

VISUAL CULTURE

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR
Spring 2007 FRPG 189K
T-TH 10:10am - 12:25 pm
NC 225 (Noble Center)

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Office Hours: Wednesday 10am - 12noon or by appointment

Mentor: Dan McKewan

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the critical study of visual culture, including aspects of popular, artistic, academic and underground culture. Students will develop an awareness of fundamental processes and formal concerns of seeing and constructing meaning. Formal design issues such as line, value, color, composition, surface, and form will be discussed and explored in studio projects and related to a variety of visual practices such as architecture, advertising, television, video, as well as the more traditional mediums of painting, drawing, and photography. Emphasis will be placed developing a critical awareness of the multifaceted means of visual communication and manipulation that fill the viewing landscape (both actual and virtual) of our culture.

LEARNING GOALS

- To become a more **active viewer** (rather than "passive absorber") of visual culture, with a basic knowledge of visual language and rhetorical strategies
- Develop a greater sense and more **conscious awareness** of how visual images and media are influential in persuasion, and develop a critical voice in relation to the influence of the visual
- Learn and cultivate **research skills** and methods that can be applied not only to visual culture but to others areas of research as well

METHODOLOGY

This course is a discussion/lecture/studio experience that is supplemented by a textbook (see below) and various readings. Individual research is required as is active participation in class critiques and discussions. Class time will consist of lectures, slides, videos, demonstrations, and studio projects. In the final weeks, presentations will

be given by each student. Library visits to learn about and conduct research will be a regular part of the course. Field trips to various museums and galleries may also be included in the class, as may be visiting artists.

COURSE TEXTS

Cartwright, Lisa and Sturken, Marita. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*

Davis, James P. A *The Rowman and Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources*

Some supplemental reading will be given out in class.

REQUIRED SUPPLIES

A small packet of supplies that includes a sketchbook, sharpie markers, x-acto knife, drawing pencils, glue stick, etc. is available at the bookstore. Also, be prepared to purchase some supplies on your own that you may need to supplement these supplies. These will most likely be materials specific to certain projects and will be discussed with certain projects in class.

RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS: FULL SKETCHBOOK

You will have visual and written assignments that will be done in the sketchbook, including sketches, drawings, and various research related to the in class projects. In addition to given assignments, students are required to fill the entire sketchbook with drawings, images, and visual spam related to the course (see Sketchbook handout and Brice Marden video).

REQUIREMENTS: STUDIO PROJECTS

Completion of various studio projects, most of which will be mounted into the sketchbook, will be worked on throughout the semester both during class time and outside of class.

REQUIREMENTS: RESEARCH PROJECT

A semester long research project is required for this course. All projects will include an a visual component, a written research paper, and oral presentation of the project at the end of the semester. There are two options:

OPTION ONE:

A visually based presentation, using a medium such as Powerpoint, that includes a minimum of 10 images on a given topic. The presentation will be given near the end of the semester and will be accompanied by a 7 to 10 page research paper on the topic.

OPTION TWO:

A visual project that takes the form of a studio project (painting, drawing, sculpture, mixed-media) or digital/video/web-based project (digital images, video, website, etc.). A presentation of the project will be given near the end of the semester and will be accompanied by a 6 to 8 page research paper on the topic of the project.

REQUIREMENTS: ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory for all scheduled class time. If you are not using this time productively, your grade will be adversely affected. **A total of three (3) absences, whether excused or unexcused, will be allowed. After three, .5 will be deducted from your final grade for each absence. Three late arrivals OR three early departures-entering the class after the day's activities have begun OR leaving before the end of the scheduled class time-will be considered one absence.**

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get your assignment by contacting a classmate. DO NOT EMAIL ME AND ASK WHAT YOU MISSED. Be aware that demos, slides, and presentations will not be repeated.

EVALUATION

The final grade will be evaluated from of the following: completion of required work (class projects, homework assignments, research), quality of work (based on objectives of assignments and creativity), and depth of research. Effort given (attitude, progress, participation, attendance) will also be considered. Work will be discussed in critiques and individual conferences. Consider the following:

- Both short exercises and extended projects should be done with thoroughness.
- Grades for late projects grade will be lowered a full letter grade.
- Participation in class critiques is an important requirement of the class and is graded.
- If you have specific concerns about your grade, it is your responsibility to talk to me.

FINAL GRADE (approximate):

Research Project: 60%
Sketchbook: 30% (Includes attending and responding to 2 artistic events)
Participation in class: 10%

POINT SYSTEM

- 4.0 - Phenomenal
- 3.5 - Excellent
- 3.0 - Very Good
- 2.5 - Significantly above average
- 2.0 - Adequate fulfillment of ALL requirements of class
- 1.5 - Less than adequate fulfillment of MOST requirements of class
- 1.0 - Passing but not meeting the requirements of the course
- 0.0 - Failure to meet the minimum requirements of the course

4.0 - Outstanding in all areas well beyond merely fulfilling requirements, consistently high effort, very active participation in class discussions and techniques, rigorous and serious problem solving, superior technique, excellent solutions to problems, excellent understanding of concepts and theory. Insightful and creative written comments including clear evidence that student has read the assigned readings and text.

3.0 - Very good in all areas well beyond merely fulfilling requirements, solid effort, above average beyond required expectations, solid concepts, very good solutions, active participation, skillful technique, solid understanding of concepts and theory. Substantial written comments including clear evidence that student has read the assigned readings and text.

2.0 - Adequately fulfills the requirements of the class, acceptable technique, strong effort, recognizable participation, basic understanding of concepts and theory. Adequate written comments including at least some evidence that student has read the assigned readings and text.

1.0 - Passing effort but not fully meeting the requirements of the course, insufficient participation, poor technique, insufficient conceptual development Less than minimal written comments with little or no evidence that student has read the assigned readings and text.

.75 and below - Failure to meet the minimal requirements of the course, severe lack of participation, failure in conceptual and technical development Inadequate written comments with no evidence that student has read the assigned readings and text.

Schedule

Subject to change

WEEK ONE

Tu 1/23 Introduction to course.
Read Nicholas Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture?"
(handed-out in class)
Buy packet of materials from bookstore and bring
to next class.

Th 1/25 What is Visual Culture? What is Visual Research?
Video: Brice Marden. Sketchbook Work.

Projects: BLACK SQUARES
COVER DESIGN IN B & W

WEEK TWO

Tu 1/30 Reading: Practices of Looking (POL)
"Introduction" and
POL Chapter 1: "Practices of Looking: Images,
Power, and Politics"

Th 2/1

Projects: RECONSTRUCTION/DECONSTRUCTION

WEEK THREE

Tu 2/6 Reading: POL Chapter 2: "Viewers Make Meaning"

Th 2/8 ODY: How to pick a topic (subject to topic)
Finding book and chapters and essays in books

Projects: IMAGE ALTERATION WITH TEXT

WEEK FOUR

Tu 2/13 Reading: POL Chapter 3: "Spectatorship, Power,
and Knowledge"

Th 2/15 ODY: Finding critiques of your topic

Projects: IMAGE ALTERATION WITHOUT TEXT

WEEK FIVE

Tu 2/20 Reading: POL Chapter 4: "Reproduction and Visual
Technologies"

Th 2/22 REARWINDOW

WEEK SIX

Tu 2/27 Reading: POL Chapter 6: "Consumer Culture and
the Manufacturing of Desire"
Bernard Welch, "We are All Simpsons"

Th 3/1 ODY: Finding Internet Sources

WEEK SEVEN

Tu 3/6 Reading: POL Chapter 5: "The Mass Media and the
Public Sphere"

Th 3/8 ODY: Prepare bibliography

WEEK EIGHT

Tu 3/13

Th 3/15 *INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS*

SPRING BREAK

WEEK NINE

Tu 3/27 Reading: POL Chapter 7: "Postmodernism and
Popular Culture"

Th 3/29 Project work

WEEK TEN

Tu 4/3 Project work

Th 4/5

Projects: CAMPUS MAPPING

WEEK ELEVEN

Tu 4/10 DRAFT DUE

Th 4/12

WEEK TWELVE

Tu 4/17

Th 4/19

WEEK THIRTEEN

Tu 4/24 *PROJECT PRESENTATIONS*

Th 4/26 *PROJECT PRESENTATIONS*

WEEK FOURTEEN

Tu 5/1 *PROJECT PRESENTATIONS*

Th 5/5 Review and wrap-up; Finish presentations if necessary

FINALS WEEK

M 5/7 **PORTFOLIOS AND SKETCHBOOKS DUE 12NOON**

First-Year Program Philosophy and Goals 2006-07

The First-Year Program (FYP) and First-Year Seminar (FYS) are the first steps in a four-year process of helping you meet the University's Aims and Objectives and the broader goals of a liberal education. The faculty of the FYP and FYS see themselves as partners and mentors in the process of working with you to acquire the intellectual habits of mind, the writing, speaking, and research skills, and the ethical self-reflexiveness that are at the core of a liberal education. The FYP and FYS will ask you to consider new perspectives on the world and your place in it and will challenge you to confront many of the hidden assumptions you bring to college with you. We hope to open you to new ideas, help you to see the complexity of the way in which knowledge gets produced and used in society, and encourage you to see yourself as an active contributor in making the world a better place. The course topics, the texts you will read, listen to, and watch, the in-class and out-of-class activities you will engage in, and the writing, speaking, and research assignments you will work on are all designed to introduce you to the depth of critical thinking and the quality and complexity of the communication skills that will be expected of you at SLU and as a citizen of an increasingly diverse society.

First and foremost among our goals are those related to your abilities as a communicator. The work of the FYP and FYS asks you to design and deliver written, spoken, performed and/or visual texts that demonstrate basic skills in the relevant modes of communication and with an increasing degree of rhetorical sensitivity. Our focus on "rhetorical sensitivity" means that we expect you to cultivate the awareness that all of your communication, whether formal or informal, involves having to make choices about your messages, whether written, spoken, aural or visual. To become a good communicator, you need to recognize that the creation of meaningful and powerful written, spoken, performed, or visual texts involves both a creator and an audience, and that therefore the voice you adopt in your communication, the audience you imagine yourself communicating to, and the social and ethical context of the content, matter a great deal in creating such texts. One important way to become a better communicator is to become a better critical reader, viewer, and listener, which is why we will ask you to engage challenging materials in a variety of forms and work with you to learn how to interpret them.

Learning to read, listen, write, speak, do research and/or perform well also requires feedback. As faculty, we submit our work for feedback from colleagues all the time, and giving and receiving constructive feedback from both friends and strangers is central to collaborative work in any field and is itself a form of critical thinking and learning. We further recognize that this feedback process is not linear and that good communication requires that you continually rethink, restructure, and revise your work in order for it to be your best. This is why we require that your writing, speaking, and performance assignments be "projects" that include preparatory exercises and multiple drafts or rehearsals, all of which ask you to continue to reflect critically on the choices you have made in the texts that you produce. Furthermore, we see all of these forms of communication as complementary and intertwined, which is why many of your assignments will ask you to integrate elements of the written, spoken, performed, and visual. Finally, developing good habits of critical inquiry and communication also means reflecting on the ethical dimensions of how your work represents that of others, thus one of our goals is to help you to understand both the nature of academic integrity and the social processes by which knowledge is produced and represented.

To ensure that the program is meeting its stated goals, all FYP and FYS syllabi are read by other faculty in the program to determine if they include a variety of assignments that foster the writing, speaking, research, and critical thinking goals of the program. All FYP and FYS courses have to be approved by faculty in the program before they are offered.

First-Year Seminar research project learning goals

With respect to research skills specifically, our learning goals for the spring are that students should:

- Be introduced to ways of conducting productive and imaginative inquiry and research in order to become a part of the various conversations surrounding issues.
- Learn to differentiate among the various ways that information is produced and presented, between popular and scholarly journals and books, between mainstream and alternative publications, between primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to evaluate and synthesize information, whether gathered from traditional sources, such as books and journals, or from websites or electronic media.
- Begin to develop the skills of critical analysis in the interpretation and use of information gathered from any source.
- Be introduced to the ethical obligations that scholars have to both responsibly represent their sources and inform their readers of the sources of their information, as well as learning, and being held responsible for the proper use of, the conventions of scholarly citation and attribution.
- Present the results of your research through writing, speaking, visual elements, or other multimedia forms in such a way that you demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using the rhetorical conventions of the chosen form.