**COM 409: Critical Methods of Visual Communication**



**Instructor:** Dr. Susan A. Sci **Classroom:** Loyola Hall 31 **Office:** Carroll 234

**Class Time:** MW 9:00-10:15 **Office Hours:** MW 11:30-1:00; 4-5pm **Email:** ssci@regis.edu

* ***Course Description***

This course uses various landmark theories and perspectives to analyze popular culture, with a particular focus paid to the importance of communication in the production and consumption of culture. We will examine various artifacts of popular culture including music, movies, texts, advertisements, clothing, apps, videogames, and other relevant artifacts. In the course of this exploration, we will study the development of culture by applying different theories or ‘lenses’ to these artifacts.

You will experience and analyze various aspects of popular culture including production, consumption, and how these processes work within the context of the contemporary U.S. We will take a critical perspective in which you will be challenged to examine your own conceptions and consumption of popular culture. You will demonstrate your knowledge of the theories covered in class and in the readings through discussions, papers, and assignments. The goal of this course is to combine relevant theories with your own observations and interests in order to develop a careful, critical and constructive analysis of popular culture.

Some of the theories as well as the conclusions we reach in class may challenge your religious, political and personal beliefs. My learning (and teaching) philosophy is to learn first, challenge second. That is, a wise person can entertain an idea (concept/theory) without believing it. One of the most important skills for college work and beyond seeks the meaning beneath the surface of a “text” (advertisement, movie, television show, etc.). Using analysis, the critical thinker separates the text into its elements in order to see meanings, relations, and assumptions that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

* ***Course Objectives***

Upon completion of this course, students of COM409 will:

* Recognize the distinguishing features of media in its current socio-historical context. Specifically, students will be able to distinguish the characteristics of media in late modernism (industrial capitalism) from media in late capitalism (postmodernity).
* Develop a deep understanding of 10 critical frameworks that help us understand the complex and dynamic relationship between a mediated text, the author and industry that created it, the socio-historical context the text was developed and consumed within, and the way contemporary audiences might interpret and use the text.
* Research, synthesize, organize, and compose a critical essay employing one of the critical frameworks from readings and class. This essay critically explicates a mediated text of your choosing and helps us understand how your text, your reading of it, and how your use of a particular critical framework fosters democratic citizenship.
* ***Required Texts***

Ott, B. L., & Mack, R. L. (2010). Critical media studies: An introduction. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

* ***Class Policies***

***Attendance:*** Three unexcused absences over the course of the semester are allowed. After that, you will receive a letter-grade deduction (ex. A = A-) per additional absence from your final class grade point total. You will not be able to “make up” in-class activities, peer reviews, or essay workshops; nor do I review missed discussion material. If you are absence, it is your responsibility to: 1) submit homework/assignments due on that date; and 2) contact a classmate to find out what material you missed in class.

***Missed/Late Assignments:*** All due dates for written assignments are final. Extensions will only be granted based under extenuating circumstances that are address well in advance of the assignment due date.

***Classroom Environment:*** For this class, I ask you to suspend your judgment, and walk into this classroom motivated to consider various perspectives on popular culture. I consider your beliefs, opinions, and experiences important, valid, and worthy of respect. In this spirit, then, I ask you to respect the theories and claims set forth by the established and revered scholars that we will be reading. To this end, I hope you find joy in “playing” with these theories with an aim towards understanding the theory, and what the theory as to offer you in understanding the artifacts you are looking at. As the course progresses, I encourage you to speak openly with me about how I can facilitate this sense of “play” in our classroom.

***Academic Integrity Policy:*** All work submitted in this class is to be the culmination of each student’s individual efforts only. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Use of external sources or materials must be acknowledged through appropriate (parenthetical) references, footnotes, and/or bibliographic (“works cited”) entries. At minimum, students who are caught plagiarizing will receive zero points for that assignment. At the instructor’s discretion, a student caught plagiarizing a paper can be assigned an “F” for the course. At the Dean’s discretion, a student caught plagiarizing a paper can face possible dismissal from the University. Students are responsible for being attentive to, or observant of, campus policies about academic honesty as stated in Regis University’s Standards of Conduct. Please read these standards to ensure full compliance. They can be found at: <http://www.regis.edu/~/media/Files/University/Academic/Course%20Catalog/cps_AcademicInfo.ashx>

***Incompletes:*** Incompletes are reserved for documented, exceptional circumstances and are only given if the student has successfully completed at least seventy-five percent of the course requirements. An incomplete grade can be given if the above condition is met and the instructor approves it. If the student does not complete the remaining coursework within 12 months, the grade granted will be based on the partial work completed.

***Disabilities Accommodations:*** Students with disabilities who qualify for academic accommodations must provide a letter from Disability Services (DS) and discuss specific needs with the professor, preferably during the first two weeks of class. DS determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. To contact DS, call (303) 458-4941 or <http://www.regis.edu/disability>.

***Athletics:*** Student athletes must provide the instructor with a signed, official schedule of events that conflict with class dates and times. You are responsible for signing up for presentation times that you are able to make and reminding me of your athletic absences during the semester.

* ***Course Assignments***

**Grading:** The following is the breakdown of percentages of assignments towards your final course grade: Textual Analysis (total 55%), Group Presentation (10%), Blog Posts (20%), Blog Responses (5%) and Class Participation (10%). Specific assignments and points follow:

1. **Textual Analysis in 4 installments – topic report (50pts), text description (100pts), theoretical rationale (150pts), final analysis & presentation (250pts).** A separate assignment sheet with a thorough explanation of each installment will be given when they are assigned.
2. **Group Presentation (100 pts).** As part of a group of 3 or 4, you will lead the class in an analysis of mediated text of your choice. Your group will 1) choose an popular culture text(s) (movie, TV show, graphic novel, website/blog, videogame, song/group, media technology, etc.); 2) if you can, bring the text (or an example of it) to class; and 3) lead your classmates in an analysis of the text(s) using the theoretical framework being covered in class that you have signed up for. This presentation should be interactive and engage the class in a collective discussion about the text and its critical communicative significance. In preparation for your presentation, each group is REQUIRED to make an appointment to meet with me.
3. **Blog Posting (4 @ 50 pts; total 200). The course blog is:** <http://popularepresentation.blogspot.com/>. Each student will receive an email invitation to join the blog as an author. If you don’t already have one, you will have to create a Blogger account in order to post**.** You will have to create at least 4 blog posts that will address four different types of analysis. These posts will be like mini critical reflection pieces that focus on a specific text from a given analytical framework (i.e., Marxist, Rhetorical, Ecological). Essentially, you will discussion how the text can be understood from the particular perspective created by this type of analysis.
4. **Blog Posting Responses (5 @ 10 pts each; total 50)**. To ensure that the blog is being read, you will have to respond to at least 5 postings. These responses need to be more than a simple acknowledgment, agreement or disagreement. You need to explain what your opinion on this text is and/or what thoughts this post prompted for you.
5. **Class Participation (100 pts).** Participation means active inclusion and notable preparation; regular, mature and meaningful contribution to small group and whole-class discussions; and conveying a considerate, engaged, positive attitude. This includes: handing in the appropriate assignments on time, coming to class ready to discuss the assigned readings, and respectfully engage in classroom conversations and activities.
* ***TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE -- Assigned Readings Are Due The Next Class Period***

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|  | **DATE** | **DAILY TOPICS** | **ASSIGNED READINGS & ESSAY DUE DATES** |
| **W-1** | **M - 8/26**  | Introduction to class | **Read: *C****hapters 1*  |
| **W - 8/28**  | Who are the Mass Media | **Read:** *Chapter 2* |
|  | ***Part 1: Media Industries*** |
| ***W-2*** | **M - 9/2**  | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Labor Day*** | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Labor Day*** |
| **W - 9/4**  | Marxist Analysis | **Assign:** Topic Report |
| **W-3** | **M - 9/9**  |  \*Media Lab | ***Read:*** *Chapter 3* |
| **W - 9/11**  | Organizational Analysis | **DUE:** **Topic Report** |
| **W-4** | **M - 9/16**  |  \*Media Lab | **Read:** *Chapter 4* |
| **W - 9/18** | Pragmatic Analysis | **Assign:** *Text Description Paper* |
| **W-5** | **M - 9/23**  |  \*Media Lab |  |
| **W - 9/25**  | **Group Presentation #1** | **Read:** *Chapter 5* |
|  | **Part 2: Media Messages** |
| **W-6** | **M - 9/30**  | Rhetorical Analysis  |  |
| **W - 10/2** |  \*Media Lab | **Read:** *Chapter 6* |
| **+** | **M - 10/7**  | Cultural Analysis |  |
| **W - 10/9**  |  \*Media Lab | ***DUE: Text Description Paper******Assign:*** *Theoretical Rationale Paper* |
| **W-8** | **M – 10/14**  | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Fall Break*** | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Fall Break*** |
| **W – 10/16**  | **Group Presentation #2** | **Read:** *Chapter 7* |
| **W-9** | **M – 10/21**  | Psychoanalytic Analysis |  |
| **W – 10/23**  |  \*Media Lab | **Read:** *Chapter 8* |
| **W-10** | **M – 10/29**  | *Feminist Analysis* | ***DUE: Theoretical Rationale Paper*** |
| **W – 10/31**  |  \*Media Lab | **Read:** *Chapter 9* |
| **W-11** | **M – 11/4**  | *Queer Theory Analysis* | ***Assign:*** *Final Analysis & Presentation* |
| **W – 11/6**  |  \*Media Lab |  |
| **W-12** | **M – 11/11**  |  |  |
| ***Part 3: Media Audiences*** |
| **W – 11/13**  | **Group Presentation #3** | **Read:** *Chapter 10 & Revised Chapter 11 (on D2L)* |
| **W-13** | **M - 11/18**  | Sociological Analysis |  |
| **W - 11/20**  |  \*Media Lab | **Read:** *Revised Chapter 12 (on D2L)* |
| **W-14** | **M - 11/25**  | Erotic Analysis |  |
| **W - 11/27**  | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Thanksgiving*** | ***SCHOOL CLOSED – Thanksgiving*** |
| **W-15** | **M - 12/2** |  \*Media Lab |  |
| **W - 12/4**  | **Group Presentation #4** |  |
|  | **W - 12/11 @ 8 a.m.**  | **FINAL EXAM Period**  | **DUE: Final Analysis Paper & Presentation** |