



**COMM 495: Honors Thesis Seminar**  
**("Knowing Ways of Knowing")**

4 units

**Fall 2019 – Section # 20763D**

**Thursdays 9-11:50am**

**Location: ANN 209**

**Instructor: Prof Mike Ananny**

**Office Hours:** TBA / email for appointment.

**Office:** ANN-310B

**Contact Info:** ananny@usc.edu

**Course Description:**

This course helps undergraduates in the COMM honors program prepare their thesis proposals. It is designed to be a workshop in which students learn about different methodologies and research designs, reflect upon compromises and tradeoffs involved in planning and executing an independent research project, and become familiar with the research of COMM faculty who may become their thesis advisors. By the end of the course students will have a full thesis proposal, a working relationship with their thesis advisor, and an appreciation of the diversity of methods and questions underpinning scholarship in Communication.

**Learning Objectives:**

The primary objective is for students to produce a thesis proposal. To get there, students will learn about different types of research project designs, ways of communicating their research to audiences, how to identify the stakes in their projects, ways of approaching a literature review, how to think critically about popular press depictions of their research interests, and how to give and receive scholarly feedback.

**Readings:**

All readings will be provided through Blackboard. There are no texts to purchase.

**Assignments:**

The entire course is designed around helping students prepare their thesis proposal. To get to that proposal, students will do a number of small assignments that will collectively provide the building blocks for the proposal. More information on each assignment will be provided in class well before the due date. For many of the assignments, you will be finding your own materials and creating your own interpretation of the assignment – this is *by design* and intended to help you practice taking ownership and control over your own thesis project and how you think it should be executed.

*ASSIGNMENT 1 (5%): Approaching your advisor (due 9/5)*

Prepare a 1-paragraph and 1-page draft description of your thesis project interests for approaching your advisor, and then write up a short report (~500 words) on your first conversation with him/her. This doesn't have to be perfect or formal – rather, this is a chance for

your to articulate your interests and questions well enough to support a conversation with an advisor or prospective advisor, and a chance for your to reflect on how the meeting went, what you know and don't know, what your next steps are.

ASSIGNMENT 2 (10%): *What's at stake in your project?* (due 9/26)

A short essay (~1000 words) reflecting on what is “at stake” in your project. Why does it matter and who are its audiences? Why does it need to be done, why does it need to be done *now*, and why are you the person to do it?

ASSIGNMENT 3 (10%): *Reflecting on method & form* (due 10/24)

A short essay (~1000 words) reflecting on the “method” and form you will use in your thesis. How will you know what you will know? What choices or compromises are you making, and will they impact the scope and power of your project? Why is this the “right” method for your thesis claim or research question? What are you creating and why is that the right form for your argument, claim, or question?

ASSIGNMENT 4 (10%): *Giving & getting feedback* (due 10/31 or before)

Learning how to give and get feedback is a key research skill. Partner with another student in the class to give and get feedback on either Assignment #2 or #3, and write a short essay (~500 words) reflecting on the experience of giving and getting feedback.

ASSIGNMENT 5 (10%): *Annotated bibliography* (due 11/14)

Create an annotated bibliography of *at least 5 scholarly texts* that are relevant to the background or context of your thesis project. One of these texts may be the text that you “open” for Assignment 3. (Your thesis advisor will probably ask you to prepare a more extensive literature review but this will get you started on mapping your project's relevant related work and practicing how to prepare succinct summaries of a text's significance.)

ASSIGNMENT 6 (10%): *Opening a scholarly text* (in class 11/14)

Share with the class and give a very short precis (7-8 minutes) of a scholarly text that's core to your thesis project. Explain the text's value and contributions, the choices it makes about method, and the relevance to your project. This is not a formal presentation but a chance to practice giving a very concise description of a piece of scholarship and showing how it connects to your own project. No written submission is required.

ASSIGNMENT 7 (5%): *Project notebook & weekly updates* (ongoing)

Throughout the semester, I expect you to keep a project “notebook” that contains *at least 5 entries or updates per week*, and to give the class very short weekly updates on the state of your project. I put “notebook” in quotes because it's up to you to decide what format this notebook takes—it could be a physical book or a file on your computer/phone—but it must be a place where you are capturing, revising, and organizing your thoughts on your project. While I expect there to be at least 5 entries or updates per week, it's up to you to decide what these are and the format they take. They can be very quick observations or reflections or more substantive reflections on your project. The point of keeping this notebook and giving regular updates to the class is to make sure that you are thinking about your thesis project throughout the semester, and create some sense of collective accountability for progress. A thesis is not something you can do

the night before; insights come at all times of day, in different ways, and it's good to see how your thinking changes over time.

***ASSIGNMENT 8: Thesis Proposal (due 12/13)***

Your thesis proposal (written submission) and oral presentation (final class).

I understand that “participation” can mean many different things and that not everyone feels comfortable speaking up in every class meeting, so I don't explicitly assign points for participation. However, I do ask that everyone is *engaged* in the class. This might mean offering an original interpretation or thoughtful reaction, taking the conversation in a new direction, asking an insightful question at just the right moment, or even listening intently and generously. A class like this only works when people show up prepared, contribute in substantive ways, are generous and thoughtful with each other. I guarantee that if you're *not* participating in meaningful ways, your grades on all the other elements will tend to suffer!

**Assignment Submission Policy:**

All assignments are to be submitted via email ([ananny@usc.edu](mailto:ananny@usc.edu)). Unless otherwise negotiated, late submissions will be penalized 10% per day and will not be accepted more than 5 days after the due date.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Assignment	Points	Due Date	% of Grade
A1: Approaching your thesis advisor	5	Sept 5	5
A2: What's at stake in your project?	10	Sept 26	10
A3: Reflecting on method & form	10	Oct 24	10
A4: Giving and getting feedback	10	Oct 31	10
A5: Annotated bibliography	10	Nov 14	10
A6: Opening a scholarly text	10	Nov 14	10
A7: Project notebook & weekly updates	5	Weekly	5
A8: Thesis proposal presentation & report	40	Dec 5 & 13	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>100%</b>

**Course Grading Policy:**

You will receive details about each assignment/exam separately. **All assignments need to be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with me in a timely manner. Do no wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.**

In order to pass this class you will need to complete ALL of the assignments. Failure to complete one or more of them will result in an F in the class.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A/A-	outstanding, thoughtful and enthusiastic work
B+/B	above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through
C and below	fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores won the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A	= 100-94	C	= 76-74
A-	= 94-90	C-	= 73-70
B+	= 89-87	D+	= 69-67
B	= 86-84	D	= 66-64
B-	= 83-80	D-	= 63-60
C+	= 79-77	F	= 59-0

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must appeal it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, within one week of receiving the graded assignment. No late appeals will be accepted for review.

### **Laptops & Phones:**

Although laptops may be used at particular times, e.g., when doing activities or consulting electronic texts, laptops are not allowed during class. I will tell you when they're allowed to be open, but the default is that they will stay closed. Phones must always be silenced and put away. If you have a circumstance that requires an exception to this policy please see me and we can discuss.

### **Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/26/19 – 12/6/19) (optional)**

Friday, September 13: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 13: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, September 17: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, October 11: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the week three equivalent for short sessions) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, November 15: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **A few notes on the weekly schedule (see table following):**

- All weekly readings are **in the Blackboard folder**, organized by date.

- This syllabus is **subject to change** based on the progress of the class, current events, and/or guest speaker availability.
- Many weeks the readings are far lighter than they would be for a 4-unit class of this type. That is because I *expect that you are building your thesis project bibliography* as the semester proceeds – i.e., you are both skimming and reading deeply work that is relevant to your project. Materials that you find on your own are great for Assignments #5 and #7 so use the “extra” time you have from lighter reading to build your own project bibliography.
- This class has **many guest speakers**. Not only is this a way of helping you appreciate the breadth of Communication as a field and (a part of!) the diversity of our faculty, it’s also a chance for you to connect with potential thesis advisors or hear their recommendations of people who fit with your projects. Even if a particular visitor or his/her methodology isn’t exactly on topic for your thesis, it’s good practice to understand different ways of knowing.
- Due to some unfortunate scheduling, there are **two class periods where we will not officially meet as a group**, but I have asked you to use the available time to meet with your (potential) advisor and fellow students and work on a part of your proposal. The scheduling of these meetings is up to you, they don’t have to happen during our regular class meeting time.
- Though not indicated explicitly in this table, Assignment #7 (“Project notebook and weekly updates”) is due **every week**.
- We will not explicitly discuss every reading every week, but you are **expected to arrive having done the readings and ready to incorporate them** into our conversation.

Wk	Date	Topic/Visitor	Readings	Due?
1	Aug 29	<p>Introductions &amp; current state of thesis interests</p> <p>Raymond Williams free writing exercise</p> <p>Open Morrison lecture</p> <p>Collaboratively develop thesis proposal structure</p> <p>Review Assignment 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Morrison</i> – 1993 Nobel Lecture</li> <li>• <i>Mills</i> – “The Promise” [from <i>The Sociological Imagination</i>]</li> </ul> <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Morrison</i> – “Playing in the Dark”</li> </ul>	N/A
2	Sept 5	No class meeting: set up advisor meeting, prepare assignment #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mills</i> – “On Intellectual Craftsmanship” [from <i>The Sociological Imagination</i>]</li> <li>• <i>Ananny</i> – “How to read an article”</li> <li>• <i>Edwards</i> – “How to read a book”</li> <li>• <i>Alford</i> – “Introduction”, “The Craft of Inquiry”, “Designing a Research Project” [from <i>The Craft of Inquiry</i>]</li> </ul>	A1: Approaching your thesis advisor
3	Sept 12	Visitor: Prof Stacy Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Smith, Pieper, Choueiti</i> – “Exploring the careers of female directors”</li> <li>• <i>Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark</i> – “Increasing inclusion in animation”</li> <li>• [intro to content analysis]</li> </ul>	N/A
4	Sept 19	Visitor: Prof Dmitri Williams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Williams &amp; Kim</i> – “Third places in the ether around us”</li> <li>• <i>Williams</i> – “Better or worse”</li> </ul>	N/A
5	Sept 26	Fieldtrip to the USC Shoah Foundation Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gallo</i> – “Doing archival research: How to find a needle in a haystack.”</li> <li>• [reading on ethics of archival research]</li> <li>• Familiarize yourself with the online archives of the Shoah Center’s Visual History Archive: <a href="https://sfi.usc.edu/vha">https://sfi.usc.edu/vha</a></li> </ul>	A2: What’s at stake in your project?
6	Oct 3	Visitor: Prof Josh Kun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Orwell</i> – “Politics and the English language”</li> <li>• <i>Bateson</i> – “Emergent visions”, “In the company of friends”, “From strength to strength” [from <i>Composing a Life</i>]</li> <li>• <i>Didion</i> – “Why I write”</li> <li>• <i>Smith</i> – “Joy”</li> </ul>	N/A

7	Oct 10	No class meeting: meet with advisor & fellow student to talk method & thesis form; work on bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>McCloud</i> – “Understanding Comics: The invisible art” – entire book available for free <a href="#">here</a> (and on Blackboard).</li> </ul> <p>As you read, think about the <i>form</i> of McCloud’s argument—it’s “just” a comic book?—and challenge yourself to consider alternative forms for your thesis.</p>	N/A
8	Oct 17	<b><i>Fall Break, no classes</i></b>		
9	Oct 24	Visitor: Prof Larry Gross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gross</i> – “You’re the first person I’ve ever told”</li> <li>• <i>Becker</i> – “Tricks” and “Imagery” [from <i>Tricks of the Trade</i>]</li> </ul>	A3: Reflecting on method
10	Oct 31	Visitor: Prof Henry Jenkins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Jenkins</i> – “<u>Popular culture as politics, politics as popular culture</u>”</li> <li>• <i>Williams</i> – “Culture is ordinary”</li> <li>• <i>Papert</i> – “<u>Some Poetic and Social Criteria for Education Design</u>”</li> </ul>	A4: Giving & getting feedback
11	Nov 7	Visitor: Prof Allissa Richardson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Smith</i> – “Introduction”, “Twenty-five indigenous projects” [from <i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i>]</li> <li>• <i>Awad</i> – “Journalists and their sources”</li> </ul>	N/A
12	Nov 14	Visitor: Prof Alison Trope  Opening a Scholarly Text Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Becker</i> – “Telling about Society”, “Representations of society as organizational products” [from <i>Telling about Society</i>]</li> <li>• <i>Dubois</i> – “The Study of the Negro Problems” (1898)</li> <li>• <i>Morris</i> – “American Negro at Paris, 1900” [from <i>WEB Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America</i>]</li> </ul>	A5: Annotated bibliography  A6: Opening a scholarly text
13	Nov 21	Workshopping current state of proposals  <u>Ethnographic exercises</u> (e.g., “The Bicycle Thief” + report out) / design research exercises (e.g., Mockups cards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Nippert-Eng</i> – “A different approach to fieldwork” [from <i>Watching Closely: A guide to ethnographic observation</i>]</li> <li>• <i>Ziewitz</i> – “A not quite random walk”</li> <li>• <i>Papert</i> – “Gears of my childhood”</li> </ul>	
14	Nov 28	<b><i>Thanksgiving Break, no class meeting</i></b>		
15	Dec 5	<b>Thesis proposal presentations: your advisor is encouraged to attend</b>		

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems:

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems:

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*  
[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*  
[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.