Course Syllabus

CODE number: CMM 302G

CULTURAL STUDIES AND CROSS-CULTURAL CAPABILITY

Number of ECTS: 6

Contact Details for Professor Jan Walravens

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Course Prerequisites (if any):
CMM101P or BUS101P or POL101P

Course Description
The first part of this course highlights major theoretical issues in the discipline of Cross-Cultural Communication (or Language and Intercultural Communication) and illustrates the difficulty of studying culture and identity in an academic manner. In the second part, fundamental insights thus gained are applied to the case of Flanders within the Belgian and European contexts. The building blocks of Flemish (and Belgian) identity are highlighted and intercultural differences with the Netherlands and the United States are examined in particular. Through our contrastive/comparative approach we will examine political, economic, geographical, historical and religious data.

Learning Objectives

The Broad Learning Outcomes of the course

1. To acquire knowledge of Communication Studies as a science and understand and compare the academic literature of different fields of Communication Studies (human, mass, organisational, intercultural, political and business communication, journalism studies, strategic communication, and media production, research and development).
2. To promote the understanding and critical reflection of occupational, regulatory, ethical, technological, political, economic, and cultural factors in communication and different media industries, and be able to assess their impact.
3. To know and be able to apply the main social science research methods in the design and execution of communication projects, independently or in a team.

4. To understand the ethical aspects of the work and the social responsibilities of professional communicators in different contexts such as interpersonal, small group and organisational communication, journalism, new media, public relations and marketing, in a comparative intercultural perspective.

5. To be prepared to pursue a Master's degree in all the different fields of Communication Studies (get stimulated to lifelong learning) and/or attain a high-level occupation in a relevant field.

These learning outcomes are in line with the following Discipline Learning Outcomes for the Bachelor in Communications Sciences as ratified by the NVAO: DLO 1, DLO 3, DLO 4, DLO 8, DLO 9 and DLO 11.

The Specific Learning Outcomes of the course

**Acquired Knowledge:**

- An overview of theoretical models in a number of communication fields, with a focus on explanatory theory and empirical research;
- The major theoretical issues in the discipline of Cross-Cultural Capability (or Language and Intercultural Communication), exploring this field in the broader context of Cultural Studies.

**Applying Knowledge & Judgement:**

- Describe the major theoretical models covered in class;
- Apply these models to the writing of research papers;
- Describe the limitations of the models in both theory and application;
- Exhibit the ability to "blend" creativity with the rigors of a specific brief/draft.

**Communication:**

- Engage with practitioners and academics in the media field.

**Attitudes:**

- To be eager to apply life-long learning skills.
COURSE CALENDAR

This course relies on student participation and its pedagogical foundation is interactive teaching. Therefore, the pace of the course is largely determined by in-class discussion and reflection.

The basic thematic and chronological structure of the course is this:

- Language as a fundamental component of (cross-)cultural capability:
  - Theories of language (symbols, animals, writing, metaphor, gender, class)
  - Sociolinguistics

- Cross-cultural capability as an academic discipline:
  - The question of consciousness
  - Culture and the brain
  - A theoretical model for cross-cultural capability

- The Low Countries in contrast:
  - Aspects of American cultural identity:
    - Cliché of the monolith
    - The American dream
  - Aspects of European cultural identity:
    - The challenge of diversity
    - Towards an interdisciplinary methodology

- Belgian cultural identities:
  - Political structure
  - Political culture

- Dutch cultural identity:
  - The welfare state
  - Living on the water

Testing:
Week 7: Midterm exam.
Final Exam: end of semester, during final exam week.
Both exams will cover lecture notes and readings (from the reader).
First academic paper is due the week before midterm exams.
Second academic paper and creative writing are due three weeks before final exams.
The first day of classes, students receive specific information with exact dates for all assignments. All papers are due on the day, before 12 noon.

Course Materials

Textbook:
- There is no specific textbook for this course. A reader, with a wide variety of texts, is provided by the professor.

Case Studies and Additional Readings:
- All cases and reading materials are in the reader.

Videos:
- A number of short videos will be watched (almost on a weekly basis), mainly from YouTube. A careful selection will be made on an ad hoc basis with respect to topical and thematic relevance to the course.
Students are strongly encouraged to attend a number of conferences at Vesalius, IES, VUB/ULB, or elsewhere.

Course support site: Pointcarré

Course materials (syllabus, support materials, important messages, etc) will be uploaded on the Vesalius website, Pointcarré. Students are expected to visit the site regularly to keep abreast of course changes and evolutions.

**Course Assessment**

- Academic paper 1 10%
- In-class participation 10%
- Creative writing 20%
- Academic paper 2 30%
- Midterm examination 10%
- Final examination 20%

TOTAL 100%

**Estimated workload for this course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time (hrs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in class: 14 weeks x 3hrs</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 exams x 2 hrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study time for 2 exams = 2 x 16 =</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 papers and 1 journal (writing and research)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare readings for class =</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL for the semester =</td>
<td>160 hrs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Grading Scale of Vesalius College**

Vesalius College grading policy, in line with the Flemish Educational norms, is now as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Scale of 20</th>
<th>Scale of 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>17.0-20.0</td>
<td>85-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>16.1-16.9</td>
<td>81-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>15.3-16.0</td>
<td>77-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14.5-15.2</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>13.7-14.4</td>
<td>69-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>13.1-13.6</td>
<td>66-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12.3-13.0</td>
<td>62-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>11.5-12.2</td>
<td>58-61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>10.7-11.4</td>
<td>54-57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>10.0-10.6</td>
<td>50-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-9.9</td>
<td>0-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment Criteria

A grade of A: Demonstrates outstanding competence. The work reflects a breadth of reading and is based on ample use of sources and displays vigorous analytical capacities; the central idea or ideas are original and distinctive, substantially developed and supported with details and illustrations. The paper is logically organized and displays careful language use: complete, clear and engaging sentences, correct and distinctive diction. There are NO errors in Standard English usage.

A grade of B: Demonstrates good competence. The central idea or ideas are original and clear; the writer shows that there is a point to be made. The central idea or ideas are developed and supported with argumentation. The work demonstrates that the student has covered the basic reading and displays good comprehension. The selection and use of sources is adequate. The research outcomes and arguments are presented in proper academic form.

A grade of C: The work displays a working ability to assemble bibliography and to use resources adequately; reasonable understanding of the core literature and an ability to attempt a scholarly interpretation and analysis of the material read, even if the analysis is incomplete. The work must be presented in a proper academic form, even if there are some flaws in the written or oral expression.

A grade of D: The work displays limited reading and incomplete knowledge, flows in the understanding, inadequate interpretation, limited argumentation. It is presented in adequate English, but with considerable flaws in academic expression.

A grade of F: An overall mark below D indicates that not even the minimal standards defined above have been attained.

The Communication Department assesses the outcome of student learning using a variety of indicators. Generally the following principles prevail in evaluating written and oral work.

a) Written work:
All written work must conform to the academic standards of research and writing (the Writing Centre provides information and guidance on this). The following aspects are taken into consideration when assessing students’ written work:

- Correct and relevant knowledge of the field.
- Understanding of the issues involved (expressed in a vigorous analysis).
- Academic writing. This includes correct use of terminology.
- Selection of relevant sources.
- Formulation of thesis statement.
The ability to use evidence - to build arguments on the basis of the sources the students have accessed.

The ability to discriminate between the significant and the trivial.

Ability to develop a consistent argument.

Logical organisation of material and a clear structure of the paper.

Independent thought: the students’ ability to assess critically the material they have used and formulate their own position on the subject of their research.

The quality of writing: the ability to express oneself clearly and consistently, and to write fluently.

b) During in-class discussions, students should demonstrate:

Correct and relevant knowledge of the field.

Understanding of the issues involved.

Correct use of terminology.

The ability to use evidence – to build arguments on the basis of the sources the students have accessed.

The ability to discriminate between the significant and the trivial;

Ability to develop a consistent argument.

Logical organization and clear structure of the argument.

Independent thought: the students’ ability to assess critically the material they have used and formulate their own position on the subject of their research.

Eloquence: the ability to express oneself clearly, consistently, and fluently.

Specific Assessment Criteria for CMM 302G

- One short academic paper (to be handed in the week before Midterms) of 2 pp. (10% of the final grade)
  - dealing with a specific aspect of the first part of the course, e.g. a critical comment on a point made in the Reader or in class, or the examination of a specific case (‘critical incident’) as illustration of a theory
  OR
  - any proposal suggested by the student and approved by the professor.

- One longer academic paper (to be handed in three weeks before Finals) of 3 pp. (30% of the final grade) on one of the following themes:
  - a case study presented by the professor (or found elsewhere) has to be developed or re-examined by the student, thus imposing on him or her critical thinking and research ‘in the field’;
  - an existing theoretical model has to be tested on its validity using ‘new information’;
-a report on ‘field work’ (e.g. on the basis of interviews or a questionnaire) carried out by the student;
-a critical comment on a point made in the Reader;
-any proposal suggested by the student and approved by the professor.

Students must follow MLA style for both academic papers.

-A personal intercultural journal (to be handed in three weeks before Finals--20% of the final grade): for the duration of the course, the students are asked to keep a ‘personal journal’ of their own intercultural experience; they can draw on past and/or present experience. The main purpose is that they should put their personal impressions into the theoretical context of the course. As such, this is as much an exercise in creative writing as it is one in critical and academic thinking. There should be a total of 15 typed pages (double spaced) of running text.

-A midterm and a final examination (respectively 10% and 20% of the final grade): the goal of these two examinations is to see whether the students can explain the methodology, theories and cases discussed in class (from memory) and whether they have understood the (sociological, political, historical, linguistic etc.) implications of said materials. Test format: short essay, written in class.

-Permanent evaluation (10% of the final grade): attendance is required and students are expected to participate in discussions in class. Regular attendance and handing in work on time will result in a B (= ‘good’). Active participation will result in a higher grade; disturbing class (for instance by frequently being late) will result in a lower grade.

**Additional Course Policies**

**Teaching and Learning Methods**

The pedagogical method in this course relies strongly on interactive teaching: student participation is strongly encouraged and we ask students to reflect carefully before responding to written statements in the reader, or comments made by other students. The professor acts as a coach: he will steer the discussion in a certain direction so that the course materials are effectively addressed, but he will also allow ample time for spontaneous student intervention – thus becoming an ‘active listener’ himself. The teacher will also make sure that students effectively and specifically address materials read or comments made in class.

Next to two academic papers, there is a creative writing assignment: in an ‘intercultural journal’ of 15 pages, students are invited to put their knowledge and skills into the context of a highly personal reflection on things learned. This exercise encourages them to freely address the ethical questions that necessarily go hand in hand with intercultural contacts. The overall debate is one about “us” versus “them” and the idea of “being right” as a relative, context-related notion.
Research methods
The content of this course and our academic approach lend themselves most easily to desk research; a critical reflection in essay style is expected for 2 short academic papers. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of avenues to achieve that type of reflection. Academic papers may therefore also be based on field work, a quantitative approach, or any research method that seems most appropriate for the paper topic selected (and approved by the professor).
Length of academic papers:
First paper: 2 pages, with an absolute minimum of 3 peer-reviewed references.
Second paper: 3 pages, with an absolute minimum of 3 peer-reviewed references.
MLA style is required.
The academic papers are kept short deliberately: students are challenged to express themselves in an accurate yet succinct fashion.
Together with the creative writing (for which no references are required), the total number of pages to be written for this course is 20. (Plus two essay questions on the midterm and the final exam.)

Specific requirements
Attendance is required. (Any absence deemed ‘acceptable’ must be attested.)
The course being based on the principles of interactive teaching, students will be asked to actively participate in discussions.
Written work submitted late will receive an F (barring exceptional and attested circumstances).
Papers must be handed in in person.
Students are expected to arrive to class on time.

Academic Integrity
Academic dishonesty is NOT tolerated in this course.

Academic honesty is not only an ethical issue but also the foundation of scholarship. Cheating and plagiarism are therefore serious breaches of academic integrity.

Following the College policy, cheating and plagiarism cases will be communicated in writing to the Associate Dean for Students and submitted to the Student Conduct Committee for disciplinary action.

If you refer to someone else’s work, appropriate references and citations must be provided. Grammar, spelling and punctuation count, so use the tools necessary to correct before handing in assignments.