Cog444 Syllabus, Fall 2021

Instructor - Class Meetings - Office Hours - Email Processing Hours

- Instructor: Craig Graci, Computer Science & Cognitive Science
- Class meetings: Monday, Wednesday & Friday 11:30am-12:25pm - **in-person**
- Office Hours: Tuesday 7:30am-9:00am & Wednesday 2:00pm-3:30pm - **zoom/meet**
- Email Processing Hours: Monday 2:00pm-3:00pm & Friday 2:00pm-3:00pm

Text

The **required** text will serve to present much of the basic semiotic knowledge featured in this course, and will provide the basic framework within which the course will unfold.

- Danesi, M. (2007). *The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice.* University of Toranto Press.

Additional semiotic material will be presented by means of lectures and various enrichment resources.

Course Description

Basic semiotic knowledge is presented by means of lectures and readings. Semiotic ideas are clarified, reinforced, and elaborated by means of class discussion and homework assignments. The topical flow for this course is roughly consistent with the sequence of chapters found in the Danesi book. A methodical reading of this book, coupled with a semester long text mining activity, will afford you an opportunity to acquire a broad perspective on the field and an understanding of a substantial amount of basic semiotic knowledge. Auxiliary readings will provide enrichment with respect to various aspects of semiotic theory, practice, and analysis.

A substantial portion of the course will be devoted to dealing quite directly with certain key semiotic ideas, including: signs and sign systems, codes and texts, non-verbal signs, visual signs, language, metaphor, and narrative. Beyond that, a collection of relatively special topics will be considered, such as: the semiotics of clothes, food, space, advertising, postmodern art, and music.

Assignments providing opportunities for engagement in semiotic inquiry and analysis are a featured part of the course. Most of these assignments will take the form of problem sets of varying sorts. Furthermore, these problem sets tend to require that you make modest classroom presentations. One very distinctive assignment features the writing of a paper which addresses some topic from a decidedly semiotic perspective. This "Semiotics of X" assignment and the aforementioned text mining assignment are, by far, the most significant assignments in the course. A midterm exam will probe your knowledge of some basic semiotic concepts, and a culminating final exam will call on you to "summarize" the particular story of semiotics presented in the course as a side effect of answering the questions that appear on the exam.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course it is expected that you will be able to:

- Display a conversational understanding of the nature, history, and scope of semiotics.

- Engage in semiotic discussion that incorporates basic vocabulary of the field.

- Describe the dominant models of the sign (Saussure and Peirce), and the implications of their manifestation within systems of signs.

- Discuss Saussure and his big ideas, beyond his take on the sign, including synchronic analysis, his privileging of the conventional sign over the natural sign, and his conception of "difference" and "value".

- Discuss Peirce and his big ideas, beyond his take on the sign, including his classification of signs (particularly icon/index/symbol), his ways of knowing (firstness, secondness, thirdness), and indefinite semiosis.

- Discuss the role that structure plays in semiotics. That is, be able to speak with some precision about structuralism.

- Define poststructuralism, and discuss its place within the realm of semiotic theory and practice.

- Discuss codes, and the paradigmatic, syntagmatic, and associative relations from which they derive.

- Define text, as the word is used in semiotics, provide diverse examples of texts, discuss types of texts, and survey various ideas pertaining to the interpretation of texts, including that of discursive versus presentational interpretation.

- Display an appreciation for the role that representation plays in the semiotic rendering of meaning.

- Articulate the role of semiotics in understanding various essential linguistic concepts that are featured in the field of semiotics, such as conceptual metaphor and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

- Generate a list of individuals who have made lasting contributions to the field of semiotics (including, quite probably, luminaries such as Roman Jacobson, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Algieras Griemas, Suzanne Langer, Thomas Sebeok, and Umberto Eco), and for each individual (1) say something about their background and orientation, (2) describe what you believe to be their most significant contribution to semiotics, and (3) discuss the significance of that contribution.

- Discuss the essential semiotic ideas and issues associated with various specific domains, such as food, clothing, advertising, architecture, film, art, and music.

- Convey an understanding of signs and sign systems by presenting semiotic analyses.

Teaching Model

In order to effectively learn something, it it is helpful to rely on a suitable model of learning to guide your progress. In college, your professors of generally establish some constraints on your engagement with course material which will, in turn, constrain whatever model of learning you might establish for yourself. For the present course, these are the principle constraints of engagement:

1. **Classroom Presence**: Come to class, prepared (1) to share material pertaining to the various learning activities in which you are expected to engage, and (2) to contribute something meaningful when asked for a contribution of some sort, perhaps to conjure up an example of some kind, or to express an opinion, or or critique an idea.

2. **"Quest for Meaning" Text Mining Activity**: This is an assignment that will run the course of the semester. It entails reading Marcel Danesi's "The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice" and mining the text for "salient sentence sequences", which are bits of text that are derived in a highly

constrained way (detailed in the specification of the assignment) from the book. This activity engages you in the creation of a rather minimal, eclectic semiotic knowledge base from which you should be able to think some semiotic thoughts and perform some semiotic analyses. These two characteristics (minimal and eclectic) of the semiotic knowledge base are appropriate to this course, since it is an introductory course and since the field of semiotics is grounded in ideas deriving from a broad collection of diverse sources.

3. **Problem Sets**: Throughout the semester you will be asked to produce documents in response to a number of assignments that are classified as "problem sets". These assignments will generally call on you to apply semiotic knowledge in one way or another, affording you an opportunity to refine and reinforce your understanding of selected semiotic concepts.

4. **Midterm Exam**: There will be a 1 hour closed-book in-class exam during one of the class days during week 9 of the semester (Oct 18 or Oct 20 or Oct 22). The exam will be formally announced one week prior to the exam date.

5. **Semiotic Paper**: Nominally, this assignment involves the writing of a highly constrained paper entitled "The Semiotics of X", where you will be invited to bind X to a topic of your own choosing. Yet in a significant way this assignment can be seen as an exercise in executing a carefully articulated process designed to produce artifacts consistent with certain cognitive scaffolding intended to support the writing of the final paper.

6. **Final Exam**: There will be a 2 hour open-book/open-note in-class exam during the officially scheduled final exam period, which is Wednesday, December 8, from 10:30am to 12:30pm.

My role as teacher will be to (1) orchestrate these learning activities, and (2) choreograph classes in a manner that integrates various aspects of these learning activities with the introduction and elaboration of material which is of central semiotic concern.

Requirements

You are required to regularly attend class. You are required to participate appropriately in classroom activities, including regular discussions and occasional student presentations (generally based on elements selected from the various problem sets). You are required to complete all assignments, the text mining assignment, the problem set assignments, and the semiotic paper assignment. You are required to take the midterm exam and the final exam.

Grading

Your grade will be determined on the basis of:

- Classroom Presense (10%)
- "Quest for Meaning" Text Mining Activity (20%)
- Problem Sets (20%)
- Midterm Exam (10%)
- Semiotics Paper (20%)
- Final Exam (20%)

Furthermore, I will adhere to the typical process for allocating grades. Thus, with respect to overall percentages, 90 or above will map to A, 80s will map to B, 70s will map to C, 60s will map to D, and other numbers will map to E.

Important Notes

1. This is an in-person, face-to-face class. I intend to teach the course accordingly, and to adhere to the admonition of my dean:

   - CLAS Dean (August 4, 2021): Faculty should continue to plan to teach their courses as posted in the schedule. **Please don't make individual exceptions to allow students to participate remotely in face-to-face courses. We know how disruptive that is to both faculty and students.**

2. Statement precluding the student use of cell phones or laptops or other electronic communication devices in the classroom: **Students will not be permitted to use cell phones or laptops or other communication devices while class is in session.** If you should need to check your phone for extraordinary reasons, please just quietly remove yourself from the classroom and check your cell for communications in the hallway. In the case of an emergency or other unexpected exigency, tend to your emergency or unexpected exigency. Otherwise, please simply quietly return to class immediately after checking your phone.

3. In consideration of lingering COVID consequences, I will generally distribute assignments via email, and I will generally place other key documents on a course site that I will maintain.

4. In the event that the college should need to go remote, as it did starting in March, 2020, I plan to use a teaching model that I developed for use at that time and that served me and my students well for the 2+ semesters that in-person teaching was so severely limited. If the need should arise, I will send you an email with a description of the model. With luck, that unfortunate situation will not recur this semester.

5. The course web page is located at:
   `http://www.cs.oswego.edu/~blue/course_pages/2021/Fall/CognitiveSemiotics/`

6. Generally speaking, I will be processing student email this semester twice each week, on Monday from 2:00pm-3:00pm and on Friday from 2:00pm-3:00pm. Please expect my responses to any email that you should send me to be timed accordingly.

7. Generally speaking, I will holding my office hours twice each week, on Tuesday from 7:30am-9:00am and on Wednesday from 2:00pm-3:30pm. I plan to conduct my office hours solely via Zoom this semester. If you would like to meet with me during an office hour within a given week, please send me an email prior to 2pm on Monday of that week, and I will be happy to schedule a Zoom meeting with you. If you have a preferred time to meet during my office hours, I will do my best to accommodate your preference. Otherwise, I will schedule on a first come - first served basis, allocating the next office hour "slot" that is available.

8. Requests to make up exams will rarely be considered unless accompanied by a written medical excuse for your absence.

9. It is intended that you complete your work by yourself. You are, of course, welcome to ask specific technical questions of others and converse over conceptual issues, but you should be doing your own work. Compelling evidence that someone other than you contributed conspicuously to the completion of required work will result in a "maximum negative" grade for that assignment, failure in the course, or worse.

10. College Intellectual Integrity Statement: SUNY Oswego is committed to Intellectual Integrity. Any form of intellectual dishonesty is a serious concern and therefore prohibited. You can find the full policy online at `http://www.oswego.edu/integrity`.

11. College Disability Statement: "If you have a disabling condition, which may interfere with your ability to successfully complete this course, please contact the Office of Accessibility Services."

12. Clery Act/Title IX Reporting Statement: SUNY Oswego is committed to enhancing the safety and security of the campus for all its members. In support of this, faculty may be required to report their knowledge of certain crimes or harassment. Reportable incidents include harassment on the basis of sex or gender prohibited by Title IX and crimes covered by the Clery Act. For more information about Title IX protections, go to https://www.oswego.edu/title-ix/ or contact the Title IX Coordinator, 405 Culkin Hall, 315-312-5604, titleix@oswego.edu. For more information about the Clery Act and campus reporting, go to the University Police annual report: `https://www.oswego.edu/police/annual-report`.