

OKANAGAN COLLEGE
Department of Communications
CMNS 230: Communication and Culture

Course Description

This course focuses on the major approaches to studying and understanding communication, drawing heavily on traditions of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies. Throughout the course, we will explore the diverse cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts from which various theoretical currents have emerged, as well as the role and application of these theories in particular cultural texts, practices, and environments.

Students will identify current popular cultural events, texts, and activities and will assess their influence on the public sphere. The course will enable students to critically question and understand how meaning is created in mainstream and marginalized communities.

Prerequisites: successful completion of CMNS 100 or 2nd year standing.

Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop an understanding of the characteristics of cultural studies
2. Understand how cultural representations are disseminated by communication systems
3. Understand the theories that inform the discipline of cultural studies
4. Identify the historical contexts which shaped the ways in which cultural studies evolved
5. Recognize the research methods used in cultural studies and their relationship to theoretical concerns
6. Develop the ability to pose a researchable communication question and to frame and answer the question within a specific theoretical tradition
7. Become competent in interpreting cultural messages in every day life

Topics

1. Definitions of culture, popular culture and cultural studies
2. The relationship between popular culture and mass communication
3. Popular culture, identity and everyday life
4. The social and historical contexts of contemporary popular texts
5. Structuralism, post-structuralism, modernism, post-modernism, Marxism
6. The link between ideology, hegemony and popular culture
7. Gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race in popular culture

8. Research approaches to studying culture including discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and ethnography
9. The multi-channel universe and its influence on individual identity
10. New communication technologies and the fragmentation of society

Method of Instruction

As a learner-centred course, students share responsibility with the instructor for the success of each class session. Having carefully read and contemplated the texts and topics under consideration in advance of a given class, students should be prepared for vibrant class discussion. Classes will feature a fluid combination of lecture, presentations, individual and collaborative work, workshops, and seminars.

Texts

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 4th ed. London: Pearson Ed., 2006.

Nicks, Joan and Jeanette Sloniowski. *Slippery Pastimes: Reading the Popular in Canadian Culture*. Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2002.

Note: Course readings will be supplemented with sources directly relevant to students' coursework.

Course Requirements

Short Analytic Papers (3@ 5% each)	15%
Student Seminar	20%
Research Proposal (1 page)	05%
Research Paper (10-15 pages)	20%
Presentation	10%
Final	20%
Participation (including attendance, participation, responses to study questions, informal group presentations, engagement in class activities, and low-stakes writing assignments)	10%

Evaluation and Assessment

Students will collaborate with the instructor to determine criteria for each assignment. The criteria will vary according to each assignment's audience, purpose, content, and communications medium and will be developed in advance of a given assignment's submission date. Students will also engage in reflective self-assessment as a means of better integrating evaluation with learning.

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Sample Assignment: Student Seminar (group project)

Worth: 20%

For this assignment, students working in groups will be responsible for running a 20 to 30 minute seminar. The seminar differs from a presentation in that seminars require class participation. In other words, you must do more than give us a PowerPoint presentation; you and your group will be leading and guiding the class through a discussion on a specific topic.

Below is a list of topics. Your group can pick a topic or suggest an alternative. You must then find a suitable reading and have it approved by the instructor. This reading must be posted to our WebCT site at least 24 hours before your seminar. This will give members of the class time to read the article so that they can engage in discussion and/or application of the article.

As part of your presentation, you must engage the class in some kind of activity. For instance – you might show the audience a music video and then ask us to analyze it using a specific theoretical framework. Or, you could ask the class to help you devise a survey designed to find how and why teenagers use MSN. The possibilities are endless.

Evaluation:

In keeping with the learner-centred nature of the course, students will work with the instructor to develop evaluation criteria.

Tips:

- You may use PowerPoint, but try to design your presentation so that it stimulates questions and discussion
- If you use PowerPoint – make sure to spell check your presentation.
- Ask questions. It's a great way to stimulate audience participation.
- Ensure you leave enough time for your activity. You might want to practice on a group of friends to get your timing right.

Possible Topics:

- The portrayal of minorities on sitcoms
- Hockey and its relationship to Canadian identity
- The image of women in music videos
- Minorities and the news
- The privileging of science in crime shows
- Ipods and identity