Political Economy of International Communication

Prerequisite: At least 75 credit hours including CMNS 240, and 261 or 262.

Overview: This course contextualizes how global communication systems are governed and the key debates contesting control of these systems. Contrary to rhetoric about the “placelessness” of global communication, the course explores readings that root current issues of international communication in distinct places. The first part of the course provides an overview of the historical development of communication networks and institutions of governance. Institutions to be studied include the ITU, WTO, WIPO, ICANN and UNESCO. This analysis suggests that current trends in international communication systems are rooted in a long-term process of globalization spurred by international conflict and the nation-state’s desire for control for the purpose of ensuring profit. At the same time, the past ten years have witnessed an acceleration of these long-term projects, largely as a result of the liberalization of communication policy and the globalization of corporate networks. The course examines key global debates over communication rights, focusing specifically on the NWICO and WSIS processes and conflicts over cultural diversity. Readings then explore the rise of the city as a major body in the governance of communication networks. Readings show how the city has become the site of social reordering in global society. As the circulation of signs and symbols accelerates, social fragmentation is only the first phase of a process that witnesses the re-embedding of these signs and symbols in the lives of individual citizens and consumers. As a result, the city becomes a key focal point for political economic studies of labour, ecology and social resistance in the last part of the course. Central to this discussion, therefore, are trends in the conceptions of citizenship and consumption in the global communication context.

Course Requirements:

Seminar participation and presentation: 20%
Mid-Term Take-Home Exam: 30%
Final Research Paper: 50%

The School expects that the grades awarded in this course will bear some reasonable relation to established university-wide practices with respect to both levels and distribution of grades. In addition, the School will follow policy T10.02 with respect to “Intellectual Honesty,” and “Academic Discipline” (see current calendar, General Regulations Section).
**Required Texts:**


The three books are available at the People’s Co-op Bookstore, 1391 Commercial Drive (Skytrain stops Broadway & Commercial; Bus route #20). In addition, a courseware package is available at the SFU bookstore. Many of the readings are available online through the SFU Library’s electronic journal subscriptions. Links to these can be found on the course website. All readings are also on reserve at the Bennett Library.

**Seminar Schedule and Reading List**

11 January: Introduction and Key Themes

18 January: The rise of global networks


25 January: Global Communication through the 20th Century: Ideological Conflicts


1 February: The American Model, Expansion of Capitalism and Issues in Global Communication Governance


   Seán Ó Siochrú and Bruce Girard. (2002). Chapters 1-4.

8 February: Institutions in the Governance of Communication Systems

   Seán Ó Siochrú and Bruce Girard. (2002). Chapters 5-11.

15 February: Intellectual Property and the Problem of Control

*Take-home mid-term distributed in class*


22 February: Cultural Diversity and Citizenship
Take-home mid-term exam due in class


1 March: From NWICO to WSIS


8 March: The City and Transnational Cultural Economies


15 March: The City and Transnational Communication


22 March: The International Division of Cultural Labour


29 March: Communication, Social Movements and Global Resistance


5 April: Social Justice, Ecology and the Future of Communication Research

Research Paper due in class

