Comm 240

Intro Comm Criticism

Fall 2017

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**Course Assistant**: Vicky Pisula

**Overview of the Course**:

Academic communication criticism (film criticism as well as rhetorical criticism) typically differs from popular forms of criticism in the amount of attention it devotes to descriptive analysis. Rigorous descriptive analysis is the foundation of critical inquiry in communication studies. This course introduces students to some of the basic analytic concepts that communication critics employ to analyze film, prose discourse (essays, speeches), and visual images. Course concepts include media grammars and styles, figurative language and visual tropes, narrative forms, and genre. Throughout the course students will learn how to prepare close readings of multiple texts.

The primary objective of the course is to introduce you to a range of *basic* terms and concepts--a vocabulary if you will--for critically analyzing film and prose discourse. The course does not attempt to introduce you to the entire field of film or rhetorical criticism. Mastering this analytic vocabulary, understanding the meaning of the terms and concepts, is the essential first step in learning to do film and rhetorical criticism and, by the end of the semester, you should have begun to master this vocabulary.

But criticism is more than just learning the meaning of terms just as learning a language is more than simply learning the meaning of words. Learning the basic analytic vocabulary of film and rhetorical criticism is like learning any language: you learn the language by putting it into practice. And putting the vocabulary of film/media studies and rhetorical criticism into practice isn’t a mechanical process nor is it like following a recipe; it will involve issues of judgment and discernment. Criticism is not something you learn in the abstract. While it is very useful to read about criticism and to read examples of criticism (and you will be doing a little of both this semester), criticism is like most practical activities (cooking, riding a bike, painting, etc.): you learn by *doing* it. Through course discussions, class exercises, and a range of projects you will learn how to employ a range of terms and concepts in order to produce communication criticism.

**Course Objectives:**

As noted above, the broad objective of the course is to introduce students to the practice of analytic, academic communication criticism and to provide students with a basic vocabulary that can be employed in critical analysis. More specifically, upon completing the course, students should be able to:

1. identify and explicate the basic logic of, and elements in, critical inquiry (emphasis on description and interpretation);

2. define and illustrate key concepts in communication criticism;

3. demonstrate their comprehension of an analytic vocabulary (a vocabulary that includes traditional grammatical and syntactical terms as well as terms from the classical and contemporary traditions of rhetoric and media studies) that enables the close reading of multiple texts from different communication media;

4. demonstrate an ability to employ the analytic vocabulary in critical practice (including an ability to “chart” sentences, paragraphs, and film scenes) in order to identify structures and patterns and assess their rhetorical significance;

5. demonstrate an ability to describe narrative forms and generic structures in prose discourse (essays, speeches) and film in order to explore their rhetorical significance; and

6. demonstrate an ability to use the analytic vocabulary as a way to edit their own writing (which means that the quality of the course’s written work is extremely important).

**Required readings**:

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Tenth edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2013.

All other required readings will be available through Moodle or as a handout. See course schedule below for reading assignment due dates.

**Required film viewings**:

View (and take careful descriptive notes of) *Dead Man Walking* before the 9/20 class period.

View (and take careful descriptive notes of) *Shawshank Redemption*  before the 10/30 class period.

Because you may encounter technological problems, view the film at least two days BEFORE the due date in the syllabus. The video may take a minute to load. If it appears not to be loading, try refreshing the page. Keep your browser and flash player up to date. The video-stream is built to work in all browsers, but if you encounter problems, try Firefox. (Avoid using the Chrome Browser). Full screen mode is not supported by Safari on Mac computers running Leopard and Tiger. If you need assistance, please contact Kaity Fain, Educational Specialist, at [kfain@pugetsound.edu](mailto:kfain@pugetsound.edu) or Tech Services.

Visual course materials are for educational purposes only and limited to students enrolled in the course. They are protected by copyright law and may not be copied, downloaded, stored, transmitted, shared or changed in any way.

**Course requirements/grading**:

Active participation in class discussion and exercises; completion of readings, film viewings, and other written assignments as assigned. Students who fail to meet this minimum requirement (as demonstrated in their attendance and their ability to discuss readings, answer questions, and productively engage in other class activities) can expect to have their final course grade lowered anywhere from one-third (e.g. from a B to a B-) to a whole letter grade.

Five analysis projects/papers. Each project/paper will be approximately 5pp. You will receive analysis assignment handouts describing each project in greater depth approximately one week before the project is due. Due dates are noted on the schedule below. **Each project will be worth 20 points.**

Over the course of the semester students will have the opportunity to complete a number of optional extra credit assignments (some assignments will be in class exercises while others will be take home). Students can earn a maximum of ten points through these optional extra credit assignments.

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

100 to 95 A 82.5 to 80 B- 72.5 to 70 C-

94 to 90 A- 79 to 77 C+ 69 to 67 D+

89 to 87 B+ 76 to 73 C 66 to 63 D

86 to 83 B

**Course Policies**

1. Students must comply with University policies regarding academic honesty. It is your responsibility to review Logger on-line so that you avoid violating University academic honesty policies, especially those relating to plagiarism.

You *must* pay special attention to maintaining academic integrity when multiple students are working on the same topic for their projects. The fact that you and your classmates are working on the same topic *does not* transform that assignment into a group project in which you would share resources with each other. *All course assignments are individual projects. Do not share your research with your classmates.*

2. *Turn off* your cell phones before class.

3. Please do not sit in class with sweatshirt hoods over your head. It is rude.

4. Please arrive to class on time. Have the reading/viewing assignments completed by the dates specified in the syllabus. ALWAYS bring copies of the assigned reading/visual analysis homework with you to class.

5. Please use courteous and appropriate communication behaviors in the classroom. Do not use derogatory language about people, their beliefs or their behaviors. You can disagree or make judgments in a respectful manner.

6. Please review university emergency preparedness and response procedures posted at www.pugetsound.edu/emergency/ <<http://www.pugetsound.edu/emergency/>> .  There is a link on the university home page.  Familiarize yourself with hall exit doors and the designated gathering area for your class and laboratory buildings.    
   
If building evacuation becomes necessary (e.g. earthquake), meet your instructor at the designated gathering area so she/he can account for your presence.  Then wait for further instructions.  Do not return to the building or classroom until advised by a university emergency response representative.  
   
If confronted by an act of violence, be prepared to make quick decisions to protect your safety.  Flee the area by running away from the source of danger if you can safely do so.  If this is not possible, shelter in place by securing classroom or lab doors and windows, closing blinds, and turning off room lights.  Lie on the floor out of sight and away from windows and doors.  Place cell phones or pagers on vibrate so that you can receive messages quietly.  Wait for further instructions.

7. If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Peggy Perno, Director of the Office of Accessibility and Accommodations, 105 Howarth, 253.879.3395. She will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

6. Upon approval from the Dean of Students’ Office, students who experience a death in the family, including parent, grandparent, sibling, or persons living in the same household, are allowed three consecutive weekdays of excused absences, as negotiated with the Dean of Students. For more information, please see the Academic Handbook.

7. If you need assistance with coursework, do not hesitate to make appointments to see the professors in charge of the class. Also, you can make an appointment to see our Course Assistant, Vicky Pisula.

**Tentative class schedule** (subject to minor revisions):

Date Topic Reading

8/28 (M) Introduction to the course.

8/30 (W) Distinguishing “Content” vs. “Form”: Introduction to Analyzing “Form” in Film and Prose Discourse. Read: Bordwell and Thompson, Ch. 8 esp. pp. 315-317.

9/4 (M) No class.

9/6 (W) Analyzing Prose Form: Grammar. Read: Moodle material.

9/11 (M) Analyzing Prose Form: Grammar. Read: Moodle material.

9/13 (W) Analyzing Prose Form: Grammar. Read: Moodle material.

9/18 (M) **Assignment #1 due** on prose form 20 points

9/20 (W) Film Form: Style and Grammar. Read Bordwell & Thompson Chap. 4 on Cinematography

9/25 (M) Film Cinematography. Read Bordwell & Thompson Chap. 5. View “DMW” by today.

9/27 (W) Film Editing. Read Bordwell & Thompson Chap. 6. Application work – bring laptops to class. Choose scene for Assignment #2 – put in writing why you have chosen this scene (hand in).

10/2 (M) Film Criticism: Application work – bring laptops to class. Bring rough draft of film chart to class.

10/4 (W) Film Criticism: Bring developed draft (minimum of 4 pp.) of Assignment #2 to class

10/9 (M) **Assignment #2 due** 20 points; students share work with class

10/11 (W) Introduction to Analyzing Prose Style (Tropes and Figures); Tropes in Visual Images. Read: Moodle material.

10/16 (M) Fall Break

10/18 (W) Analyzing Tropes and Figures in Prose: Case Study #1 (MLK, “I Have a Dream”). Read: “I Have A Dream” (Moodle)

10/23 (M) Analyzing Tropes and Figures in Prose: Case Study #2 (JFK, “Inaugural Address”) and #3 (Obama, “First Inaugural”). Read: Kennedy’s “Inaugural Address” and Obama’s “First Inaugural” (Moodle).

10/25 (W) **Assignment #3 due** 20 points

10/30 (M) Introduction to Narrative Analysis. Read: Bordwell and Thompson, Chs 2-3; Moodle material. View “Shawshank Redemption” by today.

11/1 (W) Analyzing Film Narratives. Review “DMW” for practice analysis.

11/6 (M) Analyzing Film Narratives: In-class exercises; draft of plot segmentation due today (minimum 1 ½ typed, single spaced pages)

11/8 (W) Analyzing Film Narratives: In-class exercises; detailed outline of narrative analysis due today (minimum 2 single spaced pages)

11/13 (M) **Assignment #4 due** 20 points; students present work; looking ahead to film genre

11/15 (W) No class

11/20 (M) Introduction to Rhetorical and Media Genres. Read: Moodle material.

11/23 (W) No class

11/27 (M) Modern Rhetorical Genre Case Study: Apologia. Read: Moodle material.

11/29 (W) Apologia in Politics: Nixon and Clinton. Read: Moodle material.

12/4 (M) Apologia in Sports.

Read: Moodle material.

12/6 (W) **Assignment #5 due** 20 points