

**Faculty of Communication and Culture**  
**Graduate Program in Communications Studies**  
**COMS 4013A**  
**Senior Seminar**

**Professor: Timothy Buell**

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**Office Hours:** Monday 11-2

**Room:** SS 571

**Day & Time:** Thursdays 10:00 am - 12:50 pm

Course Website: [www.ucalgary.ca/buell/coms4013.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/buell/coms4013.html)

**Course Description:**

This seminar is concerned with globalization and cyberspace (especially the Internet). It starts with an examination of key concepts and models of globalization itself, including the relations of the global to the local. We explore the relevance of the new information technological revolution in facilitating and speeding up of many globalizing processes. An important aspect is the growing dominance of global corporations, including media conglomerates and their dissemination of Western, particularly American, popular culture, and the various forms of resistance to and local reinterpretations of these messages. We encounter the question of whether there is developing a “global culture” dominated by the U.S. or whether globalization is leading to more cultural diversity.

In this connection, there are many claims about what Marshall McLuhan had earlier dubbed as “the global village” and how this technology is an irresistible force transforming the very nature of society and communities themselves. This form of “technological determinism” has encountered numerous criticisms which we will consider. We shall examine the various types of computer-media communication (CMC) in cyberspace and whether “cybercommunities” can be considered to be genuine communities. In addition, alternate uses of the Internet, whether for criminal or deviant uses, organizing protests, or free music or video downloading, have important implications.

Finally, globalization and its relation to cyberspace leads to the need to modify our models of societies which are no longer as self-contained as they were. We shall consider “the network society” as proposed by Castells and others.

This advanced seminar will be an opportunity to apply the different sociological perspectives you have studied to these processes. They can range from the macrosociological study of large-scale processes and social structures to the microsociological examination of our daily uses of computers and the relations mediated through them. The organization of topics will be flexible enough to accommodate some of our interests as they emerge.

**Required Readings:**

We shall be using a coursepack of readings available on the course website. Additional materials will be distributed in class during the course.

### **Assignments & Evaluation:**

The primary purpose of this course is to encourage discussion about many issues, including outline above. As this is a seminar, you need, first of all, to keep up with the assigned readings so that you are prepared to discuss the ideas raised in them. In addition, the major assignment is an informal presentation as a basis for class discussion on a given essay topic. The ideas and criticisms that arise in class can be incorporated into the later polished versions of this paper.

The marks for this will be divided up as follows:

- **First Report: 20%**
- **Second Report: 20%**
- **Participation in group discussions on assigned topics: 20%**
- **Major presentation & essay: 40% (10% for presentation & 30% for the final written work).**

The reports are summaries and critical discussion of the arguments raised in the assigned readings. There will be no final examination.

Outline of Topics:

#### **1. Globalization in general:**

- definitions & general perspectives,
- historical context

#### **2. The relations between the global & the local:**

- Ritzer's distinction between "glocalization" & "globalization".
- Ritzer on "McDonaldization".

#### **3. Globalization & Culture (including popular culture):**

- Global media corporations.
- Media messages—esp. diverse local interpretations of the 'same' messages in the dominant Western media.
- National cultural policies, including broadcasting policies, including Canadian content regulations.
- Hybridization & indigenization as in music (the perspicuous case of "world music").
  
- debate on whether globalization is leading to cultural homogeneity or generating local variants & even active resistance to Westernization,

#### **4. "Cyberspace":**

- conceptions of cyberspace of which the Internet is only a part.
  
- history of computers & the Internet?
- the claimed transformative effects of digital media. "Technological determinism".
  
- arguments re "the global village"—the nature of cybercommunities, in contrast to face-to-face interaction,
- digital technologies and their implications for globalization & resistance thereto.
- In some countries, censorship & the banning of the use of various media.

- Also, surveillance through the Internet.
- Role of information technology in globalization.

**5. McLuhan's major ideas & predictions:**

- "The medium is the message".
- older media as content of the new media,
- older media as changed by new media, rather than being displaced,
- "global village",

**6. ALTERNATIVE USES of the Internet, including:**

- protest groups & other forms of resistance,
- criminal activities & "cybercrime",
- downloading & software piracy. Issues of copyright.

**7. The "NETWORK SOCIETY" and related new models of societies in the global context.**

## Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, **students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**

For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

## Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

## Grading System

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

|     | Grading Scale |
|-----|---------------|
| A+  | 96-100        |
| A   | 90-95.99      |
| A - | 85-89.99      |
| B+  | 80-84.99      |
| B   | 75-79.99      |
| B-  | 70-74.99      |
| C+  | 65-69.99      |
| C   | 60-64.99      |
| C-  | 55-59.99      |
| D+  | 53-54.99      |
| D   | 50-52.99      |
| F   | 0-49          |

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, A- would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. F will be converted to zero.

## Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university. You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources. Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

**Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at the following link;

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

**Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

**Students' Union**

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see

<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>

**Student Ombudsman**

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

**Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points**

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

**"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333**

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

**Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site: <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics> or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb>

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

A daily schedule of lectures and readings, as well as detailed assignment descriptions, will be handed out on the first day of class.