Critical and Cultural Approaches to Organizational Communication

This course is based on the following three premises: 1. Communication plays a primary role in the creation, development, and maintenance of organizations; 2. Organizational Communication functions primarily to enact cooperation and/or control; and 3. An organization exists in an every-changing context to which it must continually adapt if it seeks to exist over time. Given these premises, the purpose of this course is to explore the ways in which issues of value, power, and ethics come to the fore when complex organizations use communication to simultaneously initiate changes and maintain coherent identities over time.

The course is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on cultural and interpretive approaches to organizational communication using the Morgan (1997) and Driskill and Brenton (2005) books (see below) as our guide. The second part focuses on an extended critique (the Deetz book) of “corporate colonization” – the extent to which corporations are co-opting individuals’ private and political lives – and related ethical issues (the May book). In this part of the course we will examine the ironies and limitations of the movement toward flatter, team-based, entrepreneurial, decentralized organizations; a trend that is often celebrated for its distinct advantages to the citizen-consumer and to the employee.

The course objectives are as follows:

1. Students will explore critical and interpretive approaches as they are used to achieve understanding of the role of communication in organizational processes, including socialization, leadership, values and culture formation, innovation, and identity formation and transformation;
2. Students will apply critical and interpretive methods to specific instances of organizational communication;
3. Students will determine both strengths and weaknesses of critical and interpretive approaches to understanding organizational communication

Course Texts


An additional bibliography of related articles and books for use in assignments and final papers is attached at the end of the syllabus.

**Course philosophy**

This course is run as a seminar and thus the bulk of class time will be spent on discussion of course material, in-class exercises, and student-led presentations and discussions. Learning in a seminar format depends upon preparation and involvement by the students as well as the instructor. Therefore, it is very important that you not only read the assigned material, but also that you critically examine and interrogate it. The following questions should help you to do so:

1. What are the key arguments advanced?
2. How does this material fit in with other materials in the course as well as with relevant outside materials?
3. To what extent does this information and/or approach allow me to understand or illuminate real world circumstances? How does it apply to practical ventures/my own experience?
4. What doesn’t make sense to me? What does? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

To aid us in our discussions, we will reserve the first 10 minutes of each class period for class business. To participate in class business, you need to bring in newspaper clippings, ads, annual reports, brochures, newsletters, company policy statements, training videos, or any other artifacts you may run across that illustrate, contradict or in some other way speak to the issues raised in the readings for that night. Participation in class business will be included as part of your class participation grade—each student should plan to participate at least twice during the semester.

**Assignments**

In addition to class business, there are four graded assignments in the course:

1. **Interpretive analysis of organizational culture (15%)**. Using the template provided, students will provide an analysis of the culture of an organization of which they have been or are currently a member. Students must reflect on their findings drawing from the course textbooks as well as outside readings. The paper should be 5-7 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. Students will present their analyses orally to the class on September 28.
2. **Organizational Ethics reports (15%).** Drawing upon the material presented in the Deetz and May books and in class, students will explore an issue or practice related to organizational control. The report must identify the issue or practice, provide specific examples of it, and discuss the ethical dilemma(s) it poses. Finally, it must provide recommendations based upon the Deetz book and/or external readings for how to deal with the issue or practice. These reports will be presented orally from an outline or note cards on November 9.

3. **Class Discussion Leader (15%).** You will be asked to lead class discussion for about one hour on a particular topic and related readings (the chapter(s) assigned as well as external sources you choose). In order to lead this discussion effectively, you should go quickly beyond summarizing the reading to evoke discussion with key questions, insights, examples and provocations. For instance, you may address the theoretical assumptions, conclusions or practical implications of a reading. **An outline of your discussion plan (including key points as well as relevant quotes, etc.) should be submitted to me via email the day prior to your assigned class discussion date.** (15%)

4. **Final Paper (40%).** You will write a research paper representing an original effort to analyze a problem or position related to the core materials of this course. The paper may take one of three forms: a) a critical review of literature in an area related to the course topics; b) an argumentative essay; or c) a critical/interpretive analysis of a specific organization. The first option is most suited to the preliminary exploration of a topic, where you want to verse yourself in the research literature of an area or topic. The second option is most appropriate when you have a particular position or argument you wish to advance and defend. The third option is appropriate if you have access to the types of artifacts that would enable a rigorous metaphoric or cultural analysis or a thorough ethical critique. Regardless of the option you choose, the paper should be approximately 15 pages in length. You will present your work orally during class on November 23rd and 30th and receive feedback from the professor. Final papers are due the Tuesday of finals week, Dec 7th by 7:00pm. **NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

**Class Participation and Attendance (15%).** Due to the nature of the course and the fact that we meet only once a week, attendance at all class meetings is expected. However, if circumstances arise that make it impossible to attend class, you are granted one absence without penalty. For any unexcused absences beyond the allotted one, the professor reserves the right to significantly lower your grade. Per university regulations, excused absences must fall into one of two categories: 1) sanctioned anticipated situations and 2) document emergency situations. Anticipated situations (e.g., participating in official university functions, court attendance, religious observations, or military duty) **must be submitted in writing at the beginning of the semester or one week prior to the anticipated absence.** Emergency absences (e.g. student illness, injury, or death of immediate family member) **must be documented by Student Development or an attending physician** within one week following the emergency. Make-up work will be allowed only in situations where the absences are excused. If you
miss class on a day you are scheduled to make an oral presentation, you will receive a zero for that assignment.
Please consult the following web page for further information on university attendance regulations:  [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_policies/attend/reg.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_policies/attend/reg.html)

**Academic Integrity:** Strict standards of academic honesty will be enforced according to the University policy on academic integrity found in the Code of Student Conduct. I expect that a student’s name on any test or assignment means that the student has neither given or received unauthorized aid and that the student’s work contains appropriate citation of ideas and materials that are not his or her own. Consult the following website for further details:  [http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/ncsulegal/41.03-codeof.htm](http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/ncsulegal/41.03-codeof.htm).

**ADA Statement:** Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at the beginning of the semester. Contact information is as follows:  1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653, [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/)

**Department Equity Statement:** All persons, regardless of age, race, religion, gender, physical disability, or sexual orientation shall have equal opportunity without harassment in Department of Communication courses and programs. Any harassment should be reported immediately to either the classroom instructor or the department head.

**Calendar of Topics and Assignments** (The Professor reserves the right to make changes to this calendar – in consultation with the students – as dictated by class interests and needs).

Week 1  Aug 29  Course Introduction
   Organizations: Structuring Our World Through Communication
   **Read:** Morgan’s Introduction (chpt. 1), Driskill and Benton (chpts. 1&2)
   and Deetz’s Preface

Week 2  Sept 5  Reading Organizations
   Mechanistic, Organismic, and Learning Approaches
   **Read:** Morgan, chpts. 2, 3, & 4

Week 3  Sept 12  Reading Organizations
   Cultural Approaches
   **Read:** Morgan chpt. 5 and May chpt. 1-4

Week 4  Sept 19  Reading Organizations
   Political, Psyho-Therapeutic, and Transformative Approaches
   **Read:** Morgan chpts. 6, 7, & 8

Week 5  Sept 26  Reading Organizations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>Cultural Analysis: Data Collection and Application</td>
<td>May, chpts. 5-8, Morgan Template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oct 10</td>
<td>Organizational Cultures and Issues of Value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of Culture Reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 17</td>
<td>Critical Approaches</td>
<td>Deetz, chpts. 1 &amp; 2, May chpts. 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Oct 24</td>
<td>Critical Approaches</td>
<td>Deetz, chpts. 3 &amp; 4, Selected cases from May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community and Democracy through Communication Ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Oct 31</td>
<td>Critical Approaches</td>
<td>Deetz, chpts 5-7, Selected cases from May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community and Democracy: Language, Participation and Distortion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nov 7</td>
<td>Critical Approaches</td>
<td>Deetz, chpts. 8 &amp; 9, Selected cases from May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Communication and Power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nov 14</td>
<td>NO CLASS – NCA Conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Ethics Presentations/Final Projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nov 21</td>
<td>Ethics in Organizational Communication Practice</td>
<td>Deetz, chpts. 10 &amp; 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community and Democracy in the Workplace</td>
<td>Ethics Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nov 28</td>
<td>Assessing Analytical, Critical and Interpretive Approaches</td>
<td>Morgan, chpts 10 &amp; 11, Deetz, chpt.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Imaginization and Workplace Democracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dec 5</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 16  Dec 12  **Project Presentations, Final Papers due**

COM 522 – Bibliography


