

**THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ART**  
**Syllabus for Contemporary Visual Culture Soc 301**  
**SUMMER 2008**

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<b>CREDIT HOURS:</b>	<u> X 3 or 5 </u> Semester Hours
<b>COURSE SCHEDULE:</b>	
<b>PREREQUISITES:</b>	Com 101, Com 102, Com 203, Fin 101, Fin 102 , Soc 105
<b>COURSE DESCRIPTION:</b>	This interdisciplinary class will examine the relationship between the visual structures of our society and our cultural perceptions. Students will use semiology to analyze visual media, using the language of signs to interpret the visual and cultural field. By looking at ads, architecture, comics and contemporary film and examining the structure of commercial markets, students will develop a better understanding of the definition and function of visual culture, and its impact on contemporary social structures and institutions.
<b>TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS</b>	
<b>REQUIRED TEXTBOOK (S)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Elkins, James. (1996). <i>The Object Stares Back</i>. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Books, Paperback. ISBN 0156004976</li> <li>❖ Perrotta, Tom. <i>Little Children</i>.</li> <li>❖ Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. (2001). <i>Practices of Looking An Introduction to Visual Culture</i>. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Paperback. ISBN 0198742711</li> <li>❖ Ware, Chris, ed. (2007). <i>Best American Comics 2007</i>. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., Hardback. ISBN 0618718761</li> </ul> <p>Recommended Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benjamin, Walter. <i>Illuminations: Essays and Reflections</i>. Paperback, ISBN 0805202412</li> <li>• Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. (2006). <i>American Cultural Studies</i>. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Routledge, Paperback. ISBN 0415346665</li> <li>• Copley, Paul. (1999) <i>Introducing Semiotics</i>. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Icon Books, Ltd, Paperback. ISBN 1840460733</li> <li>• Lipson, Charles. (2004). <i>Doing Honest Work in College</i>. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Paperback. ISBN 0226484734</li> <li>• Mirzoeff, Nicholas. (2000). <i>An Introduction to Visual Culture</i>. New York, NY: Routledge, Paperback. ISBN 0415158761</li> <li>• Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005). <i>What Do Pictures Want?</i> Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Paperback.</li> </ul>

<b>REQUIRED RESOURCES &amp; SUPPLIES</b>	
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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

**Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to do the following:**

Research a variety of visual and social spaces; analyze the information presented; think and respond critically to the articulated argument.

Evaluate argument and produce clear, cohesive, reasoned prose and discourse explaining one's theories, ideas or conclusions.

Use internet and library resources to develop effective research skills and technological literacy.

Develop a definition and understanding of visual culture and its relationship with the contemporary art and media worlds.

Use semiotics to evaluate and interpret visual media.

Create a sense of the relationships between individuals and society by describing the factors governing social and cultural life.

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS:**

This course will be taught as a seminar. Students will be assigned weekly readings from textbooks, and will discuss these readings at each class meeting. Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions. Additional materials, including videos, power point presentations and other media, will be referenced and analyzed during discussions. Students will demonstrate their understanding of issues and concepts through class participation and homework assignments. All assignments, texts and due dates are subject to change.

**GRADING:**

Object analysis (2)	15% each
Short assignment	5%
Research paper	30%
Final project	25%
Participation	10%

**COURSE POLICIES:**

Attendance and Tardies. Because this is primarily a discussion class, regular attendance is necessary. Attendance and tardy policies have been established by the

American Academy of Art; students should refer to the policy for more information. An unexcused absence includes, but is not limited to, being absent the entire class, leaving class at break or arriving to class more than 30 minutes late. If you must be absent or late to class, please see me in advance, or contact me via email. Excusing absences and tardies will be left to the discretion of the registrar. Students are responsible for all information or assignments missed during their absence. Students with excused absences may arrange to make up missed work at my discretion and convenience.

Standards for Written Work. Assignments and written work must adhere to standard collegiate forms of style; questions about style should be addressed before assignments are due. Students may schedule time with me to review a draft of their paper, but must do so one week prior to the paper's due date. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, font size no larger than 12 point, margins no greater than 1 inch, and multiple-page documents must be numbered. Papers will be penalized for editing and citation mistakes.

**Papers with an excessive number of editing mistakes will receive a failing grade, regardless of content.**

Always retain a copy of your paper on disk and a hard-copy of your paper in case the original is lost or damaged.

Plagiarism. Papers MUST contain a works cited page and all sources MUST be cited in-text using an accepted method of citation (MLA, Chicago, etc.). Plagiarism is a serious violation and students will be severely penalized for any instances of plagiarism, whether accidental or deliberate. Papers found to contain ANY instances of plagiarism will receive a failing grade. Additional instances of plagiarism will result in a failing course grade and possible disciplinary actions. Students are strongly encouraged to visit the Irving Shapiro Library website at

[www.aartlibrary.com](http://www.aartlibrary.com) to find additional information about MLA citation methods; students may also speak with the instructor regarding citation methods BEFORE the assignment is due. Information about the Academy's policy on Academic Integrity is available in the student handbook.

Submitting Assignments. Assignments should be submitted at the beginning of class. Students may email copies of assignments if necessary but should bring a hard copy of their assignment to the next class meeting.

Late or missed assignments. Late assignments will be penalized one-half letter grade for each late day. In extreme situations, students may make arrangements for an extension only if they have spoken with the instructor prior to the assignment's due date. Assignments are due on the assigned date regardless of a student's attendance in the class. **Work that is more than 3 weeks late will not be accepted for credit. Late final projects will not be accepted.**

Participation. A percent of the student's final grade will be determined by class participation. Because there will be in-class discussion, failure to come prepared or participate will negatively effect a student's grade.

**ATTENDANCE:** Two (2) is the maximum number of days you are allowed to miss per semester before a failing grade will be given (regardless of class grades) in a class that meets once per week. This course will move at a fast pace. It is strongly recommended that you attend every class, using absences only in the case of emergencies. ATTENDANCE will be taken at the BEGINNING and at the END of every class period. Make sure that you are in class for the duration of the entire period. THREE TARDY instances or LEAVING EARLY will equal ONE ABSENCE.

**SPECIAL NEEDS:** Any student with special needs or difficulties in learning and/or in completing course requirements should notify the instructor immediately so that available, reasonable accommodations can be arranged. Documentation of the student's disability and how it impacts their participation must also be submitted to the Academic Dean.

**Course/Topical Outline:**

WEEK/DATE	CLASS TOPICS & OBJECTIVES	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
1:	Introduction and goals of course; collectively construct a functioning definition of visual culture.	Reserve reading on semiotics
2:	Use concepts from the reading to rewrite our definition of visual culture; define semiology as a linguistic theory and apply this theory to a discussion of culture and social control.	Reserve reading from Mirzoeff <i>An Introduction to Visual Culture</i> .
3:	Review reserve reading on photography; apply Mirzoeff's discussion of photography to analyze sample images in class. Discuss the history of photography.	Read chapter 1 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> .
4:	Review semiotic theories discussed in the reading and apply semiotic analysis to art photography and selected fine art images.	Begin reading Elkins and read reserve reading from Barthes. First object analysis due next week.
5:	<b>Turn in first object analysis.</b> Conclude our discussion of photography, digital media and contemporary art.	Read chapter 2 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> and continue reading Elkins for discussion next week.
6:	Compare the concepts of looking and evaluating discussed in Elkins with those described in chapter 2. Apply these concepts to our discussion of fine art.	Read chapter 3 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> .

7:	Discuss ideas of vision and power and asses the role race, gender etc. play in personal and social identities. Review concepts from the text and discuss practices of looking, power and collective visual behavior.	Begin reading <i>Little Children</i> ; second analysis due next week and prepare research topic proposals.
8:	<b>Turn in second analysis.</b> Examine the relationship between consumption, media and identity; screen scenes from the film "Little Children".	Finish reading <i>Little Children</i> and read chapter 6 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> .
9:	Compare the "text" of the novel to the "text" of the film. Focus on the constructed visual language that shapes our broader understanding of the film and the relationship between identity and subculture. Present research topic proposals.	Research paper due in class next week.
10:	<b>Turn in research paper.</b> Discuss and apply the theories from chapter 6 in an analysis of magazine images and ads; begin product self-portraits.	Read chapter 5 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> and watch television.
11:	Present product self-portraits and review news materials; apply concepts discussed in chapter 5 to critique a selection of media.	Read chapter 7 in <i>Practices of Looking</i> and visit the MCA.
12:	Discuss images from the MCA exhibit and begin talking about comics, comix and popular culture.	Read <i>Best American Comics</i> .
13:	<b>Turn in third analysis.</b> Continue our discussion of comics and popular culture.	Read <i>Best American Comics</i> .
14:	Conclude our discussion of comics and compose proposals for final presentations on issues in contemporary visual society.	Work collaboratively preparing graphics and semiotic analysis for final presentations.
15:	Work on final research projects.	Final projects and presentations due next week.
16:	<b>Final presentations in class today.</b>	