

COM 422: Difference and Communication

The University of Nevada, Reno
Fall 2019

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Office Hours: M 2:00-4:00pm
Office Location: Lincoln Hall 306

Course Time: T 6:00-8:45pm
Course Location: FA 109

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a combination theory and application course on difference and communication. It is designed to help us understand how to communicate with people who are different than we are, and to analyze how representations of others in news and media affect how we learn to interact with those groups. We live in a global environment where individuals with vast differences interact face-to-face and through communication technologies everyday, however the ways different groups are represented in the media often follow stereotypical roles, and lead audiences toward one-dimensional understandings and ineffective communication. In this class, we will be examining how the media represents people of different genders, races, classes, sexualities, religions, ages, and nationalities, and how these representations affect interactions and relationships between different groups. Through this course, we will broaden our perspectives on life and people, and build the capacity to understand and communicate with those that are different than ourselves.

This course satisfies two objectives of the Silver Core Curriculum.

Core Objective 10:

Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity through courses that focus on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, language, and/or social class with an emphasis on the analysis of equity. Students will apply and evaluate approaches or modes of inquiry used to analyze diversity and equity and the social barriers to these goals.

Core Objective 12:

Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

The Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for the course are as follows. Students who complete COM 422 will be able to:

- Identify how human difference impacts, enriches, and complicates life in interpersonal, organizational, familial, group, and other settings
- Explain how communication functions differently across social categories
- Analyze how power and control of social identity categories are constructed (CO 10, 12)
- Compare the role of historical, political, and religious factors in creating social identity category stereotypes and perceptions (CO 10, 12)

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- Okorafor, N. (2015). *Binti*. Tor Books.
- Online readings on the syllabus or announced in class, which will be posted to WebCampus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Participation

50 pts.

This class is heavily based in discussion, and as such attendance is required. **After one unexcused absence, each following absence will result in a 20-point deduction from your final grade.**

In order to earn participation points, you are expected not only to be present, but to contribute to class discussion through analysis of the readings, reflections on the things we watch in class and the media you're exposed to outside of class, your own experiences with difference, and participation in other activities.

Classroom discussions offer a unique opportunity and environment to “unpack” complex questions about representations of difference. Participation will be based on: understanding and application of the readings; how attentive/engaged you are; how well you listen to other participants; how respectful you are of others' views when disagreeing; and how well the points you make, questions you ask, and ideas you introduce contribute to the overall discussion. To earn participation points, you must read, attend, and contribute respectfully. **Note that participation points are earned, not taken away. You start with zero and must work your way up.**

In order to participate *well*, you will need to complete the reading. I expect you to come to class having read thoroughly and formed incisive positions and/or questions about the topics being investigated in class that day. Class activities and discussion will revolve around your thoughts and ideas about the readings – you have to *have* thoughts and ideas in order for it to work! That does not mean you have to understand everything you read; we will work through complex concepts and situations in class.

Finally, we will be watching a number of films in this class. Good participation also means paying attention during the films, in order to be able to contribute to discussion later. In addition, the films form the basis for your three film analysis grades. **Being on your phone, being on your computer, or doing work for other classes during the films will negatively affect your participation grade.**

Show & Tell Assignments

50 pts.

Twice during the semester, you not have any reading for class. Instead, I expect you to spend the week finding a media clip of some sort that can stimulate further discussion on topics that we have been talking about in the class up until that point.

Show & Tell 1 should address aspects of difference in either Growing Up, Heroes/Heroines, Romance, or Education.

Show & Tell 2 should address aspects of difference in either Immigration, Religion, Poverty, or Violence. You will be required to come to class with a prepared explanation of how your media clip provides a new, different, or important angle that adds to the conversations we've had about these issues in class. Your explanation should include quotations from the course readings and references to previous class discussion. You will present your clip and explanation to a small group, facilitated by 1-2 graduate students in the class. Your small group will discuss each clip brought by a member, and decide which you think is the most important to discuss with the entire class after about an hour of small group deliberation. Your Show & Tell will be graded both on (1) how prepared you came to the group based on evaluation by your graduate facilitator and (2) the preparation, conceptual importance, and facilitation of the group presentation of one clip to the class. Each Show & Tell is worth 25 points, for a total of 50.

Media Journal

100 pts.

Each week before class you will submit a media journal entry. The journal entry should include two main parts:

1) A list of everything you have watched this week. This should include movies, television shows, webisodes, news shows, etc. (If you are musically-inclined, you might consider listing artists and albums as well; if reading-inclined, books and magazines; if artistically-inclined, artworks). Be as thorough as possible.

2) A reflection over how the media you're watching relates to the readings for the week. Each week I will provide reflection questions that will help you to apply the readings to your own viewings. In general, your reflection should demonstrate that you have thoroughly read all the required readings for the week, and can relate them to one or more things with which you have been engaging that week.

Each journal entry is worth 10 points. Your two lowest scores will be dropped. **Late Media Journals will be given a 0.**

Film Analyses

300 pts.

The primary goal for the semester is for you to develop the skills to analyze the representations you see around you every day, how ethically they represent groups that are oppressed, and how these representations affect marginalization in our society. The major assignments for this class will be three analyses of films that we are watching in class.

You must analyze:

One of the first two film options:

Moonlight OR *Aspie Seeks Love*

Two of the last three film options:

Documented, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, OR *Pumzi* (keep in mind *Pumzi* is a short film)

For each of the three analyses, you must analyze the representation of difference in the film, and make an argument about whether or not the representation is either (1) ethical or (2) effective. Using theories and other readings from class, you will write an analysis of how the film either supports or subverts stereotypes of difference, or whether or not the representation is effective in undermining oppression/marginalization/underrepresentation. The essay should include an introduction to the film, a thesis regarding its use of representation, and three main points that support the thesis. Each main point should be backed up with multiple pieces of evidence, including quotations from the film, descriptions of the film, theories/context from class reading, and class discussion. The essay should be double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1-in. margins. For undergraduate students, the essay should be 3+ pages, not including references. See the Film Analysis Assignment document for more instructions.

Each analysis is worth 100 points, for a total of 300.

GRADING

Grades are determined based on the number of points earned out of a maximum of 500 points. There is no extra credit given in this class, and there will be no rounding or curving of grades. Final grades are calculated as follows:

A	93%-100%	465-500 pts
A-	90%-92.9%	450-464 pts
B+	87%-89.9%	435-449 pts
B	84%-86.9%	420-434 pts
B-	80%-83.9%	400-419 pts
C+	77%-79.9%	385-399 pts
C	74%-76.9%	370-384 pts
C-	70%-73.9%	350-369 pts
D+	67%-69.9%	335-349 pts
D	64%-66.9%	320-334 pts
D-	60%-63.9%	300-319 pts
F	0%-59.9%	0-299 pts

In each assignment, you will earn a grade based on the following guidelines:

A = Exceeds course requirements. Exceptionally well-prepared and executed completion of assigned work, indicating significant effort, individualized creative style, and demonstrating a thorough grasp of the

material. For written assignments: writing is insightful and error-free; message is communicated clearly; research is exceptional; your argument is creative and nuanced.

- B = Meets and sometimes exceeds course requirements. Student demonstrates fundamental mastery of the material. Work is well-prepared and demonstrates considerable effort. Is distinctly superior to an average or “C” effort. For written assignments: writing is generally effective with respect to clarity, directness, and conciseness; some uneven or awkward passages are apparent, as are a few errors in grammar or punctuation. Research slightly exceeds the requirements.
- C = Meets course requirements. Satisfactory completion of assigned work at a level of effort and competency normally expected of the majority of students (i.e., basic completion, average performance, reasonable effort and preparedness). Student demonstrates minimum mastery of the material. This is average work that fails to stand out in any way. For written assignments: writing is reasonably clear, concise, and direct; uneven or awkward passages are apparent, as are multiple errors in grammar or punctuation. Minimum research done.
- D = Basic course requirements are only partially met. Student does not demonstrate minimum mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates the unsatisfactory completion of assigned work, either through misperceived objectives or the failure to grasp key concepts. This work is below average. For written assignments: The message is not communicated clearly, directly, or concisely. There is considerable unevenness or awkwardness in passages, and work is characterized by errors in grammar or punctuation.
- F = Basic course requirements are not met. Student demonstrates little or no mastery of the material. Receiving this grade indicates either a failure to complete the assigned work, or failure to grasp key concepts due to lack of reasonable effort. Work is below the minimum level of acceptance. For written assignments: Writing lacks style, content, and format associated with a college-educated individual.

COURSE POLICIES

All written assignments must be typed in Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1 in. margins (check these—sometimes margins are automatically set to 1.25 in, and must be changed). **For the Film Analyses, late work will be marked off 10% each day for the first three days it is late. After three days, late work will be given a 0. Late Media Journals will not be accepted.**

Readings must be completed on the day they are listed on the course schedule. Be sure to read thoroughly, and take notes while reading; some of these readings are very theoretically and conceptually challenging. In-class discussions are intended to *complement* (not duplicate) the readings. Do your best to approach a text with an open mind toward a given author’s disposition and message. This means trying to understand how and why they are arguing what they are, which is typically more time-consuming than simply comprehending an author’s message. Give each author a generous reading!

Communication for this course will be maintained exclusively through WebCampus. Please make sure you are checking it often for updates from me, as well as readings, assignments, and grades.

Discussion of Graded Assignments

It is your right and responsibility to take an active interest in how you are evaluated in this or any class. If you believe you have been graded unfairly, please come visit me in office hours to talk about it. Be prepared to make a well-developed case regarding the evaluation. Your argument must be related to your assignment as presented, and based on how it compares with the criteria for the assignment (not how hard you tried, how you think it compares with someone else’s work, or how it will affect your final grade in the class or GPA). **Any grade appeals must occur or be scheduled no sooner than 24 hours after but no later than one week after receiving the evaluation.**

Attendance

This course is heavily discussion based. Failure to engage in class dialogue on a regular basis will result in a lower participation grade (see Participation above). In order to be excused from a day of class, you must contact me *before* the class, unless it is a case of emergency. Excused absences may include illness, emergency, institutionally

approved activities (sports/clubs), and religious holy days (detailed in University Policy below). You must provide **documentation** for all absences within a week of their occurrence. You will not be excused for doctor's appointments, work, or transportation issues (unless they are emergency related). **Coming in significantly late or leaving class early will be equated with an unexcused absence.**

Classroom Behavior

People and ideas must be treated with respect. I want to hear all voices and opinions—and that includes yours! Please both contribute to the classroom atmosphere, and avoid disruptive behavior that makes it difficult for others to contribute.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course. University policies on academic dishonesty (see below) will be strictly enforced. Using the words and ideas of others is borrowing something from those individuals. It is always necessary to identify the original source of supporting information; you must cite the source of any material, quoted or paraphrased, that you use in your work. Proper documentation requires both referencing these sources in the text of your writing, and in a reference section at the end of your essay.

Putting your name on a piece of work indicates that the work is *yours* and that the praise or criticism is due to *you* and no one else. Putting your name on a piece of work in which any part is not yours, is *plagiarism*—unless the borrowed thought or wording is clearly marked and the work is fully identified. Keep in mind that plagiarism is a form of theft. Taking words, phrasing, sentence structure, or any other element of another person's ideas, and using them as if they were your own, is stealing. Simply paraphrasing the work of another without acknowledging the information source is also plagiarism. Merely restating another individual's ideas in different words does not make the ideas yours. ALL assignments are to be your original work. Using papers or presentations from previous semesters or other classes, even if they are your own, is still considered plagiarism.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include filing a final grade of "F"; reducing the student's final course grade one or two full grade points; awarding a failing mark on the coursework in question; or requiring the student to retake or resubmit the coursework. For more details, see the [University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog](#).

Absence Policy

It is the personal responsibility of the student to consult with the instructor regarding absence from class as soon as possible. Except as specified in this policy, the instructor shall make the final determination on allowing alternate assignments or whether missed work can be done at a time other than during the regularly scheduled class period.

Students are expected to attend classes in which they are enrolled unless absent for institutionally approved activities or other reasons allowed under institutional policy. Instructors may set course attendance requirements, which may include consequences for absences that are not institutionally approved, but such requirements must not conflict with institutional policies governing student absences. As indicated in [UAM 6,501](#), it is the instructor's responsibility to state course-specific policies regarding late work and make-up exams in the course syllabus.

Absence due to religious holy day observance

It is the policy of the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to be sensitive to the religious obligations of its students. Any student missing class, quizzes, examinations or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall, whenever possible, be given an opportunity during that semester to make

up the missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor in advance in writing, according to the policy of the institution offering the class, if the student intends to participate in a religious holiday that does not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. This policy shall not apply in the event that administering the assignment at an alternate time would impose an undue hardship on the instructor or the institution that could not be reasonably have been avoided.

Absence due to university approved extracurricular activity

For absences due to university-approved extracurricular activities, it is the student's responsibility to consult with the instructor in advance and as soon as possibly regarding the absence to arrange for the completion of all missed coursework. University-approved extracurricular activities are defined as those sanctioned by a college dean and/or the Executive Vice President & Provost, and may include, but are not limited to, intercollegiate athletics, band, drama, forensics, and recruitment. Students who represent the University at such events shall be provided with alternate, timely make up exams, quizzes, or other coursework missed as a result of their participation.

It is the responsibility of the student to arrange for written notice from the appropriate college dean or the Office of the Provost to their instructor of their participation in university-approved extracurricular activities within the first week of the academic term or as soon as the student is aware of the potential need to miss class.

Absence due to illness, family emergency, bereavement, or other compelling reason

In cases of absences due to extended illness, family emergency, bereavement, or other compelling reason, students should notify their instructors as soon as possible and within one week of the start of the absence. In such cases faculty are encouraged to develop plans and deadlines for students to complete alternate assignments that substitute for the missed components of the final course grade. Faculty have the right to request formal, written documentation in such cases as they deem appropriate.

In the case of extended absence, students should review [General Catalog](#) policies for incomplete grades ([4.2 Records and Grading: Grades, Marks, and Grade Point Average](#)), withdrawal from the university ([4.1 Registration: Withdrawal from the University](#)), or grade appeal due to improper withdrawal ([4.2 Records and Grading: Grade Changes, Grade Replacement, and Grade Appeals](#)). Students are advised to check with the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships on the implications of these actions.

Appeal

Any student who is denied a make-up assignment after appropriately notifying the instructor of a class absence, as described in the policies above, shall have the right to appeal that decision through the Academic Complaint System.

Disability Services:

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or the [Disability Resource Center](#) (Pennington Achievement Center Suite 230) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Audio and Video Recording

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Harrasment and Assault

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to providing a safe learning and work environment for all. If you believe you have experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, or

stalking, whether on or off campus, or need information related to immigration concerns, please contact the University's Equal Opportunity & Title IX office at 775-784-1547. Resources and interim measures are available to assist you. For more information, please visit the [Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#) page.

Academic Success Services

Your student fees cover usage of the [Math Center](#) (775) 784-4433, [Tutoring Center](#) (775) 784-6801, and [University Writing Center](#) (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to change with sufficient advance notice.)

Date	Topic	Readings	In-Class Films & Assignments Due (in bold)
T 8/29	Introduction to Communicating Across Difference	No Reading	<i>Arrival</i> (2016)
T 9/3	Aliens & Africa: Representations of Difference and Why They Matter	(1) Okorafor, <i>Binti</i> (2) Wainaina, "How to Write About Africa"	Chimamanda Adichie, <i>The Danger of a Single Story</i> (2009) Media Journal 1
T 9/10	The Politics of Representation	(1) Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other" (2) Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" (3) Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination"	Media Journal 2
T 9/17	Analyzing Representations and their Effects	(1) Gerbner, "Cultivation Analysis" (2) Scheufele & Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, & Priming" (3) hooks, "Eating the Other" (4) Hickey, et al., "The Next Bechdel Test"	<i>Great News: Sensitivity Training</i> (2017) <i>The Office: Diversity Day</i> (2005) Media Journal 3
T 9/24	Coming of Age	(1) Kannan, et al., "Watching Moonlight in the Twilight of Obama" (2) Laymon, "The Worst of White Folks" (3) Johansson, "Young People Talk About What It's Like Growing Up Indigenous" (4) Wortham, "Is RuPaul's Drag Race the Most Radical Show on TV?"	<i>Moonlight</i> (2016) Media Journal 4
T 10/1	Heroes and Heroines	(1) Stabile, "Sweetheart, This Ain't Gender Studies" (2) Shugart, "Supermarginal" (3) Thomas, "The Rebirth of the Female Superhero" (4) Smith, "White, Male and Brawny Seems Tired"	Media Journal 5 Film Analysis Option 1 Due
T 10/8	Romance	(1) Cloud, "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television" (2) Parameswaran, "Reading Fictions of Romance" (3) Ladau, "Playing the Online Dating Game, in a Wheelchair" (4) Silberman, "Autistic People are not Failed Versions of 'Normal'"	<i>Aspie Seeks Love</i> (2016) Media Journal 6
T 10/15	Education	(1) Cammorota, "The Praxis of Ethnic Studies" (2) Donahoo & Yakaboski, "The Prism of Hollywood" (3) Phippen, "How One Law Banning Ethnic Studies Led to its Rise" (4) Bukoski & Jones, "What Do Movies and TV Tell Us About Higher Education?" (5) Crucet, "How first-generation college students do Thanksgiving break"	Media Journal 7 Film Analysis Option 2 Due

T 10/22	Media Sharing and In-Class Analysis (Part I)		Show & Tell #1
T 10/28	Immigration	(1) Flores, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders" (2) Cisneros, "Contaminated Communities" (3) Martin, "Actor Who Came Out as Undocumented is Fighting for Hollywood to Stand with DACA"	<i>Documented</i> (2014) Stephen Colbert Opening Statement (2010) Media Journal 8
T 11/5	Religion	(1) Said, "Islam as News" (2) Shaheen, "Prologue" (3) Shaheen, "Reel Negatives" (4) Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle"	Media Journal 9 Film Analysis Option 3 Due
T 11/12	NO CLASS (DR. HANCHEY AT NCA)		
T 11/19	Poverty	(1) Katz, "From the Undeserving Poor to the Culture of Poverty" (2) Bullock, et al., "Media Images of the Poor" (3) Lowrey, "The People Left Behind When Only the 'Deserving' Poor Get Help"	<i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i> (2012) Media Journal 10
T 11/26	Violence	(1) Gay, "The Careless Language of Sexual Violence" (2) Gay, "Some Jokes are Funnier Than Others" (3) Diaz, "The Silence" (4) Cuklanz & Moorti, "Television's 'New' Feminism" (5) TV Tropes, "Bury Your Gays"	<i>Inside Amy Schumer</i> , "Football Town Nights" (2015) Media Journal 11 Film Analysis Option 4 Due
T 12/3	Media Sharing and In-Class Analysis Part II		Show & Tell #2
T 12/10	The Future	(1) Eshun, "Further Considerations in Afrofuturism" (2) Womack, "Evolution of a Space Cadet"	<i>Pumzi</i> (2009) Media Journal 12
M 12/16 4:50pm			Film Analysis Option 5 Due

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