

### **Three-Part Communication Analysis project**

You will be developing this project throughout the quarter. It will make up 50 percent of your grade. It is divided into three components due at specified dates during the term (for review by your TA). Together, the three parts of the project serves as the equivalent of a midterm and final.

#### **Overview:**

The purpose of this assignment is to introduce you to scholarly frameworks and methods for examining dimensions of communication. The project is broken down in to three parts aimed at: 1) developing and honing your ability to engage in detailed observation and description; 2) formulate meaningful questions and engage analytic frameworks; and 3) consider potential modes of further investigation. Through your work on the project you will demonstrate your grasp of key concepts and terminology that we will be exploring throughout this course.

You will begin by selecting a specific example of a form or mode of communication to consider. For the first part, you will be developing a detailed analytic description of your example that breaks it down into elements that make up the meanings conveyed. For the second part, you will frame analytic questions and pursue consideration of how your example fits into wider concerns, tendencies or contexts. Finally, in the third part you will consider ways that one could study a form of communication in a more extended manner. Together the three parts of this project serve as an exercise in considering the key questions of this course:

- What is communication?
- Where does it occur?
- How does it occur?
- Why does it matter?
- How do we study it?

#### **Grading**

You will receive a progress grade and comments on your project each time you submit a section. When you submit part two you will be given the opportunity to submit a revised version of part one with clear annotation of what you have changed (Your TA will indicate if they want you to use highlighting or track changes, etc). When you submit part three you will also be opportunity to submit a revised version of part two with clear annotation of what you have changed. Since a final draft of part three is due in the last week of class, your TA will not have time to provide you with comments or a progress grade prior to the final project due date March 20<sup>th</sup>.

You will be graded on the effort, creativity, thoughtfulness and the overall the quality of your writing, as well as the strength/clarity of your engagement with material and ideas that we cover. Our focus in grading is not on whether your arguments are "correct," but on how well you articulate and support your analysis. It is important that you carefully proofread your work for errors before submitting it. It is strongly suggested that you have someone else read it to give you feedback on the clarity of your writing and ideas.

Formatting: Use 12 point "Times" or similar font and set your margins to 1" on left and right.

## Part 1: Denotative and Conative meaning (due in section week 4)

Select an example of communication that includes visual and written or audio signs ( a news story, a music video, an advertisement,, a scene from a film or television program, a website, etc). This will serve as your object of investigation for Part I and also be the basis of your essay for part II. Since you will be doing a very detailed analysis, it's important you select an example that is manageable. For example, if you are considering a film you should select a particular scene or sequence of shots to consider.

Additional criteria: your example

- must be from the past year
- must present ideas/images that lend themselves to socio-cultural analysis (for example engage perceptions or ideas relating to identity, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, etc)
- be in English or include subtitles/translation

A) In essay form (1 to 2 pages double-spaced), provide a general description of your example of communication and situate it in relation to the historical period and sociocultural location in which it takes place. In short: What is it? When and where does it take place? Who are the participants? Through what mechanism/medium does it occur?

B) In a two-column format, provide a close reading of the object (no more than 4 pages single-spaced):

- In column one, provide a detailed comprehensive *denotative* description that breaks your example down into basic meaningful elements. You should provide a fine-grained literal account that avoids implied meanings or interpretations as much as possible. (Catalog specifically what was said; visual elements and qualities—color, texture, motion, etc.; characteristics of sound or other elements of perception).
- In column two provide *connotative* readings of the elements described in your denotative description. What meanings and association do the denotative meanings convey or imply. This requires more interpretation, but still focuses on the immediate context and commonly available associations of each element. While analytic, the connotative description aims to articulate *broadly shared* meanings of the events.

## Part 2: Analysis and Synthesis (Due in Section week 7)

Write an analytical essay (4-6 double spaced pages, not including the bibliography) that draws on your description of the communication example in part one. Begin by formulating a set of questions to ask about the wider significance of this example of communication. Your paper needs to be more than just descriptive of what the communication example means. It should provide critical insights into or an argument about the importance or significance of this example to society or culture more broadly. And it should link this to analytic frameworks from at least two of the course readings (for example; historical frameworks, frameworks for understanding how discourse functions in relations to institutional structures or interpersonal communication, etc).

- How might you relate this communication event to other social, political, economic, cultural, aesthetic phenomena?
- Consider what connections you might be able to make between this instance/example of communication and other communication.
- Draw upon key concepts, theoretical or critical approaches/frameworks that we have been covering in the course to help answer the questions that you framed about the event. ***Be sure to properly cite the texts that you are drawing on, paraphrasing, or quoting directly (engage at***

**least 2 readings**). Do this by putting author's name, page # in parenthesis; if you cite an author who isn't in the reader, do the same and also list the text in a bibliography.

- Describe some of the limits to your interpretation and/or challenges to understanding the issues you take up.

**Part 3: Extended Investigation through other Methodologies** (Final Draft due in Section week 10. Submit your complete project with any revisions on Monday, March 20 by 6 pm)

The third component of your project involves the development of a *proposal* for further study/research about a form of communication. Ideally your proposal will expand on your consideration of the form of communication you analyzed in Parts 1 and Part 2. If you would like to select a significantly different topic, please run this by your TA.

Your research proposal should convey the questions you want to ask; explain why they are important; and describe the ways you will collect the data or evidence that will help you answer these questions; and finally, the modes of analysis or interpretation you will engage. Your overarching questions might look at how this mode of communication is situated in and is shaped by broader institutional structures, social forces, and discursive practices. An important part of how you describe your proposal is to discuss how it relates to other related research that has been done—that allows you to show how your project would be in dialog with other scholars. This involves researching and citing at least 2- 3 academic sources.

*Note of Clarification:* We are asking you to think about questions and the methods of studying them. You will not actually be carrying out this research project as part of this course. The objective is to formulate thoughtful questions and well-considered methods of answering them that you would need more than the time of this course to carry out. In the end, you are giving detailed account of a process by which you might gain more knowledge about the form/example of communication that you select.

- Begin by articulating a set of questions that you feel are compelling. (1 page double-spaced. It's OK if it's just a little longer)
  - Discuss why they are important or provocative.
  - What can be clarified or uncovered that seems uncertain about this object?
  - Briefly discuss other scholarship that has been done that relates to your project (studies on similar or the same topic). What are some of the things that other scholars have said (what conversation are you entering)? Provide at least 2 or 3 bibliographic references?
- Explain your methodology (formulate a structured approach to inquiry. 1.5-2 pages double-spaced):
  - Select and describe a manageable object or set of data that you would collect that would allow you to answer or clarify your thesis question(s).
  - Discuss in specific terms how you will find/collect/select your data or objects for analysis. Some general methods include: ethnographic study, interviews, surveys, content analysis, textual analysis, historical/archival research, and controlled experiments, among others. Depending on your methods you might include proposed research tools such as interview questions, surveys, etc.
  - Describe how you might analyze your observation or findings.