Instructor: Norman Porticella (n.porticella@cornell.edu)

Description: Introduction to visual communication theory. Examines how visuals influence our attention, perspectives, and understanding. Uses examples of visuals drawn from advertising, TV news, documentaries, entertainment movies, print, and interactive media to develop a theoretical framework for becoming more visually aware and for thinking more critically about how visuals influence us.

Textbook: Paul Messaris, Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising, Sage Publications. (Available from the Cornell Online Store or your favorite other online bookstore)

Additional Readings: Provided online through Blackboard

Overview: By the end of the semester you will have an in-depth understanding of how visuals influence perceptions and behaviors and an understanding of the importance of theory in the construction of effective visual messages. The readings, lectures and sections are all important in contributing to your understanding. Lectures are an opportunity for me to add and amplify ideas from the readings, and an opportunity for me to emphasize the important ideas in the readings. I do not try to cover everything. Most of the readings are clear, and you should be able to identify the important points on your own.

COURSE SCHEDULE (See the Blackboard link for the current week for each week’s lectures, readings, and films)

WEEK 1

Topics:
- Aspects of Visual Literacy: How visuals are different from text.
- How two-dimensional images reproduce real-world perceptions of scale & depth.
- The Construction of Visuals: Balance, Stress, Leveling, Grouping, and other analytical tools

Essay 1: The Importance of Photography (Due Friday)

WEEK 2

Topics:
- Theories to help us understand images: Symbolism, Iconicity, Indexicality, and Syntactic Indeterminacy
- Techniques for Attracting Attention
- Audience Motivation, Values, Attention, and Emotion: Connecting Message and Audience

Essay 2: Elements of Visuals (Due Friday)

WEEKS 3-4

Topics:
- Visuals and Culture
- Images as Evidence:
  - The True Meaning of Pictures
  - Documentary Film: A "complex mediation of reality" or a reflection of reality?
- Photo Alteration and Visual Deception

Essay 3: Motivation, Values, Attention, and Emotion (Due Friday)
WEEK 5
Topics:
• Moving Images
• Point of View Editing
• How the juxtaposition of images creates new meaning
• Editing and Viewer Involvement
• Beyond POV Editing

Essay 4: The True Meaning of Pictures (Due Friday)

WEEK 6
Topics:
• Moving Images (continued)
• Editing for Attention and/or Memory
• Visual Propositions through Editing

Essay 5: Citizen Kane vs. ???

ASSIGMENTS & GRADING

Your final grade will be determined by your performance with the following:

ESSAYS - 1500 points
There are five 1-4 page essays where you will analyze, compare, and judge images applying course concepts.
Essay 1 - The Importance of Photography (100 points)
Essay 2 - Elements of Visuals (200 points)
Essay 3 - Motivation, Attention, and Emotion: Connecting Message and Audience (300 points)
Essay 4 - The True Meaning of Pictures (400 points)
Essay 5 - Citizen Kane vs. ??? (500 points)

EXERCISES - 25 points each (approx 250 points)
The recorded lectures will occasionally prompt you to complete an exercise. These will typically involve you choosing
one or two images from the web and analyzing them using the concepts covered in that portion of the lecture. You will
post the images along with your brief analysis in the appropriate forum in the "Exercises and Participation" area of
Blackboard (see link on left). Once all of you have posted your analyses, I will make them available to the rest of the
class. ALL EXERCISES FOR THE WEEK ARE DUE BY THE END OF FRIDAY THAT WEEK.

PARTICIPATION - 25 points for each exercise comment (approx 250 points)
Once each exercise has been made available to the rest of the class, I will send out an announcement telling you that
they are ready for commenting. For each exercise, you will then comment on another student's submission. The idea
here is for you to learn from each other while gaining a deeper understanding of the concepts covered by each exercise.
Your comments should respectfully build upon that student's analysis by providing additional exercise-specific insights
on the image(s) and analysis provided by that student.

Grades for late assignments will be reduced by 5% if they are late by 1-7 days. Assignments more than one week late
will not be accepted unless you have a documented, valid excuse.