

COLL C103 – The Semiotics of Advertising

Spring 2019 (Section 9172)

Instructor

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Course Goals

1. A good orientation in and understanding of the general principles and philosophical underpinnings of semiotics, including terminology and concepts.
2. Development of the ability to apply the tools of semiotics for the analysis of concrete texts, both visual and written.
3. The ability to write concise, focused analyses of finite semiotic texts (ads).
4. An appreciation of advertising as a creative medium (as I call it, the “new poetry”).
5. Heightened introspective sensitivity to and awareness of the subtle nuances of language use employed in advertising.
6. Increased ability to articulate how the same semiotic and linguistic effects which push our buttons and manipulate us as consumers also occur on all other levels of language, from fine literature to everyday conversation.

Textbook & Materials

- The main course web site at <http://www.indiana.edu/~slavicgf/home.html>
- Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2017, 3rd ed.
- Additional readings and materials provided via web site as required.

Course Requirements and Grading

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| 1. <i>Midterm exam</i> , 50 minutes (Week 9, Wed. March 6) | 100 pts |
| 2. <i>Final exam</i> , 120 minutes (Week 16, Wed. May 1, 5:00–7:00) | 200 |
| 3. 11 weekly <i>annotations</i> (analytical explications) of ads @ | |

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| 10 pts; annotations are due by 1:25 pm on Mondays | 110 |
| 4. 11 weekly quizzes in discussion sections | 110 |
| 5. 2 short mini-papers based on extended material @ 50 pts | 100 |
| 6. 1 term paper analyzing a series of ads or thematically related group of ads (due Mon. April 29) | 100 |
| 7. Term paper proposal in advance of term paper deadline | 30 |
| 8. 5 pop quizzes in lecture @ 20 pts | 100 |
| 9. Attendance and participation (AI's discretion) | 50 |
| | <u>900 pts</u> |

Midterm and final will each consist of two sections: 1) multiple choice questions covering primarily the semiotic content of the course (theory and application) 2) short-essay analysis of one or more advertisements you have not previously seen, in which you will identify themes discussed in the course and generally explain what is going on. If video ads are to be used, they will be provided to you in advance via the course web site. The multiple-choice section is machine-graded, and the short answers will be graded by the AIs.

Weekly assignments. As a central component of this course, you are expected to dig up advertisements that illustrate the principles which we discuss in lectures and discussion sessions. For each advertisement you will write a concise annotation which analyzes how the ad you have chosen employs one or more semiotic concepts named in the assignment. (We may limit one or more assignments to print ads only, and on some occasions we may ask you to analyze an ad we supply.) ***Annotations are to be submitted via Canvas by lecture time on Mondays.*** In that way, you'll have the benefit of reviewing the relevant material in discussion section before writing the assignment. Ads will be attached to annotations as internet links, scanned images, or any other appropriate fashion. In most cases the ads will be graded by the end of the week. They will be graded for how pertinent the ad is to the issue it illustrates, as well as how cogent the annotation is, with 10 points possible for each ad+annotation. Most Fridays there will be a 10-point quiz over the current week's lecture and reading material. In Week 1 there is no annotation to write and no quiz in discussion section. Annotations and quizzes are graded by your AI.

There will be two “mini-papers”, three-page assignments where you discuss two different versions of the same source material as presented in films. Details will be provided later. The films will be posted on line for streaming or downloading. These assignments will be graded by your AI. You will also write a (roughly) five-page term paper around the end of the semester analyzing a group of thematically related ads. Generally, we imagine three ways to approach this topic: 1) provide a comparative analytical discussion of various ads for the same product (e.g., Coca-Cola); 2) compare and contrast a set of ads for competing products in the same

category (e.g., various different SUVs); or 3) analyze a selection of ads for unrelated products which are thematically related by using the same semiotic technique(s) in each case (e.g., a bunch of ads incorporating metaphors). Other possibilities also exist, and if you are motivated to approach this in some other way, you are welcome to do so. Before tackling the term paper you will submit a proposal for the topic you will explore, and this provides an opportunity for early feedback if you try some other original idea. Term papers and proposals will be graded by George Fowler, not by the AIs. Mini-papers and term papers will be submitted via Canvas.

Five pop-quizzes will be given in lecture mainly as an attendance check, secondarily to cover any absences the instructor might pile up, due to illness or weather or car problems. If the instructor can't make it, we will normally show a film in lecture accompanied by a 20-point worksheet, replacing one of the pop quizzes.

The general course policy for missed assignments is that students will be permitted to make them up with no penalty only in cases of sickness, family emergencies, official university activities (athletics, ROTC, etc.) or extraordinary circumstances. No assignments may be skipped without a make-up. The AIs will provide specific details, but they will usually require official documentation of the reason for any make-ups. They are instructed to be strict about this policy, so be prepared for that.

Grades will be assigned on a 10% basis:

A+	97.00–100 %	B+	87.00–89.99 %	C+	77.00–79.99 %
A	93.00–96.99 %	B	83.00–86.99 %	C	73.00–76.99 %
A–	90.00–92.99 %	B–	80.00–82.99 %	C–	70.00–72.99 %, etc.

In this course you will *not* be asked to create compelling advertisements! Nor are we concerned directly with the marketing effectiveness of advertisements (though it can sometimes be relevant).

Course Structure

The course will be conducted as a fairly free-form lecture & simultaneous discussion. Interruptions are in order at any time, and I will throw questions out to the class to incorporate student input into the discussion.

Important Note 1: This course includes a significant amount of sexual and/or vulgar material, for several reasons: 1) ads often include a great deal of sexual innuendo and sometimes surprising explicit sexual references, occasionally pushing beyond what is approved for mainstream U.S. network television; 2) for orientation purposes, we need some material of this sort from outside the sphere of advertisements; 3) the instructor finds vulgar language appropriate for expressing opinions and emotions, and is prone to use it in lecture. If you find such material offensive and do not view

it as a proper object for intellectual investigation, you'd be better off switching to another course. You can use the lecture on Wednesday of Week 1 as a test for whether you might be uncomfortable with such material.

Important Note 2: The instructor is opinionated about matters involving popular culture, politics, and current events. He does not intend to impose his views on you, and will never require that you agree with him either informally or formally (i.e., for a grade of any sort). However, sometimes he is sufficiently outraged by current events that he cannot resist commenting on such matters.

Important Note 3: The instructor has gotten really fed up with distractions in the large lecture class format, and will insist upon a **no electronic device** policy in this class. That means you may not use laptops, tablets, or cell phones, even for silent texting. If I notice you using your phone, I will call you out in class. I realize that the course may not be riveting during every minute. If you are bored, sit there and bear it. I will not be offended if you literally fall asleep (not that I want to encourage you to plan naps for this period). If you genuinely want to take notes on a laptop, sorry. The course material is not really intended for note-taking, and the lecture notes projected during each lecture will remain on line for the entire semester. I mainly want you to pay attention and think about whatever we are doing. For a compelling articulation of the cognitive basis of such a policy in class, see this article from the *New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/22/business/laptops-not-during-lecture-or-meeting.html?_r=0:

Computer Resources

There is a www site for the course at:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~slavicgf/home.html>

The web site contains:

- On-line syllabus and schedule of readings & assignments. A tentative schedule for the entire semester is currently posted, **but it will surely be modified; the current state of the web site is always definitive.**
- Notes for the class sessions, as well as links and advertisements shown in lecture, will be archived here. They will mostly be posted around the time of the lecture. These are just outlines and talking points, and are not a substitute for attending the lectures.

Any major announcements will be made by email. Make sure that any communications with the instructor or your AI go to their respective general IU email addresses, as we will not be reading Canvas internal mail.