



COM 215

Visual Communication

Fall
2011

Dr. Niman

Buffalo State
College

Syllabus

COM 215 Fall 2011 Syllabus (#3053)

Visual Communication

3.0 Credit Hours (Lecture)

Tuesday/Thursday 10:50 -12:05 / Classroom B119

Professor: **Dr. Michael I. Niman**

Office Hours: Tuesday / Thursday 3:05 – 4:35

Wednesday 3:45-5:45PM & by appt. 230 Bishop Hall

Professor's Website: **<http://mediastudy.com>**

Course Methodology / Overview

We live in a visually oriented media-rich society. This course will help foster the visual literacy skills necessary to understand how omnipresent media images in our society are constructed and how their visual cues communicate with us on various levels. Students will learn basic principles of visual communication and examine the media around us to see how these principles are applied in various venues and formats. We'll look at media products to see how media makers apply visual conventions in an effort to code communications to carry various social and cultural messages about people, products, ideas and ideologies. In order to accomplish these tasks, we will both construct and deconstruct visual images while applying the theories we examine in class.

Catalog Description

"Analysis of production and consumption of visual information; exploration of the role of images in the communication process; application to journalism, broadcasting, public relations, advertising and digital media."

Learning Outcomes

Students, after successfully completing this class, should understand the role of semiotics in communication and the technology that underlies the creation and dissemination of visual images. Successful students should be able to critically

analyze visual messages, understand visual codes, understand the technology involved in image construction, understand and articulate the ethical arguments regarding visual representations of diverse peoples, and be able to apply visual communication theory through the construction and application of visual messaging in support of integrated communication presentations.

Grading



20% Class Participation * → *Attendance is mandatory* in this class. The class participation grade is based both upon *participation* in class discussions, where students should discuss class readings and voice their informed opinions and observations. Students earn a good participation grade by volunteering to show their class work or by bringing in media samples to share with the class when appropriate. Lateness is always equal to an absence.



20% Mid-Term Exam** Week 8 (10/20) → Multiple choice format.



20% Final Exam** (CEP week) → Multiple choice format. Cumulative.



30% Photo Array Assignments [#1 due Week 6 (10/6). #2 due Week 11 (11/10)] → Detailed descriptions of photo array assignments will be posted on the COM 215 Angel Site. Assignments entail creating two scrapbooks of original photos shot by the student, with each photo emphasizing a visual convention (#1) or an aspect of documentary photography (#2). Budget 15 hours of time for each of these assignments.



10% “Graded in 40 Seconds” Semester Image Assignment → You will create a complex image that communicates a strong message regarding an issue or ideology that you feel passionate about. This image will most likely take the form of a collage. It should reflect many hours of *research, thought* and ultimately, *design*. Look at the work of Shepard Fairey and Banksy for inspiration (both linked at the COM 215 Angel Site). In the tradition of music sampling, you may clip art to incorporate in what ultimately must be *your* unique design. Like a magazine ad that may take hundreds of hours to design but will only a few seconds to view, this assignment will be judged by the reader/professor in 40 seconds. Hence, it should be vibrant and captivating. Be creative and be passionate, drawing on your anger, love, frustration or insanity to inspire you. Your completed assignment should be **no larger than 11” x 14”** and should include, on a separate attached sheet, a bibliography of all artwork sampled, and a one paragraph description of what your image “says.” You may use scissors and paste or tape, electronic scan, cut and paste, or any technology you desire. Be

prepared to email copies of electronic images you used, should questions of plagiarism or originality arise. Budget 10 hours of time for this project. Read Rick Poyner's "The Designer as Reporter" (Reading Pack Appendix 'A'). **Due 12/8.**

**A student who misses or is late to seven classes will automatically fail this course.*

**** No curve. 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, <60=F**

Please Note:

All policies articulated in this syllabus, including attendance policies, supersede Communication Department suggested policies.

Plagiarism will result in automatic course failure and departmental or college disciplinary action. Plagiarism means passing off someone else's writing or other work (intellectual property – e.g. photos or artwork) as if it is your own.

Students entering this course **must possess literacy skills appropriate for a college sophomore**. This is a prerequisite. You *must resign* from this class if you do not possess these skills (meaning do not understand the language used in readings or class lectures – so look over the readings and decide if you are staying).

Cellies must be in silent mode. Ringing cell phones = lowered semester grade and/or public torment and humiliation.

The use of electronic recording devices is prohibited in class except with specific permission of the professor, or except, after notification of the professor, as provided for under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. All course content is protected intellectual property.

3.0 credit courses require at least **9.0 hours of work per week**.

Please remember that grading is never quite fair, so don't expect your grade to always adequately reflect what you have learned. The best strategy to address the injustices inherent in grading is to carefully read the reading material, submit exemplary assignments, show up on time, participate in class and avoid any possible ambiguity regarding the quality of your work.

By registering for and remaining in this class, students are agreeing to abide by these guidelines.

BSC Disabilities Policy: "Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the professor and to the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, 120 South Wing, 878-4500" (BSC Office of Disabilities Services Syllabus Statement).

Required Texts & Tools

- (1) COM 215 Course Reading Pack – Available (approximately \$25) at **Queen City Imaging**, 3100 Main Street. Open first week of class 9am-5pm Friday and Sat, 10am-3pm. Open M-F 9am-5pm after that. Telephone: 832-8100. From BSC, left on Elmwood, right on Amherst or Hertel, left on Main St. Elmwood bus to Hertel bus, get off at Main Street. QCI is one block north of LaSalle subway station.
- (2) On Photography, by Susan Sontag, Picador Press (\$13). Available at the Main Street **Talking Leaves Bookstore** (BSC Text Section) 3158 Main St. (837-8554). TL is between Hertel and Winspear Avenues, one block north of Queen City Imaging.
- (3) Students should have access to a **camera** in order to complete photo array assignments. Format (digital or film) is unimportant. Students will turn in prints on paper as per assignment instructions.

Fall 2011 Course Outline

WEEK 1 (8/30, 9/1)



Introductions. Course expectations. Discuss visual media in our lives and an overview of the crafting of those images. Discuss Coca Cola™ red, Pepsi™ blue and Santa Claus.

Read: *Week 2 Readings.*

WEEK 2 (9/6, 9/8)



Television in American culture. The transformation from the spoken word to the printed word to a visually oriented society. Discuss Mander and Postman.

Read: *Week 3 Readings.*

WEEK 3 (9/13, 9/15)

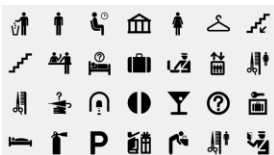


Four aspects of visual literacy. Using visual literacy tools. Widely used visual conventions. The role of culture in decoding visual messages. Visual manipulation.

Read: *Week 4 Readings*

Think about Photo Array #1. Budget 15 hours to complete this assignment.

WEEK 4 (9/20, 9/22)



Visual literacy cont. The physiology of seeing. Sensual/Perceptual theories of visual communication. Semiotics. Gestalt. Codes.

Read: *Week 5 Readings.*

Prepare: Photo Array #1. **Due 10/6**

WEEK 5 (9/27, 9/29) No Class 2/22 (President's Day Weekend)

☞ Typography. How We See FONTS. Using fonts to communicate ideas and moods. Graphic design. How and why we design messages as we do. Principles of graphic design. Digital graphics. Design principles.

Read: *On Photography* p. 3-48.

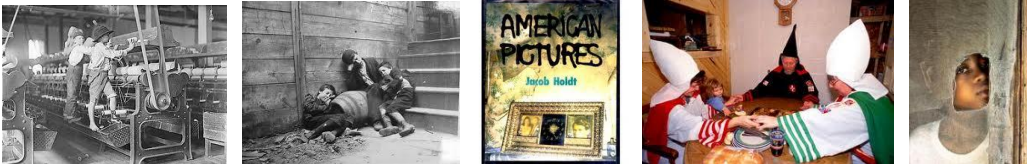
WEEK 6 (10/4, 10/6) 📷 Photo Array # 1 Due 10/6



Rethinking photography. The role of still image photography in American culture. Examining photographic ethics: Is photography predatory? Seeing America through photography. Discuss Sontag. Horror as art. View Dianne Arbus' photographs.

Read: *Week 7 Readings.*

WEEK 7 (10/11, 10/13)



Documentary photography and its role in American history. Photojournalism. Ethics of photojournalism. View the photographs of Jacob Holdt, Jacob Riis and Camilo Jose Vergara. Aesthetics and technology of photography.

Read: *Week 8 Readings.*

Study: for Mid-Term Exam

WEEK 8 (10/18, 10/20) 🖋 In Class Mid Term Exam 10/20



Trauma, pain and mediated images – photography, fear and our culture of anxiety. Analyzing visual images. View classic AP and NY Times photos.

Read: *Week 9 Readings.*

WEEK 9 (10/25, 10/27)



Deconstructing and Interpreting film and television images. How do we make them? Editing techniques. Using editing to convey emotion. Viewer involvement. Conventions of film editing.

Read: *Week 10 Readings*

Work on: *Photo Array # 2 (Due Week 11 – 11/10) This should take 15 hours.*

WEEK 10 (11/1, 11/3)



Advertising. Image based culture. Critique of advertising images. View *Merchants of Cool*.

Read: *Week 11 Readings.*

Prepare: *Photo Array # 2 due Week 11 (11/10).*

WEEK 11 (11/8, 11/10) Photo Array # 2 due 11/10.



Meme Wars. Art and advertising. Advertising as visual persuasion. Advertising and propaganda. The semiotics of consumerism. Deconstruct a Whopper™.

Read: *Week 12 Readings.*

WEEK 12 (11/15, 11/17)



Pornography and the commodification of sexuality. Pornography vs. erotica. The relationship between advertising and pornography. How advertising images depict women. View sample advertisements. Discuss imagery in contemporary ads.

Read: *Week 13 Readings*

WEEK 13 (11/22) No Class 11/24



Discussion of image-based culture. The future of visual communication. Home-made media. Media deconstruction.

Complete: "Graded in 40 Seconds" project – due 12/8

WEEK 14 (11/29, 12/1)



Image Immersion Experience. *Koyaanisqatsi*. or

Week 15 (12/6, 12/8) "Graded in 40 seconds" project due 12/8.

The Ad and the Ego. The future of Visual Media.

CEP Week Final Exam – 12/13 (Tuesday) @ 9:40AM

Suggested Visual Communication Readings:

- *Obey the Giant: Life in the Image World* by Rick Poynor. Berlin: Birkhauser 2007
- *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. London: Penguin.
- *Visual Literacy: Image, Mind, & Reality* by Paul Messaris. Boulder: Westview.
- *Visual Journalism* by C. Harris and P.M. Lester. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- *Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication 3rd Edition* by Arthur Asa Berger. New York: McGraw Hill. 2008

- Regarding the Pain of Others by Susan Sontag. New York: Picador. 2003.
 - Photojournalism or Photofiction: Ethics & Media Imagery in the Digital Age by Thomas Wheeler. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. 2002.
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About the Cover: Street Art of Shephard Fairey photographed by Dr. Niman in Austin Texas, January 2010.

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