COMS 492: “Power, Difference and Justice” Remote Delivery Plan
Prof. Carrie Rentschler (she/her)
Fall 2020
Tuesdays: 11:35am-1:25pm in ZOOM (for those who can meet synchronously)

We’ll be meeting remotely for the entire semester in COMS 492. In order to make things as easy and productive for us as possible, we will be dividing our class preparation and seminar time up a bit differently than a course that normally meets in person in a classroom. Please note that the terms of this remote delivery plan are subject to modification as conditions change, in order to provide for flexibility and to optimize course delivery. Course requirements as set out in the Course Syllabus, however, will not be subject to modification.

This plan first explains how course activities will work for students who can join the course for some of its synchronous elements. It will then explain how students will participate asynchronously, if they are either unable to join synchronously, if asynchronous works better or accommodates their needs better for them, or if their conditions change over the course of the term and they need to do their work asynchronously. Some course activities will be done asynchronously, by everyone, including reading annotations, discussion forum participation, and assignment preparation, for instance. So that everything is clear, here is what is meant by synchronous and asynchronous learning (see below graphic).

![Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Teaching](image_url)

*Image description: a blue and white graphic explaining differences between synchronous and asynchronous teaching; image from Edublogger*

For those students who are able to join the course synchronously: each week Prof. Rentschler will host a 2-hour Zoom session (access from within MyCourses), from 11:35am-1:25pm on Tuesdays. This is an hour less than our seminar session would normally be scheduled. Afterwards, your professor will stay on the Zoom from 1:25-2:25pm to be available to any student or group who would like to meet with the professor at that time after the close of our seminar meeting.

For those joining synchronously, our Tuesday course meeting time will be broken-down in the following way:

1. **15-20 minutes** of lecture by Prof. Rentschler + **15-minute** Q&A (30 minutes total)
2. **@45 minutes** of smaller group discussion building from the lecture and reading
3. **a 20-minute break** (step away from Zoom! Pet your cat! Make coffee! Get a snack!)
4. **a 30-minute discussion** of the reading annotation (in Perusall, more information below) and preview of the next class meeting.

**In Zoom** we will make use of the **breakout room feature** to have smaller group discussions. The smaller group discussions will sometimes be given over to discussing seminar projects, to provide in-class time for this work (see just below for how this will work for students taking the course fully asynchronously). To ask questions during our meeting time, students can use the “raise hand” function in Zoom to indicate they would like to ask a question or can simply raise their hand to be visible in their video feed. Students can also use the chat to pose questions or make comments relevant to the class session and the issues/ideas under discussion. The Professor will take time during our meeting to check the chat for questions/comments.

For **students working asynchronously in COMS 492**: Prof. Rentschler will record her lecture that she will deliver via Zoom on Tuesdays and will post it to MyCourses. Students taking the course asynchronously will be asked to raise questions about the reading before the Tuesday Zoom meeting in the Discussion forum, so that Prof. Rentschler can answer those questions along with questions that other members of the class have. Prof. Rentschler will post answers to all student questions in MyCourses (as a video or audio recording). If students in the Zoom consent to being recorded during the Q&A session, she will post the recording of that along with the lecture recording. If they do not consent, she will post a recap of the discussion in MyCourses.

*Please note*: any video and audio recordings created for this course and posted to MyCourses are not reproduced for, or being placed in, the public domain. This means that COMS 492 students can use the recordings for their own educational (and research) purposes, but they cannot allow others to use it, by posting it on the Internet or by giving it or selling it to others who may also copy it and make it available. Please refer to McGill’s Guidelines for Instructors and Students on Remote Teaching and Learning for further information.

For **students taking the course asynchronously**, we will form a group or groups (if there are enough of you) who will do the same discussion-based activities that other students will be doing in our synchronous sessions in Zoom (as described under #2 in the Zoom session). There will be two options for this: 1) Students working in time zones close to each other can hold group meetings using a platform such as Microsoft Teams (which is
available to all students through McGill). For this option, I will ask someone(s) in the group(s) to take responsibility for setting up the group discussion. **Groups will set their own schedule to complete the task by end of day Thursday (by 5pm Eastern time zone)** 2) If option #1 is not feasible, Prof. Rentschler will post the discussion activities to the discussion form, where students will complete them and respond to each other’s posts.

We will also be using the program Perusall to collectively annotate shared readings we will be doing together. The program will enable us to make comments on particular passages in texts, to raise questions around particular passages, and to respond to others’ comments and questions on the reading. This will be a way in which we will engage in “textualized” discussion through a shared text we are reading together. Students taking the course asynchronously and synchronously will be sharing the same readings to annotate.

**Seminar projects** for the term will be done in groups. It will likely be easiest for students who are taking the course asynchronously to work with other students who are also taking the course asynchronously. The Professor will create dedicated Discussion Forums in MyCourses accessible to group members only (and to the Professor as well). Over the course of the term, projects are broken down into their constituent parts (and assignments) in order to help organize and reflect upon group work, to collaboratively share work and divide labor for the project, to plan for and conduct project research, and to comment on existing models of the kind of project your group chooses. As described in the Assignment section of the syllabus (which is forthcoming!), there will be 5 options for the seminar project that groups will choose from: 1) a Manifesto, 2) a Resource Guide or “Toolkit”, 3) a Public Syllabus/ Curriculum, 4) an Infographic and Guide, or 5) you can propose, and get approval for, another option. Groups can also use Microsoft Teams (available to students at McGill as part of the Office 365 suite) or another platform of their choosing to hold group meetings (your professor is unable to set this up for you). Assignments have been structured to best facilitate collaborative work, in distinct and do-able steps.


**Assignments:** All work for the course will be submitted on MyCourses. Assignments will include weekly reading annotations in Perusall, and a group project broken down into the following components over the
term: a written plan for co-working among your group members; a short review of an example project; a midterm project proposal; a short progress report; an initial draft and then a revised final draft of the project; and short self and group assessments. All feedback will be communicated to students through MyCourses. There will be no exams or quizzes in COMS 492. More details will be available in the syllabus.

A **discussion board will be set up on MyCourses** to enable further conversation/discussion between students and between the students and professor, to ask questions of other people or your professor, and to share resources with each other. Students participating in COMS 492 asynchronously will make use of the discussion forum to pose and post questions on the readings, respond to others’ posts, and extend the contexts of discussion. We will also do some collective writing before, during, and after our first class session using Google docs; one Google doc has already been set up for the first meeting of our seminar. You will find the link to the Google doc under the Week One module in the Content section of MyCourses. Everyone can access the Google doc already, so please feel free to start filling in your ideas for your aspirational learning outcomes and your expectations of how we will interact together over the term. Thank you for your contributions to this document!

**Office Hours** will be held via Zoom on two days during the week: **Wednesdays 4-6pm Eastern time zone** and **Fridays 10am-12 noon Eastern time zone** (these times may need to change due to circumstances in Prof. Rentschler’s workplace; any changes will be announced). Zoom links are available in MyCourses. Please do not share the Zoom links with people outside of our course. These office hours are also available to students in Prof. Rentschler’s other undergraduate course this term as well. For those of you in different time zones, if neither of these 2-hour sessions enable you to visit office hours, please let Prof. Rentschler know and she’ll work out another way to connect.

(Some Expectations for How We Interact Together: For those of us who will meet in Zoom, please mute your microphone at all times except when you are speaking. When you have finished commenting/speaking, please say something like, “okay, that’s my point” that signals you are done.

Ideally, COMS 492 is a space in which we can grow as scholars, critics, writers, analysts, and for some, advocates. In this space, we are able to try out ideas, even if we might abandon them later. In this course, one of our goals is to give ourselves and other people the space to transform their thinking and change their
minds. We will not seek to achieve “pure” ideas, nor should we expect others’ ideas to be pure of contradictions and complexities. Contingency, contradiction, mutability, uncertainty, and partial knowledge all make up how we think, what we think, and what we believe. In the midst of all of this, clarity in what we say and write is especially valuable. Respectful dialogue is expected of everyone. And while disagreements are expected, they should not shut down dialogue. Learning is a process: we make mistakes; we change our minds; we sometimes even regret some things we’ve said. Our aim is to work together to learn and un-learn some of the things we take for granted, and to sharpen our analytic skills in the process.

To this end, please grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not. Avoid attacking someone’s character or personhood if you disagree with something they have said: what someone thinks or says is not reducible to who and where they are. Our goal in using the discussion forum and talking in small groups (in Zoom, in Microsoft Teams, and other platforms) is to understand the texts we read, the concepts we use, and the media examples we encounter, and how they might be useful to us. As much as possible, we will work to avoid purely negative critique in comments and responses. Please also extend the same consideration to classmates. Consider what other people say in their comments and discussion forum posts and think about how you can build on and respond to them as generously as possible.

While you each bring interesting experiences to the course, please consider whether you really want to bring them up in discussion. If you do bring up your own experience, recognize that it becomes a topic for discussion. Ask yourself what point you want to make by talking about something really personal. Do you want others to know this about you? You also do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

**Questions about Remote Delivery?** If you have any questions about the remote delivery plan for the course, or have any accessibility needs of which I should be aware, please contact Prof. Rentschler at: [carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca](mailto:carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca). Please also familiarize yourself with the student guidelines on remote delivery of courses: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/instructors/class-disruption/guidelines-remote#students](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/instructors/class-disruption/guidelines-remote#students). For tutorials on the different platforms we will be using in COMS 492, check out: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources)

I’m looking forward to our conversations this term. See you on MyCourses and in Zoom!