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

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  \(23 \times 1\) hr 23hrs
- tutorials  \(10 \times 1\) hr 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:

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.
* 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.

* 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:

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