

Critical/Cultural CommStudies

Dr. Bob Bednar

**Department of
Communication Studies**

Southwestern University

COM 75-134-01/02

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OFFICE HOURS: MW 10:00-10:50; Th 11:50-12:50; and by appointment
CLASS MEETINGS: Section 1: 11:00-12:15 MW, FWO 209
Section 2: 1:30-2:50 MW, FWO 209

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This Communication Studies Foundation Course introduces theoretical and critical perspectives central to the two cognate areas of the major: Rhetorical Studies and Critical Media Studies. A special focus on introducing qualitative critical/interpretive analysis, research methods, and theoretical frameworks enhances students' understanding of the role that communication plays in the construction and negotiation of culture and identity and the role of critical engagement in public advocacy. COM Foundation course.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*, 2nd Ed (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2012).

Additional course readings located at the Course Resource Webpage, and indicated in syllabus as {W}:

<http://people.southwestern.edu/~bednarb/critical-cultural>

GRADING:

Your final grade for this class will be determined according to the following percentages and will be evaluated according to a plus/minus system (e.g., 88-89=B+, 83-87=B, 80-82=B-, etc.):

"That's Me, That's You" Project	5%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Communication/Culture/Identity Analysis Project	15%
Group Public Advocacy Research Project	15%
Everyday Classwork	15%
Class Participation	15%

PROCEDURES AND POLICIES:

This is not a lecture class; it demands and rewards your active critical engagement with the course materials as well as with me and everyone else in the class throughout the semester. The course revolves around seminar-style class discussions, small-group collaborations, and hands-on learning experiences that will produce engaging and/or unpredictable dynamics that will strengthen your learning of the material and help you become even more aware of the complexities of the interrelationships among communication, culture, and identity. In keeping with this, the grading is distributed across different types of assignments that teach and test different competencies.

We will discuss more specific guidelines for the class assignments as the course progresses, but here is a short outline to help orient you at the outset:

- **"THAT'S ME, THAT'S YOU" PROJECT:** This project will give you an early introduction into exploring and analyzing connections between communication, culture, and identity by having you do a short, 3-minute informal presentation about some material object that represents your identity and writing a short paper about an assigned classmate's performed identity. This assignment will be evaluated on a 5-point numerical system.
- **EXAMS:** The two essay Exams are designed to test your understanding of and ability to critically engage the course materials. The Exams will cover all of our class readings and discussions up to the point of each exam, with the first Exam focused on the first half of the course and the second Exam covering the whole course, but with more emphasis on the last half of the course. The Exams will be comprised of large-scale "big picture" essay questions as well as more specific short-answer questions, matching, and/or multiple-choice questions, and will be evaluated on a 100-point numerical system. We will do a review and you will receive a study guide for each Exam.
- **COMMUNICATION/CULTURE/IDENTITY ANALYSIS PROJECT:** This assignment will allow you to reflexively explore the ways in which communication has shaped your individual identity as well as the ways that you perform aspects of your identity communicatively as you negotiate the dialectic of how you see yourself and how others see you. In 4-6 pages, you will analyze: how your sense of self is a product of your identity communities; how it has been shaped and developed through communication; your particular standpoint or positionality within your culture; and some of the ways that you communicate, resist, and reinforce your identity through cultural performance. This assignment will be preceded by a handout and will be evaluated on a letter-grade plus/minus system.
- **PUBLIC ADVOCACY GROUP RESEARCH PRESENTATION PROJECT:** This assignment asks you to collaborate with 4-5 classmates to research and develop an argument advocating for the value of understanding a certain media theory (or more general critical theory applied to media) in developing the practice of critical media literacy in contemporary U.S. culture. The presentation will be assessed on the quality of the information presented about the theory, the quality and illustrative capacity of the analysis of examples used to illuminate the theory, the quality of the presentation itself, and the effectiveness of the argument as a form of public advocacy. This assignment will be preceded by a handout and will be evaluated on a letter-grade plus/minus system, where everyone in the group receives the same grade.
- **CLASSWORK:** Your Classwork grade will be determined by your performance on daily discussion questions, reading quizzes, etc. To help you prepare to be active participants in our daily class discussions, each student will produce "daily Discussion Questions" (**DQs**) to submit to me every day we have assigned readings. Each DQ document will include at least two discussion questions, including at least one question that addresses a specific question focused on a particular reading for the day and one question that brings together issues across and in between multiple readings. The DQs can be handwritten, and to save paper, they can be on a piece of paper no smaller than a standard index card. The best DQs are *anchored in the readings*, *interpretive*, and *open-ended* (e.g., with no pre-determined

yes/no answers). More specifically, good DQs start with particular passages from the readings and then either seek to *clarify*, *extend*, and/or *challenge* the ideas, analysis, and/or interpretive arguments in them. You will prepare these daily DQs in advance, show them to me at the beginning of class, work from them in class, and submit them to me at the end of class for evaluation. In addition to these questions, we may also have reading quizzes to evaluate your understanding of the readings further. Each Classwork assignment will be evaluated on a 10-point numerical system.

- **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Because this course revolves around dynamic group discussion of materials we have all read and thought about, daily Class Participation is vital. One way I will evaluate your participation is with the Classwork assignments outlined above; the other is through your everyday participation in class discussion. Good Class Participation means more than merely attending class, which to me is a given in a face-to-face learning community like Southwestern. Minimally, it means reading the assigned course materials and coming to class ready to critically engage them—and actively contributing to the class discussion by speaking *and* listening not only to me, but to your classmates as well. More substantially, it means actively working with me and your colleagues in the class to make our class a space of open, respectful, responsible, and challenging engagement with ideas, perspectives, and voices both similar to and different from your own.

- **ATTENDANCE:** I expect you to be in class and prepared every day. I will grant two free absences to account for contingencies, but starting with the third, each absence thereafter will cost you five points off of your final grade—in addition to any negative evaluation of your overall Class Participation grade. Please note that documenting an illness or other non-scheduled absence with the Office of Academic Success does not “excuse” an absence; it merely shows *why* you were absent. If you have absences that are both scheduled in advance and officially sanctioned by the University as “excused absences”—such as absences for religious holidays or for required travel for academic purposes or for intercollegiate athletics—you are responsible for notifying me of the absence in advance and are responsible for arranging the means of making up and turning in applicable work in advance of the absence. Because the Classwork assignments are designed to help prepare you to better participate in class discussions and because our discussions will thus work through the material in class, you cannot receive full credit for missed Classwork made up after the absence. Thus *make-ups after the fact for missed daily Classwork will count for no more than half of the original assignment grade.*

- **READING ASSIGNMENTS:** All reading assignments must be completed before class on the day scheduled for discussion of the readings.

- **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** Unless indicated explicitly otherwise, you should assume that all writing assignments for this class must be produced and revised using a word processor and printed out in a hard copy. The page limits assume standard 1” margins, double-spacing, and the default of Times 12-point font. Citations should be rendered in Chicago, MLA, or Harvard format, with in-text citations in the essay and full bibliographic citations in a separate “Works Cited” section at the end of the paper. To save paper, two-sided printing is OK, and there is no need to put the Works Cited on its own separate page.

- **LATE PAPERS:** Papers are due at the beginning of class on the days indicated in the schedule. Late papers for any assignment will be penalized a full letter grade for each day that they are late.

- **ACCOMMODATIONS:** As an advocate for an inclusive and diverse learning community, I know that there can be significant differences in how students learn and perform their knowledge in an academic setting, which is why I include many different kinds of assignments in my classes. I also will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students should contact the Access and Academic Resource Coordinator within the Center for Academic Success to determine their eligibility to receive accommodations. It is your responsibility to discuss any necessary accommodations with me as well.

- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** It is your responsibility to understand and live by the Southwestern Honor Code, so you should review its policies and procedures outlined in the *SU Student Handbook*. Students who violate University policies on Academic Dishonesty by representing another's work as their own or who commit some other academic integrity violation are subject to review by the Honor Code Council, which includes the possibility of disciplinary penalties, including dismissal from the University. For this particular class, all individual and collaborative in-class and out-of-class assignments are subject to the Honor Code. Therefore, any individual writing assignment you turn in must include your signature and a full statement of the Pledge ("I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not."); if both the pledge and your signature are not present on your paper, I will assume that you either have committed an Honor Code violation or have witnessed an Honor Code violation and wish to pursue it. The Honor Code also applies to your group Collaborative Projects as well. To act with integrity in a group is a little more complex than in individual work, but it is no less important. It means not only that you take responsibility for "carrying your weight" by producing your part of the group's work with integrity (as you would with individual work), but also that you have produced the work *as a group*, which means that you have tried your best to respect the similarities *and* differences of your group members and to take responsibility for working together productively with your group to find common ground. Thus, to act with integrity in a collaborative group, you need to take an active role in the group, find ways to use your strengths as a collaborator, identify and foster the strengths of your group members, make your best effort to make the group itself work as well as it can, *and* produce the group's best work. If collaborative issues emerge in the group, they need to be resolved *within the group*.

- **COURSE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Critical/Cultural Communication Studies is a CommStudies Foundational Course required of all CommStudies majors and minors. It provides a gateway to the rest of the major. By the end of the course, students will demonstrate:

- Proficiency in understanding and critically engaging concepts central to culturally oriented critical communication studies, such as advocacy, audience, connectivity, culture, discourse, hegemony, identity, ideology, incorporation, interpellation, medium, narrative, performance, power, resistance, rhetoric, and semiotics.
- Proficiency in understanding the central role that communication plays in shaping as well as allowing for the performance of individual identity and culture, and reflexively interrogating their own communication practices.
- Proficiency in understanding the features and interrelationships between the two core areas of the liberal arts-oriented CommStudies major at Southwestern: rhetorical studies and critical media studies.
- Proficiency in critically engaging scholarly writing in framing scholarly arguments that analyze and interpret particular communication texts, practices, and phenomena.
- Proficiency in developing effective research strategies for identifying primary and secondary sources pertinent to the analysis and interpretation of communication texts, practices, and phenomena.
- Proficiency in group collaboration and presentation.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Jan 11: Mapping the Course/Introductions

16: <<no class—MLK day>>

18: What is Critical/Cultural Communication Studies?

Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 1; Herrman, "Stage Craft" {W}

Due: Discussion Questions

- Jan 23: Authors and Readers
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 2-3
Due: Discussion Questions
- 25: Subjectivity
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 4
Due: Discussion Questions
- 30: Cultural Semiotics
Read: Hall, "The Work of Representation" pp. 1-26 plus Reading A (Bryson), B (Barthes), C (Barthes), D (Barthes) {W}
Due: Discussion Questions
- Feb 1: Discourse
Read: Hall, "The Work of Representation" pp. 26-47 plus Reading E (Laclau/Mouffe), and Reading F (Showalter) {W}
Due: Discussion Questions
- 6: "That's Me" Presentations
8: Embodied Performances
Read: Goffman, from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* {W}
Due: "That's You" paper
Due: Discussion Questions
- 13: Culture
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 5
Due: Discussion Questions
- 15: Ideology; Review
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 6
Due: Discussion Questions
- 20: >>**Mid-Term Exam**<<
- 22: History/Memory
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 7; Walker, "Things To Do in Cyberspace When You Are Dead" {W}
Due: Discussion Questions
- Feb 27: Space/Time
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 8; de Certeau, "Trajectories, Tactics, Rhetorics"; "Walking in the City" {W}
Due: Discussion Questions
- Mar 1: Gender and Sexuality
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, pp. 171-189
Due: Discussion Questions
- 6: Race and Class
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, pp. 189-205
Due: Discussion Questions

- Mar 8: Power and Privilege
Read: McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege" {W}
Due: Discussion Questions
Due: Communication/Culture/Identity Analysis Project
- Mar 13-15 <<no class—Spring Break>>
- Mar 20: Post-modernism/structuralism/colonialism
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 9
Due: Discussion Questions
- 22: Biopower
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 11
Due: Discussion Questions
- 27: Nature/Culture
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 12
Due: Discussion Questions
- 29: Agency
Read: Nealon & Searls Giroux, Ch. 13
Due: Discussion Questions
- Apr 3: <<Reading Day>>
- 5: The Medium is the Message
Read: McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message" {W}
Due: Group Public Advocacy Project Presentation 1
- 10: Mobile Communication, Social Media, and Constant Connectivity
Read: de Souza e Silva & Frith, "Introduction" {W}
Due: Group Public Advocacy Project Presentation 2
- 12: Interpellation, Spectatorship, and Identification
Read: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" {W};
Smith, "How Do We Identify with Characters?" {W}
Due: Group Public Advocacy Project Presentation 3
- 17: Commodification, Resistance, and Incorporation
Read: Fiske, "The Jeaning of America" {W}
Due: Group Public Advocacy Project Presentation 4
- 19: Culture Jamming
Read: Harold, "Pranking Rhetoric" {W}
Due: Group Public Advocacy Project Presentation 5
- 24: <<Reading Day>>
- Apr 26: Review/Course Evaluations
- >>Final Exam<<**
Section 1 (11:00 MW): Thursday, May 4, 1:30-4:30 PM
Section 2 (1:30 MW): Thursday, May 4, 8:30-11:30 AM

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**COM 75-134: Critical/Cultural Communication Studies
Web Resource Readings**

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd Edition, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 139-141. London: Routledge, 2002.
- de Certeau, Michel. "Trajectories, Tactics, and Rhetorics." In Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans Steven F. Rendell, xviii-xxii. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- de Certeau, Michel. "Walking in the City." In Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans Steven F. Rendell, 97-103. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- de Souza e Silva, Adriana, and Frith, Jordan. Excerpt from *Mobile Interfaces in Public Spaces: Locational Privacy, Control, and Urban Sociality* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-21.
- Fiske, John. "The Jeaning of America." In John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 1-21. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Goffman, Erving. Excerpt from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 1-16.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation." In *Representation*, 2nd Edition, edited by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, 1-59. Los Angeles: Sage, 2013{includes readings from Bryson, Barthes, Laclau & Mouffe, and Showalter}.
- Harold, Christine. "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004): 189-211.
- Herrman, John. "Stage Craft," *New York Times Magazine*, December 18, 2016, pp. 15-16, 18.
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." Working Paper No. 189, Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA, 1988, pp. 1-20.
- McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message." In *Media & Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 129-138. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.
- Smith, Greg. "'How Do We Identify With Characters?'" In Greg Smith, *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss*, 34-51. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Walker, Rob. "Things to Do in Cyberspace When You're Dead," *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 2011, pp. 30-37, 44-46.

Pronouns and Possessives:

its = possessive pronoun

e.g. the essay's point of view => its point of view

it's = contraction of it + is

e.g. It is a fine day => It's a fine day

their = possessive pronoun

e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo's dog roams the neighborhood => Their dog roams the neighborhood

there = adverb indicating place

e.g. Their dog usually leaves its mark on that tree over there.

they're = contraction of they + are

e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo are looking for their dog => They're looking for their dog.

Punctuation/Sentence Structure Problems:

fragment (frag)

A fragment is an incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, a verb, or both.

e.g. Washing the car. (no subject, incomplete verb, and incomplete thought)

comma splice (cs)

A comma cannot, on its own, join two independent clauses.

e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue, Hondo prefers tofu => Jo Jo likes barbecue; Hondo prefers tofu.
=> Jo Jo likes barbecue, but Hondo prefers tofu.
=> Jo Jo likes barbecue. Hondo prefers tofu.

fused sentence (fs)

A fused sentence lacks the punctuation necessary to separate two independent clauses.

e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue Hondo prefers tofu => see comma splice corrections above

semicolon errors

A semicolon can only be used in an extensive series or to separate two independent clauses.

e.g. Hondo stumbled; washing the car => Hondo stumbled; he was washing the car.
=> While he was washing the car, Hondo stumbled.

run-on

A run-on sentence proliferates verbs and subjects and objects without attention to grammatical structure.

awkward (AWK)

An awkward sentence stumbles over itself as it tries to communicate its point, rendering the writing confused/confusing. Often the fix is to "write to the point" more directly.

using the word "however"

The word "however" is not an interchangeable synonym for the word "but" or "although." It cannot be used to indicate contradiction unless you use punctuation to interrupt the flow of the sentence. If a sentence begins with the word, it must be followed by a comma; if a sentence ends with the word, it must be preceded with a comma. If it is used in the middle of a sentence, it must be set apart either with a set of commas before and after it or with a semicolon and a comma (see also **fs, cs,** and **run-ons**).

e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out; however, I know that she does.
e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out. However, I know that she does.
e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out. I know, however, that she does.

Apostrophes:

A singular noun that does not end in "s" takes "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. the woman's dog (the dog belongs to one woman)

A plural noun that already ends in "s" takes an "'s" only to indicate possession.

e.g. the boys' dog (the dog belongs to more than one boy)
e.g. the ladies' house (the house belongs to more than one lady)

A plural noun that does not end in "s" takes "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. the children's dog (the dog belongs to all the children)
e.g. the women's house (the house belong to the women)

A singular noun that ends in "s" takes either "'s" or "'s" to indicate possession.

e.g. Charles' spaniel or Charles's spaniel (the spaniel belongs to Charles)

Punctuating quotes and citations:

I expect you to critically engage other writers as you develop your own arguments. Document all citations (including direct quotations, paraphrases, and "general indebtedness") using MLA, Harvard, Chicago, or some other standard in-text citation format within the essay and then list all of your cited sources in a Works Cited section at the end of the paper. Notice that the standard format for documenting a quote ends the quote, includes the citation, and only then provides the sentence's end punctuation, as in the following example: As Patrick Phillips argues, "There is a fine line between determining and overdetermining the meaning of a film text" (Phillips, 157).