Socl 923: Critical Methods in Media and Cultural Studies

The group research project: blog and presentations

The group research project is an important component of this course. It provides an opportunity to conceive of, design, plan and develop a viable media and/or cultural studies research project at a Masters level. You will be assigned to research groups in Week 1, and as mentioned above, you will develop the research proposal and research project throughout the course. Each week, groups will add new questions examples, concepts, references or ideas to the group project.

The progress of the project, and the variety of academic, media and other materials that relate to the project should be documented on a research blog during the first 9 weeks of the course. This blog can easily be set up at wordpress.com or blogger.com. Each member of the research group should have edit access to the blog, and each blog should show individual contributions from all members of the research group.

Assessment criteria for the group research project blog

1. The blog should show regular and frequent contributions from all members of a research throughout the course.

2. The contents of the blog should document the development of the research project beginning from choice of topic, through framing of questions, consideration of relevant academic work, design of research, examples of materials, objects, things, and events relating to the project, and critical, theoretically and methodologically informed writing about how the research group carried out the project.

3. The blog should demonstrate the research group has a considered and practiced with a range of different research methods and approaches, and this range of methods should include visual, textual, and audiovisual analysis, ethnographic and interview techniques, as well as consideration of medium specificity. It may also include activist, participant, and other kinds of critical practice such as photography, video-making, sound recordings, etc.

4. Effective research blogs will make use of the many different blogging possibilities of displaying images, writing entries, tagging entries to organise them, linking to other sources (including other blogs), and feedback through comments.

Group research project activities by weeks

Week 1: the complexity of a cultural studies approach to your research topic

Collectively draft an blog entry or piece of writing on your group research platform that:

1. provides some sample empirical materials (cut and pasted?), or via hyperlinks
2. Lists some of the voices (individual, group, institutional, commercial, etc.) evidenced in this materials
3. Describes how your own situations (as students, as a certain age, sex, class, nationality, etc.) affects your experience (or lack of experience!) in relation to the topic

Week 2: the textual environment and your group research topic

1. Choose one or two contrasting texts relating to your project and do a semiotic analysis of how they make meanings
2. Using the same texts, describe the textuality of the texts
3. Using the same texts, describe some aspects of the textual production and distribution in the textual environment
4. How does an analysis of the textual environment differ from the semiotic analysis of the text in your examples?
5. Document the examples and yours analysis on your group research site

Week 3: finding an authoritative source for your group research project

1. Spend some time identifying what might be an authoritative source for your topic
2. Now find some less authoritative sources
3. List some common features and some differences between the two types of sources
4. Can you identify any contradictions or tensions that need further analysis?
5. Write this analysis up as a post for the online group documentation – make sure you include snippets or examples from the different sources

Week 4: visual methodologies exercise:

- Write a preliminary description of the institutional apparatuses, technologies and practices of audiencing that visually construct your topic of analysis.
  Document this description using text and images on your group project online site.

  OR

- Write a description of the visual construction of your research topic following the 'showing seeing' guidelines and rules described by W.J.T. Mitchell in this week's reading.
  Document this description using text and images on your group project online site.

Week 5: Ethnography and 'the field' :

1. List actual places nearby and online (some of both) that could be ethnographic field sites for your group research project
2. How could you explore 'decoding' processes there?

3. What kinds of mobility or circulation of media could you observe, and how would could document them?
4. Write up these notes for your group research project online

Week 6: Exercise on digital ethnography

Discuss a digital ethnographic study that would:

- Deal with problems of geography and social inclusion
- Provide some way for participants to engage in the research (see 'Live Methods' manifesto)

Write a brief outline (300-450 words) describing how you imagine this study would work in practice. Remember to add it to your group research project.

Week 7: focusing the project on something doable

1. Develop the table of empirical materials you started in class, and then put it up on the blog. The table should show

- the empirical materials you will use, with numbers that quantify how many of each thing

- the methods you will use to gather and analyse the materials

- the order in which you will work on the materials

2. Annotate the list of academic references you found relating to your research topic. You should put a full bibliographic reference for each reference. Rank or order the list of references in terms of their relevance to your project. Put the list of references on the group research blog.

3. Take 3 course outlines from courses you are doing this year. Choose 2 key texts or concepts from each outline that could relate to your research project. Put the references in some kind of order that makes sense to you -- this is hard to explain, but it should be doable. Put the list of the references or referenced concepts on the blog.

4. Put all the research questions you came up with on the blog.