

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Class Time: 10:00-11:15 TR Olin 209

Office Hours: TR by appointment Mundy 116

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the myriad ways in which social movements have mobilized dominant and alternative modes of representation and visibility to represent the rights of oppressed groups. Specifically, we will explore how rights have been articulated through the media of photography and visual materials. How might photography provide insight into critical social problems such as poverty, labor abuses, racism, and war? What might photography obscure in the process and how does this fit into the contemporary digital media age?

Through these questions and our readings, this course will address theoretical questions such as: How does one represent the rights of a group of people through visual materials? What are the rhetorical possibilities and constraints of photographs—that is, how do photographs simultaneously communicate “truth” and point to the construction of knowledge and culture? How have historical and technological changes altered the relationship between photography and social movements? How are some groups privileged in the ways of seeing and visibility available to them and how might photography be used both as a resource for justice and as a tool for the perpetuation of injustice? How might empathy, logic, prejudice, and fear be both culturally and neurologically related? Are we naturally predisposed to trust or distrust certain people or certain representations?

The readings and class discussion will provide a theoretical and applied framework within which students will develop skills in developing, planning, and producing high-quality analyses of the visual strategies employed by distinct social movements. Students who successfully complete this course will develop experience and knowledge in analyzing visual materials and critically evaluating the rhetorical practices linking social movements and visual representation and in analyzing historical and contemporary rhetorical practices.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course is designed to meet objectives for students’ knowledge of important historical and rhetorical concepts relating to social justice movements and visual strategies with a close attention to cultural, feminist, and race and ethnicity studies. With regard to their knowledge of rhetoric, at the end of this course students will be able to:

1. acknowledge and critically engage with the social justice issues facing marginalized groups,
2. identify and critique processes by which visual texts communicate meaning,
3. analyze the cultural, contextual, and historical relationship to the circulation and interpretation of discourse,
4. understand the interplay between dominant and counter discourses.

THEMATIC QUESTIONS — MIND/BRAIN CLUSTER

1. What is the relationship between mind and brain, and how do they influence behavior?
2. What do we know about mind/brain, and how do we know it?
3. How do science, culture, and history influence mind/brain, and vice versa?
4. What ethical questions are raised by the study of mind/brain?

5. How does mind/brain relate to wellness and illness?

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All readings will be provided on Moodle. Students are expected to carefully and thoughtfully read and take notes on all assigned materials before class. During class time, it is expected that these readings and notes will be out and readily available for reference.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The nature and topic of this course requires sensitivity and accountability. Photography and social justice are both vulnerable enterprises. The questions about ethics, rights, and responsibilities that social justice campaigns raise can inspire, or incite, passion. As scholars probing the ways we address such deeply difficult issues in our culture, we have the important task of remaining engaged, respectful, and inquisitive. **You can expect to spend between 2-5 hours/week on reading, evaluating, and critically engaging with course readings. Successful students will attend class, read carefully and analytically, turn in assignments on time, and relate to other class participants in an ethical, open, and kind manner.**

SAFE SPACE/CIVILITY PLEDGE

In this course, I acknowledge that racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, able-ism, and other forms of interpersonal and institutionalized forms of oppression exist in society, and agree to do my best to better understand those forms of oppression, refrain from repeating misinformation, and harness knowledge to change perceptions. I will:

- Keep an open mind, listen, and respect everyone
- Keep personal experiences shared in the context of the classroom confidential unless otherwise agreed upon
- Not ridicule or demean anyone for sharing his/her personal experience(s) and idea(s)
- Not rely on any individual to be a representative spokesperson for a given group of people. (Adapted from Lindsey M. McDougale)

COMMUNICATION

Please stay in contact with me throughout the semester, especially if you are experiencing a circumstance or difficulty that affects your participation in the course. I strive to be available to students for any questions or concerns they may have. You can sign up to meet with me during class or make an appointment via email. You can best reach me at rigdonr@southwestern.edu. Unless it is the weekend, I will respond within 48 hours.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

- ☐ You can have two excused absences, for any reason. **Neither of these absences may be on ANY day on which you are presenting.** No excuse is needed but email me within 24 hours of the missed class to let me know. **Additional absences will result in grade penalties: every unexcused absence will reduce your final score by one-third of a letter grade.** *For example, someone with a B+ who has one unexcused absence will earn a B for the term.*
- ☐ Every tardy will be counted as ½ of an absence.
- ☐ If you do not attend class, you cannot make up missed assignments unless you have cleared it with me first. You must complete all major assignments to pass.

RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION

Southwestern University recognizes that it has students from a variety of religious and cultural traditions that have special days of observance or celebration that may take students out of their regular activities on certain days during the school year. Since the academic calendar does not always coincide with these days, the following policy is to be followed in order to facilitate student absences due to cultural and religious observances: As far in advance as possible, the student is expected to notify the professor(s) or instructor(s) of the class(es) to be missed. The student is expected to learn what assignments or exams are due or will be assigned on those dates and negotiate with the professor(s) or instructor(s) alternate times for fulfilling those requirements. Students should be prepared to fulfill the requirements prior to the class(es) to be missed.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should register with the Center for Academic Success, located in the Prothro Center. Professors must be officially notified by the Access and Academic Resources Coordinator that documentation is on file at least two weeks before the accommodation is needed.

INVOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL POLICY

When, prior to the last day to drop courses (after the 10th week of class), excessive absences, as defined by the instructor in the course syllabus and the University Excused Absence Policy, jeopardize a student's work in any course, the instructor may request that the Records drop the student from the course. After the last day to drop, students missing an excessive number of class meetings could be dropped at the discretion of the instructor with an F. Students will be notified of this action by the Records Office.

HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM

Students should act "with honesty and integrity," as the SU honor code requires, which includes properly citing the work of others and collaborating with others only when it is specifically authorized (e.g., discussion leading, peer evaluations).

Plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity are strictly prohibited and subject to penalty as defined by the University. Plagiarism is defined in the Faculty Handbook as "the submission of another's work as one's own without acknowledgement in the written work" (p. 85). Princeton University's Word Net defines plagiarism as:

- (n) Plagiarism: a piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work.
- (n) Plagiarism, plagiarization, plagiarisation, piracy: the act of plagiarizing; taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own.

PAPER SUBMISSIONS

- All written work should follow a recognized style manual (i.e., MLA, APA, Chicago).
- Most Submissions will be on Moodle, double-spaced, in twelve-point type, with one-inch left and right margins. *It is not difficult to tell when margins, fonts, or spacing have been altered.*

LATE WRITTEN WORK

Late written work will be assessed a penalty of one full letter grade for each day that it is late. I will not accept any work that is more than 72 hours late. Presentations must be delivered on the date assigned.

COMPLAINTS AND GRADE DISPUTES

Unless I have made a mathematical error, students who wish to contest the grade on an assignment must submit their request for reconsideration to me, in writing, within seven calendar days of the date that I first returned the assignments to the class. This request should describe, with specific examples and adequate documentation, the reasons the student believes that another grade is warranted. It is advised that you wait at least three days before contesting a grade to give yourself time to examine and reflect on your work.

DEBBY ELLIS WRITING CENTER

I highly encourage students to use the Debby Ellis Writing Center as a resource for help organizing an essay, fine-tuning a thesis, improving critical analyses, and clarifying outlines and ideas. You can make an appointment or drop-in at Mood-Bridwell Hall, Room 306. www.southwestern.edu/offices/writing/

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Laptops and other electronic devices may be used to reference readings and take notes during lectures. If these devices become more distracting than useful, I will ask that all screen devices be removed from the class. Wireless communication devices must be silenced and put away during class time.

MODIFICATIONS TO SYLLABUS

This syllabus may be modified at any time. In that circumstance, all students will receive adequate notice.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Please submit all formal essays on Moodle **with your full name and the title of the assignment in the file name. PDF, Word, or Open Office document files only.**
- ▣ **One important basis for your grades will be your responsiveness to feedback—both from your peers and me. Improvement is a large factor in my evaluation of your work.**

Final letter grades will be computed exactly according to the following percentage and will not be rounded:

Score	295	300	315	335	350	364	385	400	415	435	450	465	485
%	59%	60%	63%	67%	70%	73%	77%	80%	83%	87%	90%	93%	97%
Ltr Grade	F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Self-Reflection 25pts
Discussion Leading: 75pts
Case Study: 75pts

Reading Responses: 75pts
Final Project: 150pts
Participation: 100pts
Total: 500pts

SELF-REFLECTION (5%)

You will write a 500-750-word paper reflecting on your personal experiences and perspectives on privilege, oppression, social justice, and empathy. Useful jumping off points might be: How do I respond to images? What connections between empathy, visuality, culture, and our neurology do I see? What do I believe influences my empathetic responses to images most? What privileges do I enjoy the benefits of? How might my privilege alter how I see the world? How does my privilege alter how the world sees me? What forms of oppression do I experience? How do those experiences with oppression affect how I see the world and how I am seen by the world? How might these experiences help me understand and develop a countervisuality?

READING RESPONSES (15%)

All students are expected to post **THREE (3) 300-500-word** reading responses on the course Moodle site by Monday at NOON for Tuesday readings or Wednesday at NOON for Thursday readings. Students may choose to write in any three weeks over the course of the semester. The reading responses should be organized as follows:

1. **Part 1:** 100-150-word summary of the reading.
2. **Part 2:** 100-150 word assessment of the most valuable contribution of the reading to our understanding of social justice and/or visuality as a concept. This can be critical or laudatory.
3. **Part 3:** 100-150-word explanation of an important tool practice/policy for addressing and enhancing social justice as suggested by the reading. This will often be non-obvious and will require the student to be both critical and creative.

The reading responses are very brief and must get to the point swiftly and clearly. Responses will be graded on insight, accuracy, creativity, and clarity of writing.” (Adapted from Melissa Harris-Perry)

Responses must be from different readings than the ones you present on for your Discussion Leading.

DISCUSSION LEADING: 15%

At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up to work with a partner(s) to lead discussion on the readings for your selected date. **Reading Responses cannot overlap with the texts on which you are Leading Discussion.**

This will include:

- 1) **Within 24 hours of the selected class, you and your partner will post at least 4 questions responding to the assigned readings on Moodle.** You will use these 4+ questions to help lead class discussion.
- 2) **You and your partner should have a cohesive and collaborative presentation of the readings for the class.** Use a visual aid such as handouts, Prezi, or PowerPoint. You should guide discussion for 20-30 minutes. You are encouraged to be creative about how to best increase student engagement and participation.
- 3) **You and your partner must *each* find and present a visual artifact that relates to the readings and helps expand our understanding of how those concepts are playing out in the “real world.”** You are also encouraged to incorporate examples that contradict or trouble the arguments made in the readings.

Questions and presentations should demonstrate and expand knowledge of the core concepts, synthesize arguments, point to patterns and contrasts, connect to other readings, and provide thought for critique of the arguments presented. The process of synthesizing—pulling together diverse elements into conversation with one

another—is a key analytical component necessary for research writing and one that we will practice through our class discussions. The questions are intended to both indicate your understanding of the materials and facilitate the class's engagement with the theoretical and pragmatic components of the texts. **All students are expected to check Moodle and review the posted discussion questions prior to class time.**

PARTICIPATION: 20%

The seminar format requires substantial participation as evidenced by clear engagements with course materials and peer evaluations, thoughtful and informed contributions to class discussion, and timely and thorough completion of assignments. Participation will also include all short in-class and home writing activities, self-reflections, pop quizzes, and peer critiques.

CASE STUDY PAPER: 15%

You will select a social justice issue and write a 4-6 page essay describing and analyzing how oppressed groups have advanced their cause on behalf of that issue. You should demonstrate knowledge of the history, context, and strategies employed by these groups. What challenges did they face in representing their cause? How did/do they use visual rhetorical strategies to communicate or overcome those challenges? You may use class readings but your paper should primarily reflect and cite significant external research. While largely expository, this essay should also include a short analysis of the rhetorical strategies at work within photographic representations of that issue and how they relate to social justice claims.

You may use this assignment as a jumping off point for your final paper **but** while you may incorporate aspects of this paper into your final project, your final paper must be unique and analytical rather than expository. **RES students MUST focus both their Case Study and Final Project on an issue of race or ethnicity.**

FINAL PROJECT: 30%

Students will complete a final project featuring a 10-12 page paper over the artifact(s) or archive the student has selected. The final paper should draw upon and synthesize course themes and readings as well as substantial external research to support its claims about an issue of visual rhetoric relating to social justice. **RES students MUST focus both their Case Study and Final Project on an issue of race or ethnicity.**

The final paper will be developed through a series of stages:

Topic Proposal: 5 points

By Thursday, Oct. 25, you will submit a 1-2 page proposal of the topic you want to explore for your final. You should identify the artifact(s), methodologies, and academic support you plan to employ for your project.

Annotated Bibliography: 10 points

By Friday, November 11th at NOON you will submit an annotated bibliography of at least 8 sources you are using for your final project. **At least 5 of those sources must be 1) external from course readings and 2) distinct from your case study.**

Workshopping and Abstract: 15 points

You will be placed in a group of six students and present an abstract and 1-2 artifacts from your final project. The presentation should take a maximum of FIVE minutes, with TEN minutes allotted for questions and peer suggestions. Presentations should include at least 6 copies of a handout that includes your

abstract and visual artifact – five for your peers and one for me. I will cut students short if they exceed the time limit.

A strong approach to this assignment would be to select a small sample of your archive and discuss your analysis of it and how it supports your thesis. Clear connections to course readings and evidence should be seen. Students will be graded on content and delivery.

Draft: 20 points

On Tuesday, Nov. 29 you will come to class with four copies of your final draft—1 to turn into me and 3 to share with peer evaluators. You will also submit the draft to me on Moodle. This should be a thoroughly fleshed out draft in the final stages of composition.

Final Paper: 100 points

You will submit a 10-12 page paper on Moodle by 5pm on Wednesday, December 7. This paper should identify a visual artifact or archive for analysis. You should provide historical context for the discourse around the artifact and its use in advancing social justice claims. This paper can draw upon information related in the Case Study but the student should interweave and thoughtfully incorporate from the Case Study as opposed to simply copying and pasting.

Papers should state a clear thesis on the relationship between the archive and its use, draw upon course readings and significant and high-quality external sources to support arguments, and analyze the archive's use in social justice advocacy.

EXTRA CREDIT: 20 POINTS (10 POINTS EACH)

Social justice is best achieved when the intellectual and educational aspects are tied to embodied and engaged ones. As such, I offer two opportunities for extra credit. If you engage in social justice or advocacy work and write a 3-4-page paper detailing the experience, linking it to course concepts, and critiquing how your experience advances the goals of a social justice movement, you may earn up to 10 points/paper for a maximum of 20 points. You must provide proof of your participation in the movement and you are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Community-Engaged Learning in Prothro 243 for support finding a good fit.

While you may submit two papers about the same movement, the two papers must be significantly different by highlighting the different ways you engaged with the movement, link to course materials, and personal points of connection. For example, if you write about participating in a political protest for your first paper, your second paper could still be related to that movement but would need to be on a different experience with them such as being part of the planning or outreach components of the movement or attending a public and/or academic lecture on the topic. If you are unsure if your choice is sufficient to earn extra credit, please check with me.