

# SPCOM 228: Public Communication

Faculty of Arts, Department of Drama and Speech Communication  
Fall 2015: Thursday 11:30-2:30 in ML-354

## Professor Robert Danisch

**Office Hours:** Wednesday: 10:30-11:30; Thursday: 10:30-11:30; and by appointment

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## Course Description:

Since the 18th century the growth and expansion of forms of publics and public cultures has increasingly become a central feature of modern life. Some publics, such as the political public associated with a modern European or North American state, are large and extremely complex, while others, such as the public of a special interest group, may be small and relatively simple. This course is dedicated to the study of publics, their forms, their cultures and their influence on our history and our future, and to the project of explaining how communication constitutes particular forms of public life. The study of public communication is also the study of forms of democracy. Research into whatever a public might be is often interested in the histories, aesthetics, invention, consumption, reception, and circulation of communication in so far as such practices or performances are significant to democratic life. Such research also concerns the commonplace concept of the public sphere as a central component of contemporary democracy. One of the most useful things about the concept of the public sphere is the explicit place it gives to media and modes of communication as central to public culture in all varieties and to democracy more generally. Students interested in rhetoric, broadcasting, cinema, news, popular culture, music, art and other kinds of communication or other forms of public performance should find this course useful in grappling with the larger significance of such practices for democratic life.

Theories and practices of public communication raise the following set of questions: What constitutes a public? What is the function of public communication in democratic systems of government? What role do aesthetics and art play as central strategies for the invention and maintenance of public culture? Is the concept of the public sphere still useful? What role does free speech play in democratic forms of public communication? What are the central features of a public identity? What's the difference between public and private identity? How does public agency operate through political institutions? In asking these questions, we will explore the following topics: democratic theory, liberalism, and free speech; politics of representation; agency and self-governance; social movements and dissent; mass art and the aesthetics of popular culture; mediated versus face-to-face communication; legal strategies for the regulation of public expression and public space; and institutional and discursive management of publics.

## Course Objectives:

- Students should become familiar with some of the varied intellectual traditions and theories of public culture, public life, and public communication.

- Students should gain a sense of the central philosophical and intellectual questions concerning the relationship between publics and communication.
- Students should have a working vocabulary of key theories of public communication (working vocabulary means that you will have the ability to use these theories in practical ways as explanatory or interpretive tools).
- Students should develop, practice, and master some practical tools for engaging in public communication.
- Students should develop the capacity to think theoretically and critically. That is, students should be able to explain particular phenomena by appeals to general ways of understanding and figure out how to explore ideas and the meaning of objects or events in a sustained, substantive, sophisticated, and insightful manner.
- Students will be introduced to and expected to read very difficult texts. Thus, students will be expected to improve their reading comprehension skills.
- Students will be expected to turn in polished, elegant writing that demonstrates a clear command of the readings, a distinct authorial voice, and a capacity for thoughtful reflection on complex ideas.
- Students will be expected to develop the ability to think critically, clearly and analytically. This means understanding the ideas and concepts raised throughout the course, their origins, strengths, weaknesses, and their relationship to larger themes in this class, in your education, and in your view of the world.
- Students will be expected to improve their abilities to read and listen critically, to respond reflectively and reasonably to others, and to distinguish successful and unsuccessful arguments.

### **Course Policies and Procedures:**

- *In the Classroom* – This is a hybrid lecture/seminar/workshop class. At various points during the semester or during individual course meetings, I will deliver a lecture on the topics outlined on the course schedule. However, that does not mean I expect you to be passive consumers. At times I will be asking you questions and I will expect you to ask me questions. In addition, I will ask you to provide examples of concepts we talk about in class, and so participation in lectures will be encouraged in a variety of ways. We will also try to turn lectures into seminars. One of the main objectives of the class is for a small group of students to engage in intense study and conversation about public communication. Seminars are characterized by high degrees of interactivity between students and between professor and student. Finally, we may, at times, engage in practical exercises designed to improve public communication practices. At these moments, seminars or lectures will transform into a workshop designed to improve students' communication skills. In order to make the lectures, seminars and workshops run effectively, I ask all students to please turn off all ringing electronic devices when entering the classroom. The sound of a cell phone (or any other device) is extremely distracting to your professor, and I assume to your fellow classmates, and it is rude and offensive.
- *Attendance* – Your presence in class is mandatory. However, I will not be taking attendance, and there will be no way for me to be absolutely certain that you are attending regularly. But you should be aware that the best way to do well in this course is to show up to every class,

prepared and attentive. Inevitably, at the end of the semester, students who missed classes do poorly, while students who show up consistently do well. I do not post lecture notes on the Internet, nor do I respond to emails that say “what did we talk about in class on Thursday.” We cover lots of material in class and for that reason it is critical that you attend in order to do well. Attendance also means refraining from playing with your cell phone, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, using other electronic devices or doing other coursework while in the classroom. If I notice you engaged in some activity that does not pertain to what is happening in the class, I will ask you to leave. This course is designed for courteous, motivated students who attend each class, do all the reading, and ask questions when they don’t understand something. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting materials we covered from a classmate. Students who fail to meet these basic and reasonable expectations can assume that their performance on assignments will suffer.

- *Academic Integrity* – I expect that the work you complete for this course will be your own, which is to say that cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any written assignment that borrows from other sources without giving proper credit or that is plagiarized in whole or in part from another source (including other student’s work) is grounds for an “F” on the assignment, or depending on the severity of the crime, is grounds for an “F” in the course.

## **University Policies on Academic Integrity:**

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-guidelines/policy-70>

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72>

**Academic Integrity website (Arts):**

[http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic\\_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)

**Academic Integrity Office (University):**

<http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:**

The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

**Required Texts and Readings:**

I like books - I like buying them, I like reading them, I like keeping them on my bookshelf, I like talking to people about them. Reading makes you smarter. You should read a lot. Reading carefully, critically, and analytically is essential for your success. This is a humanities course, and, therefore, it requires careful reading of complex and sophisticated texts. Really motivated students will go to Amazon.com (or some other website or bookstore) and buy the following books: John Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems*, Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, Jeffrey Stout's *Blessed are the Organized*, Craig Calhoun's *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, John Durham Peters's *Courting the Abyss*, and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Students are not required to purchase these texts. Instead, I will make an email list for the course during the first meeting (or perhaps a dropbox folder). Each week I will email .pdf copies of the readings for the following week to the class. I expect everyone to have done all of the readings before coming to class and to have the readings accessible (either as a book, printed out, or on an electronic device) for classroom conversation.

**Assignments:**

- 1) **Think Questions** – You are required to complete the readings prior to each class session – class discussion and class content will build upon the readings assigned for that particular day. The quality of class discussion and your experience will depend on your having made an attempt to read and understand the articles assigned each week. On FOUR occasions throughout the semester I will ask you to write a 1-2 page, single-spaced response to a specific question I pose about the readings. I will ask the question at the end of class about the following week's readings, and the following week you will turn in your answer. The due dates for the think question are: October 8<sup>th</sup>, October 15<sup>th</sup>, October 29<sup>th</sup>, and November 5<sup>th</sup>. Each think question will be graded on a scale of 0-25 for a total of 100 possible points. Collectively, the think questions are worth a total of 25% of your final grade.

- 2) **Independent Research and Analysis Paper** - As individuals, each of you will be asked to choose a particular problem, issue, example, or concept related to concerns about public communication. You will then write a 6-9 page paper (including footnotes and references) that summarizes and analyzes current research into this problem, concept, etc. and demonstrates an individual critical engagement with the course content. Each of the Research and Analysis papers will be related to social media and other forms of digital technology. The papers will be made “public” and will include individual analyses of the impact of social media on the issues we’ve been addressing in class. I’ll have more details in class. This assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and will be worth 25% of your final grade. The paper will be distributed to the whole class and is due electronically on Monday, November 23rd. A magnificent paper will even reflect on the making “public” of the papers and the technology used to complete the assignment.
- 3) **Collaborative Course Dialogue** – Early in the semester I will create a word document for everyone in the class to have access to. I will then write a one-paragraph entry on some example of public communication related to course content. Once I’ve written the first paragraph, every member of the class must contribute five times to the ongoing dialogue by writing a thoughtful, articulate response to whatever has been posted to the document. There will be guidelines that govern student responses, which I’ll discuss in class. What will happen over the course of the semester is that an engaged dialogue over course issues will emerge. Do not wait until the end of the semester to participate in this dialogue. The quality of each individual’s contributions will be assessed on a scale of 0-100 and the total assignment will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- 4) **Public/Oral Final Exam** – At the end of the semester all students will participate in a public/oral final exam. Your instructor and other students in the class will ask a variety of questions, and students will be expected to offer clear, sophisticated, and thoughtful responses that can withstand public scrutiny and evaluation. Each student will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and this exam will be worth 25% of your final grade.

### **Grades:**

- *Is this Class Going to be Easy?* - The students in this class represent some of the best and most capable young people in the province. Accordingly, I will expect a lot from you. You will not automatically be given an A because you have made an effort or because you are accustomed to getting high marks. C is an average grade, and in order to do better than that, you will have to produce better than average work. This means that you will go the extra distance, do the extra reading, prepare for classes by taking notes and formulating questions, make thoughtful interventions in class, submit careful and polished assignments free from careless errors, etc. There are no easy A’s and this is not an easy class.

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the four assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. I will then average the marks based on the percentage weights listed above. I do not like giving students numerical marks and I think it is an inferior system of grading. In my mind, I often think in terms of a letter grade. So that you know, your number out of 100 points translates into the following letter grades:

90-100 = A+	73-76 = B	60-62 = C-	0-50 = F
85-89 = A	70-72 = B-	57-59 = D+	
80-84 = A-	67-69 = C+	53-56 = D	
77-79 = B+	63-66 = C	50-52 = D-	

- *What do the Grades Mean?* – Loosely translated the letter grades mean the following: an A+ is truly outstanding and spectacular work that goes well above and beyond the normal expectations of an assignment and demonstrates a complete mastery of the subject matter. An A or an A- is excellent and exceptional work. A grade in the B range is good to very good work that demonstrates a solid grasp of the material. A grade in the C range is average work that demonstrates a satisfactory but incomplete grasp of the course material. A grade in the D range is unsatisfactory work of poor quality. And an F is failing work that does not meet the minimum requirements for the course. Because grades in the A range are exceptional and grades in the C range are average, A grades are rare and difficult to obtain. I'm telling you this so that you know that if you earn a 75 on an assignment it means that I think the assignment is good not excellent. If you earn a 95, it means it's one of the best pieces of work I've have ever seen for this kind of class.
- *Extensions* – There are no extensions for any assignment. Assignments are announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you cannot make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. I am under no obligation to accept late assignments; assignments that are accepted may suffer a significant penalty (5 points for each day late).
- *Negotiations and Missed Assignments* - I do not haggle with students over grades, nor do I listen to declarations about why a student deserves an extra point here or there. You and I will not be negotiating your grade for the class – you will be earning a grade based on criteria that are explicitly stated in class. In addition, after the final grades are posted for the semester I will not re-mark or re-consider any grade from earlier in the semester. If you do not understand why you got a particular grade or why you lost points on a given assignment, you should come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me and I will explain your grade.

## Course Schedule:

### Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup> –

“What is a public? What does the public have to do with communication?”

### Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup> –

“John Dewey vs. Walter Lippmann: The Problem of the Public and the Origins of Communication Studies”

Readings:

John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press, 1954): pp. 3-36 and 119-184.

Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Free Press, 1949): pp. 3-22 and 201-262.

### Thursday, October 1<sup>st</sup> –

“How to Make a Public: Communication, Community Organizing, and Political Action in the Twentieth Century”

Readings:

Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Vintage Books, 1971): 3-97.

Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton University Press, 2012): 1-164.

### Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup> –

“Jürgen Habermas and the Public Sphere”

Readings:

Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” *New German Critique* No. 3 (1974): 49-55.

Craig Calhoun, “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,” from *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (The MIT Press, 1992): pp. 1-51.

Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” from *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 109-142).

\*\*\*First Think Question Due.

**Thursday, October 15<sup>th</sup> –**

“Hannah Arendt on the Difference between the Public and Private”

Readings:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1998): sections 1-12, 17-18, 23-28, 31-35, 37, 39, and 41.

\*\*\*Second Think Question Due.

**Thursday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> –**

“Publics and Counterpublics”

Readings:

Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002): 7-124 and 159-186.

**Thursday, October 29<sup>th</sup> –**

“The Ethics of Public Communication in a Liberal Democracy: Free Speech, Pain, and Tolerance”

Readings:

John Durham Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2005): 1-28, 142-214, and 284-298

\*\*\*Third Think Question Due.

**Thursday, November 5<sup>th</sup> –**

“Narrative and The Rhetorical Constitution of a Public”

Readings:

Marshall Ganz, “What is Public Narrative?” – unpublished (2008).

Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*” from *Quarterly Journal of Speech* vol. 73 (1987): 133-150.

Michael Calvin McGee, “The Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” from *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader* (The Guilford Press, 1999): 425-440.

Robert Danisch, “The Roots and Form of Obama’s Rhetorical Pragmatism,” from *Rhetoric Review* 31, no. 2 (2012): 148-168.

\*\*\*Fourth Think Question Due.

**Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> –**

“The Media and the Constitution of Public Culture”

Readings:

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1983): sections, 1-72 and 180-221.

Edward Bernays, “Manipulating Public Opinion: the Why and the How,” from *Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts, 1919-1968* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004): 51-77.

Edward Bernays, “The Engineering of Consent,” from *Public Relations* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1952): 157-168.

**Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup> –**

\*\*\*No Class This Week\*\*\*

**Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup> –**

“Social Media, Digital Publicity, and the Public/Private Self”

No New Readings.

**Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> –**

“The Crisis of Public Communication? Or the Crisis of Private Communication?”

Reading:

TBD