

Introduction to Semiotics: DSGN 3100

Course Code:	DSGN 3100
Course Name:	Introduction to Semiotics
Semester/ Year:	Fall 2025
Day/ Time/ Room:	Wednesday 9:00-12:00, Location: N230 Sept 10 – Dec 17
Instructor's Name:	Robert Currie
Instructor's Contact Information:	rcurrie@nscad.ca or rcurrie@mac.com
Office Location/Hours:	Slack or email
Prerequisite(s)/Corequisite(s):	6 LASC credits at the 2000-level
Credit Value:	3 Credits
Class website:	http://nscad.geneva9.com/

Course description

This course surveys various theories of signs, especially with relation to problems of visual communication.

Prerequisite: 6 Credits of 2000-level LAS

Learning outcomes: Upon successful completion of this course the student will demonstrate the ability to:

- Conduct contextual and media research and critically review
- Demonstrate openness to new approaches and ideas during the design process.
- Apply relevant aspects of design process appropriately.
- Demonstrate capacity for taking risks as a means of generating innovation.
- Test, create, and apply appropriate strategies to devise concepts that inform and invent.
- Employ oral and written structured presentations to illustrate their strategy and decision-making.
- Practise oral and written feedback in exchanges with peers, instructors and collaborators.
- Critically analyze and historical, theoretical and practical methods of design practice.
- Demonstrate and articulate how context was analyzed and synthesized into their design concepts
- Identify a problem, dilemma or ambiguity in real / future world scenarios.
- Search, identify and recognize the skill or technique they will learn in order to facilitate self-initiation of professional development.

Course goals

- demonstrate an understanding of the main schools of thought in semiotics
- identify the types of signs, codes and rhetorical devices
- apply semiotic and rhetorical principles to practical and written work.

By the end of the course, students should be familiar with the context of semiotics as it relates to philosophy, linguistics and contemporary critical theory, and be able to use semiotics as a core design problem-solving skill.

Please note that each learning outcome must be successfully achieved before a final grade for the course is assigned.

Student workload: Total student workload for a 3 credit course is estimated to be 9 hours/week.

Course format: This will be conducted online or in person. Weekly online lectures, readings, class discussion, written and visual design assignments and in-class presentations. Students will be expected to attend weekly sessions, participate in class exercises and discussions. All course projects need to be completed in full by the set due dates.

Course Attendance Policy:

Attendance and participation in class is mandatory and will be factors in your grade. Students who miss more than three online lectures without satisfactory communication and explanation may receive a grade of F, regardless of performance on assignments, quizzes or evaluations. Unexcused absences will result in a lowered class grade.

There may be times when it is necessary to miss class for illness or emergencies, but in these situations you need to notify me as soon as practicable.

I will be as reasonable as possible when students are experiencing difficulty, but communication is vital - let me know as soon as possible if you need to miss class (preferably before class) and propose a plan for getting caught up on what you have missed. As a guideline, missing three or more classes without promptly communicated excuses may be grounds for a mark of F.

Note that foreseeable reasons, such as travel, work, commitments to other classes or factors other than illness or unforeseeable emergencies are **not** valid reasons for missing class. Travel and immigration arraignments, employment schedules and general time management are fully the responsibility of students.

Readings will be assigned weekly. Information will be provided via the class website and class Slack

NSCAD University occupational health and safety policy

At NSCAD safety is a priority. All students are required to obtain and maintain up-to-date safety (WHMIS) certification. An on-line Brightspace certification process is available to all NSCAD students.

Please note that your NSCAD ID card needs an up-to-date Health and Safety (WHMIS) sticker to access shops and studios, and for Security to permit you access to the university campus sites after hours. WHMIS training is provided online through students' Brightspace account.

Evaluation criteria:

Completion of all assignments is mandatory. Evaluation will be based on a number of assignments, quizzes, and an essay assignment. Participation in class discussion will also account for a portion of the grade. Assignments and projects will be completed outside of normal instruction hours. Dates and details will be provided as the course progresses. All work must be submitted in English. Each class will include class discussion of assigned readings from the text or other sources. Expect to spend significant time on the readings; many of the readings will be challenging. There may be brief in-class quizzes on readings.

Assignments:..... 70%
Class discussion and participation..... 15%
Quizzes 15%

Grading system: Successful completion of this course requires that students perform to an acceptable standard in reaching the course objectives. This course will be graded as follows:

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalent	Grade Point Score	Descriptive Term
A+	95 and above	4.3	Excellent
A	90-94	4.0	Excellent
A-	85-89	3.7	Very Good
B+	80-84	3.3	Very Good
B	73-79	3.0	Good
B-	67-72	2.7	Good
C+	63-66	2.3	Satisfactory
C	59-62	2.0	Satisfactory
C-	55-58	1.7	Satisfactory
D	50-54	1.0	Marginal
F(Fail)	49 and below		Unsatisfactory
AUD	n/a	n/a	Audit
INC	n/a	n/a	Incomplete

Academic integrity

A climate and culture of academic integrity is an expectation of everyone. Students at NSCAD are required to comply with standard academic practices in acknowledging sources in all work presented for academic credit. Please refer to the NSCAD Academic Calendar for the full description and regulations on 'Academic Integrity and Plagiarism'.

Note on use of machine learning/artificial intelligence tools

Machine learning and artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT, dall-e, midjourney, and many others) are evolving rapidly. These tools generate text, images or other media by recombining elements of existing works.

The NSCAD Academic Integrity policy is clear. Use of such tools without fully crediting the source is a violation of NSCAD's plagiarism policy. Punishments range up to a mark of zero for the assignment, failing the course or expulsion from NSCAD. Material created, in whole or in part, by tools like ChatGPT or other similar AI/ Large Language Models (or any other software to generate text, images or other media) cannot, ever, be considered your own work.

Each assignment will have clear rules for use of media and citations. Ask if you have any questions, and keep in mind the basic rule: all work you submit must be your own, unless the assignment includes clear written instructions stating otherwise.

Writing Centre

The NSCAD Writing Centre in S403 offers professional tutoring for any kind of written assignment, at any level of study, at any stage of the work. Please see the Writing Centre web page for more information and booking online at <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/home/studentresources/the-writing-centre/>

Accessibility policy

Accommodations can be arranged for disability-related needs by contacting accessibility@nscad.ca. Students are encouraged to connect with the Accessibility Office as early in the term as possible. Students can connect with the Accessibility Office at any point in the semester or time as a NSCAD student to access or learn more about the available supports. Visit: <https://nscad.ca/student-experience/academic-resources/accessibility/> for more information and to find the Accessibility Policy which includes a protocol that clearly outlines everyone's roles and responsibilities in the accommodation process.

Spiritual/ Religious Observance:

Requests for accommodations for spiritual or religious observances must be presented in writing to the instructor within the first two weeks of class.

Planned Schedule:

- Class 1 Introduction to semiotics
- Class 2 Anatomy of signs
- Class 3: Codes
- Class 4 Modes of signification/models of communication
- Class 5 Semiotics as method/ Connotation, denotation, myth
- Class 6 Decoding the everyday
- Class 7 Barthes: Semiotics of design
- Class 8 Rhetoric
- Class 9 Political semiotics
- Class 10 Semiotics of product design
- Class 11 Urban semiotics: signs and the city
- Class 12 Technical semiotics: Software, interfaces and communication
- Class 13 Conceptual metaphors
- Class 14 Final quiz and wrapup

Copyright notice:

All materials used in this course and distributed within the Brightspace Course Management System are subject to the Canadian Copyright Act and NSCAD's Use of Copyright Materials Policy. <https://tinyurl.com/y8h3lk8j>

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Fair Dealing usage guidelines as outlined in NSCAD's Copyright guide are here: <https://guides.nscad.ca/copyrightpages/fairdealing>

Please see NSCAD's Copyright Guide for guidelines and contact information

<https://guides.nscad.ca/copyrightpages/home>

Schedule

September 3.....	New Student Orientation
September 5.....	Fall semester classes begin
September 19.....	Last day to add/drop a course without financial or academic impact
September 20.....	Courses dropped recorded on transcript as 'W'
September 30.....	University closed: Truth and Reconciliation Day
October 13.....	University closed: Thanksgiving
October 17.....	Faculty mid-semester warning
October 31.....	Last day to drop course with a 'W'
November 10-14.....	No classes: Study break
November 11.....	University closed: Remembrance Day
December 5.....	Tuesday classes will be held instead of Friday classes
December 17.....	End of classes/assessment
December 19.....	Final grades due to the Registrar's Office at noon
December 20-January 2.....	Winter holiday break

Attendance Policy

To achieve this course's learning objectives, students are required to attend and participate in classes, according to your instructor's requirements. For studio and non-lecture courses: many of the topics and content delivered in this course will be taught through class demonstrations, discussions, and activities. As such, your attendance and participation are essential to your successful learning process. However, students should NOT attend in person classes if they are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, if they have been in any sites where COVID-19 cases have been detected/identified, if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or if they are feeling unwell.

Students should familiarise themselves with their course's attendance policies and pay special attention to their instructor's guidelines regarding attendance requirements. Your instructor will provide information on the attendance policy specific to this course. In case of illness or COVID-related symptoms, please contact your instructor immediately by email to discuss options for completing your course work.

Students will not be penalised for having to self-quarantine if required to do so. In this event, course materials and assignment will be made available for completion in an alternative way to be communicated to you by your instructor.

Need support/help?

NSCAD is aware of the challenges caused by COVID-19 and is concerned about our students' health and well-being. Here are some resources to help you have a successful and productive academic term:

COVID-19 Information and Updates : <https://nscad.ca/covid-19-information-and-updates/>

Accessibility and Wellness Services: <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/wellness/>

Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/home/academicsadministration/occupational-health-safety/>

Counselling and Psychological Services: <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/home/academicsadministration/occupational-health-safety/>

Writing Centre – PLEASE WATCH FOR SPECIAL WORKSHOPS TO BE ANNOUNCED IN EARLY WINTER 2022 TERM https://nscad.ca/student_life/writing-centre/

Financial Aid: <https://nscad.ca/current-students/student-resources/scholarships-and-bursaries/>

SUNSCAD Food Bank: <https://suncad.org/food-bank/>

The Learning Commons <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/home/services/learning-commons/>

