

**SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION, SFU, Surrey****D R A F T****CMNS 110-3 INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES  
Syllabus: Fall, 2007**

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**A. COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course provides students with a general introduction to the systematic study of communication -- its various phenomena, history, practices, media and mediating processes and dynamics, scholarship, explanatory and directional theories, and criticism.

Beginning from the origins and foundations of communication studies, the course traces the development of communication technologies, techniques and ecologies; surveys the characteristics of oral and written forms of media and cultural frameworks shaping knowledge and social climates; examines the relationships between communication and the formation and mediated nature of the self; the formal and relation-conditioning properties of media; key positions and ideas of various paradigms that have influenced or arisen out of the field; as well as the social forces, fields, media, and institutions that shape, and are shaped by, communication processes.

The course introduces students to intellectual tools for critical assessment of images, messages, practices, media institutions and technologies making up our information-dense and time-urgent world.

**1. REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- i. Plato. *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*. Translated by Walter Hamilton. London: Penguin, 1973.
- ii. Watson, James, and Anne Hill. *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies*. 6 ed. London: Arnold; Oxford University Press, 2003.
- iii. Weekly readings assigned from the Internet through the "Coursewhere."

**2. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Survey Assignment (15%)
- Midterm (20%)
- Critical Intervention or Briefing Note (30%)
- Tutorials (15%)
- Scheduled Final Exam (20%)

### 3. COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK	LECTURE & LIT	ASSIGNMENTS
Week 1 Sept 10	Introduction: Syllabus review.	No tutorials
Week 2. Sept 17	Media studies, history & and "critical determinism" (Toronto school)	<b>Tutorials begin</b>
Week 3. Sept 24	Communication and human ecology: the Chicago School & Pragmaticism	<b>Briefings begin in tutorials</b>
Week 4. Oct 1	a) Phenomenology and the dramaturgy of the social world. b) Pragmatics of communication: Double bind & chorus line	<b>Survey assignment due</b>
Week 5. Oct 8	<b>NO CLASS</b> Social psychology and the management of crowds	<b>NO TUTORIALS</b>
Week 6. Oct 15	Propaganda, indoctrination and PR	
Week 7. Oct 22	American empirical, "administrative," and quantitative research	
Week 8. Oct 29	<b>MIDTERM: NO TUTORIALS</b>	
Week 9. Nov 5	Critical theory: Freudo-Marxism, false consciousness, the culture industry and authoritarian personality,	
Week 10. Nov 12	<b>NO CLASS</b> Structuralism, semiosis, semiurgy and semioclasis	<b>NO TUTORIALS</b>
Week 11. Nov 19	Cultural studies (CCCS, AKA "The Birmingham School"):	
Week 12 Nov 26.	Political economy of media	<b>Research assignment due</b>
Week 13. Dec 3	Plato. "The Phaedrus," <i>Phaedrus &amp; The Seventh and Eighth Letters</i> . pp. 7-103.	
Week 13	Scheduled final exam 11:00 AM, Dec. 6 <sup>th</sup> .	

## B. COURSE PROCESS, NOTES & GUIDELINES:

### I. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

1. SURVEY/FIRST ASSIGNMENT (10%) Due week 4, October 1st.

The assignment is in TWO (2) parts:

- 1.1. Part ONE: 3 pages 750 words +/-, double-spaced; concision is an asset). Compare and contrast the treatment (discussion) of two (2) topics, people or ideas covered in both Watson & Hill and the ToC.

### 1.2. Part TWO: Biographic sketch: 150-word biography (3rd person)

This is a statement about you serving as an introduction or a "publishable thumbnail" or bio. It should contain something about your past, about what you think you'd like to get out of this course or why you've enrolled in it, and something of what you hope awaits you in the future.

### 1.3. NOTE:

Parts 1 and 2, in the form of an integrated document, in hard copy, are to be handed in to your TA in tutorials in the week the assignment is due.

The biographical statement, Part 2 only, is to be sent to me ( [HYPERLINK "mailto:roman@sfu.ca" roman@sfu.ca](mailto:roman@sfu.ca)) by e-mail, not as an attachment but in the message field. The "To" field of the e-mail should contain "CMNS 110."

Proper academic form is expected in the first assignment, and all written work thereafter: Clarity and transparency of the organization of discourse, succinct writing, correct use of citations and bibliographies, introductory summary, clear point of departure, conclusion or summation, course-driven vocabulary and copia, overall presentation, and the presence of the "something extra," are all factored into grading criteria.

## I. 2. RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT:

There is one assignment requiring research and critical assessment of assigned themes or questions for development in essay form; worth 30% of course grade; 2000-word maximum; due in tutorials Week 12. Abstracts due by e-mail week 12 by lecture.

### 2.1. Undertaking:

You may take one of two approaches to the research assignment.

OPTION 1: Write a briefing note reporting on researched supporting your assessment of the influence or impact of a person, school of thought, set of methods or ideas on our understanding of communication as a relational and reality-making process. Your discussion should include views that may be contrary to yours, i.e. critics of your selections contributions, and you should try to answer them, as well as explaining why the contribution is worthy of note.

OPTION 2: Write a critical intervention. You will still need to do research to support your critique of some communication phenomenon, practice or institution, but rather than reporting, you will have to take a critical position and encouraged to engage in a soundly-reasoned, solidly-supported, and well-controlled rant, or, more correctly, an informed opinion piece. In other words, you identify something in the communication universe of you think is an exigence, conduct your research, and use it to support you arguing a point.

Both options require a thesis statement, a position you will take, argue, prove and, if necessary, (based on your research) defend.

### 2.2. Frameworks:

If we ask what communication is for, we arrive at *relation* of one sort or another. All communication phenomena are concerned with relations being formed, defined,

framed, sometimes cultivated, contested, pursued, deformed, suffered, embraced, exploited, betrayed, broken or resisted. In a sense, we're born into a web of relations in which we live out our lives. Communication is what we call the energy interchanges that power and shape that web.

Relational questions can be said to gravitate around three clusters of factors:

1. How does communication position us with respect to ourselves as persons with responsibilities and rights? Are we enlarged and enabled or diminished and constrained by the communication and the relations whence it emerged and that it re/produces? What rights have we to not communicate, to decline being understood, read, classified, known? In an age of terrorism and transparency, can we expect any privacy at all? Are we, by nature, solitary and inwardly private or public and collective beings? Do changes in communication change human nature?
2. How does communication position us in relation to Others, and them toward us; are these relations symmetrical, exploitative, and mutually beneficial; do we stereotype the Others or accommodate their individual uniqueness? Do we position Others as mere instruments to our ends, or do we see in them intrinsic value outside of our intentions and interests? How do we define and make community? How do we get along with neighbours? Which communication strategies and institutions impede or enable constructive and destructive social processes and forces?
3. How do communication practices and institutions position us with respect to the material world, both human and non-human? How does communication enfold and express us as embodied, material and mortal beings? Do we make of the natural and our artificial worlds merely in instrument to our ends, or do we see value in them as they are, and ensure that they are left to be? What value do we place on our past or future, to the works of our ancestors and what our works will bequeath to our embodied descendants? In which ways do we use things to establish which kinds of relations amongst each other? Do we conceive of ourselves as makers or consumers of our world?

### **2.3. RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

This assignment requires you make us of:

- No less than five (5) scholarly sources (more's OK). Scholarly sources include peer-reviewed journals (either hard copy or electronic through SFU library, as well as published books).
- Up to four (5) web or periodical sources. These can include web sites, trade press, mass circulation magazines, newspapers, and other perhaps more ephemeral and popular media (TV, film, music, games and so on).

### **2.4. FORMAT:**

Effective papers are typically organized in a sequence around a set of implicit questions. I'll approach the paper as a story, a narrative or exposition: You're telling the reader something, and it usually comes down to a story. Now, it is both a virtue and a burden of communication research and scholarship (and no less so practice), the field draws on many other disciplines – is interdisciplinary. Translating ideas across vocabularies is a useful skill to develop. So for example, read the

following translating for yourself where I've written "story" to "argument." So, rather than "What is this story about?" it becomes, "What's your argument or position about" and so on.

**2.4.1. The set up:** (between 1.5-3 pp.)

1. What is this story about? Why is it worth attending? (Abstract/ 100-150 words)
2. What' is the story? Why do you care? Why should I? Why should anyone? (Introduction/ 1-2 pp.)

**2.4.2. The story/exposition/argument:** (between 4-7 pp.)

1. How did the story come about? How did the story unfold or emerge and become the matter you're putting before an audience?
2. What contribution does your subject make? Or, what effect does/did the idea, institution, or practice, have? In which context/s? How? What is his/her/its agenda?
3. Which influences on other ideas, people or institutions does/did/might he/she/it exert, and to what end? Has the agenda changed?
4. Who disagrees? Anyone have issues with your subject? Have there been arguments, debates, dust-ups? Who was involved? How were the critics answered (or not)?

**2.4.3. The wrap/conclusion/next steps:** (between 1-2 pp.)

1. How can the most important features of the discussion be summed-up as a build-up to your point?
2. What sense have you made, or ought we make, of the matter you put before us?
3. What next? What ought be done (inquired into, thought about); what ought we do (inquire into, think about) and why (repeats I above in condensed form)

The structure above imitates the most basic rules of effective mandated discourse:

1. Have something [worth hearing] to say,
2. Have the right to say it, and,
3. The skill to say it right (this throughout, though the proof's in II.2.4.3 immediately above, i.e. in the effect you have on whomever you ask to see, understand, remember, consider or do).

Papers, as formal written research discourse, will adhere to proper academic form, be explicitly organized, use citations, and include a full bibliography. Any commonly accepted style is acceptable, although it should be used consistently.

**2.5. Examples:**

Some examples of larger questions from which you might begin:

- How do media affect the relationship between power and knowledge?
- Is there a relationship between Media ownership, ideology and the kinds of news we get?
- What is the relationship between fringe cultures, marginal groups and mainstream Media?
- Can the concept of "double bind" be applied to one-way communication, as might be the case with mass media instead of dyadic and small group two-way interactions? If so, then who binds whom to what, and how? If not, why is the idea unworkable?
- What is the relationship between advertising and experiences and expressions of ethnicity, race, age or gender?

- In which kinds of ways could the proposed copyright legislation and globalization affect our relationship to media producers, the media we own, and the media we have access too?
- What is the relationship between war, media and knowledge?
- We normally associate censorship with repressive totalitarian or authoritarian states. Are there forms of censorship in liberal democracies such as ours? If this is the case, who practices or imposes it?
- Has orality disappeared, or have we returned to a combination of orality and literacy, or are we witnessing the emergence of something completely new?
- Can "false consciousness" explain our relationship with our Media?
- What is the relationship between our use of material culture as media and the state of the environment?
- How do various media strategies modulate our relationship to celebrity?
- How can the relationship between a user and his/her system of media be optimized?
- Do you think the factors discussed by Babe will continue to affect how we think about communication in Canada?
- Did Innis say anything back then that we ought to attend to now?
- Can we infer a relationship between the fashion industry and its image-rich media culture and eating disorders?
- Which kinds of social relationships are implied in consumer goods?
- How does the relationship between advertising and sport shape "the game?" How does technological or media innovation affect this relationship or the one between the game and its fans?
- McLuhan alone of his generation (and subsequent ones) of media scholars became a bona fide celebrity, albeit his spot in the limelight didn't last that long. How did he become a celebrity? What effect did it have on his career? What made him a celebrity again?
- What can PR practices tell us about how communication can be used to alter, manage, actualize and maintain relationships?
- How does technological innovation alter relationships within and between media industries?
- Is there, or can there be, a semiotics of instrumentation?
- Do cosmetics and/or clothing change our relationships to ourselves, and our expectations of others and ourselves?
- Did broadcast TV alter the relationship people had to each other through routines and schedules? Did VCRs? Home PCs? How?
- Can a relationship be demonstrated between violent media entertainment (video/TV, movies, music, games) and social violence?
- What kinds of relationships exist between community standards and media content?
- How do the (mainstream) Media represent the relationship between the average voter and the political system? Do all media sources portray the relationship in the same way?
- What kinds of voter relationship to political process do mass media foster? Alternate media? Partisan media?
- What is the relationship between formats (live, radio, film, PA system) of communication and the effects they have on their audiences?
- Which kinds of relations determine or shape how and which kinds of media content are made and distributed?
- What do the relationships (commonalities and conflicts) between schools of thought or individual thinkers tell us about how communication interrelates us?

- If Mass Media are solely concerned with keeping us distracted from what really matters, how to alter this relationship? To what ought we attend? All the time? Says who?

These are examples, not recommended topics. You're welcome to use any of them; notes follow to help with that. But, importantly, these are *not the only formulations, questions or issues*. The list is incomplete and biased by my approach. So, do not feel you must or should use any of the topics on it. They're there to help, not get between you, the things you find interesting about communication, thinking, and a satisfying communication research experience.

Some of these are huge, and the rest are even bigger. These starting points are all composed of clusters of theory, discourse, problematics (things that make problems), issues, history, trends, research and the like. To get to a doable paper, you'll probably have to drill down to a more detailed examination of some smaller aspect of one of these larger issues. In much of the scholarly material you'll be reading for this undertaking, you'll find that the authors have something very focused to say, but it will be in a framed in a larger set of concerns and relations. The potential questions listed above would correspond to such a framework, rather than an actual paper.

We learn by imitation. Read your research material carefully. Not only does the content matter, but also how it's presented, argued, organized and supported. And please recall, when we copy (and not acknowledge the source) then we aren't imitating, but plagiarizing. Don't mean to preach, but when you plagiarize, you don't learn – seems like a waste of tuition.

## **2.6. Getting started**

If you're starting & wondering where to nail down a topic, Watson and Hill on pp. xiv-xxv, "Topic Guide" is a very useful for browsing for topics and points of departure. As noted above, you're encouraged to generate your own topic and write about the aspects of communication that you find most compelling.

## **2.7. "The brick"**

You have a maximum limit of 2000 words, that's about 8 pages at 12pt, not including title page, notes, and bibliography. The briefing note or critical intervention is due in hard copy in tutorials in week 12. Just the abstract (100-150 words) is to be sent to me by e-mail, in the message window & not by attachment. The SUBJECT LINE should be CMNS 110. The abstracts should be e-mailed to me by lecture, Week 12.

Papers, as formal written research discourse, will adhere to proper academic form, be explicitly organized (headings and sub headings), use citations (reference sources of the material they use), and include a full bibliography. Any commonly accepted style is fine, although it should be used consistently. TAs may have preferred styles they can recommend.

## **II. Tutorials.**

15%: Briefing: documentation and presentation, 10%; participation/attendance, 5%.

You pay for the tutorials. We have them so that the literature, ideas, questions and problems, that arise out of the learning process can be explored with greater depth

than can be done in the lecture hall. In addition to briefings and discussion, vocabulary and concepts arising from readings and lectures are reviewed weekly. Attendance is taken.

Briefings begin Week 3 and, with the exception of weeks 5, 8 & 10, run to week 13. Briefings involve a student-prepared handout of approximately 2 pages and a five (5) minute oral introduction to the document and briefing on its contents. All briefings are drawn from the ToC.

The briefing note, or "documentation"/handout (500 +/- words: approx. 2 sides of a standard letter-size sheet of paper), should be comprised of a synopsis statement of the author's key argument (s), supported or illustrated by a set of key quotes drawn from the reading and properly cited, as well as the student's assessment of the argument or questions the article raises. The note will have a proper title, your "name & number," the TA's name and tutorial section, and provide correct bibliographic data on the article. Any of the academic styles (e.g. APA, Chicago etc.) is acceptable, so long as it is used consistently. Use of charts and infographics in addition to the 500+/- is welcomed and encouraged.

Since briefings will be on the Wikipedia material, all of which is interlinked, it seems reasonable that briefing notes provide some indication the student has enriched their grasp of the matter to hand by having explored some of these. Where possible connections between the Wiki material and Watson and Hall **should** be explored, and can be used as an organizing device – one of many – for the briefing. When in doubt, compare and contrast.

The "presentation" is more of an introduction to the reading and context-work you've done and the note you're providing, than a performance or some sort of putative pedagogical method. You basically "speak to" what you've already written. In effect, having made their reading notes on an article for them, you're just "walking" your colleagues and TA through the material you've just handed out. Neither drama, nor show, or production required, or desired; just effective "show and tell." At best, you're telling a story that people want to hear, because they'll need this material as much as you will in the exams and research paper (course-fed copia). Time permitting, questions and discussion following briefings are encouraged.

### **III. Exams**

Prior to both the midterm and final, study questions in excess of the number that will appear on the exam are provided, typically a week in advance. At the exam the list is cut down to a smaller number, and students select from the remaining questions. This applies to essay type questions. When a short answer component is included in an exam, question themes and areas are provided to aid in study.

1. Midterm (20%: 10% short answer; 10% on essay types)  
Week 8: In class, closed book, 2 hours.

2. Final Exam ((20%: 20% on essay types)  
Week 13: Scheduled, closed book, 2 hours.

### **C. COURSE COMMUNICATION**

1. I use e-mail a fair bit to communicate with the class. The university provides me with an e-mail list of all registered students in the course, and that's what I use to send out clarifications, announcements and alerts of postings on my **site**. You must use your SFU e-mail account (or check it regularly) to get these mailings.
2. E-mails addressed to me must contain your name, and your TA's, as well as the course name (I teach more than CMNS 110).
3. I read and return e-mails.
4. I neither read nor reply to dumb e-mails, however.

Definition of dumb e-mail: " An e-mail asking a long convoluted question or even a simple one that the sender could have answered themselves using either the course web-pages, my e-mails to the class, a search engine, or the course "text," Wikipedia. E-mails omitting name, course, etc., whilst not dumb, are frustrating, which makes the receiver prone to ignoring them and thereby foregoing the further irritation and loss of time trying to figure out who's who & what's what.

5. All else course-related, is fair game.
6. Complex issues and explanations are better dealt with F2F. I do not have office hours, but am glad to make appointments to meet.

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The School expects that the grades in this course will bear some reasonable relation to established university-wide practices with respect to both levels and distributions of grades. The School follows Policy T10.02 with respect to "Intellectual Honesty" and "Academic Discipline" (see SFU Calendar, General Regulations).