

## **John Cabot University**

COM 111-1, Introduction to Visual Communication, Fall 2018

Period: Monday & Wednesday, 10:00– 11:15

Room: G.G.1-Guarini Campus, Ground Floor, Room 1

Professor: Marco G. Ferrari, [mferrari@johncabot.edu](mailto:mferrari@johncabot.edu)

Office hours: by appointment

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Course Description**

From photojournalism to Instagram, 21st century communication is primarily image-based. Whether its mass media, individual expression, social media or alternative media, images are used for promoting ideas, products, information and political discourses. In this course students investigate the role of visual culture in daily life, exploring fine art, popular culture, film, television, advertising, business communications, propaganda, viral social media and information graphics. As a critical introduction to visual communication, this course mixes theory, analysis and practical activities for an applied understanding of key issues, including the relationship between images, power and politics; the historical practice of looking; visual media analysis; spectatorship; historic evolution of visual codes; impact of visual technologies; media literacy; information graphics literacy; and global visual culture.

### **Summary of Course Content**

Topics include the evolution of visual culture from the Renaissance to Postmodernism; an introduction to semiotics; the influence of photography from its early inception to Instagram; image politics in elections, terrorism and war; the role of visual and reproduction technology; the study of images in popular culture, ads and viral media; fonts, visual data and information graphics; global visual culture; and image ethics.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The course's content and activities are meant to prepare students for future studies in communications and media studies. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Describe key theories and concepts of visual studies
- Identify how ways of looking are culturally constructed
- Perform semiotic media analysis
- Use media literacy to analyze a range of visual texts, including advertising, social media memes and information graphics
- Distinguish communication strategies in visual media
- Critique the role of images in shaping political discourses
- Assess ethical dilemmas posed by images
- Generate visual media that reflect key themes from the course

### **Textbooks**

- Title—Visual Culture; Author—Howells and Negreiros; Publisher—Polity; ISBN—0745650716
- Title—Introduction to Visual Communication; Author—Susan N. Barnes; Publisher—Peter Lang; ISBN— 1433112574
- Title—Media Semiotics: An Introduction Second Edition; Author—Jonathan Bignell; Publisher—Manchester University Press; ISBN— 978-0719062056
- Blank notebook for journaling

It is recommended for you to purchase these books. A copy of each is on reserve at the library.

- Anglo American Bookshop, via della Vite, 102 (<http://www.aab.it>)
- Almost Corner Bookshop, via del Moro, 45 (near the Tiber Campus)

### **Course Home Page**

Course Enrollment Key: **COM111-1Fall18**

<http://moodle.johncabot.edu/>

Updates and additional readings, guides and in-class material will be posted on **Moodle** along

with auxiliary readings and points of reference. Since **Moodle** is not integrated with the school database, and with the class roster, you will have to create your own account, if you do not have already one. Once you have an account, you will have to enroll in this course by using the enrollment key (noted above).

### **Grading/Assignment Methods**

- Midterm Exam (15)
- Final Exam (15)
- Image Analysis Paper (15)
- Infographic (15)
- Four Observation Activities (20)
- Participation and Attendance: a combination of class participation, attendance and evidence of reading required texts will be graded (15)
- Journal: You are required to keep a hand written journal and take physical notes during class. No computers will be allowed. (5)

A: Work of this quality directly addresses the question or problem raised and provides a coherent argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information or content. This type of work demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate concepts and theory and has an element of novelty and originality. There is clear evidence of a significant amount of reading beyond that required for the course.

B: This is highly competent level of performance and directly addresses the question or problem raised. There is a demonstration of some ability to critically evaluate theory and concepts and relate them to practice. Discussions reflect the student's own arguments and are not simply a repetition of standard lecture and reference material. The work does not suffer from any major errors or omissions and provides evidence of reading beyond the required assignments.

C: This is an acceptable level of performance and provides answers that are clear but limited, reflecting the information offered in the lectures and reference readings.

D: This level of performances demonstrates that the student lacks a coherent grasp of the material. Important information is omitted and irrelevant points included. In effect, the student has barely done enough to persuade the instructor that s/he should not fail.

F: This work fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question. Most of the material in the answer is irrelevant.

### **Attendance Requirements and Examination Policy**

You cannot make-up a major exam (midterm or final) without the permission of the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office will grant such permission only when the absence was caused by a serious impediment, such as a documented illness, hospitalization or death in the immediate family (in which you must attend the funeral) or other situations of similar gravity. Absences due to other meaningful conflicts, such as job interviews, family celebrations, travel difficulties, student misunderstandings or personal convenience, will not be excused.

Students who will be absent from a major exam must notify the Dean's Office prior to that exam. Absences from class due to the observance of a religious holiday will normally be excused. Individual students who will have to miss class to observe a religious holiday should notify the instructor by the end of the Add/Drop period to make prior arrangements for making up any work that will be missed. Three late arrivals (more than 10 minutes) are counted as one unexcused absence. More than three absences will result in the loss of a letter grade if not adequately excused.

## **SCHEDULE**

(Note: this schedule is subject to change)

### **Part I: Visual Analysis**

#### **Week 1, September 3 & 5: Introduction to Visual Communication**

- Howells/Negreiros: Introduction
- Barnes: Introduction & Chapter 1
- Bignell: Introduction

#### **Week 2, September 10 & 12: Visual Theories, Visual Codes, Genre and Intertextuality (Semiotics)**

- Howells/Negreiros: Chapter 1–4 & 6

#### **Week 3, September 17 & 19: Cont. Visual Theories, Visual Codes, Genre and Intertextuality (Semiotics)**

- Bignell: Chapter 1
- Barnes: Chapters 2–4

#### **Week 4, September 24 & 26: Cont. Visual Theories, Visual Codes, Genre and Intertextuality (Semiotics)**

- Barnes: Chapters 2–4

#### **Week 5, October 1 & 3: Persuasion**

- Barnes: Chapter 13
- Bignell: Chapter 2
- \*Midterm review (midterm first day of week 6)

### **Part II: Images Analysis**

#### **Week 6, October 8 & 10: Media Literacy and Visual Analysis**

- \*Midterm Exam
- Barnes: Chapters 5–6
- Media Students Handbook: Image-Analysis (PDF, available on course website)
- Additional readings: Handout
- \*Image analysis paper assigned

#### **Week 7, October 15 & 17: Typography, Graphic Design and Information Graphic**

- Lester: Chapter 7: Typography; Chapter 8: Graphic Design; Chapters 9: Informational Graphics
- \*Infographic assigned (due final exam week)

#### **Week 8, October 22 & 24: Cont. Typography, Graphic Design and Information Graphic**

- Barnes: Chapter 7
- Bignell: Chapters 3–4

### **Part II: Media Formats**

#### **Week 9, October 29 & 31: Drawing and Painting: From fine art to comics**

- Howells/Negreiros: Chapter 7
- Lester: Chapter 10—Cartoons
- McCloud: Understanding Comics Understanding Comics, Chapter 1 (PDF, available on course website)
- \*Image analysis paper due

**Week 10, November 5 & 7: Photography**

- Howells/Negreiros: Ch 8
- Susan Sontag: On Photography (“In Plato’s Cave,”), (PDF, available on course website)
- Lester: Chapter 11—Photography

**Week 11, November 12 & 14: Film**

- Barnes: Chapter 8
- Bignell: Chapter 9

**Week 12, November 19 & 21: TV**

- Barnes: Chapter 10
- Bignell: Chapters 5–7

**Week 13:, November 26 & 28: Computers and the Web: Memes, Viral Imagery and Culture Jamming**

- Howells/Negreiros: Chapters 11–12

**Week 14, December 3 & 5: Conclusion—Global Visual Culture**

- Barnes: Chapter 14
- Howells/Negreiros: Conclusion
- Final Exam Review

**Week 15: Exam Week**

- \*Final exam
- \*Infographic due
- \*Class journal due