

## **MFCO303: Critical problems in communication studies**

Please note: the following is a shortened example of a course outline as it has been taught in past years. As such it is **indicative only**: the assessment and schedule may change. If you require any further information please contact the department: [mfco@otago.ac.nz](mailto:mfco@otago.ac.nz)

### **Introduction**

Critical problems in communication studies is a required paper for the Communication Studies major. It can also be taken as part of the Film and Media Studies major. The paper will explore the intricacies and complexities of the study of communication as well as research within the social sciences in general. Students will encounter the theoretical and practical aspects of a range of research methods. These include: empiricism, critical theory, ethnomethodology, cultural studies, and discourse analysis.

### **Aims**

On the successful completion of this paper, students should have achieved the following objectives:

- be able to understand a range of communication research paradigms
- be able to outline the limitations of specific research methods
- be able to capably analyze a variety of texts and situations in terms of a specific research methodology
- conduct an independent research project
- be able to situate Communication Studies as a body of knowledge in relation to other disciplines including Media Studies, Sociology, Philosophy, and Politics.

**In addition, it is expected that this paper will generally contribute to:**

- effective development of students at Level 3 in terms of knowledge, academic integrity, level of critical reading and ability to reference material
- awareness and sensitivity to plural cultural participants as local, national and global citizens
- the development of students as Otago Graduates who display key attributes of critical thinking, independence, interdisciplinarity, responsibility, ethics and who are immersed in an on-going engagement with knowledge

### **Expected workload**

[based on 180 hours for an 18-point paper]:

lectures	23 x 1hr	23hrs
tutorials	10 x 1hr	10hrs
reading and other preparation		50hrs
methodology essay		20hrs
tutorial assignment preparation		10hrs
research project		46hrs
in-class test and revision		21hrs

## **Assessment**

Methodology Essay	20%	due: Thursday 29 March 4pm
In-Class Test	20%	due: Wednesday 2 May
Tutorial assignments	20%	due: Weeks 2-11
Research project	40%	due: Friday 1 June 4pm

\* There is no final examination for this paper.

## **Weekly lectures and readings**

Please note that in the event of unforeseen circumstances the order of weekly topics may be altered

### **Week 1 – 26/28 Feb**

Communication research overview

Reading:

Howell, an introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 1.

Peters, Speaking into the air: a history of the idea of communication, pp. 1-31

### **Week 2 – 5/7 March**

Communication theory

Reading:

Howell, An introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 2. Radford, On the philosophy of communication, pp.14-35.

### **Week 3 – 12/14 March**

Class, taste and communication (Bourdieu)

Reading:

Bourdieu, Distinction, Chapter 1, “A social critique of the judgement of taste”.

Thornton, Club cultures, Chapter 1, “The distinctions of culture without distinctions”.

### **Week 4 – 19/21 March**

Empiricism/positivism/post-positivism – data counts

Reading:

Howell, An introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 3.

Velasco, “Sketching Bitcoin: Empirical Research of Digital Affordances”, in Innovative methods in media and communication research, pp. 99-122.

\* The first tutorial assignment is due to be handed in at the lecture 21 March

### **Week 5 – 26/28 March**

Critical theory – the commodification of communication

Reading:

Howell, an introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 5.

Peters, “The subtlety of Horkheimer and Adorno: reading ‘The culture industry’”, pp 58-73.

\* Assignment 1 is due 29 March

[Mid semester break – 30 March-8 April]

### **Week 6 – 9/11 April**

Cultural studies – the world as text

Reading:

Gray, Research Practice for Cultural Studies Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures, pp. 39-49.

Alasuutari, Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies, pp. 23-37.

### **Week 7 – 16/18 April**

Ethnomethodology – communicating behavioral norms

Reading:

Francis and Hester, An Invitation to Ethnomethodology Language, Society and Interaction, chapter 2, “Doing ethnomethodology”.

Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 35-75.

\* The second tutorial assignment is due to be handed in at the lecture on 18 April

### **Week 8 – 23 April**

[no lecture 25 April] Poststructuralism and discourse

### **No tutorials this week**

Reading:

Howell, An introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 7.

Glynos and Howarth, Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory, Chapter 5, “Logics”.

**Week 9 – 30 April/2 May**

Concepts review (30 April) In class test (2 May)

**Week 10 – 7/9 May**

Designing your research project

Reading:

Material will be handed out in class.

\*The third tutorial assignment is due to be handed in at the lecture 30 April

**Week 11 – 14/16 May**

Research ethics

Reading:

Asante, “De-Westernizing communication: strategies for neutralizing cultural myths”, in De-Westernizing communication research: altering questions and changing frameworks, pp. 21-27.

**Week 12 – 21/23 May**

Validity and reflexivity in research

Reading:

Howell, An introduction to the philosophy of methodology, Chapter 12.

**NO LECTURES IN WEEK 13**

\*Assignment 4 is due 1 June