Syllabus – Communication 691: Communication and Identity  
Spring, 2014, Wednesday, 3:00 – 5:45 p.m.

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Office Hours: MTW, 10:30 – 11:30 a.m., or by appointment

Overview

This seminar will explore the connections between communication and the concepts of identity and self. In the first section of the course, we will consider theoretical approaches to these concepts, moving from early considerations of an “essential self” through social approaches to identity including Goffman and social identity theory, narrative conceptions of identity and identification, and postmodern and post-structuralist approaches to self and community. In the second half of the course, we will explore the ways in which these ideas regarding the connections between communication and identity are implicated in areas that might include gender identity, generational identity, citizenship, sexuality, online communities, disability, organizational and professional identity, family roles, identity politics, and more.

Readings

Specific readings for each week are indicated on the course schedule. The Elliott book is available from a variety of sources and all required journal articles are available on Blackboard. The Miller book (War Makes Men of Boys) will be used for one of the workshops after the break, and the exact schedule for these workshops will be determined early in the semester.


Evaluation

You will be evaluated in three areas: participation and involvement (20% of grade), workshop collaboration (40% of grade), and an individual project (40% of grade).

Participation and Involvement: You will be asked to invest in the course in a variety of ways. First, because the content of the course is identity, you should be purposely self-reflective throughout the semester. This self-reflection could involve journaling, blogging, or just a whole lot of thinking. But I anticipate that this self-reflection will be manifest in seminar comments and participation. In addition, you will be asked to submit a brief essay (3-5 pages) at the end of the class exploring one or more issues that have emerged from this exercise. Second, discussion questions (three per week) should be submitted each week before spring break (i.e., before workshops begin). These discussion questions are due by Tuesday morning at 8:00 a.m. Third, you should participate actively in a Facebook group that I’ll set up for the class. This group will provide a forum for sharing issues regarding communication and identity on an ongoing basis.

Workshop collaboration. The second half of the course will be devoted to “workshops” on a wide variety of issues relevant to communication and identity. In essence, these workshops will be an opportunity to put the theoretical ideas we’ve considered in the first part of the class into “action” in whatever areas are of interest to you. For example, workshops might consider topics including gender identity, identity
politics, generational identity, disability, citizenship, online/offline identity, organizational and occupational identity, family roles, cultural identity, work/family conflict, sexuality, and more. I will present two of these workshops and the rest will be directed by a student with assistance from two other students. In other words, you will be in charge of one workshop and assisting on two others. My vision for these workshops is that they will look like a “special topic” short course at a conference and will include aspects of both presentation and group participation. I anticipate that these workshops might include a few “assigned readings” but will emphasize current debates in politics, social media, popular culture, etc. I’d like to these workshops to be informative and engaging! We’ll decide early in the term on workshop topics, schedule, collaboration teams, etc., so start thinking now about what you’d like to do. Each workshop team will have an opportunity for a planning meeting with me ahead of the planned workshop date.

*Individual Project.* You will have a lot of latitude in terms of the specific nature of the individual project. Possibilities include a literature review, a research proposal, a report on ongoing research, a case study that could be used for pedagogical purposes, a performance piece that embodies organizational communication issues, a relevant narrative or autoethnography … you get the idea — there are lots of options. The only requirements are that: (1) it is relevant to communication and identity; (2) it is of a scope that we both agree is appropriate for a cumulative project in a semester course; (3) it is something that you believe will be helpful to you in the vision you have of your developing career, and (4) that it is not duplicative of work you’re doing for another class (though I appreciate that there can be some overlap in projects). I encourage you to talk to me early about your thoughts on your project and we’ll have multiple opportunities to “check in” on progress. The projects are due on Monday, May 5.

*Class Policies and Procedures (with liberal borrowing from Sarah Tracy)*

*Norms of Civility*

Let’s create an oasis of civility in this class by: arriving on time and staying for the entire class period, keeping an alert and enthusiastic presence, paying attention to course material rather than other distractions, listening supportively and attentively—speaking one at a time and helping others stay focused. When we speak about sensitive, personal or painful issues, I hope we can ensure a safe classroom environment by respecting each others’ confidences.

To help create this environment, students should not: arrive late, leave early, sleep, use a phone or lap-top for non-course activities, eat odiferous or noisy food, or carry on side conversations. Many of us are irresistibly drawn to our hand-held devices. If this is the case for you, make it invisible—put it away and turn off the buzzer, beeper and vibrator.

*Academic Integrity*

Assignments with integrity are written at the graduate level, with clear and appropriate organization, full sentence structure, grammar and spelling. When referring to material from the text, class notes, or any other source (including Internet webpages), using quotation marks and appropriate citation is ethically and stylistically required.

Students are warned against cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment or exam, large or small. Plagiarizing includes copying from other students, past coursework, the Internet, the text, or other published sources without proper citation. It also includes excessive “help” or “editing” on assignments from others (if in doubt, ask me). Students found to be in violation of academic integrity guidelines will face disciplinary action which may include being suspended or expelled from the College or University, given an XE on the transcript, referred to Student Judicial Affairs and/or having his/her name kept on file.
Student assignments are routinely checked against plagiarism-detection websites and files of past student papers, so do your own work and cite all sources.

While it is appropriate that several graduate school papers overlap in conceptual focus, your course assignments should be original work devised for this class. If you plan on using material prepared for a different course, please consult with me regarding appropriateness.

Unique Academic Needs

Students with unique academic needs who desire special accommodations should document their needs with ASU’s disability resource center (http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc/lab/) and contact me in the first couple sessions to discuss options.

Absences, Due Dates, Late or Incomplete Work

Assignments will be marked down up to 20% each day late. All coursework must be completed in order to pass the class. Incompletes are available to students who: 1) have finished more than half the coursework and 2) experience serious illness or personal emergency.

Schedule

January 15
Introduction to Course and Each Other

January 22
Conceptual introduction and TED Exploration
   Elliott, Introduction
   NPR Ted Talk podcast: Identities
   http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=3&islist=true&id=57&d=10-11-2013

January 29
Basics of Self and Identity – Part 1
   Elliott, Chapters 1-3

February 5
Basics of Self and Identity – Part 2
   Elliott, Chapters 4-5, Conclusion

February 12
Beyond the Basics – Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory


**February 19**

Beyond the Basics – Considering Mead and Post-Structuralism


More readings may be added

**February 26**

Beyond the Basics – Narrative Approaches to Identity


**March 5**

Beyond the Basics – So what’s communication’s take on all this?


After spring break, there will be seven remaining class periods. We’ll use these class periods for the workshops that take the theoretical issues of identity into more specific contexts. The exact schedule of these workshops will be determined depending on number of students in the class, collaboration groups, and your scheduling desires and needs.
Possible Additional Resources – Books


Possible Additional Resources – Articles


