

COMS 210—Winter 2007

Introduction to Communication Studies

Lecture: MWF 11:30-12:30, McConnell Engineering 204 (until 16 Jan)
Lecture: MW 11:35-12:25, McConnell Engineering 204 + 1 weekly conference (after 16 Jan)
(You are required to register for your Friday conference. Check Minerva for available times.)

As the only required course in our new minor, this course offers an introduction to the field of Communication Studies as it is practiced at McGill. Students will be exposed to some of the major questions facing Communication Studies scholars today, learn how to take positions in important debates, and explore emerging issues in the contemporary media landscape.

Professor Jonathan Sterne

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Check the course website for TA office locations and further contact information.

Please allow at least 36 hours for a response to your email – longer on weekends. Per McGill policy and to insure your privacy, you must use your McGill email address to contact us.

Availability: Office hours are set aside for you – feel free to stop by office hours without an appointment. The rest of our time is set aside for meetings, class prep, writing, reading, etc. If you wish to see us outside our regular office hours, please make an appointment. Office hours may occasionally be cancelled or rescheduled; this will be announced on the course website. We are also happy to answer simple questions over email or after class, but office hours are the best way to get your questions answered.

Other Contacts:

(Name) (Phone) (E-Mail)

(Name) (Phone) (E-Mail)

Requirements and Grading

Conference Papers: [10%] For most discussion meetings, a few students in each section will each write and present a short 500-word papers on a pre-assigned topic and post it on the discussion board for their conference section. These papers and the presentations based on them are designed to help set up discussion. Dates will also be assigned in the first conference session.

Conference Participation: [15%] This mark will represent your performance on short assignments for conference sections and in-class discussion. Your lowest mark will be dropped (for instance, if you miss a session). If your online participation is otherwise exceptional in quality (note that *quantity* is not enough), it will help boost your semester mark in tutorial participation. Rude or disruptive behavior toward classmates or teachers will lead to a reduction in your semester participation mark.

Analytical Paper: [30%] Toward the end of the semester, you will submit a single analytical paper on a topic to be announced during the term. Papers are graded according to a standard grid (we will hand it out with the assignment). Because of the volume of papers, we cannot provide other written comments on your finished product. However, we will be happy to meet with you during office hours to talk about your paper. We will also provide you with time off from conferences and extra office hours to meet with us before the paper is due.

Midterm and Final: [40%] A midterm exam will occur on Monday, 12 February 2007. Given that the midterm is essentially a practice run for the final, the midterm and final will be averaged in the following way: 10% of your semester grade for the midterm, 30% for the final. If you score higher on the final than the midterm, the final score will replace your mark on the midterm (so long as you took the midterm). University policy requires that I offer a supplemental final. This final will be worth 40% of the semester grade and will consist of a few difficult essay questions.

In-Lecture Writing: [5%] Over the course of the semester, between three and nine pop quizzes and other assignments will occur during lecture. Pop quizzes may cover a reading due on the day of the quiz, any item from the previous two lectures, or other materials you would reasonably be expected to know on a given day. Although they will be closed book and closed note, pop quizzes are designed to be easy, to reward your for keeping up with the course. (Students who require special exam accommodations should notify the professor during the first week of class.) We will drop your two lowest quiz scores (including “0” scores for nonattendance). Beyond the two freebies, missed pop quizzes or in-class assignments cannot be made up and are not “excused” for any reason whatsoever.

Resources:

I. Yourself: “There are those who think that the speaker has a function to perform, and the hearer none. They think it only right that the speaker shall come with his lecture carefully thought out and prepared, while they, without consideration or thought of their obligations, rush in and take their seats exactly as if they had come to dinner, to have a good time while others work hard. Those people bite.” – Plutarch, Greek Philosopher

Although this is a large lecture course, your participation is essential. Listen carefully. Take lots of notes on lectures and readings. Take advantage of opportunities to participate. Ask questions in lecture or over email. Use our office hours.

II. Your prof and TA: See page 1.

III. Required Readings:

1. A course website has been set up on WebCT. Log in at via your McGill account at [<http://www.mcgill.ca/webct/>]. You should visit it at least twice a week to check for the official course schedule, announcements, reading assignments and questions, lecture questions, new material, schedule changes, etc. The website also provides links to the online readings not in the coursepack, a chatroom and a messageboard which will be used for discussion section assignments and other course-related discussions.
2. A coursepack, available from the McGill Bookstore and on reserve at McLennan-Redpath Library. Note that coursepacks from previous years of COMS 210 (back when it was EngC 210) will not be of much use. This is a new class with just a little overlap.

IV. Additional University Resources:

The University has some additional resources to help you out. These are not remedial programs, and often the best and most advanced students use them:

The Writing Centre offers individual consultation on all aspects of writing. Appointments are required. They can be found at rm. 244 Education Bldg., 398-6960 [<http://www.mcgill.ca/writing/>].

The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) provides a broad range of support and services to assist students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. They are located in suite 3100 Brown Student Services Bldg., 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

The Counseling Service provides personal, academic, and career counseling to undergraduate and graduate students. They also offer workshops on study skills, multiple choice exams, text anxiety/stress management. They can be found at suite 4200 Brown Student Services Bldg, 398-3601 [<http://www.mcgill.ca/counselling/>]. An additional list of workshops can be found at [<http://www.mcgill.ca/student-services/workshops/>].

The Rules (and a few Expectations)

Failure to follow the letter and the spirit of class or university regulations can result in a reduction of your final grade, failure of the course, and/or other penalties as set by University policy.

1. Attendance and Performance

This course is designed for courteous, motivated students who attend all class sessions, do all the reading, and ask questions when they don't understand something. If there is something you don't understand, it is your responsibility to ask your prof or TA a question. If you miss class, you are responsible to get materials we covered from a classmate and make sure you understand them. Should you fail to meet these basic and reasonable expectations, your performance will suffer.

2. Late Arrivals and Early Departures

Your professor finds people entering and leaving the classroom during lecture to be very unpleasant and distracting. If you know that you must leave early on a given day, please let him know before class. Please make your visits to the bathroom and drinking fountain before and after class. If you arrive late or leave early (or if your excretory system presents you with an emergency in the middle of class) enter or leave the classroom quietly. If you are more than 10 minutes late, don't come to class. Repeat offenders will find their semester grades reduced.

3. **The Classroom: Seating, Questions, and Comments**

Please sit toward the front and center, so that you can hear the lecture and be heard when you ask questions. Although this is a large class, we like discussion. **You are encouraged to raise your hand during lecture and ask questions, add comments, or ask for something you didn't understand to be repeated or clarified.** When you do, please speak up. The room acoustics can be funny: even if you can hear the prof perfectly, your classmates may not hear you as well.

Cell phones, beepers, and other appliances that make noise are not welcome in our classroom. If you must bring them with you, turn them off. The professor reserves the right to take action against offending devices or their owners.

4. **Extensions**

Assignments will be announced well in advance of due dates. If you know well in advance that you can't make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with us beforehand. If you would prefer a different date for your conference paper than the one you get, it is your responsibility to switch with someone else.

5. **Late Assignments and Missed Exams**

Late papers will be penalized 2/3 a letter grade per day that they are late (including weekends). Late assignments will be "excused" only in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances. To get a late assignment excused after the fact, you must submit (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note on letterhead. The written (not emailed) request for an excuse must be in the professor's hands within one week after the scheduled due date and it is entirely your responsibility to provide sufficient documentation. Note that instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations for more on the final.

6. **Grades and Appeals**

We take grades very seriously because we know you do. We do not give out grades over email or the telephone. We cannot even disclose that you are enrolled in the course to third parties, including your parents, roommates, boy/girlfriend/spouse, etc.

Should you wish to dispute a mark, it must be done according to the grade appeal policy on the course WebCT site. Keep in mind that "A" grades are awarded for superior (and not merely sufficient) performance. Although there is no quota, an "A" is a truly superior grade in this course. Last year, 32 of the 200 enrolled students earned an A or A- semester grade. Also keep in mind that disputes very seldom result in an elevated mark and may result in a lower mark.

7. **Language**

The language of instruction at McGill University is English. However, you are allowed to submit your work in French

8. **Accommodations**

If you require special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both the professor and Office for Students with Disabilities by the end of the first week in which you are enrolled in the course. They are located in suite 3100 Brown Student Services Bldg., 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

9. **Nondiscrimination Statement**

Your teachers value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. Be assured that we will promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with University policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, civil status,

religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, personal handicap or the use of any means to palliate such a handicap. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher or the assigned readings in order to do well in this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it*. If there is something we can do to make the class more hospitable, please let us know.

10. **Cheating, Plagiarism and Exam Conduct**

Since we take grades seriously, we also take academic integrity very seriously. Failure to follow procedure or a direct request from your prof or TA during a quiz or exam can result in immediate failure of the exam. Use of any communication devices other than your pen or pencil is forbidden during an in-class quiz. **Please note that taking out an electronic communication device (or talking) during a quiz or exam is considered cheating – per Chapter 3, Section A.III.16 of the *McGill Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*.** And now, McGill’s official language regarding plagiarism and cheating:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences cheating plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

UNOfficial Course Schedule (and Bibliography):

This is a guideline only. The official schedule is online and will likely change.

Changes will be announced on the website.

Intro

W 3 Jan: Apologia: “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

F 5 Jan: The Multiplicity of Communication

Peters, John Durham. “Introduction: The Problem of Communication.” In *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, 1-31. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Part 1: Theories and Experiences of Communication

1A: Sender→Message→Receiver

M 8 Jan: A Transmission Model

Hall, Stuart. “Encoding/Decoding.” In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-9*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, 128-38. London: Hutchinson, 1980.

W 10 Jan: Limits of Transmission

Davison, W. Phillips. “The Third Person Effect in Communication.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1983): 1-15.

St. John, Jeffrey. “Communication as Failure.” In *Communication As...: Perspectives on Theory*, edited by Gregory Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John and Ted Striphas, 249-56. Thousand Oaks:

Sage, 2006.

F 12 Jan: Transmission vs. Ritual

Carey, James. "A Cultural Approach to Communication." In *Communication as Culture* 13-36. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

1B: Process Theories of Communication

M 15 Jan: Sensation and the Saturation Argument

Marvin, Carolyn. "Communication as Embodiment." In *Communication As...: Perspectives on Theory*, edited by Gregory Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John and Ted Striphas, 67-74. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006.

Gitlin, Todd. "Historical Origins of the Torrent," "Distractions, Drugs and Fetishes," and "Calculation and Feeling." In *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*, 24-44 (notes 213-16). New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001.

W 17 Jan: Media Culture as Play

Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, edited by Mark J.P Wolf and Bernard Perron, 221-35. New York: Routledge, 2003.

F 19 Jan: Conference 1

M 22 Jan: Fighting Boredom

McCarthy, Anna. "Television While You Wait." In *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*, 195-223 (notes 281-84). Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001.

1C: Affiliation and Display

W 24 Jan: Social Critiques of Taste

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Preface to the English-Language Edition," "Introduction," and "The Aristocracy of Culture." In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, xi-18. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Straw, Will. "Exhausted Commodities: The Material Culture of Music." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 25, no. 1 (2000): 175-85. Available online at <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=571&layout=html>

F 26 Jan: Conference 2

M 29 Jan: Cultural Affiliation

Boyd, Danah. "Friends, Friendster and the Top Eight: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites." *First Monday* 11, no. 12 (1996): available online at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/index.html

W 31 Jan: Catch-up day (yes, we'll need it)

F 2 Feb: Conference 3

The Middle Part of the Class, Wherein We Do the Midterm and Connect the Two Parts of the Course

M 5 Feb: More on Culture and Power

Bourdieu, Pierre. "On Symbolic Power." In *Language and Symbolic Power*, 163-70 (notes 276-77). Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

W 7 Feb: No class – professor out of town

F 9 Feb: Conference 4: Midterm Review – bring your questions

M 12 Feb: Midterm

W 14 Feb: Go over midterm + Announce paper assignment

F 16 Feb: No class, I'm not stupid.

19-23 Feb: **Study Break 2007!**

Part II: Shaping Communication: Institutional and Technological Politics

2A: Capitalism and Control

M 26 Feb: The Media Concentration Argument

McChesney, Robert. "The Market Über Alles" In *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, 175-209 (notes 329-37). New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004.

W 28 Feb: Advertising 1 – The Rise of the Brand and the Decline of the Spot

Klein, Naomi. "New Branded World" and "Alt.Everything: The Youth Market and the Marketing of Cool." In *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, 3-26 and 63-85 (notes 447-48 and 449-51). New York: Picador, 1999.

F 2 March: Conference 5

M 5 March: Advertising 2 – The Fantasy of Happiness

Schudson, Michael. "Advertising as Capitalist Realism." In *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 209-33 (notes 272-75). New York: Basic Books, 1984.

W 7 March: Public Relations

King, Samantha. "A Dream Cause: Breast Cancer, Corporate Philanthropy and the Market for Generosity." In *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*, 1-28 (notes 131-137). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

F 9 March: Conference 6

2B The Audience: They Think You're An Institution Too

M 12 March: You're a Commodity

Meehan, Eileen. "Why We Don't Count: The Commodity Audience." In *Logics of Television*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp, 117-37. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

W 14 March: You're an Agent (sort of)

Jenkins, Henry. "Buying Into American Idol: How We Are Being Sold on Reality TV." In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 59-92 (notes 263-266). New York: New York University Press, 2006.

F 16 March: Conference 7

2C Who's In Charge Here?

M 19 March: Governments as Regulators

Raboy, Marc. "Introduction." In *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy*, 5-15 (notes 359-62).. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.

W 21 March: Corporations as Regulators

Braman, Sandra and Stephanie Lynch. "Advantage ISP: Terms of Service as Media Law," *New Media & Society* 5, no. 3 (2003): 422-48.

F 23 March: Conference 8

M 26 March: Intellectual Property: A Regulatory Struggle

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "Introduction." In *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity*, 1-17 (191-194). New York: New York University Press, 2001.

McLeod, Kembrew. "MP3s Are Killing Home Taping: The Rise of Internet Distribution and Its Challenge to the Major Label Music Monopoly." *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 4 (2005): 521-31.

2D: Understanding Technology

W 28 March: The Question of Impact

Williams, Raymond. "The Technology and the Society." In *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 3-25. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1974/1992.

Faulkner, Tony. "FM: Frequency Modulation or Fallen Man?" in *Radiotext(e)*, edited by Neil Strauss, 61-65. New York: Semiotext(e), 1993.

F 30 March: No conferences—Extra office hours for the paper

M 2 April: Analytical papers due; How Technologies Change (and not)

Berland, Jody. "Cultural Technologies and the 'Evolution' of Technological Cultures." In *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*, edited by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss, 235-58. New York: Routledge, 2000.

W 4 April: Technologies are Made of Everything We Studied This Term

Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and J. Macgregor Wise. "Agency" and "Articulation and Assemblage." In *Culture + Technology: A Primer*, 115-33 (notes 202). New York: Peter Lang, 2006.

F 6 April: Conference 9: Final exam review – bring your questions.

M 9 April: Easter – No Class

W 11 April: Catch up and/or more review.

FINAL EXAM DATE AND LOCATION TBA.