COMS 616
Proseminar in Communication Studies
Fall 2007

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Prospectus:

This course is designed to introduce entering MA and PhD students to the graduate program in Communication Studies at McGill. The course will offer a mix of academic acculturation to the field of communication studies – especially as it is practiced at McGill – and relevant professional concerns for students, such as grant writing, the thesis and what it means to be an academic and an intellectual.

Class time will feature weekly lectures and discussions, and throughout the term we will have visits from members of the Communication Studies faculty. Students will write a series of short seminar papers and participate in class with verve and regularity.

Required Texts (for sale at Paragraphe and on reserve at the library):


There is a packet of required and recommended course readings available at Copie Nova, 1015 Sherbrooke St. West.

Additional recommended readings will be listed in a bibliography at the end of this syllabus, and where possible, they will be placed on reserve at the McClennan Reserve Desk.

Course requirements:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar participation</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short papers (x4)</td>
<td>60%</td>
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*Seminar participation* will consist of vigorous engagement in weekly discussions of assigned texts. Consistent failure to attend or participate will be penalized. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom is also required. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstance. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.
Short papers will consist of brief (2 pages max.) critical responses to one or more of the assigned readings. Papers should avoid excessive summary and description, and focus instead on points of critical interrogation of the text and its implications. Papers may illustrate points of critique and argument with reference to empirical evidence, actual cases, social phenomena, etc., or draw comparisons with other texts, but the primary focus of analysis should remain the assigned text in question. Students must complete four short papers over the course of the term, on readings selected from the schedule below. Short papers must be submitted in the body of an e-mail message to the course listserv no later than 3 pm the Saturday before the reading is to be discussed in class. **Papers submitted after this deadline will not be eligible for credit.**

Students are expected to read their colleagues’ short papers in preparation for class discussion.

**McGill University statement on academic integrity:**
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequence of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

### SEMINAR SCHEDULE

**Week 1 (Sept. 10): Course introduction and Intro to the Field**

Apologia for the course; on the history of communication studies.


**Week 2 (Sept. 17): Interestingness**


**Week 3 (Sept. 24): Grant-writing workshop**

Profs. Jonathan Sterne and Marc Raboy

Students not applying for SSHRC or FQRSC funding in this year’s competition are excused (this seminar will be open to all students in the program who are applying).
**Week 4 (Oct 1): The Thesis**

Using the ProQuest dissertations and theses database (available via McGill University library website), or by visiting the departmental library of dissertations and theses (now housed in the hallway), obtain an MA or PhD thesis (corresponding to your own level of study). Prepare a brief 5-10 minute presentation of the thesis. Presentations should highlight: the research problem or question addressed by the thesis or dissertation; its breadth, coverage and organization; its methodology and theoretical content. Presentations should also reflect on the distinctiveness of the thesis or dissertation as a genre: how is it distinguished from other genres of academic writing (articles, monographs, etc.)?

**Week 5 (Oct. 9 TUESDAY): Competing Accounts of Communication Studies**

For this class session, we will each pick a book or set of articles characterizing some aspect of the history of the field of communication studies and discuss its depiction of the field. Options will be presented after I learn a bit more about student interests.

**Week 6 (Oct. 15): Theory – Prof. Darin Barney**


**Week 7 (Oct. 22): The Problem of Defining Method - Prof. Carrie Rentschler**


**Week 8 (Oct. 29): Why Study Media and Communication Policy? – Prof. Marc Raboy**

Week 9 (Nov 5): Urban Space and Social Difference – Prof. Jenny Burman


Week 10 (Nov. 12): Topic TBA – Prof. Kevin Robins

Readings TBA

Week 11 (Nov. 19): Media and Cultural Memory – Prof. Will Straw (note: Prof Straw has a conflict at this time so we will need to reschedule this meeting)


Week 12 (Nov. 26): Sound, Technology and Historiography – Prof. Jonathan Sterne


Week 13: (Dec 3): Professionalization

Profs Carrie Rentschler, Jenny Burman, Jonathan Sterne