COMS 361: Selected Topics Communication Studies 1: Media and Culture of the Night  
Fall, 2020  
Syllabus and Course Delivery Guide

Instructor: Prof. Will Straw
william.straw@mcgill.ca

Teaching Assistant: Andy Stuhl
andy.stuhl@mail.mcgill.ca

Description of course

The night of cities has recently become the focus of attention by historians, city governments, cultural activists and others. This course will look at the key concerns of what are now called “night studies”. How have media and cultural events organized themselves in relation to the 24-hour cycle of day and night? How does the night function within what geographer Luc Gwiazdzinski calls the “discontinuous citizenship” of the 24-hour cycle, in which the rights of different groups to occupy cities varies as we move from day to night? How have cities responded to the rise of notions like the “night-time economy” or the spread of governance instruments like the “night mayor”? How has the night become a focus of conflicts over gentrification, noise, and gender-based safety? What might be the future of night-time culture in a post-pandemic world?

Description of course delivery

This course will be offered through a combination of synchronous and non-synchronous (or “fixed” and “flexible”) methods.

A list of classes, topics and readings will be found later in this document. This information will also be placed in the modules and topics for the course appearing on MyCourses.

All readings will be made available electronically through MyCourses.

The scheduled times for the class are

Tuesday: 10:05 – 11:25
Thursday 10:05 – 11:25

Professor’s Office hours

Wednesday: 1 – 2:00 pm
Thursday: 5 – 6:00 pm

Or by appointment

Zoom links for classes and office hours are available on MyCourses under the Zoom menu item.
Structure of each class

Each class (except the first) will unfold as follows:

1) A synchronous (“live”) introduction by the professor (approximately 10 minutes). This will be recorded and uploaded to MyCourses following the scheduled class time. This introduction may include requests to students to (for example) tell us of any events concerning night culture which they have encountered since the last class. Answers may be posted to the Chat section of Zoom and I may read these out or take them up in my introduction.

2) One or more pre-recorded presentations by the professor consisting of voice, Powerpoints, film and video clips, images and other materials (approximately 20-30 minutes total length). These will have been uploaded to MyCourses just before the class begins and will be presented from within MyCourses.

3) A synchronous discussion of the presentation, with oral or written questions and comments from students and the professor (10-15 minutes). An anonymized textual summary of this discussion will be prepared by the professor and Teaching Assistant and posted on MyCourses.

Assignments and grading

1. Assignment: short essay/artefact analysis (individual) (25%)

For this assignment, you must choose any example of media or cultural expression which represents the night. You are asked to write an essay of five double-spaced pages showing some of the ways in which your artefact is linked to the night – it may be made at night, consumed at night or said to embody something of a night-time aesthetic or sensibility. Further details, including anonymized examples of superior papers from a previous version of the course, will be provided on MyCourses. By September 30th, students must post, to MyCourses, an image and 50 words representing their artefact. This essay will be due on October 15th.
2. Second assignment: City analysis (group presentation) (25%)

For this assignment, you are required to work in a group to produce an audiovisual presentation about of a city in the world and the social, cultural and economic condition of its night. You will collaborate in groups of eight students to produce a presentation roughly 10 minutes in length and suitable in form and content for publication online.

This activity will be coordinated by the Teaching Assistant. By October 29th, one or more people representing each group will be required to make a short presentation to the Professor and Teaching Assistant in which you inform us of the composition of your group, the city you have chosen, and some of the relevant issues you have already identified. These presentations will take place outside of class time in a time agreeable to all parties.

The final submission of the project will involve

(a) presenting the final study as a video to the whole class, in one of the three sessions (the three last classes) devoted to this exercise.

b) publishing the final presentation on an on-line site (to be determined);

(c) submission of a 2-page self-evaluation document explaining how work within the group was distributed and how the process was organized.

3. Reading Responses (25%)

You are required to post, to MyCourses, a total of fourteen reading responses, as follows:

7 original reading responses

7 responses to one or more reading responses of other students

One or more readings has been assigned for each scheduled class. For seven of these readings, you are required to write a response of 100-150 words and post this to MyCourses under the Reading Responses forum created for each class. This response should be posted by noon two days before the appropriate class (that is, if your report is on a reading for the class of September 17th, your report should be posted before noon on September 15th.)

For another seven of your responses, you are required to post a comment responding to one or more of the reading responses posted by other students about a particular reading. These should be posted by noon on the day before the appropriate class. In other words, when you choose to respond to another student’s “reading response”, you will have an additional day to do so.

You may schedule your original responses and your comment-responses as you wish, as long as you complete a total of fourteen of these, for separate classes, by the class of November 19th. (You may not post two separate responses on two readings assigned for the same class.)

4. Final take-home exam (25%)
The final exam will be a take-home exam, taking place over 72 hours during the scheduled exam period as set by the Exam Office. 72 hours before the deadline for submitting the completed exam, I will post the questions on MyCourses.

Professor accessibility

I will be available to respond to student questions or concerns in three ways:

1) via email at william.straw@mcgill.ca  It is my policy to respond to all emails within 24 hours, unless exceptional circumstances make this impossible.

2) in a one-on-one or group meetings during scheduled office hours, for which a Zoom link will be made available. These office hours will be held twice a week, at different times, to accommodate those attending the course in different time zones.

3) via responses to questions and concerns posted to a Discussion section of MyCourses devoted to administrative matters. It is recommended that those with questions about the administration of the course post their queries here, so that my answers will be available to other students.

My expectations concerning conduct (in synchronous sessions and on discussion boards or other non-synchronous platforms).

I ask you to remember that those participating in this class come from different backgrounds, are at different years of undergraduate study and may be facing a wide variety of personal, technological and educational challenges. I insist that you treat others with respect and that you engage with each other in the spirit of fruitful exchange.

I ask that you read this list of guidelines for behavior in online courses, and return to it regularly if you are unsure about appropriate conduct. While this was prepared for another university, our department has determined that it its recommendations are useful ones for our own situation.
Important Announcements

Plagiarism and Student Conduct
Students should be familiar with McGill University’s student policies and student responsibilities. Special attention should be paid to the policies on plagiarism. McGill policy and student responsibilities can be found online at https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/integrity/cheating

Language of submitted work
In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Land acknowledgement
McGill is situated on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. You are asked to honour and respect the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory on which we gather today.

Inclusive Learning Environment
As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and with the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.
Class dates, topics and readings

Note on “Optional” readings:

For each class there is a “Main Reading.” For certain classes, there are also “Optional non-English readings” and “Optional policy readings.” If you wish, you may at any time choose one of these optional readings and write a response. These responses will count towards your seven.

These Optional Readings have two purposes. The study of the “night” is very much an international endeavour, and much of the best writing is in French or Spanish, the languages in which these optional readings are made available. (The selection is limited to languages that I am able to read myself.) If you read these languages and wish to write a response on an Optional non-English reading this will help bring ideas from these articles into the class discussion.

The Optional Policy Readings are offered in case students have a specific interest in policy documents – in the documents issued by various levels of government, trade associations, think tanks and consultants. A great deal of recent research on night-time culture is contained within such documents.

September 3 : Introduction

September 8: Histories and Concepts

Main reading:


Optional non-English reading:


September 10: Night Time Economies

Main reading:

James Farrer. “Nightlife and Night-Time Economy in Urban China.” In Weiping Wu and Mark Frazier, eds. The Sage handbook of contemporary China, 2018,

Optional policy readings


---

**September 15: Media and the Night 1: Pre-Digital Media**

**Main reading:**


---

**September 17: Media and the Night 2: Residual Media**

**Main reading:**


---

**September 22: Media and the Night 3: Digital Media and the Night**

**Main reading:**


---

**September 24: Media and the Night 4: Narrating the Night**

**Main reading:**

Will Straw. “Chrono-Urbanism and Single-Night Narratives in Film.” *Film Studies*, vol. 12, no 1 (Spring, 2015), pp. 46-56.

---

**September 29: Night aesthetics: the night in painting, music and photography**

**Main reading:**

Audrey Goodman, “After Hours, Through the Night: Jazz Poetry and the Temporality of Emergence”, Miranda no20 | 2020, [http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/24424](http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/24424)
October 1: Pandemic nights

Main readings:

Global Nighttime Recovery Plan. (Chapters will be added as they are released.)


October 6: Night aesthetics: all-night festivals and the ludic city

Main reading:


Optional policy reading:


October 8: Nightlife 1: Nightlife as theatre

Main reading:


October 13: Nightlife 2: Drinking cultures

Main reading:


October 15: Nightlife 3: Nightlife as circuit and scene

Main reading:


Optional non-English reading:

October 20: Nightlife 4: Nightlife as community

Main reading:

Optional policy reading:

October 22: The Politics of the Night 1: The Politics of Sleep

Main reading:

Optional non-English reading:

October 27: The Politics of the Night 2: Night-time Protest

Main reading:

Optional non-English reading:

October 29: The Politics of the Night 3: Gender-based insecurity and the night

Main reading:

Optional non-English reading:
November 3: City governance and the night: Night Mayors and Night Czars

Main reading:


Optional non-English readings:


Optional policy reading:


November 5: City governance and the night: The politics of gentrification

Main reading:


November 10: Montreal as city of night

Main reading:

November 12: Montreal: Identitarian spaces of the night

Main reading:

November 17: Montreal: building new policies for the Montreal night

Guest speaker: Dr. Jess Reia, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Art History and Communication Studies

November 19: Ecological questions: the struggle over darkness

Main reading:

November 24: City group projects

November 26: City group projects

December 1: City group projects