

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
Office of Extended Studies

COMMUNICATION and POWER
COMM 461: SEMINAR IN COMMUNICATION
Spring 2010

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Office Hours: Posted
Communication Studies

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Hi everyone. Welcome to Comm 461: Communication and Power.

We are all about to partake in a college course online – together. So, let's try to start very simple, ok? At its core, this course is about oppression and resistance.

For example – across human history, there has always been slavery and resistance to it. In more specific terms, the course has us examine how communication is central to oppression and resistance – that is, how communication is central to the negotiation of power.

The course takes as its central questions: how do humans use communication to oppress – and how do they use communication to resist oppression?

To understand this idea – let us first recognize that one feature of history is the tendency of human beings to oppress each other. History tells us harsh stories of slavery, genocide, poverty, sexism, worker oppression, imperialism, fascism, and on and on. It is clear that humans have suffered much at the hands of other humans.

Keep in mind, however, that oppression is not a thing of the past – but instead, is very much alive today. Indeed, right now, around the world, slavery, genocide, sexism, poverty, and imperialism are occurring at levels that almost defy comprehension.

A group of scholars, known as critical theorists, strongly desire to understand and change the systems of oppression they see around them. They study how and why people use power to oppress – and how oppression might be overcome.

Let us look together at some of the significant ideas of critical theorists – let us agree and disagree with them, and make up our own minds about how communication is central to oppression and resistance.

To review: the course introduces students to the academic project of critical theory, and invites them to apply critical theory to situations in which they see oppression and resistance occurring.

Your first assignment—besides reading the rest of the syllabus—is to (1) to read View Set 1 in the 'View Set' tab and (2) to respond to Discussion #1 in the 'Discussion Board' tab. Have fun...

COURSE READINGS:

1. Macey, D. The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory (Penguin Books: New York): 2000 or 2005 edition (either is okay).

→this book is available at the Book Stop or online.

→use this book to look-up words from the readings/viewings that you need help defining.

2. Various online texts: see 'view sets and assignments'.

GROUND RULES

1. Academic Integrity: Honor Code

All members of the University of Northern Colorado community are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and promote five fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Respect, Fairness, and Responsibility. These core elements foster an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which serves as a foundation and guides the UNC community's academic, professional, and personal growth. Endorsement of these core elements by students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees strengthens the integrity and value of our academic climate. UNC's policies and recommendations for academic misconduct will be followed. For additional information, please see the Dean of Student's website, Student Handbook link <http://www.unco.edu/dos/handbook/index.html>

2. Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services at (970) 351-2289 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure appropriate accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

3. Due Dates

You are expected to complete your assignments on time or accept the penalties without complaint. Assignment dates should not be missed—except under the most dire of circumstances. If you encounter circumstances that will impede you from completing an assignment on time, contact me to discuss options.

4. Written Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted through blackboard. At the end of every assignment, you will find a 'View/Complete Assignment' tab. Use this tab to complete and submit your written work. I strongly suggest you write the assignment in another program and then "paste" it into the Assignment tab. It is important to remember to hit

the submit button when the assignment is finished. It is also strongly recommended that you keep a copy of your assignment in-case it is not transmitted properly. This may help prevent you from having to re-write the assignment.

5. Online Class Discussion

This course examines powerful and sensitive issues—issues which all of us will be discussing and debating. You are expected to comport yourself in these discussions with respect and poise. No one benefits—indeed, all of us are reduced—if a discussion degenerates into disrespectful or attack-minded talk. Even if you disagree vehemently with a classmate about an idea or opinion, I expect you to maintain an air of respect and open-mindedness in your talk. If any student steps beyond the pale of reasonable and respectful dialogue, I reserve the right to remove you from this discussion and potentially from the course.

In essence, the same standards of behavior that you would follow in “real life” apply in an on-line course. Class netiquette mandates that you do your best to act within the laws of society while interacting with your classmates on-line.

Here are a few tips:

1. Remember there is a human on the other side . . . Think before you post.
2. Be ethical.
3. Respect others and be courteous.
4. Share your knowledge, do your part to create a community of learners.
5. Forgive mistakes, we are all a newbie at some time, we learn by doing.
6. Ask questions.
7. Avoid using ALL CAPITALS! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING!
8. Use conventional English, you are in college, not text messaging a friend.
9. The use of emoticons is okay ☺

6. Student Satisfaction Evaluation

Participants will be asked to evaluate the workshop for instructors’ knowledge, interest and enthusiasm as well as providing additional information on classes or topics which you would like to see developed as a future offering from UNC.

7. Course Withdrawal Information

In accordance with University and Colorado Department of Higher Education policy, if you drop this class after the course starts you will be assessed a drop fee. The drop fee is pro-rated up to the half-way point in the class. You are legally responsible for payment of full tuition once 50% of this course has been concluded. In order to be eligible to receive any refund of tuition, you must contact the Office of Extended Studies (1-800-232-1749) to formally withdraw from your class. Your refund, if applicable, will be based on the date of contact with our office. Withdrawals received via telephone during non-business hours will be processed and dated on the next working day.

Failure to notify us will result in UNC tuition being owed even though you do not attend or complete the coursework.

8. Library Services for Distance Education and Off-Campus Students: Obtaining Materials from UNC Libraries

Off-campus students residing within 50 miles of the UNC campus are required to come to the library and borrow materials in person. Students residing more than 50 miles from campus may request that materials be delivered to them. All requests must include complete citations. We will supply materials from the UNC Libraries, as well as materials from other libraries obtained via Interlibrary Loan. Articles will be delivered via email. Books will be mailed first class. Delivery time by U.S. postal service is approximately 1 week. It is the responsibility of the student to return books by the date due. UNC does not pay return postage on books. For information on document delivery, call (970) 351-1446.

Requests for materials may be made through the following methods:

Online: <http://www.unco.edu/library/forms/distancerequest.htm>

By email: library.ocp@unco.edu

By fax: (970) 351-2540

COURSE PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Response Papers

There are 6 response papers assigned throughout the summer session (see course schedule). The content of each paper will stem from questions posed from the assigned reading. The questions for each response paper are outlined in the 'Papers' tab. Each paper should be 2 full pages single-spaced (or 4 full pages double-spaced), and should represent your best writing. I suggest editing each paper 4 to 5 times prior to submission. For submission requirements, see 'written assignments' in 'ground rules'. The best format to follow is as follows:

Introduction sentence—thesis sentence (or claim that is the central argument of your response paper) — brief preview of the content of the paper.

Primary claim that heads-off this section— followed by supporting ideas and evidence.

Primary claim that heads-off this section— followed by supporting ideas and evidence.

And, so on.

2. Threaded Discussion— Online Discussion

Regular and consistent participation on the discussion board is **crucial to your success** in this course. This is an on-line course, you do not have to attend a class, and your participation in group discussion is **equivalent to attendance in the class**. Nearly one quarter of your points in this class stems from your input in group discussion, so please take them very seriously.

We will have 6 graded discussion topics throughout the session. Each of these discussions is a discussion period—the beginning and ending of which are outlined in the course schedule. During each discussion period, you are required to participate two times, each on different days. Yes, you may participate more if you like. But at a minimum: two times per topic—one each on two separate days.

The discussions will allow you to share your ideas and perspectives with the other students in our class. When we have a discussion question, you have the option of either responding directly to the question or to respond to someone else's response.

6 discussion topics x 2 entries each=12 total entries. Each entry is worth a total of 10 points. (12 entries x 10pts =120 pts total).

Postings on our discussion board will be assessed based upon three criteria: (1) quality of ideas—unique, insightful, and relevant: 40% (2) quality of supporting materials—citations from readings/viewing: 40% and (3) quality of writing—spelling, grammar, and organization: 20%. Postings should be between 100-200 words. To make your life easier, I suggest writing your thoughts out first in a word processing program (e.g., Word) and then cutting and pasting your response into the discussion board. By doing so, you can take advantage of the spelling and grammar programs available in these programs. Please avoid: (1) sweeping generalizations, (2) critiques without evidence, and (3) simple agreement with another posting without elaborating or reframing.

3. Critical Theorist Summary

Throughout the semester you will have the chance to read and reflect upon the works of many critical theorists. This assignment charges you to choose one of those theorists and construct a brief summary of his or her ideas—and to share your ideas with the class. This summary will count 30 points toward your final grade. The summary need not be long, an extended paragraph will do. In it, identify the theorist's name, his/her area of focus, a 5-6 line concise summary of his/her main ideas, and finally a brief outline of what it is you like about this theorist's specific angle. Examples of critical theorists might include Theodore Adorno, Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, or Betty Friedan. For resources, see sites in the 'external links' tab. Your summary is due to the class discussion board on June 23rd. The class will then spend Discussion 7 discussing each other's ideas.

4. One Original 'Critical Theory' Theory

As a student of critical theory, you should not only read the theories of others, but develop your own critical theories as well. This assignment charges students to apply a critical lens to communication text they believe to be significant and to develop their own original critical theory based on that application. The idea here is to develop insights into how power works with communication as its central organizing feature.

Look around you, power and oppression are occurring everywhere, both on explicit and on very subtle levels. Devise a theory that is an original insight into the processes of oppression. Follow closely the model provided in 'sample paper' section in the syllabus.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

6 response papers x 25 pts each.....150pts
Threaded Discussions.....140pts
Original Theory Paper..... 110 pts
400 pts total

400-373: A 372-360: A-
359-348: B+ 347-332: B 331-320: B-
319-308: C+ 307-292: C 291-280: C-
279-268: D+ 267-252: D 251-240: D-
239-000: F

While all of us have been required to study history at some point in our education, very rarely have we been asked to study in depth how and why people create systems of oppression and domination and how resistance is mobilized against these systems. A group of scholars known as critical theorists take these topics as their primary focus. They want to understand the reasons and methods of oppression and they want to help transform society so it is less oppressive. While their ideas seem complicated at times, we can always return to the basic idea that critical theorists want to explain and change economic oppression, racial oppression, gender oppression, political oppression—all forms of oppression. As is stated in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy reading above, *According to these theorists, a "critical" theory may be distinguished from a "traditional" theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them."* In this course, we will focus on how oppression operates in specific social arenas, and in particular, how communication is a central feature of how both oppression and resistance work.

Introduction to Critical Theory

One harsh reality of history is that humans oppress each other. Systems of oppression such as slavery, sexism, and imperialism are not only pervasive, but often violent. From ancient-Egyptian slavery to modern-day sweatshop labor, oppressors have sought to serve their interests at the expense of the oppressed.

Critical theorists are scholars who strongly believe that oppressive practices should be studied and changed. Feminists, for example, study how women have had to struggle for equality in patriarchal societies and, at the same time, they try to remake society so it is more equal. Race theorists both study and seek to transform the practices of racism. Class scholars focus on how the poor are often subjected to oppression at the hands of

the rich, while, at the same time, seek to develop economic systems that shrink the wide gap that exists between the rich and the poor.

Critical theory is simply the body of literature to which these scholars contribute.

The history of critical theory is complex—but at its core is a group of scholars who study the lived experiences of oppression and resistance. Famous critical scholars include Karl Marx, Theodore Adorno, Betty Friedan, and Stuart Hall. At their core, these theorists ask us to examine how race, religion, gender, politics, corporations, and the media have been exploited as systems of oppression.

Two prime questions all critical theorists share are (1) how and why do certain groups oppress other groups? and (2) how can oppression be overcome?

Scholars who study race, for example, seek to understand the reasons and methods of racism—as well as the reasons and methods of its resistance. Race scholars often study the U.S. civil rights movement, for example. To do so, they try to have a solid understanding of the context in which the civil rights movement occurred, its various players, and the methods of oppression and resistance that have occurred in this arena. Two prime questions race scholars ask here are: (1) What are the systems of domination that have been created to oppress black populations in the history of America? and (2) How has resistance, such as the civil rights movement, fared in its attempts to overcome systems of white supremacy?

The ‘race-scholar’ example simply points out the idea that there are blocs of scholars who are studying oppression as it was and is lived. Let’s turn here to look at how oppression, power, and communication are linked.

Critical theorists see the notion of *power* as central to the process of domination. Simply put, power is the ability of one group to influence or control another group. Initially, scholars recognized power as violent force, which makes sense given the extent to which violence has been used across history in the service of domination. The Roman Empire, for example, is a case study in violent domination. For a thousand years, the Romans used brutal levels of violence as the prime method to expand and control their empire.

In the early 20th century, critical theorists began to notice something interesting: oppressors were employing propaganda more so than violence to oppress and control populations. The Nazi propaganda project, for example, headed by Joseph Goebbels, was an elaborate system of communication—not violence—designed to shape and control German public opinion. Using a system of talk and images, the Nazi’s strategically controlled public opinion to support their imperial military campaign. In essence, they exerted power (or influence) over their own population by using strategic communication.

By studying closely Nazi and other propaganda systems, scholars began to see how communication can play a central role in how domination and oppression works. Simply put, while the old model of domination focused on violence-as-the-prime-means-of-control, the new model focuses on strategic communication-as-the-prime-means-of-control.

Let’s look at an example to illustrate this idea—the practice of sexism in America.

Most societies across history have been patriarchal—that is, they have been structured to privilege male interests at the expense of female interests. The United States, for example, has many patriarchal characteristics. Here, women have had to struggle to obtain the right to vote, to be treated as equals in the eyes of the law, to have reproductive rights, and to have equal opportunity and pay in the workplace. While violence has certainly been used to oppress women in the U.S., female oppression has more so been based in practices of communication.

Ok, so, how does communication-based oppression work? Well, here, it works subtly as we are all socialized into American society—into the system of talk and images our society uses to communicate to us the proper role and value of men and women in our culture. From a very early age, we are all taught via Barbie dolls, Disney movies, Teen Beat, and MTV that girls are valued primarily for their surface appearance. The sea of images we consume as we grow older reinforces this basic idea: women in advertising, beauty contests, super models, Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition, Cosmo, Maxim, Girls Gone Wild—all reinforce the idea that women are valued primarily as visual objects.

The idea that women are not often valued for their intelligence, drive, and ideas is reinforced via their conspicuous absence in American history. As we read American history books, we find that virtually all of our political leaders have been men, as have our academic, economic, medical, and religious leaders. With few exceptions, men have been allotted the primary role of shaping our political, social, and economic system.

In this sense, the American system is one of talk and images (a system of communication) that subtly teaches all of us that men are the rightful shapers and leaders of society while women are valued most when attractive, quiet, and controlled. One should not under-appreciate the struggle women have had to endure to overcome patriarchal oppression in the United States and beyond—systems of oppression which have forced women to endure incredible hardships simply to achieve basic equalities.

Feminists are simply critical theorists who study the how and why of oppression against women in patriarchal societies—as well as how feminist movements have struggled against these oppressive systems.

Feminists are but one example of how critical theorists study oppression. There are many critical theorists trying to make the world less oppressive—your job is to tap into their scholarship and activism. In this course we will focus on how corporations, education, the media, sexism, and racism are systems of oppression that employ communication strategies to achieve their oppressive goals.

Note that critical theory is not conspiracy theory. Critical theorists do not believe that there are evil men in dark rooms plotting the oppression of other groups. Instead, they see oppression as something that occurs in broad daylight, in plain view for all to see. The histories of racism, classism, sexism, and global imperialism are not secretive projects—they are blatantly open forms of oppression that critical theorists believe should be studied and changed. Does this mean that conspiracies don't exist? No, it means that visible forms of oppression are so rampant that theorizing about possible

conspiracies seems trivial relative to confronting the systemic oppression that exists out in the open.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	View Set	Response Paper	Discussion #
Jan 12	Introduction	*	*	#1 begins
Jan 13	Critical Theory	1	*	#1
Jan 14	Critical Theory	1	*	#1
Jan 15	Critical Theory	1	*	#1
Jan 19	MLK Day	--	--	#1 ends
Jan 20	Corporations	2	*	#2 begins
Jan 21	Corporations	2	*	#2
Jan 22	Corporations	2	*	#2
Jan 26	Corporations	2	*	#2
Jan 27	Corporations	2	*	#2
Jan 28	Corporations	2	*	#2
Jan 29	Corporations	3		#2 ends
			Response 1 due by Feb 1 by 11pm	
Feb 2	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 3	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 4	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 5	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 9	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 10	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 11	Education	3	*	#3
Feb 12	Education	4		#3 ends
			Response 2 due Feb 15 by 11pm	
Feb 16	Media	4	*	#4 begins
Feb 17	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 18	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 19	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 23	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 24	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 25	Media	4	*	#4
Feb 26	Media	4	*	#4 ends
			Response 3 due March 1 by 11pm	

Mar 2	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 3	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 4	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 5	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 9	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 10	Feminism	5	*	#5
Mar 11	Feminism	5	*	#5 ends
Mar 12	Feminism	5	Response 4 due Mar 8 by 11pm	Break Begins
-----	SPRING BREAK			
Mar 23	Race Studies	6	*	#6 begins
Mar 24	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Mar 25	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Mar 26	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Mar 30	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Mar 31	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Apr 1	Race Studies	6	*	#6
Apr 2	Race Studies	6		#6 ends
			Response 5 due Apr 5 by 11pm	
Apr 6	Western Dominance	7	*	#7 begins
Apr 7	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 8	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 9	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 13	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 14	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 15	Western Dominance	7	*	#7
Apr 16	Western Dominance	7		#7 ends
			Response 6 due Apr 19 by 11pm	
Apr 20	Original Theories	*	*	#8
Apr 21	Original Theories	*	Theory Outline Due to class	#8
Apr 22	Original Theories	*	*	#8
Apr 23	Original Theories	*	*	#8
Apr 27	Original Theories	*	*	#8
Apr 28	Original Theories	*	*	#8
Apr 29	Original Theories	*	*	#8 ends
Apr 30	Original Theories	*	Original Theory Due to me	--