic, semiotic, scientific, and cultural studies points of view and methodologies. This class, which concentrates on the “discourse” stream of the major, will place a particular emphasis on how language (talk and text) and culture work to create access, influence, and power in the world.

The course is organized around motivating questions. How are language, communication, codes, and representation intertwined? We will examine the model of a sender who encodes a message and sends it through a channel to a receiver who decodes it. What does this model buy us? What does it leave out? Second, how are language, culture, and thought related? Do visual, musical, gestural, (perhaps even culinary) messages function like language? Third, how does communicative style link up with identity? We will explore myths, fantasy, and desire and examine the importance of the concept of the individual (i.e. subjectivity and identity) in communication. Fourth, how are language, power, and ideology related?

In addition to the readings and class discussion, this course will include a “field” component, focusing on communication and culture in Main South, the neighborhood surrounding Clark University. For this field component, we will be collaborating with a group of high school students from the University Park Campus School (UPCS), building and maintaining a Main South Website, called “Main South Speaks” (www.mainsouthspeaks.com). Most of the discussion sections (see below) and some of our regular class sessions will be devoted to this project.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE:

The main objectives of the course are:

- 1) to understand communication — in its many forms — as both a producer and a product of culture;
- 2) to understand communication as a system of signs;
- 3) to distinguish differing theories and models of communication;
- 4) to develop the ability to analyze specific cultural products;
- 5) to hone skills in oral expression and critical writing;
- 6) to put these ideas and tools into practice in developing, maintaining, and evaluating the Main South website.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADES:

The work of this class consists of reading, writing, participation in discussions, fieldwork, and research. You are expected to read closely the assigned materials before each class meeting, and come prepared to participate in a discussion (see the section below on Shared Inquiry). **Class attendance is mandatory.** You are allowed 2 unexcused absences before a missed class will lower your grade. There are several types of readings assigned for each week. First, the Fiske text will provide a broad theoretical context for each subject. The Vivian textbook will provide historical, technical & organizational background. For each week's topic there is a source reading (an article or book section) which has made an important critical contribution to the field. Finally, something more contemporary, such as a recent case study, a movie, or a news report, will address the weekly theme and provide the basis for a class discussion. In addition to the two class sessions each week, you will attend a weekly “fieldwork and discussion section” led by Hila Bernstein, our “Peer Learning Assistant” (or PLA). These sections will provide an opportunity for in depth discussion of some of the more challenging readings and also provide support for hands on activities and fieldwork with our UPCS collaborators, where you will work on the Main South Speaks website. These discussion sessions will also serve to help you prepare a group presentation to the class and the PLA will provide guidance as you prepare your individual written assignments. On-time attendance at these discussion sessions is required. Attendance will be taken and absences will be counted as an absence from class.

ABOUT CLASS DISCUSSION:

As befits a course on communication, a great deal of class time will be dedicated to whole group discussion — of readings, key concepts, and original data that class participants bring to class to illustrate, problematize, or extend these ideas. Typically, during our Tuesday session, there will be focused lectures and presentations, as well as screenings of films. Thursdays will be dedicated to making sense of the readings, and extending our understanding of the readings by making connections with our own original data and first hand experiences with communication and culture.

Acting as Respondent in a Class Discussion: Once during the semester, working with a few members of your discussion group, you will be required to formulate a response to the week's materials and serve as discussion leaders. In the week(s) prior to your presentation, you must meet with me and present a short list of interpretive questions which will help the rest of the class prepare for class discussion. This means that you must prepare for your week's materials early! Once approved, you will post the study questions to the class's electronic discussion (see the course Blackboard site at <echalk.clarku.edu>) and monitor the discussion, as needed, to clarify your study questions. Through lecture during the first class session each week, I will be responsible for presenting the theoretical content of the textbook and explicating the (usually quite-difficult-to-understand) "source" article. Your group will be responsible, in the second of the weekly session of your appointed time, to formulate a response to the theoretical materials for discussion. Formal presentation of materials is required. You are expected to prepare, present and discuss an illustrative example (i.e. something like a "case study"), and to participate actively in the class discussion as a way of demonstrating your mastery of the required readings. There will be a single grade given for the entire group, so it is in everyone's interest that everyone in the group participates. [I will grant bonus/debit credit to individuals in extraordinary cases where their contribution is disproportionate.] This is, of course, not your only opportunity to participate. Everyone is expected to prepare for every class discussion by reading carefully and coming to class with comments, questions, and examples.

The time spent on the readings is an effort to achieve a more thorough understanding of a text by discussing questions, responses, and insights with others. For both the "respondents" and the participants, careful listening is essential. The "respondents" and I will guide the discussion by asking questions about specific ideas and problems of meaning in the text, but we will not necessarily seek to impose our own interpretation on the group.

During a discussion, group members consider a number of possible ideas and weigh the evidence for each. Ideas that are entertained and then refined or abandoned are not thought of as mistakes, but as valuable parts of the thinking process. Group members gain experience in communicating complex ideas and in supporting, testing, and expanding their thoughts. Everyone in the group contributes to the discussion, and while participants may disagree with each other, they treat each other's ideas respectfully.

This process of communal discovery is vital to developing an understanding of important texts and ideas, rather than merely cataloging knowledge about them.

GUIDELINES FOR LEADING AND PARTICIPATING IN DISCUSSION:

1. **Read the selection before participating in the discussion.** This ensures that all participants are equally prepared to talk about the ideas in the work, and helps prevent talk that would distract the group from its purpose.
2. **Support your ideas with evidence from the text.** This keeps the discussion focused on understanding the selection and enables the group to weigh textual support for different answers and to choose intelligently among them.
3. **Discuss the ideas in the selection, and try to understand them fully before exploring issues that go beyond the selection.** Reflecting on a range of ideas and the evidence to support them makes the exploration of related issues more productive.
4. **Listen to others and respond to them directly.** Class discussion is about the give and take of ideas, a willingness to listen to others and to talk to them respectfully. Directing your comments and questions to other group members, not always to the leader will make the discussion livelier and more dynamic.
5. **Expect the leader to ask questions, rather than answer them.** The leader is a kind of chief learner, whose role is to keep discussion effective and interesting by listening and asking questions. The leader's goal is to help the participants develop their own ideas, with everyone (the leader included) gaining new understanding in the process. When participants hang back and wait for the leader to suggest answers, discussion falters.

HOW TO MAKE DISCUSSIONS MORE EFFECTIVE:

- **Ask questions when something is unclear.** Simply asking someone to explain what he or she means by a particular word, or to repeat a comment, can give everyone in the group time to think about the idea in depth.
- **Ask for evidence.** Asking "What in the text gave you that idea?" helps everyone better understand the reasoning behind the answer, and it allows the group to consider which ideas have the best support.

- **Ask for agreement and disagreement.** “Does your idea agree with hers, or is it different?” Questions of this kind help the group understand how ideas are related or distinct.
- **Reflect on the discussion afterward.** Sharing comments about how the discussion went and ideas for improvement can make each discussion better than the last.

(The above guidelines are adapted from the practices of Shared Inquiry developed by the Great Books Foundation.)

Readings:

Available through the bookstore:

Fiske, John *Introduction to Communication Studies, 2nd Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000)

Vivian, John *The Media of Mass Communication* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 7th Edition, 2006 update)

The required reading packet for this course is available only through the Curry Copy office (basement of the UC).

N.B. Please bring the reading assigned for the week to class sessions.

Highly recommended:

Hacker, Diane, *A Writer's Reference* 4th edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999)

(in abbreviated form: www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/writersref). This is the adopted Style Manual for the Communication and Culture Program.

Assignments: Beyond the weekly course readings, there are six requirements.

Deadlines:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Date Due (in class)</u>	<u>Format</u>
content analysis	Sept. 20	PowerPoint presentation
quiz I	Oct. 18	short written answers and identifications
semiotic analysis	Nov. 1	3–5 page paper
quiz II	Dec. 8	short written answers and identifications
group presentation	10/20-11/24	in class presentation/discussion
ideology analysis	Dec. 13	5–7 page paper

These deadlines are firm. If you know beforehand that you will have to miss a deadline, it is your responsibility to contact me 48 hours prior to the due date and request an extension or a makeup.

Assignments: These assignments are your opportunity to show how well you have mastered the materials of the course and can use those materials to think with. Each assignment is based on a group of the readings from one of the units described on the schedule of readings below. Your written work should focus on the primary and theoretical materials assigned for that unit. As you work your way through the course, your range of pertinent references should increase, and your papers should be richer in their allusions to materials studied earlier in the semester. I will announce the specific problems, questions, or texts you should focus on in each paper at the start of each of the units. In all cases, however, please remember that you are not being asked to summarize a theory or to write reviews of software, web sites, films, or TV advertisements, but to consider the issues that emerge when you compare one theory to another or use a set of theoretical concerns.

Format: You are required to keep all papers to a rigid format: 12 pt. type, double-spaced, with enough margins for comments (i.e. 1.0 inches all around the page). Observe the prescribed paper length. I may not accept longer papers; shorter papers will receive partial credit. Don't include a cover page. Put your name and the unit number at the top of the first page. You will be graded on the quality of your writing as well as on your ability to think through the issues presented in lecture and discussions. Make your points as clearly and economically as you can. While brief references to examples from the primary texts and lectures may help you communicate, do not use up space with summaries of plots or theories. You may assume your reader knows all the materials assigned for this course.

Grading will be based upon the following:

content analysis	10%
semiotic analysis	20%
group presentation	20%
website analysis	25%
quiz I & II	20% (10% each)
class participation	Active, regular participation can raise your grade.

Grading standards are described in the *Clark University Academic Catalog*.

III. Course Meetings: Lecture/Discussion

WEEK ONE - THREE Communication & Representation
WEEK ONE

Blackboard Assignment: COMM Autobiography -- Due Thursday, 9/1, by 5 PM.

Tuesday, 8/30: **Introductions**
Course Overview: Reviewing Syllabus
Pre-test Ice Breaker: Just for Fun
Video: NAQOYQATSI (An interview with filmmaker Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass)
Goals: Framing the Big Questions

Thursday, 9/1: **Mass Media and Democracy**
Hand in COMM autobiography (submit via digital drop box on Blackboard or bring to class). See "COMM Autobiography Assignment" in "Assignments" in Blackboard.

Read:
Fiske Ch. 1 pp. 1-22
Vivian Ch 1: Mass Media
Shared Inquiry Preparing to Lead a Discussion

Video Screening: Rich Media/Poor Democracy – with Robert McChesney and Mark Crispin Miller (Media Education Foundation, 2003). Check out Robert McChesney and Mark Crispin Miller on the Web.

Post one comment on Blackboard reacting to the video.

Discussion Section Unpacking "messages" and "codes" in a set of urban and suburban images. "Reading" signs of class in photographs of Main South, Worcester and a wealthy suburban community in Massachusetts, and applying Shannon & Weaver's model to this range of examples of communication.

Begin a one week mass media journal, noting down every form of mass communication you "consume," for how long, under what conditions. This will form the basis of your discussion session next week.

WEEK TWO -- Meeting our UPCS colleagues and collaborators!!!

Blackboard Assignment: What is Main South? Where is Main South? -- Due Thursday, 9/8 by 5 PM.

Tuesday, 9/6: **Critiquing the models**
Read:
Fiske Ch. 2 pp. 24-37 (Note: Skip Newcomb's model and Westley and MacLean's model, pp. 31-34, but read Jacobson's model to end of chapter, pp. 35-37)
Vivian Ch 15: Mass Communication
Shannon & Weaver "Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication"

Thursday, 9/8: **PowerPoint Training**

Meet in computer lab, JC 105

Read:
Fiske Ch. 3 pp. 39-60

Discussion Section A walking tour of the perimeter of Clark University. What is communicated — via the buildings, the open space, plants/trees, the fences and chains? What is Clark's digital face (on its website)? Are the messages the same or different? What signs can you identify? (Bring along a digital camera.)

WEEK THREE

Blackboard Assignment -- Thursday, 9/15 by 5 PM: What messages and signs did you identify on your walk or perusal of Clark’s Website? Do any of the models in Fiske work in explaining how the message is communicated?

Tuesday, 9/13:Representations: TV & empiricism

Read:
Fiske Ch. 8 pp. 135–163
Vivian Ch 8: “TV”

Thursday, 9/15: How Tools Shape What We Can Do

Read:
Tufte “The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint”

Discussion Section A data fest!! Bring your data from your TV content analysis to the table. Share and compare. Review the 5 paragraph essay in preparation for the first written essay. In addition, bring your mass media journal to the table. If there is time, how could you create a spreadsheet that combines your entire group’s data?

9/20 Powerpoint presentations of content analysis due in class

WEEK FOUR—SEVEN The Language Question

WEEK FOUR

Tuesday, 9/20: Thinking Language

Submit PowerPoint via the digital dropbox on Blackboard and bring 2 page written analysis (about PP) to class.

Read:
Pinker “Mentalese”
Sacks Chapter Two in *Seeing Voices*
Video Screening of Cross-Talk

Thursday, 9/22: Culture as Communication

Read:
Duranti “Culture as Communication”
McWhorter “People Just Talk: Speech Versus Writing”

Discussion Section Finish the spreadsheet that combines your group’s mass media data. **Is there a link between mass media consumption and gender? Are there differences between the results of the UPCS kids and the Clark undergraduates? Is there a connection between GPA and mass media consumption?**

WEEK FIVE

Blackboard Assignment: Questions and findings from the mass media diary. Is there a link between mass media consumption and gender or age? Is there a connection between GPA and mass media consumption?

Tuesday, 9/27 Semiotics: Communication, Words and Signs

Read:
Fiske Re-read Ch. 3 pp. 39–63
Vivian Ch 9 “The Web”

Thursday, 9/29 The Medium is the Message

McLuhan “The Medium is the Message”
Levinson “Net Content” (from *Digital McLuhan*)

Highly recommended (see esp. the glossary):
Chandler [Semiotics for Beginners](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B) (www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B)

Marx "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof"
Vivian Ch. 12 "Advertising" & Ch 13 "Market Research"
Rushkoff "Media Virus" and "Virtual Marketing"

student presentation group 3: spam, media viruses, or pornography in advertising
Presenters: Tim, Sarah, and Naomi

Discussion Section screening *Still Killing Us Softly*

WEEK ELEVEN (11/8-11/10) : Institutions and Power

Read:

Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"
Vivian Ch. 18 "Mass Media & Governance" & Ch. 19 "Mass Media Law"
screening *Noam Chomsky "Necessary Illusions: The Manufacture of Consent"*

student presentation group 4: campaign advertising & political discourse
Presenters: Alexis, Liz, Steph, and Billie

Discussion Section screening, cont. *Noam Chomsky "Necessary Illusions: The Manufacture of Consent"*

WEEK TWELVE(11/15-11/17) :Musical Objects and Culture Industry

Read:

Adorno "On the Fetish Character in Music and Regressive Listening"
Gendron "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs"
Vivian Ch 5 "Recordings"

Also suggested:

Garofalo ["From Music Publishing to MP3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century"](#)
(available through InfoTrak)

screening *DVD Dream Worlds*

Discussion Section Main South Speaks!

WEEK THIRTEEN(11/22-11/24) : Culture and the Other

Read:

Fiske: Ch. 9 pp. 164–189
Said "Introduction" in *Orientalism*

screening: Edward Said on Orientalism

student presentation group 6: domestic & foreign news perspectives on the Iraq war
Presenters: Hayley and Gabby

Discussion Section Main South Speaks!

WEEK FOURTEEN (11/29-12/1): The Local and the Global

Read:

Stuart Hall "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity"
Stuart Hall "Old and New Identities"

Discussion Section Main South Speaks!

WEEK FIFTEEN (12/6-12/8):Communication as a Cultural Practice: Implications for Action

Vivian Ch. 6: "Movies"

student presentation group 1: fantasy in the movies
Ashley, Carly, and Jen

Final Papers due on Dec. 13, 10 AM in my box in the Education Department. Make sure you have a duplicate copy. Have Betty Bacinskas sign your paper in with date and time.