

CST 210

Research in Communication

Fall 2008

T/R 1:00 – 2:15 p.m. 3 Credits

Dr. Jim Brancato, Hartzel 231

Office Hours: TBA

Extension 3470; Messages can be left at x3389

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Course Description

This course is intended to be an exploration of the means and the principles that inform and organize research in the area of communication. Specifically, we'll be studying qualitative approaches to research---methods of interpretation and criticism of communication texts.

We will ask: What kinds of questions are normally posed in the field of communication? What general approaches are typically taken by researchers? What different perspectives inform these approaches? What kinds of data are used or are available? How can it be collected? Do the different approaches all ask the same question? Can they be combined?

Course Objectives

This course is meant to give you an intensive training in qualitative methods of inquiry. If successful, it should provide you with a vigorous foundation and a set of tools and resources for understanding and assessing the problems, questions and methods of different knowledge claims that you may encounter in the world, whether academically or professionally. In the more immediate future, it should give you the proper foundation from which to develop your senior thesis which should be the culmination of your work for the major. To this end, your final project will ask you to approach one potential research question from a variety of perspectives, as well as to collect and analyze research on that area of interest.

Course Outcomes

1. Students will know a variety of qualitative methods to analyze and thus interpret and better understand the role of media in culture and society.
2. Students will be able to create a research proposal that utilizes one or more of these methods. This proposal will be for original research within the field of communications; within it, students will also learn to compile a professional literature review of primary sources.
3. Students will gain public speaking experience through team-teaching a class that covers a research method.

Required Readings

Berger, A. (2000). Media and communication research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Additional readings may be assigned as we proceed. Make sure you check with me during class as we go along.

Recommended Readings

Alexander, A. & Potter, W. J. (Eds.) (2001). How to publish your communication research: An insider's guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Allen, R. (Ed.) (1987). Channels of discourse. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Bywater, T. & Sobchack, T. (1989). Introduction to film criticism: Major critical approaches to narrative film. New York, N.Y.: Longman, Inc.

Stokes, J. (2003). How to do media and cultural studies. London: Sage Publications.

Course Policies

This course is a sophomore level course, designed to prepare you for research as an upperclassman in the Communication Program at Cedar Crest College. You will be presenting material to the class at least once during the semester. Materials must be gathered to pass out to the class one week before you present. Conduct in the class at all times is governed by the rules and provisions of the Cedar Crest Honor Code, as well as the Cedar Crest Classroom Protocol. It is your responsibility to become aware of these codes and provisions, found in the Customs Book and other campus publications.

Every student can be absent once without penalty. For the second absence and thereafter, 8 points will be taken off your Attendance and Participation grade for each missed class. If you are absent and are ill, you need to have a valid written medical excuse for your absence, in which case no points will be deducted. *If a student misses 7 or more sessions, with no valid medical excuse, she will be graded an F for the course.*

Plagiarism is defined and covered by the rules and provisions stated in official campus publications. If a student is found to have plagiarized material for an assignment, the student will receive an "F" for the assignment and/or for the class, including referral to the Dean of Students Office for further disciplinary action.

Late Work

In fairness to the students who work hard to complete their assignments on time, all work submitted to the instructor after the designated due date will be penalized 1/2 grade for each day that it's late, regardless of the reason. The only exception I will make to this rule is if you have experienced an emergency that has been documented by the office of the Dean of Students, in which case I will of course allow you to turn in your work late without penalty. The variety of excuses for late work has increased tremendously in the wake of computer technology; my advice to you is to save your work to at least two places (hard disks, your h-drive), to save often. If you *do* lose your work (we all have horror stories of disk or computer crashes, myself included), it is your responsibility to redo the assignment.

Note: You **MUST** give me a printed and stapled copy of your work, if applicable to the assignment. ***Do not send to me a file via email***, unless you are physically ill or unable to come to class for a documented reason and we've agreed ahead of time that you can send an electronic version.

Students with Disabilities

I am happy to make accommodations for students with documented disabilities, under the terms of the ADA. Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with me as soon as possible. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Advising Center. I will need to receive official notice of a student's accommodations in order to provide these.

Requests to Reschedule or Make Up Quizzes/Exams

In general, I expect you to take exams when they are scheduled on the syllabus. You should not make plans, nor allow others to make plans, that prevent you from taking an exam or turning in assigned work on the day indicated on the syllabus. On occasion, circumstances arise that are beyond your control. In these cases, I will allow you to take an exam at an alternate time, but **ONLY** if you speak with me about it at least a week in advance and you take the exam before the time the class is scheduled to take it. If you have an emergency on the day of the exam, I will expect you to contact me as soon as possible afterwards and to provide documentation to explain your absence. I will not offer a make-up exam unless I receive legitimate documentation.

General Policies

I expect students to arrive having read the assigned materials. I consider "having read" to mean not necessarily mastering the material; indeed, it is my responsibility to help you to understand what I have assigned to you. So, coming to class with a question about the reading is often much more helpful to everyone than, say, commenting on it (although that is helpful as well!). Please feel free to request clarification on any points about readings or lecture at any time.

Requirements

Weekly Tests/Quizzes	40%
Research Paper First Draft	10%
Presentations	20%
Media Criticism Paper	20%
Class Discussion/Attendance/Homework	10%

COURSE OUTLINE (tentative)

Date Topic/Readings

8/26 Introduction to the Course; Syllabus

8/28 Studying/Researching Communication Through Words and Images

9/2 General Approaches to Knowledge (Epistemology) **B: Introduction**

9/4 Overview of Methodology: Quantitative v. Qualitative **B: 1**

9/9 Writing Research Proposals (Library Trip Possible) **B: 2**

9/11 Formulating the Research Question, Presenting Your Work (APA Style, etc.)
I may start on Semiotics this day, to give us a head start. You may want to read Berger's Chapter 3 ahead of time.

9/16 , 18 Semiotics **B: 3**

9/23, 25 Rhetorical Analysis **Readings TBA Q#1**
Excerpts of Obama/McCain's Convention speeches shown in class

9/30, 10/2 Textual/Content Analysis **B: 11** **Q#2**
Presenters:

10/7, 9 Principles of Interviewing **B: 7, Q#3** *Research Topic/Questions Due to Jim*

10/14 **No Class: Fall Break**

10/16 Discussion of Student Topics and Questions

- 10/21, 23 Principles of Surveys **B: 12 Q#4**
Presenters:
- 10/28, 30 Focus Group Methods **Readings TBA Q#5**
- 11/4, 6 Ideological Criticism **B: 5 Q#6 DRAFT DUE**
Presenters:
- 11/11, 13 Feminist Criticism **Readings TBA Q#7**
Presenters:
- 11/18, 11/20 Psychoanalytic, Narrative, Auteur, Genre Criticism, Participant Observation
(student's choice!)
Readings TBA Q#8
Presenters:
- 11/25 Media Criticism Papers Presented Group 1 **Q#9 (may be take home)**
- 11/27 **No Class: Thanksgiving Break**
- 12/2 Media Criticism Papers Presented Group 2
- 12/4 Media Criticism Papers Presented Group 3

Final Project Proposal Due on Exam Day

