Winter 2015

**English 306F: Introduction to Semiotics**

HH138: MTTh 8:30-9:20am  
Instructor: Jesse Hutchison  
Office: PAS 1061: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:30-11:30am  
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**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 and listening to music 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.

***PLEASE NOTE*** The use of any electronic devices or any type of behaviour that is distracting or disrespectful to others (i.e., chatting, texting, Facebook, etc.) will be noted and will detract from your participation grade.

**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% February 9
Presentation: 15%
Essay Proposal: 5% March 19
Final Essay (10-12 pages): 30% April 6
Final Exam: 25%

Participation:
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:
The early mid-term test will concentrate specifically on the terms and concepts that we will have discussed in the first month of the course.

Presentation:
You will be asked to give a presentation on one of the articles that we are scheduled to read that day. During your presentation, you will be summarizing and analyzing the article as well as bringing three or four topic questions for the class to discuss. You will hand in whatever notes you have made for the presentation.

Essay:
In your 10-12 page essay, you are to do a semiotic analysis of a text of your choice, be it film, music, literature, advertisements, logos, etc. There are several ways to approach this analysis: you may, for example, do a close reading of a scene from a film, analyze an entire film, compare and contrast multiple works, etc. At least four outside sources are required for your paper.

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.

Papers should be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt Times New Roman font. 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.
Final Exam: The final exam will be 2 hours. The exam will require you to do a semiotic analysis of yet to be determined texts where you will apply the concepts and terminology that we will have looked at throughout the term.

Course policies:
Missed classes, assignments, and exams:
The penalty for a late assignment is 2% per working day. 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.

Late assignments should be submitted to the Department of English Undergraduate Office to be date-stamped, and then placed in the department's drop-box. If your assignment is lost because you did not follow this procedure, you will be responsible for that loss, including the resulting grade. Electronic or emailed submissions will not be accepted. Please keep a copy of your assignments and submissions; in the case of a lost submission, I will ask you to provide another copy.

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.

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 come and see me during my office hours, 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.
Academic Integrity
In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community 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 Office Webpage (http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility) for more information.

Discipline
A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (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. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline (http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties (http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm).

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 (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70). 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 (http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm).

Note for Students with Disabilities
The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, 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 OPD at the beginning of each academic term.
Schedule:

Jan 5: Introduction
Jan 6: Danesi, Chapter 1
Jan 8: Danesi, Chapter 1 (cont.)
Jan 12: Danesi, Chapter 2
Jan 13: Danesi, Chapter 3
Jan 15: Danesi, Chapter 3 (cont.)
Jan 19: Danesi, Chapter 4
Jan 20: Danesi, Chapter 5
Jan 22: Danesi, Chapter 7
Jan 27: Barthes, *Mythologies* ("Blind and Dumb Criticism" to "The Face of Garbo")
Jan 29: Barthes, *Mythologies* ("Wine and Milk" to "Neither-Nor Criticism")
Feb 2: Barthes, *Mythologies* ("Striptease" to "The Lady of the Camellias")
Feb 3: Barthes, *Mythologies* ("Myth is a Type of Speech" to "Myth as a Stolen Language")
Feb 5: Barthes, *Mythologies* ("The Bourgeoisie as a Joint-Stock Company" to "Necessity and Limits of Mythology")
Feb 9: In-Class Test
Feb 10: Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson, “Hoes and Hashtags: Constructions of Gender and Race in Trending Topics,” *Social Semiotics* 24.2 (March 2014)
Feb 12: King, “Stardom, Celebrity and the Para-Confession,” *Social Semiotics* 18.2 (June 2008)
Feb 16-20: Reading Week

Feb 24: Songs


March 3: Commercials and Logos


March 9: Bignell, “Cinema,”

March 10: *The Big Lebowski* or *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

March 12: *The Big Lebowski* or *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

March 16: film and discussion

March 17: film discussion


**Essay Proposal Due**

March 23: duPlessis, “Constructing Patient-Psychiatrist Relations in Psychiatric Hospitals: The Role of Space and Personal Action,” *Social Semiotics* 23.3 (June 2013)

March 24: Essay Workshop

March 26: Scalvini, “Glamorizing Sick Bodies: How Commercial Advertising has Changed the Representation of HIV/AIDS,” *Social Semiotics* 20.3 (June 2010)


April 2: Catch-up and Summary

April 6: Exam Review
Essay Due