HU2820 COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE  

FALL '2003  

P. Sotirin (pjsotiri@mtu.edu) Office hours: MWF 12-2pm (7-3264, Walker 345)  

Texts:  
• D. Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*  
• R.P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture, 2nd ed.*  
• W. Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding As Text: Communicating Cultural Identities Through Ritual*  
• Supplemental readings – on-line or on library reserve  

Rationale:  
This course is about how culture and identities are created, changed, and maintained through communication. Two methods for studying communication and culture will be introduced: semiotic analysis and ethnographic methods. Semiotic analysis is a method for understanding how communication codes work. In an age when culture is for sale everywhere and ideological meaning invests our most common practices, being able to “read” the work of signs is an imperative skill. The ways we dress and changes in fashion offer visible and familiar forms of cultural codes. We will examine dress codes and make our own study of such codes. Observational skills are also a way of studying culture. Ethnography is a method of observational study that has become quite popular among communication researchers. Weddings offer a rich site for observing cultural codes and communication in action. On the basis of these introductions, students will develop their own semiotic or observational study of a cultural practice.  

Objectives:  
1. Understand and apply the basic skills of semiotic analysis and ethnographic study  
2. Be able to give a rich definition for culture and communication and explain the relation between communication and culture  
3. Learn about the field of communication studies  

Policies:  
• After three absences, I will deduct 5 points from your final grade in the class for each additional absence.  
• There will be no make-up for in-class activities including presentations.  
• Plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students so carefully document any sources you use for your presentations.  
• I encourage you to contact me about any questions or suggestions. In addition, please see me about any particular accommodations in accordance with MTU’s ADA policy: *MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (72212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action office (7-3310).*
### Grading:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class exercises &amp; reports</td>
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<td>Group project</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
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### Week One: Introduction
- What is culture?
- What is communication?
- How is culture communicated?

### Week Two: Dress codes
- Why are modes of dress codes?
- How do dress codes work?

### Week Three: Semiotics
- What are codes?
- How do different codes work together?

### Week Four: Signs
- What are the basic tools of sign analysis?
- How can we read the signs around us?

### Week Five: Dress and Sociocultural discourses
- How do styles of dress relate to social and cultural discourses?
- How do we create "public selves" by using dress codes?

### Week Six: Coding sociocultural relations
- How do dress codes create images of power, authority, gender, and sexuality?
- How do these codes construct sociocultural relations by marginalizing or celebrating certain images?

### Week Seven: Structures
- What does it mean to do a structural semiotic analysis?
- What can such an analysis tell us about cultural practices?

### Week Eight: Tropes
- What is a trope?
- How do these figures operate as codes?

### Week Nine: History, Fashion, and Culture: 1050-1900
- Where do our ideas about dress and cultural meaning come from?
- What can we learn from fashions in the Middle Ages and Early Modern centuries?
Week Ten: History, Fashion, and Culture: Bodies
How have cultural ideals of beauty and physical perfection changed over time?
How are cultural ideas about youth and age, health and illness signified through body images and dress codes?

Week Eleven: Ethnography
What is ethnography?
What are the methods of ethnographic study?

Week Twelve: Weddings
Why are weddings complex semiotic events?
How do food, clothing, and objects function as cultural symbols in a wedding?

Week Thirteen: Weddings
How do couples use cultural codes to design their wedding rituals to simultaneously meet multiple and different requirements?
How is it possible to display different cultural identities simultaneously?

Week Fourteen: Student projects
What observational data can you gather for a communication analysis of cultural codes?

Week Fifteen: Student reports
What does your analysis show about the use of codes to communicate identities, create images, and support or change cultural ideals?