Spring 2018

English 306F: Introduction to Semiotics
ML 354: MW 10:00-11:30am
Instructor: Jesse Hutchison
Office: HH369: MW 1:00-3:00pm
Email: j6hutchi@uwaterloo.ca

About this course:
Semiotics is a discipline of study that examines the way that we use signs as a way to make meaning. A sign is anything that can stand for something else. Consequently, semiotics analysis can be applied to just about anything – from literature, film, fine art, and music to the clothes we wear, the body language we display, and the language that we use.

In this course we’ll have three main tasks: to read about the history and theory of semiotics; to learn the vocabulary and methodology of semiotics; and to apply vocabulary and methodology to everyday texts. In particular, we will be looking at a film, studying advertisements, and examining photography in order to consider how to practically apply semiotic theory.

Expectations:
We will be discussing these texts in significant detail. My central expectation is that you come to class fully prepared. Being fully prepared means that you have read the required texts, you have given them some thought, and you have arrived in class with something relevant to say about them, or with a question in mind. To participate fully, you must bring your texts to class with you. Please be on time, and plan to attend every class.

You are expected to show respect and consideration towards your instructor and fellow classmates. Respect and consideration involves not talking while others are addressing the class, actively listening, and not using any electronic devices (excluding laptops for note-taking) during class time. This means that all cell phones are turned off, no text messaging, no internet browsing, and no social networking.

Course Texts:
Marcel Danesi, The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice
Roland Barthes, Mythologies

Assignments and Evaluation:
Participation & Attendance: 10%
Mid-term Test: 15% June 11
Presentation and 2 page Write-Up: 15%
Essay Proposal: 5% June 27
Final Essay (8-10 pages): 30% July 16
Take Home Exam (5-7 pages): 25% August 6
Participation (10%):
Participation means that you come to class with the text, ready to express your own ideas and exchange them with your other classmates and myself. Attendance is crucial but attendance alone does not count for full participation. Please feel free to bring in outside examples that we do not discuss in class that would work for a semiotic analysis.

Test (15%):
The early mid-term test will concentrate specifically on the terms and concepts from the Danesi and Barthes texts. **June 11**

Presentation (7.5%):
Along with another classmate, you will be asked to give a ten-minute presentation on class material (not including Q&A). During your presentation, you will be summarizing and analyzing the material as well as bringing three or four topic questions for the class to discuss. Both presenters should provide a summary, analysis, and questions. Analyzing means that you can interrogate or question the material, explain why you think it’s relevant or important, give other examples not given in the material to help reinforce its argument or to show similar types of arguments, etc. Summarizing is, of course, important in helping us elucidate the material; however, you want to go further than just summary. Presenters should decide between themselves how to divide the material so that the presentation is given in the most effective manner. Presentations will be evaluated on their clarity, structure, and the class discussion.

Write-Up for Presentation (7.5%)
While you are presenting with another classmate, you will hand in your own individual report. Your report should be two pages double-spaced; it may include additional information. It will be evaluated primarily in terms of the accuracy of the summary and the strength of the analysis and questions. To a lesser extent, the presentation will be evaluated for its grammar, clarity, and structure. The write-up will be due on LEARN the same day as the presentation any time before midnight.

Essay Proposal (5%):
You will also be handing in an essay proposal in which you provide a thesis statement, main points, and a brief (bullet point) summary of each source that you intend to use. The purpose of this assignment is to have you thinking about your essays in advance with the understanding that your final paper is subject to change and always a work in progress. There is no set page limit, but the more detailed, the better. Aim for at least a full page of points. The proposal will be due on LEARN anytime before midnight. **June 27**

Essay (30%):
In your 8-10 page essay, you are to do a semiotic analysis of any topic of your choice. In many ways, the Barthes book and the subsequent essays that we read in class should give you a good idea of how to approach a semiotic analysis in essay form. At least four outside sources are required for your paper. The works cited will not count as part of your page count. Papers should be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt Times New Roman font. Remember too that 8-10 pages means at least a full eight pages at a minimum. You are to write argumentative, thesis-driven
essays. Use proper MLA citation methods. Please consult the most recent edition of the MLA handbook for details. The essay will be due on LEARN anytime before midnight. **July 16**

**Take Home Exam (25%)**
In the final few weeks of class, we will examine material on brands, advertisements, photographs, and film. The take home exam will ask you to write a 5-7 page paper where you will do a semiotic analysis on the film we watch in the last two classes, as well as an analysis on either an advertisement or a photograph which I will put up on LEARN. The analysis of the film should be at least 4 of the 5-7 pages. Because this is an exam rather than a formal essay, you will not be graded as rigidly on formal and formatting requirements (though I still expect all outside sources to be documented, if you use them). If clarity becomes an issue then this will impact on the grade but overall the focus of this should be on the semiotic analysis. **August 6**

**Grading Rubric**

**A** - The paper contains a clear, original, thought provoking, and argumentative thesis statement. The argument is persuasive and argued with coherency. Use of primary and secondary sources is exemplary. Quotations are well chosen and are smoothly integrated into the essay and sharply analyzed. There is a strong flow from paragraph to paragraph as well as from sentence to sentence. “A” papers are structured well, with solid introductions, body paragraphs, topic sentences, and conclusions. The essay remains on-topic throughout. The writing style is formal and professional. The words chosen are appropriate for the context and the writing is free from grammatical errors. Formatting details are free of errors.

**B** - The paper contains a clear and argumentative thesis statement which is argued with coherency and consistency throughout the paper. Good analysis of primary and secondary sources. Quotations are well chosen and are usually well integrated into the essay but they may occasionally be summarized rather than analyzed. There is a flow from paragraph to paragraph as well as from sentence to sentence. “B” papers are structured well, with solid introductions, body paragraphs, topic sentences, and conclusions. The essay remains on-topic for the most part but contains some tangents. The writing in the essay is clear though there are some awkward word choices and some grammatical errors throughout. The body paragraphs make good points but are occasionally too long or too short. Formatting details are mostly free of errors.

**C** – The paper contains a thesis but it is somewhat descriptive or speculative or, perhaps, somewhat unclear or awkwardly worded. There is a discussion of the primary and secondary texts but it does not always serve to reinforce an argument. The essay will occasionally veer off-topic, being about something other than the primary text. In a paper that requires research, the secondary source may be used a bit awkwardly or superficially. There is a structure at work in the paper but the essay occasionally becomes unstructured. There may be an imbalance of focus on one text over another. Paragraphs might be of good length or they might be all too long or too short. The writing style has multiple stylistic and grammatical errors leading to an occasional lack in clarity. Formatting is good but contains some errors.

**D** – The paper lacks a clear and coherent thesis statement. The discussion of the primary and secondary sources is superficial or entirely descriptive. The vast majority of the paper is off-
topic, being about something other than the primary text. The secondary source is used without clear understanding of the text and the context from which the quotation comes. There are frequent structural problems throughout. There is little flow in the paper as it contains mostly awkward transitions. Grammatical and stylistic errors contribute to a lack in clarity. The formatting contains multiple errors.

F – The paper lacks a thesis statement. The discussion of the primary and secondary sources is superficial or entirely descriptive. The vast majority of the paper is off-topic, being about something other than the primary text. It is possible that neither the primary nor the secondary text is quoted. There is a lack of structure to the paper and grammatical and stylistic errors render the paper largely unclear. The writing style may be unprofessional. The formatting either contains multiple errors or is absent entirely.

Participation Rubric

A – Your comments in class display an engagement with both the material as well as your other classmates. The comments are insightful and thought provoking. Attendance is excellent.

B – Your comments display an engagement with the material and with the course’s overall themes. While your comments are very good they are not necessarily always contributing to an overall conversation. Attendance is strong.

C – Your level of participation varies from class to class. Here, you might have an excellent attendance record without participating in the conversation. Conversely, you might participate here and there and have several absences.

D – You might have a good attendance record (marked with several absences) without participating in the conversation. You might make rare occasional comments but have missed a good number of classes.

F – You have missed a great number of classes and/or your participation in class is disruptive and/or inappropriate.

Course policies:

Missed classes and assignments
The two essays and essay proposal are to be handed in on LEARN by 11:59pm on the day the assignment is due. Microsoft Word documents are preferred over PDF and Pages. Marks will be returned on Learn. For the presentation write-up and essay proposal, I will write notes in the comment section provided by Learn. For the essay and exam, I will re-attach the document with my notes and comments on the document itself. The penalty for a late assignment is 2% per day, including weekend days. This will be incurred in all cases except certified emergencies. Papers more than ten days late will not be accepted, and a mark of zero will be given for the assignments.
A doctor’s note is required to avoid a late penalty, and it should document serious illness on and for the period directly preceding the due date for assignments, or on the scheduled dates of exams.

In cases of personal matters such as mental health concerns, I am very sympathetic but I am also unable to properly evaluate these cases. If you need an extension on work for such issues, it is crucial to go to AccessAbility and have them evaluate your case. They can then contact me if they believe you require alternate accommodations for assignments. At that point, I am always happy to help the student in any way that I can. Please see more information below for AccessAbility as well as for counselling services.

If you miss a class for unavoidable circumstances, please connect with a classmate to discuss the material that was covered during your absence.

**Appointments and email:**

I am always happy to meet with students to discuss course matters, including difficulties with the material or upcoming assignments. Please feel free to make an appointment to meet with me, or send me an email.

If you send me an email, please wait 24 hours before sending me a reminder. I may not be able to respond right away, or I may be looking into the matter on your behalf, but I will get back to you as soon as possible. If you have not received a response after 24 hours, or 48 hours on a weekend, please email me again. Please note that mail from some external email servers, such as Hotmail or Yahoo, may be bounced by the university server.

Email should be reserved for relatively simple communication matters, such as brief questions or to make an appointment. If your query will require a longer conversation as in, for example, the discussion of a grade or an assignment, please make an appointment to meet with me in person. In general, I will not give out marks over email.

**Cross-listed course (requirement for all Arts courses)**

Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science rubric.

**Academic Integrity**

*Academic Integrity:* In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage](https://arts.uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity) for more information.

*Discipline:* A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate
Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Mental Health Support

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 xt 32655
- MATES: one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek form Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- Good2Talk: Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-433 ext. 6880
- Here 24/7: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- OK2BME: set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.
Schedule:

May 2: Introduction

May 7: Danesi, Chapter One

May 9: Danesi, Chapter Two and Three

May 14: Danesi, Chapter Four and Five

May 16: Danesi, Chapter Six and Seven


June 11: In-class Test


July 18: Bignell, “Cinema”

July 23: Movie screening

July 25: Movie screening and final questions

August 6: Take-home exam due