



**COMM2040:**  
**Critical-Cultural Communication Theory**  
**Spring 2020**  
**Section 001**  
**Mon/Wed 2:30-3:45 p.m.**  
**Daniel Hall 407**

**Professor: Dr. James N. Gilmore, Ph.D.**

Department of Communication

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office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9-11 a.m., and by appointment

“A theory is exactly like a box of tools...It must be useful.”

- Gilles Deleuze

### **Course Description and Overview**

It is perhaps obvious to say that we live in culture—we watch “popular culture,” we may be “highly cultured,” and we may hear politicians dismiss problems as being “part of the culture.” But what, exactly, does the word “culture” mean, and how does one go about *studying* culture? This class is designed to introduce Communication majors to Cultural Studies frameworks of thinking, theorizing, and analyzing, demonstrating the ways the work of Communication is heavily related to the work of culture. We will ask: How is critical theory different from other ways of doing communication research? What does it mean to “do” Cultural Studies? What are the relevant traditions of this approach, who uses them, and to what end?

We will answer these questions through a focused and precise engagement with *theory*. We will learn how to effectively read theory and understand the theoretical arguments of foundational authors. We will discuss why theory is useful to critical-cultural communication frameworks, and, most importantly, how to “make theory useful” in general. We will explore a number of cultural studies models for analysis that depend on theory, and explore how theory can help us in our work as communications researchers and workers. Our guiding principle is this: While there is value in reading and understanding “the greatest hits” of critical-cultural theory, it is far more important to figure out how, if, and to what degree these theories might remain useful for understanding what’s going on in the world today. At each step, we will be sure to ask how the arguments and concepts of our authors might be used to help us make sense of things going on at Clemson University, in South Carolina, across the United States, and around the world.

### **Value Statement**

While in many ways the idea of theory may seem far removed from “the real world,” I subscribe to the belief that an understanding of the major theoretical debates around communication and culture can outfit communication students to understand the complexity of their work, to make decisions that will improve the world around them, and to be critically informed of the way communication impacts the world around them. Theory gives us tools to understand “the real world,” and as such is vitally important.

**Student Learning Objectives:**

1. Summarize key theoretical perspectives and concepts use in critical-cultural communication research.
2. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of critical-cultural theory and research.
3. Connect critical-cultural theory to related issues in communication and culture.
4. Demonstrate proficiency in related oral and written communication.

**Prerequisites:**

Students should have completed COMM2010 (“Introduction to Communication Studies”) with a grade of ‘C’ or better before enrolling in this course.

**Required Text:**

All readings will be made available as .pdf files on Canvas. You can access these materials at the COMM2040 Canvas site at any time through the Files tab. You should bring a copy of each day’s reading to class, either in hard copy or on a tablet/laptop.

## **COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

**Academic Integrity**

As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson’s vision of this institution as a “high seminary of learning.” Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.

A simple definition of plagiarism is when someone presents another person’s words, visuals, or ideas as his or her own. I will deal with plagiarism on a case-by-case basis. I will use, at my discretion, the Plagiarism Resolution Form. All infractions of academic dishonesty will be reported to Undergraduate Studies for resolution through that office.

See the Undergraduate Academic Integrity Policy website for additional information about academic integrity at Clemson. <[https://www.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/universypolicies/academic\\_integrity.html](https://www.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/universypolicies/academic_integrity.html)>.

**Classroom Environment**

This classroom will largely operate as a series of discussions, incorporating pairs, groups, and whole class discussion, interspersed with lectures to help set up and expand on the day’s readings and theories.

I do my best to cultivate a respectful and comfortable environment for each and every student, and ask that you respect the contributions of others. Inevitably, this class will touch on complicated political, social, and economic issues, among others. Your opinion, no matter what it is (and so long as it does not devalue or degrade the lived experiences of others), is valuable to me, and I want you to feel welcome to share it within our discussion. If you feel uncomfortable sharing your opinion or questions, please let me know so I can do my best to adjust my teaching style, if possible.

**Contacting Me**

The best ways to interact with me are in class, or in office hours. A visit to office hours gives us the opportunity to have a lengthier, more informal conversation about your questions on the material, to extend classroom conversations, or anything else for which you feel I may be helpful. Beyond office hours, you should direct all of your queries and concerns to my Clemson e-mail address. I will do everything in my power to reply to your e-mail within 36 hours. You should not anticipate a reply from me earlier than that, and you should not e-mail with questions right before an assignment is due. Plan ahead.

**Personal Technology**

You are welcome to use a tablet or laptop to take notes or to display the day's readings. Using a cell phone during class will negatively impact your participation grade. You are not as skilled at texting under your desk as you think you are. Spending all of class staring at your computer screen is obvious and will negatively impact your participation grade. I will not take time out of class to "call you out," but expect you to be mature and considerate in how you use personal devices.

**Copyright**

All materials found in this course are strictly for the use of students enrolled in this course and for purposes associated with this course. These materials are disseminated under Fair Use laws.

**Privacy Policy**

As students, your privacy is legally protected under FERPA laws. If, however, you feel an assignment or technology tool undermines your right to privacy, please contact me immediately, and we will discuss how to appropriately resolve this issue.

**Student Accessibility Services**

Clemson University values the diversity of our student body as a strength and a critical component of our dynamic community. Students with disabilities or temporary injuries/conditions may require accommodations due to barriers in the structure of facilities, course design, technology used for curricular purposes, or other campus resources. Students who experience a barrier to full access to this class should let me know, and make an appointment to meet with a staff member in Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

You can make an appointment by calling 864-656-6848, by emailing [studentaccess@lists.clemson.edu](mailto:studentaccess@lists.clemson.edu), or by visiting Suite 239 in the Academic Success Center building. Appointments are strongly encouraged. If you receive Academic Access Letters, please present them to me as early in the semester as possible so that accommodations can be made in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow this process each semester.

You can find further information at the Student Accessibility Services website at [www.clemson.edu/academics/studentaccess](http://www.clemson.edu/academics/studentaccess), as well as the Office of Access and Equity website at [www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/access](http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/access).

**Academic Grievances**

Students are advised to visit the Ombuds' Office (<https://www.clemson.edu/administration/ombudsman/index.html>) prior to filing a grievance. After discussion with the undergraduate academic ombudsman, students should contact Undergraduate Studies (864-656-3022) for assistance filing official paperwork.

### **Sexual Harassment and Title IX Support**

Clemson University is committed to providing a higher education environment that is free from sexual discrimination. Therefore, if you believe you or someone else that is part of the Clemson University community has been discriminated against based on sex, or if you have questions about Title IX, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Alesia Smith, who also serves as the Executive Director of Equity Compliance, at 110 Holtzendorff Hall, 864-656-3181 (voice). The Title IX Coordinator is the person designated by Clemson University to oversee its Title IX compliance efforts. Please consult the University's Title IX policy for full details at <<https://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/access/title-ix/>>

## **GRADING POLICIES**

### **Grading**

A grade of “A” is not simply given for effort, or for completing the basic requirements of any given assignment, but is rather earned through thoughtful engagement. You are welcome to meet with me at any time during the semester to discuss your grade in the class.

### **Grading Criteria**

A – Excellent and Exemplary. Work or performance that goes beyond meritorious to the extent of providing an example or model of excellence for others.

B – Good/Meritorious. Work or performance that not only meets all requirements but exceeds them, demonstrating depth, originality, and other marks of quality that give the work distinction.

C – Satisfactory. Work or performance that fully meets all requirements competently and shows the ability to function as a college student.

D – Marginal. Work or performance that either 1) fails to meet all requirements, though what is done may be considered competent; 2) meets all requirements but not at a basic level of competence; or 3) both of the above but not poor enough to be considered failing.

F – Failing. Work or performance that falls significantly short of requirements, basic competence, or both. This also includes, of course, work not done.

### **Late Work**

There are no excuses for late work. If you foresee a problem meeting a deadline, it is your responsibility to contact me **well** in advance to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will only be granted in extreme circumstances. Consult the syllabus for all due dates. Written assignments are due to appropriate submission portals on our Canvas website. Late submissions will receive a 10% penalty for each 24-hour period after the due date, including weekends. Work submitted a week after a due date will receive a zero.

### **Participation/Attendance**

Participation is crucial to success in this course; similarly, it is difficult to participate if one does not attend. You do not need to demonstrate mastery of the material each class, but you should consistently be willing to ask questions, respond to others, and show you have prepared for each class meeting (also known as “doing the work”). Consistent tardiness to this class will negatively impact your Participation grade. I will not take attendance for this class, but I will not post PowerPoints or notes to Canvas. It will be your responsibility to find out what you have missed if you are not in class. If I feel students are abusing this policy, I reserve the right to reinstate a formal attendance policy at any point.

**Writing Assignments**

Writing is a process and not an event. Good writing takes time and consideration, and cannot be done the night before a paper is due. You should anticipate composing and revising a series of drafts for each of your writing assignments in order to craft the best work possible. I encourage each of you to meet with me in my office throughout the semester to discuss the evolution of your writing, and to seek help on developing and clarifying your ideas. In submitting your assignment, you affirm that it is your independent work, you have written it on your own, and you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid.

**Academic Integrity**

I make the assumption that all undergraduates understand what constitutes plagiarism, and how to appropriately cite sources. You **must** quote all direct statements, and cite all direct statements and paraphrases of others' words. If you do not understand how to cite sources, let me know well in advance of a paper submission. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty.

I take all issues of academic integrity very seriously, and report all potential violations to Dr. Jeff Appling, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, for investigation.

**Grade Challenges**

Once a grade has been assigned, you will not be allowed to re-write your paper. After a grade is assigned, I request a 24-hour period for you to "sit with" my feedback. You then have seven days to voice your concerns. If you believe you have not been graded fairly, please submit via e-mail a detailed explanation of what seems wrong and why, being sure to reference the feedback I provide. Challenging a grade is requesting a re-grade: a revised grade may be higher or lower.

After one week of an assignment's return, grades are considered final.

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES****Academic Success Center**

The Academic Success Center provides free services, including tutoring, academic coaching, and academic skills workshops, for all Clemson students. Visit <<https://www.clemson.edu/asc>> for more information.

**Writing Center**

Clemson University's Writing Center offers free one-on-one tutoring for all Clemson students. Visit <<https://clemson.mywconline.com>> for more information.

**Cooper Library**

Reference librarians are available in person and via text, phone, email, and chat to answer your research questions. Visit Ask a Librarian for more information at <<https://libraries.clemson.edu/ask>>

**Technical Support**

If you are having hardware or software problems, CCIT's Service Desk may be able to help you. Contact them at [ITHELP@clemson.edu](mailto:ITHELP@clemson.edu) with a detailed description of your problem.

**Academic Advising**

Academic advising (<<https://www.clemson.edu/academics/advising/index.html>>) is an ongoing educational process that connects the student to the University. Academic advising supports the University's mission of preparing students for learning beyond the confines of the academy. Academic advisors represent and interpret University policies and procedures to students and help students navigate the academic and organizational paths of the institution.

**Registrar**

The Registrar's office provides information about important deadlines, degree and program requirements, and other key information, including use of iROAR to add, drop, or withdraw from courses.

**ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW**

Participation: 10%

\*\* includes Google Doc contribution @ 2%

Unit Quizzes: 6 @ 5% each = 30%

Forum Discussions: 10 @ 1% each = 10%

Connection Presentation: 10%

Journal Article Research: 10%

Theory Evaluation: 10%

Critical Cultural Studies Paper: 20%

*Quizzes* (30%; 6 @ 5% each): Every two or three weeks, we will have a five-to-seven-question quiz designed to demonstrate your understanding of the course material. Each quiz is non-cumulative and will emphasize the major concepts, as well as the main ideas and contributions of the course. You will not be responsible for remembering dates and minutiae, in other words, but you will be responsible for showing you understand the theories. See the course calendar below for quiz dates.

*Forum Discussions* (10%): Once each week, you will be responsible for writing a brief, preliminary response to a course reading in our Canvas Discussion Forums. You are expected to post approximately 6-8 sentences each week that:

- 1) Identifies and transcribes a specific passage or claim from the day's reading
  - 2) Explains something you found to be compelling, interesting, confusing, problematic, etc. about the reading, either from within the passage you transcribed or from another part of the reading.
- You may also ask additional questions of the reading you would like to discuss in class.

You will do this for **10** different weeks; you choose the weeks and you choose the day you contribute. It's up to you to stay on top of this.

You should consider this a "low-stakes" form of preparing for class discussion. While you should strive to use correct grammar and spelling, as well as write coherently, these are not graded on the formal quality of the writing, but rather on your willingness to work through the three components of the Forum Post each week. Because they will be posted publicly on Canvas, you are also encouraged to respond to other classmates' observations and ask questions of your peers. The goal is to begin organizing a conversation and developing talking points we can bring into the class discussion. Posts which are shorter than the required length will count as a "0."

You have the freedom to select which reading you want to discuss each week, and you can post before either Monday or Wednesday's meeting. I ask that you please post **no later than 10 a.m. on the day of a class meeting**, to make sure I have time to read the posts and organize some discussion points around them. You cannot write a post for a class retroactively.

**Due Date: Ongoing, by 10 a.m. before the class period for which you post.**

*Course Google Doc Contribution* (2%): During the first week, I will e-mail everyone a link to a shared Google Doc for you to create a collective course document, ask questions, and incorporate material that will be helpful to one another. You are responsible for contributing something—a set of notes, a series of questions, links to relevant material—to this Google Doc over the course of the semester. I will check the Google Doc each Friday to respond to any questions or concerns. To receive credit for this assignment, you should e-mail me and identify what part of the Google Doc you contributed.

*Connection Presentation* (10%): Once during the semester, each student will “connect” the course material to a relatively recent news story (from the last 3-5 years). It will be up to you to do outside research and find a story you think resonates with our theoretical discussions of culture. Some places to start: *Variety* (for entertainment news), *Wired* (for technology news), *Forbes* (for business news), *The Washington Post* (for political news), *Slate* (for opinion writing), *The Atlantic* (for longer features), and surely many more. Over the course of your presentation, you will:

- 1) Introduce your news story and summarize its main points
- 2) Explain how this story connects to our course material (i.e., how does Taylor Swift draw on influencers to promote her content? OR how was *ritual communication* important for building support of a new television program?)
- 3) Take a position as to whether or not the theoretical framework of our course material is helpful for understanding some of the larger importance of your news story.
- 4) Ask one open-ended question for the class to consider

Each presentation should be between 5-8 minutes long. The goal is to allow you to bring in outside material you think is important to help aid our discussion, and for you to begin thinking about how real-world examples might connect to theoretical concepts.

**Due Date: Ongoing, sign-up for presentation date in week two**

*Theory Evaluation* (10%): Due at the end of Week Six, you will turn in an approximately 600-700 word evaluation of one reading of your choice from the first ten weeks of class. In that evaluation, you will provide a summary of the author’s main points and will offer one possibility for how this reading might be made useful for the study of communication and/or culture today. Students are encouraged to select an article that resonated with them for any number of reasons, including disagreement. A detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in Week Five.

**Due Date: Friday, February 14 at 5 p.m., to Canvas**

*Journal Article Research* (10%): Due at the end of Week Ten, this 800-1000-word paper will ask you to seek out an academic research article from a major Critical/Cultural Studies journal. You will provide an overview of the article, explain to what degree it fits into our course material, and take an argumentative stand as to whether or not the author’s argument/contribution is useful to the study of communication and culture. You can search for an article in the following journals: *Cultural Studies*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, or *Communication, Culture, and Critique*. A detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in Week Nine.

**Due Date: Friday, March 13 at 5 p.m., to Canvas**

*Critical Cultural Studies Paper* (20%): This 2000-2500-word paper will synthesize the work in the class. Students will have the option to revise and incorporate all the elements of their previous papers and presentations in this paper. While a formal assignment sheet will be distributed near the start of November, in general you will select and analyze an issue in communication and/or culture that matters to you through a carefully considered theoretical, critical analysis. This could include popular culture, technology, industry, or some sort of political or economic issue that is impacting culture and/or communication. You will be significant latitude in the topic for this paper, but it will ask you to combine

course readings, outside research articles, news stories or opinion pieces from the popular press, and your own theory-based analysis to make an argument about the element of culture you select.

**Due Date: Thursday, April 30, 5:30 p.m., to Canvas**

### **One Final Note**

The material in this course may, at first, seem quite difficult to you, particularly because it may be completely alien to other kinds of material you've read for other courses. This course, additionally, requires a good bit of reading for each meeting. We are all in this together, and it is part of my job to help give some sort of sense to what may, on first encounter, seem like non-sense. There is a reason "communication" and "community" share a root word, and our classroom will be at its best when we embrace those connections! Do not let yourself get discouraged!

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

### **Week One: Introduction to Being Critical**

Wednesday, January 8: Course Introduction; On Being Critical

No reading

### **Week Two: Defining Culture**

Monday, January 13: What is "Culture," Anyway?

Read:

Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" (pp. 92-100)

Wednesday, January 15: Culture and Computers

Read:

Blake Hallinan and Ted Striphas, "Recommended for you: The Netflix Prize and the algorithmic production of culture" (pp. 117-137)

### **Week Three: Critical Foundations**

Monday, January 20: **NO CLASS**

**\*\*\*No class meeting in observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Wednesday, January 22: Historical Materialism

Read:

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas" (pp. 39-42)

Hall, Hobson, Lowe, and Willis, "Reformulating the 'break'" from *Culture, Media, Language* (pp. 223-226)

### **Week Four: Cultural Capital**

#### Monday, January 27: Cultural Capital

##### *Quiz #1*

Read:

Pierre Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital" (pp. 15-29)

#### Wednesday, January 29: Gaming the Algorithm

Read:

Kelley Cotter, "Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram" (pp. 895-913)

*Watch: Fyre (2019) (Netflix)*

### **Week Five: The Chicago School**

#### Monday, February 3: Communication and Democracy

Read:

John Dewey, "Search for the Great Community" (pp. 143-185)

#### Wednesday, February 5: Commodity Activism

Read:

Laurie Ouellette, "Citizen Brand: ABC and the Do Good Turn in US Television"

*Watch: Extreme Makeover Home Edition (YouTube)*

### **Week Six: The Frankfurt School**

#### Monday, February 10: The Culture Industry

##### *Quiz #2*

Read:

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception," (pp. 31-41)

#### Wednesday, February 12: Franchising Culture

Read:

Derek Johnson, "Imagining the franchise: Structures, social relations, and cultural work" (pp. 27-66)

*Watch: Avengers: Endgame – All Bonus Features (YouTube)*

*\*\*Theory Evaluation Paper due February 14 at 5 p.m. to Canvas*

### **Week Seven: The Birmingham School**

#### Monday, February 17: Mapping Conjunctures

Read:

Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, “*Policing the Crisis*: Preface to the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition” (pp. 362-373)

#### Wednesday, February 19: Hegemony

Read:

John Clarke, “Of crises and conjunctures: The problem of the present” (pp. 337-354)

### **Week Eight: Semiotics and Visual Culture**

#### Monday, February 24: Interpreting Images

*Quiz #3*

Read:

Roland Barthes, excerpt from *Camera Lucida*

#### Wednesday, February 26: Attention Economy

Read:

Diana Zulli, “Capitalizing on the look: insights into the glance, attention economy, and Instagram” (pp. 137-150)

### **Week Nine: Representation**

#### Monday, March 2: Coding

Read:

Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding”

#### Wednesday, March 4: Cultural Forums

Read:

Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, “Television as a Cultural Forum” (pp. 561-573)

*Watch*: “Nosedive,” *Black Mirror* (Netflix)

**Week Ten: Social Construction and the Toronto School**

Monday, March 9: Social Constructionism

*Quiz #4*

Read:

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "The reality of everyday life," "Social interaction in everyday life" (pp. 33-48)

Wednesday, March 11: Media Theory and the Toronto School

Read:

John Durham Peters, "Understanding Media" (pp. 13-52)

*\*\*\*Journal Article Research Paper due on Friday, March 13 at 5 p.m. to Canvas*

**\*\*\* SPRING BREAK, NO CLASSES MARCH 16-20**

**Week Eleven: Communication/Culture and the Illinois School**

Monday, March 23: Ritual Communication

Read:

James W. Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication" (pp. 11-18)

Wednesday, March 25: The Politics of Memes

Read:

Jessica Baldwin-Phillipi, "The Technological Performance of Populism" (pp. 376-397)

*Watch: The Great Hack (2019) (Netflix)*

**Week Twelve: The Public Sphere and/as Dissent**

Monday, March 30: The Public Sphere

*Quiz #5*

Read:

Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Entry" (pp. 49-55)

Wednesday, April 1: Publics and Protests

Read:

Zeynep Tufekci, "A Networked Public" (pp. 3-27)

*Watch: The Square (2013) (Netflix)*

**Week Thirteen: Power**

Monday, April 6: Power/Knowledge

Read:

Michel Foucault, "Lecture: 14 January 1976" (pp. 92-108)

Wednesday, April 8: *Serial* and the Battle Over Truth

Read:

Michael Buozi, "Giving voice to the accused: *Serial* and the critical potential of true crime" (pp. 254-270)

*Listen*: Episode 01, *Serial* (2014) (NPR link on Canvas)

**Week Fourteen: Participatory Culture and its Limits**

Monday, April 13: Textual Poachers

*Quiz #6*

Read:

Henry Jenkins, "'Get a Life!': Fans, Poachers, Nomads" (pp. 9-49)

Wednesday, April 15: Marginalization

Read:

Suzanne Scott, "Fangirls in refrigerators: The politics of (in)visibility in comic book culture" (pp. 1-30)

**Week Fifteen: Course Conclusion**

Monday, April 20: The Future Tense

Read:

Megan M. Wood, "On 'telling better stories'" (pp. 19-28)

Wednesday, April 22: Consultations

\*\*\* *No formal class meeting; meet with Dr. Gilmore to discuss final papers*

**Week Sixteen: Exam Week**

*Final papers due Thursday, April 30, at 5:30 p.m.*

## COURSE REFERENCES

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Scott, S. (2013). Fangirls in refrigerators: The politics of (in)visibility in comic book culture. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 13: 1-30.

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Williams, Raymond. (2000). Culture is ordinary. In *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (pp. 91-100). New York: Routledge.

Wood, M.M. (2019). On 'telling better stories.' *Cultural Studies*, 33(1): 19-28.

Zulli, D. (2018). Capitalizing on the look: Insights into the glance, the attention economy, and Instagram. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35(2): 137-150.