HUS004: COMMUNICATION IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Michigan Technological University, Spring 2012
T: 7:05 - 9:35 HDMZ Room 120 C

Dr. Sue Collins
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course introduces students to some of the intellectual legacies, theories, and key issues informing the study of communication and cultural theory. We are interested in exploring the centrality of meaning and culture as part of the human experience, which requires an understanding of the interconnectedness among language, the self, the other, and society. Critical to our inquiry is to 1) recognize the dynamics of relations of power in structuring hierarchies among these components, and 2) to understand how power is imbricated in subjectivity, representation, and praxis. Although the course will engage disciplinary knowledge foundational to the humanities, it will also draw significantly from the social sciences (namely, sociology and anthropology) and from cultural studies in order to present a preliminary intellectual history of fields of inquiry important to scholars working in the “C” stream of the RTC program.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
• to familiarize you with conceptual “vocabulary” fundamental to communication and cultural theory at the graduate level
• to overview some of the methodological assumptions and concerns that undergird various approaches to knowledge formation, interpretation, and critique
• to give you an opportunity to read some of the primary generative writings that are drawn upon in RTC courses and by RTC faculty in their own research
• In short, to begin to build a conceptual toolbox to aid you in the pursuit of your advanced degree

REQUIRED READING:
David Harvey: The Condition of Postmodernity, Blackwell, 1990
John Thompson: Ideology and Modern Culture, Stanford University Press, 1990

EVALUATION:
20% --Attendance and Participation: As this is a graduate seminar and not a lecture course, your participation is critical. Please come on time, having read the week’s assigned readings and prepared to participate in discussion. Bring the texts to class (including your BB entries), as well as your insight, relevant observations, questions, and pertinent examples to illustrate your points; in other words, you should provide evidence of the fruits of your labor in carefully reading and thinking about the texts under examination! You will be required to co-facilitate (with me and another student) the class discussion regarding the week’s reading twice during the semester. More than two absences will adversely affect your grade. If you have five or more absences you will NOT receive a passing grade.
Please check with a classmate to find out what you missed if you are absent from class. If you then need further clarification, please make an appointment with me.

10%--Blackboard: You are required to post a critical response or reflection (approx. 400-500 words) on Blackboard in advance of class meetings (by 3:00 p.m. on the day of class) ten times of your choosing during the semester. See handout for more information.
60% Take home exam (2): Students will choose from a collection of broadly based questions provided by me to demonstrate their careful engagement with select concepts and issues in the course readings.

10% Book review: Students will choose one book (with approval by me) and write a review of the text. Book reviews must include three additional outside sources. More details will follow.

**Evaluation Standards and Policies:**

93-100 = A; 88-92 = AB; 83-87 = B; 78-82 = BC; 73-77 = C

93-100 = Excellent. This work is outstanding work in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of and engagement with course materials, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary, engagement and analysis of the course’s themes, theories, methods and reading materials. Includes skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and no grammatical/careless errors.

88-92 = Very good. This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course materials, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis.

83-87 = Good. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread.

78-82 = Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates understanding that hits in the ballpark but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expressing some significant errors or weaknesses.

73-77 = Passable. Reflects minimal engagement with material. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing/articulation may appear vague, hard to follow, or loaded with typos and other technical errors.

60-69 = Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

59 and below = Failed. Work not submitted or attempted.

**For all written assignments, please follow this format: in the upper left corner, include your name, course name, date, and assignment heading or paper title (no title pages). Type all work, 12 point font, double space, number all pages using a header in the upper right hand corner, and STAPLE multiple pages (no paper clips, please). Follow a formal style manual for guidelines on citations, quotations, bibliography, etc. Make sure you edit/proofread your paper before submitting. Your grade will partly be based on your ability to follow the norms and conventions of writing using Standard English styles and conventions.

**LATE PAPERS will result in a drop in a letter grade.** Please remember that email is always a way to turn in papers on time in the event of an emergency.
**Plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in failing the course. Consult the University rules and guidelines regarding this serious breach of ethics. However, please note that all materials used in the construction of your written work (notes, outlines, rough drafts, etc.) should be saved until you have received a passing grade from me.

**University Policies:**
Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University's policies. For more information on this serious breach of conduct, see:
http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310

For more information on these policies, see:
Affirmative Action:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aoa/
Disability Services:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability
Equal Opportunity Statement:

**SCHEDULE:**  (the syllabus may change during the semester to meet instruction needs)

1/10  Intro
Smith: Chpt 1, What is Culture

1/17  Modernity/postmodernity (part 1)
Hamilton: Enlightenment and the Birth of Social Science
Harvey: Chpt 1-4

1/24  Sociology of culture
Simmel: Metropolis and Mental Life
Couldry: Media Rituals: Beyond Functionalism
Dyer: Stars As a Social Phenomenon
Bourdieu: How Can One Be a Sports Fan?
Smith: Chpt 1, Culture in Classical Social Theory (pp 6-19)
Smith: Chpt 8, Culture, Structure, and Agency… (pp. 128-136)

1/31  Marxism: ideology
Harvey: Chpt 5-11
Thompson: Intro, Chpt 1
2/7 **Structuralism**  
Saussure: Nature of the Linguistic Sign  
Lévi-Strauss: Structural Analysis  
Barthes: Myth Today; World of Wrestling  
Voloshinov: Multiaccentuality and the Sign  
Smith: Chpt 6, Structuralism and the Semiotic Analysis of Culture

2/14 **Neo-Marxism and cultural studies**  
Althusser: Ideological State Apparatuses  
Thompson, chpt 2  
Williams: Base & Superstructure  
Hall: Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms

2/21 **Culture and mass communication**  
Thompson: Chpt 3-4  
Geertz: Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight

2/28 **NO CLASS: Examination 1**

3/13 **Psychoanalysis**  
Grosz: selections from *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*  
Smith: Chpt 12, Psychoanalytic Approaches to Culture

3/20 **Post-structuralism**  
Derrida: Signature, Event, Context  
Foucault: What is an Author?  
Foucault: selections from *History of Sexuality*  
Smith: Chpt 7, The Poststructural Turn

3/27 **Post Marxism**  
Hall: Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates  
Laclau and Mouffe: selections from *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*  
Semati and Sotirin: Hollywood’s Transnational Appeal: Hegemony and Democratic Potential?

4/3 **Governmentality**  
Foucault: Governmentality  
Foucault: Technologies of the Self  
Bennett: The Political Rationality of the Museum  
Rose: Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies

4/10 **The popular, the affective, and the everyday**  
De Certeau: The Practice of Everyday Life  
Fiske: The Popular Economy  
Highmore: Senses of the Ordinary  
Deleuze and Guattari: Rhizome
4/17  Cultural analysis of postmodernism (part II)
  Harvey: chpts finish
  Smith: chpt 13, The Cultural Analysis of Postmodernism and Postmodernity
  Smith: chpt 14, Postmodern and Poststructural Critical Theory

4/24  Book review social

  Examination 2 deadline to be determined…