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COMM 4220-004, Fall 2009

Senior Seminar: Functions of Communication

Deliberation and Dialogue in Public Discourse

(Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00 - 3:15 p.m., EKLC E1B75)

Instructor: Prof. Robert T. Craig

Office: Hellems 84

Office Hours: Tues. 11:00- 12:30, Thurs. 12:00-1:30, or by appointment

Phone: 303-492-6498

Fax (Comm. Dept.): 303-492-8411

E-mail: Robert.Craig@colorado.edu

Web Home: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~craigr>

Overview and Objectives

Many critics (for example, Deborah Tannen in *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*) have argued that public communication in our society is needlessly hostile and antagonistic. These critics have advocated a shift from polarized debate to higher quality deliberation and dialogue in public discourse. In this seminar we will explore this issue in depth. Students will learn how to carefully observe, describe, and critique the quality of discourse in a range of contemporary sites of public participation (such as blogs, social networking sites and other Web 2.0 environments, call-in talk shows, public meetings, etc.). Students will learn current theories about deliberation and dialogue and apply them to assess what is currently going on in sites of public discourse and to imagine better alternative forms of communication.

Successful participation in this course will enhance your awareness of current issues in public discourse, your knowledge of deliberation and dialogue theories, and your skills in critical thinking, analysis, writing, discussion, and oral presentation.

Learning will be assessed based on class participation and daily assignments, two in-class written tests, and a semester project to be completed in several steps.

Online Resources

- **CULearn (<https://culearn.colorado.edu>):** CULearn will be your portal to all online resources for this course. We will use it as a collaborative tool for sharing class materials, readings, assignments, and projects.
- **<meta>discourses | theory <for> communication (<http://www.colorado.edu/communication/meta-discourses>):** Resources on communication theory, including full-text papers, slide shows, web links, suggested readings, and other materials.
- **Bob Craig's Web Home (<http://spot.colorado.edu/~craigr>):** The online version of this syllabus is posted on this site and will be updated as needed during the semester. Feel free to browse other parts of my website. If you would like to learn more about my courses and other professional activities, My weekly schedule is also posted there.

Availability of Assigned Readings

- Jill Walker Rettberg. (2008). *Blogging*. Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity Press. (ordered through CU Bookstore)
- Other readings will be handed out or posted on CULearn for downloading.

Assignments, Expectations & Grading

Grading Scheme

Grading will be on an A-F scale based on a weighted average of three main components:

- Participation and daily assignments (30%)
- Two in-class tests (30%)
- Semester project including preliminary assignments, final paper, and persuasive message presentation (40%)

Any of the following conditions will result in an automatic failing grade:

- Absence from more than 8 class sessions
- Failure to take an in-class test
- Failure to submit the final paper by the posted deadline
- Plagiarism or cheating

Participation

You are expected to attend regularly, complete readings and other assignments on time, and participate constructively in class discussions and activities.

Many short assignments will be posted on CULearn or done in class. These assignments will not each be graded, but you will receive written feedback on your performance at least twice during the semester and oral feedback any time you ask for it.

You are invited (and may be required at some point in the semester) to meet with me in office hours to discuss projects or other aspects of the course.

CULearn and the Internet will be used extensively in this course. You are expected to check your CU email account and CULearn *at least twice a week*, access on-line materials as needed, and upload assignments to CULearn as directed. If you need technical assistance with anything, don't hesitate to ask.

Tests

In-class tests will include essay and/or short answer questions designed to demonstrate your understanding of materials presented in readings and class discussions as well as your own reflection and critical thinking about these materials. Answers will be scored based on comprehensiveness and accuracy in responding to the question, quality of critical thinking, organization, and writing. Specific instructions will be provided in advance.

Semester Project & Final Paper

The goal of the semester project is to perform careful observations and critical analysis of public discourse in a selected site, applying a normative model derived from theories of deliberation and/or dialogue, and to present practical recommendations based on your analysis. The project will be completed in several overlapping phases, including:

1. **Select a research site** (a place where ordinary members of the public participate in the discussion of public issues, such as a blog or social networking site, an audience participation radio or TV talk show, or public meetings of a school board or city council; write a brief description of the site and a rationale explaining why you have selected it)
2. **Collect extensive samples of public discourse at the selected site** (write a series of observation logs based on repeated real-time observations, downloaded documents or transcripts, audio/video recording or capture of streaming content).
3. **Do background research on the type of site selected** (find and read academic and general audience literature relevant to the type of site, such as blogs or public meetings; prepare a bibliography and write a summary of the literature).
4. **Construct a normative model for public discourse in the type of site selected** (drawing from readings on deliberation and/or dialogue theory along with any relevant site-specific literature, develop a normative model – i.e., a set of ideal principles and guidelines – for evaluating the quality of public discourse in the site).
5. **Conduct a critical analysis applying the normative model to evaluate observed samples of public discourse** (collect and analyze a series of examples representing the best and worst of typical public discourse on the site, use your normative model to assess the quality of these examples, and conclude with an overall assessment of strengths and weaknesses).
6. **Formulate practical recommendations** (write a set of recommendations based on your observations and critical analysis).
7. **Write the final paper** (see below for details).
8. **Write and present a 150-250 word persuasive message based on your project recommendations** (write in a style appropriate for a letter to the editor or online comment; in class, present a 5-minute oral summary plus Q&A; although you are not required to actually submit a message for publication, you are encouraged to do so after getting class and instructor feedback).

The **final paper** (15-18 double-spaced pages of main text, plus title page, reference list, and notes or appendices, if any) will present your research, observations, critical analysis, conclusions, and recommendations. The paper should demonstrate excellent performance of all phases of the semester project and may incorporate portions of previously submitted assignments. The paper should be well written and clearly organized to develop a central thesis (main point). It should be professionally presented and completely free of typographical, spelling, usage, and grammatical errors. Pages should be numbered. The paper should begin with a separate title page presenting a descriptive title for your paper (e.g., "A Critical Analysis of Public Discourse on the *Daily Kos* Blog Site"), and listing your name, the date, and the course. Follow APA style for citing and listing sources (see the *APA Style Guide* on CULearn for examples). All sources used in the paper should be acknowledged with in-text citations and listed under References on a separate page or pages following the main text. The paper should be saved as an MS Word document and submitted by uploading it to CULearn as a file attachment to a message posted on your individual project area under Student Projects. The subject heading of the message should be the title of your paper (e.g. "A Critical Analysis of

Public Discourse on the *Daily Kos* Blog Site"), and the file name of the attached MS Word file should include your name (e.g., "craig final paper.doc"). Avoid using punctuation in file names.

The semester project will conclude with **a written persuasive message and oral presentation on your practical recommendations, to be delivered during the scheduled final exam period.**

Deadlines for each phase of the project will be announced during the semester. All materials will be submitted by uploading them to your individual project area on CULearn under Student Projects.

Policies

Equipment Check-Out

The Communication Department has equipment that is available for students in Communication courses to check out. Equipment includes laptop computers, digital video cameras and audio recorders, web cameras, wireless Internet cards, transcribers, and more. See <http://comm.colorado.edu/tac> for more information.

Honor Code

Academic writing frequently quotes, paraphrases, or otherwise uses materials taken from various research sources. Writers are ethically required to disclose all assistance received and all sources of information used by following accepted practices of citation, quotation, acknowledgement, etc. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty. Other forms of academic dishonesty include cheating, submitting the same work for more than one course without permission, etc. CU-Boulder has established an Honor Code to promote and enforce standards of academic honesty. See <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/> for more information.

Classroom Behavior

See <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> for information about CU-Boulder's classroom behavior policy.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Any student who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. See <http://www.colorado.edu/odh/> for more information.

Students with Disabilities

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met.

You will need to provide documentation of your disability through the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671; <http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices>).

Religious Observance

If you anticipate conflicts between religious observance dates and any requirements or activities of this course, please let me know well in advance so we can arrange appropriate accommodations.

Class Schedule

Detailed daily schedule will be posted on CULearn under Class Resources. Here is a tentative outline:

- Week 1 (Aug. 25-27): Introduction
- Weeks 2 - 5 (Sept. 1 - 24): Blogs and Other Sites of Public Discourse (read Rettberg book; other readings and assignments TBA; in-class test Sept. 17)
- Weeks 6 - 10 (Sept. 29 - Oct. 29): Normative Models of Deliberation and Dialogue (readings TBA; in-class test Oct. 29)
- Weeks 11 - 16 (Nov. 3 - Dec. 10): Examples, applications, and preparation of semester projects (readings & assignments TBA; final paper due Dec. 10)
- Final exam period (Saturday, Dec, 12, 1:30-4:00pm): Oral presentation and discussion of semester projects