

# INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

NYU

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

---

Class # and Section:	E59.0005
Class time and room:	12:30-1:45/TISC LC9
Instructor:	Dr. Gabriella Coleman
Office:	713, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, East Building
Office hours:	Wednesday 2-4 (Sign up sheet on my door)
Phone:	212-992-7696
e-mail:	biella@nyu.edu

---



---

## COURSE DESCRIPTION & OVERVIEW

This course examines major concepts, theories, and research perspectives within the field of culture and human communication. It will introduce and review key approaches to the study of human interaction, rhetoric, language, persuasion, and cultural processes across diverse contexts. As a student of this class, you will explore its interdisciplinary character, examining the role of language and meaning; how language structures reality; the nonverbal aspects of social interaction; and the processes and meanings of interaction in varied contexts, such as interpersonal, small groups, and organizations. Specifically, the course provides a framework from which you can think seriously about how culture and society are constructed in and through our communicative practices. We will examine the social, cultural, and political impacts of communication as it unfolds in everyday life. By semester's end, you will develop the critical tools to consider the process and role of communication in contemporary society and begin to establish your own perspectives on the study of human communication.

## COURSE FORMAT, GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, & ATTENDANCE

I will begin each class with a brief introductory lecture that examines the themes and readings for the week. The rest of the class should function to promote class discussion and student-led conversation about the various readings. Because active participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class, you should come prepared for discussion and with copies of the reading.

To aid our discussion and to improve your writing skills, you will be required to turn in eight Blackboard posts where you will (1) provide a brief, one paragraph summary of the argument of each reading (2) pose at least one conceptual question about the readings and/or topics under discussion. To be accepted for a grade they must be posted one hour before class on our Blackboard site. Please bring a copy to class (printed in single space to save paper). Four of them must be posted before class by October 21st. For most classes, I will bring in two to four student questions to help with our discussion of the readings.

In addition, there will be an in-class mid-term consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions, definitions, and one essay question as well as a take-home final exam. You will also have one short writing assignment during the course of the class based on a movie. More information on these assignments will be provided in class.

Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. Two or more missed classes without prior notices and excuse will result in your grade being dropped by one half letter.

Please be advised that no late work will be accepted and no exam will be rescheduled without a preceding agreement with your instructor. Delayed due dates will be rare, authorized only under truly justified circumstances (which will be defined as such only by your instructor).

**Fair warning of things I will take note of, but may not call you on:** Coming to class late, leaving class early, sleeping in class, using your laptop or other electronic device, doing work for other courses in class—these activities will negatively affect your participation grade.

Before class begins, please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and any other items that might ring, buzz, play music, or otherwise call attention to themselves and disrupt class.

Because this syllabus is a guide, changes in schedule, readings, or assignments may occur. You will be properly notified in advance if changes need to be made.

### GRADING

- Class Participation: 10%
- **Blackboard Posts/Questions: 20%**
- Mid-Term Exam: 25%
- Writing Assignment: 15%
- Final Exam: 30%

### EVALUATION

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate.

Plus and minus grade indicate the standing within the above grades.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 240 Greene Street, [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

## RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Students who follow special religious holidays that may interfere with the class schedule need to see me at the beginning of the semester to talk about your schedule.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY & PLAGARISM

Plagiarism or cheating on any assignment will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failure of the assignment and possibly failure of this class. "Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do. You violate the principle when you cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions..." (see School of Education Bulletin, 2004-6, p. 174)

## FORMAT

With the exception of the Blackboard posts, written work must be typed, double-spaced, and paginated. Multiple pages should be stapled. You are expected to follow a formal style manual for guidelines on citations, quotations, etc. Purchasing a style manual is strongly encouraged, as it will help you improve the organization and composition of your written work and ensure the proper citation of sources. Whatever citation style you choose, use it consistently throughout your writing.

Style manuals are available at the bookstore. A recommended style manual is: The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.

## STUDENT RESOURCES

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities: 240 Greene St, 2nd Floor.

Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233.

## READINGS & OTHER MATERIALS:

Most readings are available on Blackboard. The following two texts are required and are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore:

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Available at the NYU Bookstore.

Diaz, Junot (2007). *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Available at the NYU Bookstore.

## Section 1: What is Communication Theory?

### Week 1.

#### 1. Wednesday September 9: Introduction

- During the first meeting we will discuss the syllabus, goals and requirements of the course.
- Handout: a Critical Approach

### Week 2.

### **1. Monday September 14: Two Opposing Views of Language, Communication, and Culture**

- Colapinto, “The Interpreter”
- Pinker, “Mentalese”
- An Update on the Pirahã:  
[http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=432:an-update-on-the-piraha&catid=31:hugo&Itemid=34](http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=432:an-update-on-the-piraha&catid=31:hugo&Itemid=34)

### **2. Wednesday September 16: What is Communication Theory? What is Culture?**

- Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication”
- Williams, “Culture” Keywords, <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~dml3/880williams.htm>

### **Week 3.**

#### **1. Monday September 21: The Social Construction of Knowledge**

- Berger & Luckmann, “The Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life”

#### **2. Wednesday September 23: Culture, How Deep Does it Go?**

- Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System”
- Geertz, “Life without Husbands”

## **Section 2: Language, Metaphor, & Rhetoric**

### **Week 4.**

#### **1. Monday September 28: The Power of Language**

- Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies”
- Borditsky, “How does language shape the way we think?”  
[http://edge.org/3rd\\_culture/boroditsky09/boroditsky09\\_index.html](http://edge.org/3rd_culture/boroditsky09/boroditsky09_index.html)

#### **2. Wednesday September 30: Language, Speaking, and the Social Power of Names**

- Basso, “Speaking with Names: Language and Landscape among Western Apache”

### **Week 5.**

#### **1. Monday October 5: Metaphor**

- Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (selections)
- Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (selections)

#### **2. Wednesday: October 7**

- No class

### **Week 6.**

#### **1. Monday October 12: Rhetoric**

- Trenholm, Chapter 1 and “The Rhetoric of Aristotle,” sections 1.1-1.4 (NB—I have included Book 1 of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in its entirety for your reference, but you are only responsible for the first 4 sections.)

#### **2. Wednesday October 14: Interactive Review Session**

We have covered a lot of very dense material and now we are ready to slow down, look it over, and make some

connections between all of them. Take this chance to look over notes before class. For the review session, be ready to answer general questions about what we have covered so far but also bring in questions you may have about the readings.

## **Week 7.**

### **1. Monday October 19: Midterm**

- In class mid-term exam.

## **Section 3: Communication in Contexts and Genres of Communication**

### **2. Wednesday October 21: Nonverbal Communication**

- Kobena, "Black Hair/Style Politics"
- Hebdige, "The Meaning of Style"

## **Week 8.**

### **1. Monday October 26: Proxemics—Space as Communication**

- Trenholm, Chapter 5, pp. 124-130 ("Territory and the Use of Space," "Spatial Arrangement," "Personal Space" & "Touch")
- E.T. Hall, "Culture as Communication," "Anthropology of Space" & "Distances in Man"
- Rosenbloom, "In Certain Circles, Two is a Crowd"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/16/fashion/16space.html?ei=5090&en=254c2d8760696f70&ex=1321333200&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all>

### **2. Wednesday October 28: Chronemics-- Time as Communication**

- E.T. Hall, "Introduction" & "How Many Kinds of Time?"
- Gleick, "FSTR" (selections)
- Frankel "Man's Search for Meaning." (selections)

## **Week 9.**

### **1. Monday November 2: Stereotype, Bias, and Ethnicity**

- Moore, "Racist Stereotyping in the English Language"
- Dyer, "White" (selections)
- Politically Correct Bed Time Stories  
<http://www.bizbag.com/Politically%20Correct/PC%20Bedtimes%20Stories%20%20Little%20Red%20Riding%20Hood.htm>Interpersonal

### **2. Wednesday November 4: Essay**

- Movie Assignment, No Class, Due Friday November 6

## **Week 10.**

### **1. Monday November 9: Self-Presentation and Communication,**

- Goffman, Introduction, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life
- Goffman "Chapter 3" (½), The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

### **2. Wednesday November 11: Self-Presentation continued**

- Goffman, Chapter 3, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (finish)
- Elliot, "The Face Behind the Mask" (selections)

### Week 11.

#### 1. Monday November 16: Humor

- Mulkay, "Humour and Social Structure" (sections)
- Critchley, "On Humour"
- Beeman, "Humor"

#### 2. Wednesday November 18: Gender

- Kulick, "Anger, Gender, Language Shift and the Politics of Revelation in a Papau New Guinean Village"
- Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals"
- Steinem, "If Men Could Menstruate" <http://www.mum.org/ifmencou.htm>

### Week 12.

#### 1. November 23: Disability

- Wolman, "The Truth about Autism" [http://www.wired.com/medtech/health/magazine/16-03/ff\\_autism?currentPage=all](http://www.wired.com/medtech/health/magazine/16-03/ff_autism?currentPage=all)
- Groce, "Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard"  
OR
- Sacks, "An Anthropologist on Mars"
- Who Cares? The Totally Retard Use of the Word Retarded:  
<http://www.viceland.com/int/v9n11/htdocs/who.php?source=db>

#### 2. Wednesday November 25: Thanksgiving Break

- No class

### Week 13.

#### 1. Monday November 30: Technologically Mediated Communication

- Elliot, "Amputees by Choice"
- Grigoriadis, "Do You Own Facebook? Or Does Facebook Own You?"  
<http://nymag.com/news/features/55878/>
- Listen to before class: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92406717&sc=emafs>

#### 2. Wednesday December 2: Political Communication and Spectacle

- Duncombe, "Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy" (Chapter 1 and another chapter from the book, TBD)

### Week 14.

#### 1. Monday December 7: Inter-Cultural Communication and Humor via the Novel

- Junot, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao"

#### 2. Wednesday December 9: Inter-Cultural Communication via the Novel

- Junot, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao"

**Week 15.**

**1. Monday December 14: Concluding Thoughts**

- Concluding thoughts, pick up take-home final exam.
-

The Steinhardt School of Education Statement on Academic Integrity\*  
"Your degree should represent genuine learning"

The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience in The Steinhardt School of Education at New York University. This relationship takes an honor code for granted. Mutual trust, respect and responsibility are foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A University education aims not only to produce high quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you:

- *Cheat on an exam;*
- *Submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors;*
- *Receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work;*
- *Plagiarize.*

*Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.*

*Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score and/or other materials which are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:*

- *Copy verbatim from a book, an article or other media;*
- *Download documents from the Internet;*
- *Purchase documents;*
- *Report from other's oral work;*
- *Paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis and/or conclusions;*
- *Copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.*

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

### ***Avoiding Academic Dishonesty***

- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
- Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks or footnotes or other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
- Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

### ***Disciplinary Sanctions***

When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action is as follows:

- The Professor will meet with the student to discuss, and present evidence for the particular violation, giving the

student opportunity to refute or deny the charge(s).

- If the Professor confirms the violation(s), he/she, in consultation with the Program Director and Department Chair may take any of the following actions:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Allow the student to redo the assignment     |
| 2 | Lower the grade for the work in question     |
| 3 | Assign a grade of F for the work in question |
| 4 | Assign a grade of F for the course           |
| 5 | Recommend dismissal                          |

Once an action (s) is taken, the Professor will inform the Program Director and Department Chair, and inform the student in writing, instructing the student to schedule an appointment with the Associate Dean for Student Services and Public Affairs, as a final step. Copies of the letter will be sent to the Department Chair for his/her confidential student file and the Associate Dean for Student Services and Public Affairs. The student has the right to appeal the action taken in accordance with the School's Student Complaint Procedure as outlined in *The Steinhardt School of Education Student Handbook*

When dismissal is recommended, that recommendation will be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Student Services and Public Affairs, who will convene all parties involved. An appeal of the decision at this step is submitted in writing to the Vice Dean, including full documentation to support the appeal.

**\* The Steinhardt School of Education Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.**