

Cultural Codes in Communication

Comm 212, Spring 2009

Lecture: Herter Hall 231, Monday, Wednesday 1:25-2:15

Sections: Friday

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Teaching Assistants: David Avishay, Brion van Over, Lisa Wortman

Welcome to Comm 212!

Here are the **guiding questions** for our course of study: How is communication practiced by people around the world? What do these practices suggest about communication, about social and cultural life? How is communication influenced by culture? And, in turn, how does communication influence social interactions among cultures?

Assumptions: This course is designed to explore how communication creates, and is created in, social and cultural contexts. By "communication" we are drawing attention to all means and media of communication. By "social contexts" we draw attention to specific scenes of social interaction in which communication occurs. By "cultural contexts" we draw attention to two things, common meanings which are presumed for communication to take place, and feelings of group membership that are associated with those meanings. The general approach for the course, then, assumes that communication occurs in specific scenes, has something to do with common meanings, and, that common meanings form bases for membership in communities. The approach does not assume that people always understand, are equal to, or agree with one other, only that some practices of communication, on some occasions, are commonly meaningful and thus ground communal life.

Objectives: In order to address these questions, on the bases of these assumptions, we will explore three kinds of readings: (1) Readings which introduce basic concepts in communication studies. The central core of readings in this course, however, (2) explores cultural patterns of communication in many social and cultural contexts from around the world, including (3) the context we might call "mainstream or popular American." By the end of the course, you will have some knowledge of the diverse communication resources that various people have created, a way to unravel and critically reflect upon these resources, and a mode of explaining communication which relies less on psychological and individual differences, and more on the cultural coding of communicative life.

Focal concerns: You will notice in the course schedule below that the readings are organized around four central dimensions of communication. Each is an important feature in communication everywhere in the world. That is, by surveying communication around the globe, we know that as people everywhere communicate, so they "say" something (1) about place – where they are, and what they are part of, (2) about identity – who they are, and their social relationships, (3) about communication itself, for example about the media-in-use and/or the nature of social interaction, and (4) about

emotion, that is, what is worthy of feeling. By asking how each of these dimensions are interpreted and expressively produced for each people, we can begin understanding, and thus bring into better focus, cultural codes in communication.

Course format: Class time is divided between lecture (on Mondays and Wednesdays) and section meetings (on Fridays). For your best education, you will need to be present for every class period, both lectures and section meetings. However, just "being there" is not enough. You should come prepared to reflect upon and discuss ideas, having read, taken notes upon, and raised questions about the assigned readings for that week. Use class time wisely to test and develop your thinking, devoting about half of your time to taking notes, and half to reflecting on the material at hand.

The **section meetings** are an important part of this class. In these meetings, you will discuss readings and lectures, and also, at times, be introduced to additional course materials. During these meetings, you will be asked to deliberate upon, apply, and in various ways work with course materials. For some of these meetings, you will be asked to reflect upon ideas presented in the readings and lectures. For others, you will be assigned a graded project, to be completed alone or with others, to be handed in during the section meeting itself, or later. These assignments are designed to help you explore, and understand better, course materials. Lectures and section meetings thus work together.

Graded Assignments consist of the following: (1) three multiple choice exams covering lecture and section materials (each exam is worth about 20% of your course grade, the three thus totaling 60% of the course grade); (2) several short written assignments including quizzes and reaction papers completed during lectures and assignments to be completed in conjunction with section meetings (35% of grade); and (3) participation (5%). The assignments will be explained further in lecture and/or in the section meetings. The dates for the exams are noted on the following schedule. (Please note: There will be no make-up exams or assignments. Also, we do not accept late papers. No exceptions. Anyone caught cheating on an exam or assignment will receive a 0.0 for their course grade.)

There are three **required texts** for the course (keyed to the schedule below): (1) Donal Carbaugh's CULTURES IN CONVERSATION, Erlbaum Publishers (CC on the schedule below); (2) Keith Basso's PORTRAITS OF "THE WHITEMAN," London: Cambridge University Press (PW on the schedule); and (3) a reading packet on ereserves (RP). The first two required books are available at the university's textbook annex. We will discuss how to gain access to the required packet of readings in class. These are the minimal reading requirements. If you desire further readings in an area of interest, we will be delighted to make further suggestions.

University designations: The General Education Council of the University of Massachusetts' Faculty Senate has selected this course

for two special designations. First, this course bears the Social and Behavioral Science designation of the General Education Program because it aims to help you become proficient in the theories and methods of the social sciences, and to develop critical thinking skills as these apply to concrete social situations. Second, this course bears the Diversity Designation because its content reaches beyond mainstream North American cultures and the Western tradition to develop an explicit understanding and appreciation of the cultures, experiences, and expressions of those outside these traditions.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Readings should be completed by the first date on the line (e.g., read the reserve article by Carey by January 28).

January 26 Introduction to the course

The basic probes: How is communication a cultural resource?
What is a Communication Code?

Jan 28, Feb 2 Read: Carey (RP); CC (Introduction)

Unit 1: The Cultural Communication of Place

The basic probe: How does communication presume and create senses of place?

Feb 4, 9 Read: Philipsen (RP); CC (ch. 7);
Feb 11 Carbaugh & Rudnick (RP)

Unit 2: The Cultural Communication of Identity

Probe: How does communication create cultural identities and social relationships?

Feb 18 Read: Mechling (RP); Wieder & Pratt (RP);
Feb 23, 25 CC (ch. 2); Yep (RP);
March 2 Daniel & Smitherman (RP); CC (ch. 6);
March 4 Hastings (RP)

***** **March 9** **Exam # 1** *****

Unit 3: The Cultural Communication of Social Interaction

Probes: How is social action culturally shaped and meaningful?
Which channel of communication is given priority?
What is celebrated by groups as ways of communicating?

March 11 Film

March 23, 25 Read: Frake (RP); Hall (RP); Fitch (RP)
March 30, Apr 1 CC (chs. 3-4);
April 6, 8 Basso (RP); Griefat & Katriel
(RP);
April 13 Katriel and Philipsen (RP);
April 15 Basso (PW)

***** April 21 Exam # 2 *****

Unit 4: The Cultural Communication of Emotion

Probe: Does culture influence what and how we feel,
as well as how we express our emotions?

April 22 Read: Varenne (RP); Lakoff & Kovecses
(RP);
April 27 Potter (RP); Wierzbicka (RP);
April 29 Bergmann (RP)

***** May 4 Exam # 3

Final Project: Deciphering Cultural Communication Codes

Read: CC (ch. 8)

May 6, 11 Final report due May 11th in lecture

Order and Citation of Readings in Reading Packet:

1. J. Carey. (1975). A cultural approach to communication. Communication, 2, 1-22.
2. G. Philipsen. (1976). Places for speaking in Teamsterville. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62, 15-25.
 3. D. Carbaugh and L. Rudnick. (2002). Which places, what story? Cultural discourses at the border of the Blackfeet reservation and Glacier National Park. Great Plains Quarterly (in press).
4. J. Mechling, (1980). The magic of the boy scout campfire. Journal of American Folklore, 93, 35-56.
 5. L. Wieder & S. Pratt. (1990). On being a recognizable Indian among Indians. In D. Carbaugh (ed.), Cultural communication and intercultural contact (pp. 45-64). London and Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum Pub.
 6. G. Yep. (1998). My three cultures: Navigating the multicultural identity landscape. In J. Martin, T. Nakayama, & L. Flores (eds.), Readings in Cultural Contexts (pp. 79-85). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
 7. J. Daniel & G. Smitherman. (1990). How I got over: Communication dynamics in the Black community. In D. Carbaugh (ed.), Cultural communication and intercultural contact (pp. 27-44). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., Inc.
 8. S. O. Hastings. (2001). Social drama as a site for the communal construction and management of Asian Indian "stranger" identity. Research on Language and Social Interaction, 34 (3), 309-335.
 9. C. Frake. (1980). How to ask for a drink in Subanun. In his Language and cultural description. Stanford, CA: Stanford University press.

10. B. Hall. (1998). Ritual as part of everyday life. In J. Martin, T. Nakayama, & L. Flores (eds.), Readings in Cultural Contexts (pp. 172-179). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
11. K. Fitch. (1998). A ritual for attempting leave-taking in Colombia. In Martin, Nakayama, and Flores (pp. 179-186).
12. K. Basso, (1970). To give up on words: Silence in western Apache culture. Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 26, 213-230.
13. Y. Griefat & T. Katriel, (1989). Life demands "musayra": Communication and culture among Arabs in Israel. International and Intercultural Communication Annual, 13, 121-138.
14. T. Katriel and G. Philipsen. (1981). What we need is "communication": "Communication" as a cultural category in some American speech. Communication Monographs, 48, 302-17.
15. H. Varenne, (1977). Chapters 8 & 9 from his Americans together (pp. 166-187). New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
16. G. Lakoff & Z. Kovecses. (1987). The cognitive model of anger inherent in American English. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (eds.), Cultural models in language and thought (pp. 195-221). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
17. S. Potter, (1988). The cultural construction of emotion in rural Chinese social life. Ethos, 16, 181-207.
18. A. Wierzbicka, (1986). Human emotions: Universal or culture-specific? American Anthropologist, 88, 584-594.
19. F. Bergmann, (1979). A monologue on the emotions. In F. Miller & T. Attig (eds.), Understanding human emotions. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press.