**Communication Theory: Race, Health, and Gender**
DMC 298
Spring 2025
Monday & Wednesday
12:30 – 1:50 pm
Professor Kim Adams

**Course Description**
Is race a social construct? How do you know you are sane? Does anyone have a perfect body? Is one born or made a woman? In this class, we will read short selections from classic works of critical theory concerning how we encounter, understand, and make meaning in the world. These works belong to a tradition of reading and writing, interpretation and agitation from which the discipline of media studies emerged in the late twentieth century. Our job as a class is to use this tradition to interrogate three vectors of power that shape our daily lives: race, health, and gender. To that end, the course is split in half. Each week, we will dedicate one class meeting to reading and discussing a work of theory. Our second meeting will be dedicated to a communal research and production project that centers the intersections of race, health, and gender. The goal is for our media practice to inform and be informed by our encounters with theory. This course fulfills the Communications and Cultural Diversity requirement for the Digital Media and Communications Major in the Department of Film and New Media Studies.

**Course Objectives**
In this course you should aim to:
- Make something on your own, with your peers, from scratch.
- Not be afraid of changing your mind.
- Think big ideas.

**Learning Outcomes**
By the end of this course, you will be able to:
- Develop, manage, collaborate on, and complete a media project.
- Understand, explain, respond to, and use new ideas.
- Read difficult texts.

**Please note that this syllabus is a live document, subject to change in response to the class dynamic and the everchanging world in which we are living.**

**FDMC Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is an important component of academic success and absolutely essential in the Film, Digital Media, and Communication industries. You are allowed 2 absences without explanation. These are designed to cover minor illnesses and other mishaps. No other absences will be excused except for bereavement or unscheduled hospitalization. Any additional absences will lower the final course grade by a third of a letter for each class missed (e.g., B becomes B-, a C+ becomes a C, etc.) and require a meeting with the department chair.

Five or more absences will result in an “F” in the course unless exceptional circumstances are documented with the Office of Academic Advising.

**Content**

In this course we will be reading and talking about challenging issues across the intersections of race, gender, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity. In the classroom we will approach these issues and each other with intellectual and emotional care and generosity.

**Academic Accommodations**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Filene Center for Academic Advising, Support & Accessibility Services to register for accommodations as early as possible in the semester. They can be reached at accessibility@wheatoncollege.edu, by phone at 508-286-8215, or through their website: wheatoncollege.edu/academics/academic-advising/accessibility-services/

**Academic Integrity & Generative AI**

College education is a credentialling exercise that shapes the society in which we live, and our lives within it. If you get ChatGPT or your roommate to write your papers for you, you will not learn how to write them yourself, and at that point, you would do well to consider why you are paying to take this class. Note that all of the writing assignments are structured to emphasize the writing process that leads to the polished result. If you intend to use AI at any point in your writing process, you are required to consult with me first. Academic integrity meant to be a positive thing: the development of habits and character traits that allow us to thrive in our academic lives with integrity. Wheaton has an honor code. Follow it. If you have questions, ask. Do the right thing. It matters.

**Assignments**

Reading Reports: Due In Class on Monday with Assigned Reading

You will write two response papers to the course readings. These papers should be 800-1000 words in length and cite the text in question, and any other sources you used to help you understand the reading. You should include a bibliography in MLA or Chicago style. The purpose of the paper is to explain the theory given in the reading to someone who hasn’t read it, and why it matters. Response papers are due in class on the day of the reading. Signups here.

Working Documents: Due Each Wednesday at the end of class

At the end of each Wednesday workshop students will submit the documents and other materials they have created for the class project that week. These will be graded wholistically based on individual and group performance.

Working Reports: Due Each Friday at Noon

Students will submit a short (100-500 word) reflection on their progress and contributions to the group project on Friday of each class week at noon. These reflections should celebrate your work and ideas, and consider how there week’s reading has shaped your approach to the class project.

Final Project: Due In Class on April 30
The final project will be developed over the course of the semester by all students in the class, taking the form and content that the group chooses. Students will be graded on their individual contributions and the quality of the final project.

**Grading Breakdown & Scale**
Reading Reports – 20% (10% each)
Working Documents – 10%
Working Reports - 10%
Final Project – 20%
Attendance and Participation – 20%

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A+** | **97-100** | **C** | **73-76** |
| **A** | **93-96** | **C-** | **70-72** |
| **A-** | **90-92** | **D+** | **67-69** |
| **B+** | **87-89** | **D** | **63-66** |
| **B** | **83-86** | **D-** | **60-62** |
| **B-** | **80-82** | **F** | **59 or below** |
| **C+** | **77-79** | | |

**Schedule**

Week 1
Jan 22
Introduction and Project Planning
Reading: Audre Lorde. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.

Week 2
Jan 27
Reading: Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994. 1-42

Jan 29
Workshop goal: choose medium

Week 3
Feb 3

Reading: Stuart Hall (1993), “Encoding, Decoding” *The Cultural Studies Reader,* Simon During (Ed), Routledge Press, 1999. 507-517.

Feb 5
Workshop goal: choose topics and roles

Week 4
Feb 10
Reading: Stanley Fish, “Is There a Text in This Class?” *Is There A Text in This Class?* Harvard University Press, 1980. 303-321

Feb 12
Workshop goal: research

Week 5
Feb 17
Reading: J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (excerpt), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Balckwell Publishers Ltd., 2004. 162-176.

Feb 19
Workshop goal: short proposal

Week 6
Feb 24
Reading: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*
Part 1, Ch. 1 & 2 (p.65-78) Part 2, Ch. 4 (p.111-122)
trans. Wade Baskin. Columbia University Press, 2011

Feb 26
Workshop goal: sources/contacts list

Week 7
March 3
Reading: Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting.* (excerpt) Harvard University Press, 2012.

March 5
Workshop goal: elevator pitch

Spring Break!

Week 8
March 17
Reading: Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (excerpt), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Balckwell Publishers Ltd., 2004. 1017-1030.

March 19
Workshop goal: demo tape/proof of principle

Week 9
March 24
Reading: Edward Said, "Introduction," *Orientalism.* Random House, 1978. 10-28.

March 26
Workshop goal: make the thing

Week 10
March 31
Reading: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. Malden,
MA: Balckwell Publishers Ltd., 2004. 693-702

April 2
Workshop goal: continue the process
Class on Zoom

Week 11
April 7
Reading: Thorstein Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption" *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* Oxford University Press, 2007.

April 9
Workshop goal: digital promotion

Week 12
April 14
Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" *Illuminations*. trans. Harry Zohn. Schocken Books, 2007. p. 217-251.

April 16
Workshop goal: irl promotion

Week 13
April 21
Reading: Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, “The Migration of the Aura, or How to Explore the Original Through Its Fac Similes” *Switching Codes: Thinking Through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts.* University of Chicago Press, 2011. 275-297 http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/151

April 23
Workshop: task completion

Week 14
April 28
Reading: Richard Dawkins, “Memes: the New Replicators” *The Selfish Gene,* Oxford University Press, 1989.

April 30
Conclusion
Present your work