Capstone Courses for Fall 2015

COMM 480, section 01: Capstone in Communication: Semiotics and American Pop Culture
Instructor: Dr. Robert Westerfelhaus
Course Meeting Time: MW 2:00 – 3:15 pm

Semiotics is the study of signs, the basic units of meaning. The creation and organization of signs is fundamental to the processes of communication in all contexts. This course uses semiotic theory to examine the way that meaning is created, shared, and occasionally contested within the context of American popular culture. Students will gain an understanding of semiotic theories and practices that are useful tools for critical thinking, enabling students to become more savvy producers and consumers of communication within the media-saturated world they inhabit.

Through individual and group papers, presentations, projects, and a collaboratively authored research paper, students will apply semiotic theory as a means of making sense of their daily lives, with a focus upon American popular culture artifacts and practices associated with advertisements, comic books, fashion, films, music, shopping, social media, television series, and urban design.

By the end of this course students will be able to: Demonstrate through written assignments and oral presentations an advanced knowledge of classic and contemporary semiotic theory and its relation to human communication; describe popular culture texts (comic books, films, material culture, music, television shows, etc.) in semiotic terms; conduct analyses of popular culture texts that draw from, and contribute to, semiotic scholarship; report such analyses in an academic paper worthy of being presented at a conference and published in a peer reviewed journal; and point out the practical and theoretical implications of their analytical findings.
COMM 480, section 02: Capstone in Communication: Training and Development – Putting your Degree to Work  
Instructor: Dr. Kathleen DeHaan  
Course Meeting Time: T/Th 9:25 – 10:40 am

So, you've arrived at nearly the end of your college career, having almost completed your degree in Communication. This capstone in Talent, Training and Development will offer students the opportunity to synthesize and employ those learning experiences.

In 2013 organizations in the United States and across the world spent an estimated $170 Billion dollars (roughly $1,200 per employee) on training and development, much of it focused upon topics such as: Leadership, Team Building, Communication, Change Management, Conflict Resolution, Career Advancement, Coaching, Motivation, Critical Thinking, and Listening Skills. The TT&D function crosses all organizational boundaries - healthcare, not for profit, technology, heavy industry, academics, sports, corporate marketplaces, etc.

This course explores talent, training and development through both theoretical and applied lenses independently and in teams. Students will learn how to identify and assess workplace competence as well as how to develop and deliver training programs to address gaps in those competencies. In other words, you will solve problems. To be successful in this course you should be curious, confident, creative, reliable, analytical, as well as fairly technologically savvy. My assumption is that as a senior in Communication you have well-developed skills in: research (quantitative and qualitative), writing, speaking, listening, advocacy, and relationship building. We will utilize learning resources such as: Diagnostic Assessments, Aptitude Tests, eLearning, Storyboards/Posters, Case Studies, Games and Simulations, Books, Training Exercises, and other materials.

Students will work independently and in teams to develop and present training modules for organizations of their choice. (There are both exam and presentation components for this course.) For example, students might assess and design a training module about resume writing for clients at Crisis Ministries; a module about intercultural communication for employees at Boeing; a module about handling a hostile customer for Mellow Mushroom; a module about creating a positive internet presence for college seniors; or a module about social media safety for parents of middle school students.

Upon completion of this course, students will: Gain insight into the field of training as a potential career, or at the very least insight into the importance of integrating training into their future organizations. Have a demonstrable grasp of basic training theories. Understand fundamental training methodologies. Be able to design an effective Needs Assessment. Be able to write detailed and achievable Training Objectives. Be able to choose appropriate instructional methods. Understand how to select, prepare and use effective training aids. Grasp the foundations of effective presentational techniques for training. Have successfully developed and presented two Training Modules. Be able to critically evaluate the effectiveness of training instruction. And – we’ll have a lot of fun.
COMM 480, sections 03: Capstone in Communication: Wired and Inspired
Instructor: Dr. Merissa Ferrara
Course Meeting Time: MWF 10:00 – 10:50 am

Have you ever stopped to think about what is possible? What is really possible in your life? Do you know how great people come up with great possibilities in their lives? There are possibilities that exist within you that exceed the greatest goal you can ever plan for. We will uncover those possibilities and learn how to take action to make them real.

What holds you back? What could you accomplish if those things were not holding you back? What actions could you take to create a reality for yourself where nothing holds you back? What moves you forward? What we do and say brings meaning to life. Is what you are doing and saying reflecting the life you want to lead?

This capstone is driven by your interests and needs as you complete your last year of college. We will begin the semester exploring who you are, dreamlining, and investigating research around achieving what you thought may be impossible. Each month we will look at seemingly benign interpersonal communicative acts like greetings, empathy, apologies, networking, compliments, smiles, complaining, etc. and make small changes to test for improved outcomes. We will explore a variety of voices on the topic from scholars, bloggers, Ted talks, your family, etc. to deepen our understanding on the concept. We will enter into a series of challenges that are centered on taking action within relationships in your personal life, around campus and in the greater community. Much of your learning will take place outside of the classroom walls.

To be successful everyone has to be willing to engage and show an active interest in people, especially their classmates. We form a close class community. People cannot hide. The class requires self-analysis and reflective writing. Some of the challenges will push our comfort zones, ask difficult questions, and complete assignments quickly.

Everyone is required to have an IPAD for this course. We utilize Evernote, Dropbox, Ted, Zite, LinkedIn, Wordpress, imovie, and more.
COMM 480, sections 04: Capstone in Communication: Wired and Inspired - SERVICE
Instructor: Dr. Merissa Ferrara
Course Meeting Time: MWF 11:00-11:50

You are fortunate. You are one year away from graduating with a degree from a respectable institution. And yet, if you walk around Charleston or read about world events you cannot help but notice that others are not as fortunate. As individuals entering your last year of college it is time to use your knowledge and skill sets to help others.

This capstone section is similar to Wired and Inspired because it is grounded in interpersonal theory and fosters interpersonal skills. However, this section will achieve similar goals through service learning. Successful applicants will speak to their interest in and commitment to a year of service in their application. Read the remaining description with reaching out to help the community in mind.

Have you ever stopped to think about what is possible? What is really possible in life? Do you know how great people come up with great possibilities in their lives? There are possibilities that exist within you that exceed the greatest goal you can ever plan for. What holds you back? What could you accomplish if those things were not holding you back? What actions could you take to create a reality for yourself and others? What moves you forward? What we do and say brings meaning to live. Is what you are doing and saying reflecting the life you want to lead?

This capstone is driven by your service interests. We will begin the semester by exploring who you are, your social advocacy plan, dreamlining, and investigating research around achieving what you thought may be impossible. We will explore a variety of voices on topics from scholars, community leaders, bloggers, Ted talks, and change agents to deepen our understanding of concepts like social advocacy, civic engagement, poverty tourism, outreach, human connection, and change. We will work together toward small and large community service projects.

To be successful everyone must be willing to engage and show an active interest in people. We form a close community. People cannot hide. This class requires self-analysis and reflective writing. Some of the experiences will push our comfort zones and ask difficult questions.

Much of your learning will take place outside of the classroom walls. We will meet outside of class time for service projects.
COMM 480, section 05: Capstone in Communication: The Bully Pulpit Experience
Instructor: Dr. Amanda Ruth-McSwain
Course Meeting Time: T/Th 10:50 am – 12:05 pm

Get behind-the-scenes access to the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Campaign Season. The most exciting event series at the College of Charleston, The Bully Pulpit, is preparing for a busy 2015-2016 primary election season and you have the opportunity to be part of the team. Through this capstone, students will be exposed to theories and concepts in civic engagement and electoral participation, strategic campaign planning, and event management. Over the course of two semesters, students on The Bully Pulpit Capstone Team will be responsible for the following:

• Develop strategic communication efforts to support Series’ events (event promotion),
• Conduct primary and secondary research on topics related to campaign communication, public opinion, and media discourse surrounding the election season,
• Motivate members of the campus community to exercise their voices as informed and engaged citizens through GOTV initiatives, and
• Plan, execute, and evaluate both small- and large-scale events.

As representatives of The Bully Pulpit Series, students enrolled in this capstone will be expected to act as professionals at all times. It is highly likely that students will interact with presidential candidates, public officials, political campaign staff, CofC leaders, and community members, and as such, will need to feel comfortable and confident engaging in such interactions. For a glimpse of the 2011-2012 Bully Pulpit Season, watch this recap video. The Bully Pulpit Capstone is a hands-on, portfolio-building experience that prepares students for competitive careers in event management, political campaigning, and strategic communication (public relations and marketing).

Prerequisites: Strong work ethic, desire to exceed expectations, comfortable in new or changing environments, ability to multi-task, and resourceful.
COMM 480, section 06: Capstone in Communication: Organizational Influence and Advocacy
Instructor: Dr. Julie Davis
Course Meeting Time: T/Th 1:40 – 2:55 pm

Have you ever wondered why organizations make the statements they do? Who do they think is listening? Students interested in public relations, internal organizational communication, and marketing will find this section a good fit.

With the advent of new communication technologies, organizations have found themselves communicating more frequently with a greater range of audiences than ever before, complicating the already challenging task of meeting multiple goals with simple messages. This year-long course will examine how organizations formulate and attempt to reach their goals by evaluating their strategic use of symbols as communication, examining the theoretical and practical considerations that organizations must take into account when designing messages, and creating original organizational discourse. It will include concepts from rhetorical criticism, media studies, public relations, and organizational communication to examine texts created by both organizations as a whole and by members of an organization working individually.

In this capstone experience, students will select an organization of interest to them, make a contact with that organization, and conduct research into its rhetorical situation. This knowledge will allow them to critically evaluate the messages through which the organization responds to a variety of situations and create original discourse that would help the organization address these situations. Students will also complete a final project discussing the unique situation that their organization faces, reflecting upon their experience both analyzing and creating organizational messages, and providing recommendations to that organization on ways to improve its communication.
COMM 480, section 05: Capstone in Communication: Experimenting with Nonverbal Communication  
Instructor: Dr. Jenifer Kopfman  
Course Meeting Time: T/Th 9:25 –10:40 am

How do people react when you stand too close to them during a conversation? Can you change another person’s mood simply by changing the tone and pitch of your own voice? When your voice sends one message but your facial expression sends the opposite, which will your friends believe? Are you willing to be that awkward person to find the answer to these questions?

You have spent most of your communication major learning how to craft beautifully written messages and eloquently constructed speeches, but some researchers suggest that approximately two-thirds of all meaning is conveyed through nonverbal channels. Students in this capstone will spend the first eight weeks examining all of the nonverbal codes and conducting informal “experiments” to find answers to questions like those above. The rest of the year will be spent designing, executing, and writing your own study in one specific area of nonverbal communication. Our second semester will focus on nonverbal issues related to job search contexts, particularly resumes, application letters, and interviews.

Students applying for this capstone should have an interest in nonverbal communication and a willingness to put oneself in awkward situations for the sake of research. It is also preferred that students have a strong interest in research methods.

By the end of this course, students will find themselves overanalyzing both their own nonverbal behavior and that of their friends and family (but in a good way!). They will develop a strong understanding of the effects nonverbal aspects can have on the communication process, and be able to explain these effects using primary theories and literature in the field. They will design and conduct research in nonverbal communication, resulting in a paper of publishable or conference-presentation quality. Some students may have the opportunity to present their research at a regional conference.