**COMS 361: Selected Topics Communication Studies 1: Media and Culture of the Night**

**Course Delivery Guide**

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

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

The terms of this guide are subject to modification as conditions change, in order to provide for flexibility and to optimize course delivery. Course requirements set out in the Course Syllabus (to be distributed in the first week of class) are not subject to modification.”

**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.

**The scheduled times for the class are**

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

**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.

2) A pre-recorded presentation by the professor consisting of voice, Powerpoints, film and video clips, images and other materials (approximately 20 minutes), edited into a single Zoom file. This will have been uploaded to MyCourses just before the class begins and will be presented
from within MyCourses. Students will be encouraged to comment on the materials and ask questions using the Chat function of Zoom.

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.

4) **Break-out sessions**, with randomized membership, taking up a question assigned by the professor in relation to the previous presentation (15-20 minutes). This same question will be assigned to those who are following the course asynchronously, who may wish to form small groups for the purpose of responding. In both cases, students will have the option of arriving at a collective response or responding individually. Forty-eight hours after each class, short answers (200 words) are to be posted to a module in MyCourses created for this purpose.

**Assignments and grading**

1. **Question responses (15%)**

This portion of the mark covers the short answers to questions posed by the Professor near the end of each class. Students must complete twenty of these for the entire course (either individually or as part of group responses.) These answers will not be graded individually; completion of all of them will result in a perfect score of 15, with lower completion marked proportionately.

2. **Short essay, artefact analysis (individual) (20%)**

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, consumed at night or might be 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.

3. **Second paper: City analysis (group) (20%)**

For this assignment, you are required to work in a group to produce an audiovisual and textual study of a city in the world and the social, cultural and economic condition of its night. You will collaborate in groups of ten students to produce a presentation suitable in form and content for publication online. Groups will be chosen through on-line sign-up sheets for particular cities, though suggestions will be considered.

This activity will be coordinated by the Teaching Assistant. The class of October 29th will be devoted to short group presentations (no longer than five minutes) in which each group will describe its city and the relevant issues surrounding it. The final submission of the project will involve (a) posting materials to a web address (to be determined); (b) submission of a 3-page self-evaluation document explaining how work within the group was distributed and how the
process was organized; and (c) presentation on MyCourses of a 5-minute video describing the challenges faced and the ways in which the research was carried out.

4. Reading Responses (20%)

A reading has been assigned for each scheduled class. For 7 of these, 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 7 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. You may schedule your original responses and your comment-responses as you wish, as long as you complete seven of each, for separate classes.

Note that, in addition to the single readings assigned to everyone for each week, alternate readings in French, Spanish or other languages may be offered as options. If you possess the appropriate linguistic ability, you may write your response on these articles if you wish.

5. 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@mcmill.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 meeting 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 and 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 its recommendations are useful ones for our own situation.