AY 397A: Introduction to Anthropology of the Senses
Tuesday, Thursday 2:30 – 3:45 pm

Instructor:
William Hope, PhD
305 Diamond
Office Hours: by appointment, please
wmhope@colby.edu

Course Description

This course explores a basic premise of the Anthropology of the Senses: sensory perception is as much a cultural act as a physical or biological function. Central to this claim are the many ways that sensory domains become associated with particular social values and cultural practices. In this class, we will consider a number of scholarly debates and concerns regarding the inter-relations of the senses with historically dynamic human bodily experience. What does it mean to study the senses? What are the possible relationships among physiological capacities; social, political, and economic organizations; and their corresponding relations of power? How are gender, race, sexuality, and social class constructed not only through public institutions and markets but also embodied through everyday sociality and sensory perceptions? A particular focus of the course will be an examination of the various ways food, drink, art, music, dance, and other corporeal practices are mediated through personal and collective ideologies and practices around the affective and the sensual.

Requirements

Guiding principles:

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening, and reading.

   • This class requires a serious commitment to maintaining the course readings as these will be the foundations upon which we will develop our class discussions. Some of these readings are challenging; however, each presents a series of considerations and insights that will provide you with useful conceptual tools in your engagements with the complexities of human conditions and experiences. In order to get the most out of them, we will all need to be actively present in class and prepared to engage in productive discussion.

2. Good faith, good humor, and respect toward your colleagues (and your teacher) in the classroom.

   • We will inevitably have differences of opinion and moments of disagreement: this is good. Feel free to passionately engage your colleagues as you share your perspectives. Equally important, make a conscious effort to listen to and consider their perspectives as well. Rudeness and personal attacks will not be acceptable under any circumstances.
Assignments:

1. *Weekly Reading Notes with Questions for Discussion*

Each class you will turn in a brief set of reading notes that outline the central arguments of the assigned readings, any questions that might have emerged from your readings, and one concrete point of discussion for the class. Far from being busy work, this is a great reading skill to cultivate as you will establish strong habits in looking for an author’s central points, organization, and style of writing. These insights can productively shape your own writing.

- Submit your reading notes via email no later than one hour prior to the start of class.
- Make sure to reference specific passages from the readings.
- Refrain from the “Search and Destroy” approach to academic criticism, but rather seek to understand the coherency of the essays on the author’s own terms. *You do not have to be in agreement with the argument, implications, organization, or conclusions of the essay.* These are great points for discussion. However, you do need to be able to identify and engage with the author’s intent for writing the essay.
- We will not be able to incorporate everyone’s points of discussion in every class. If there is something that you really prepared for that didn’t come up in discussion, don’t be discouraged. These can be good resources for your response papers or final project. Finally, I will be happy to discuss outside of class anything that you find interesting about the readings or class discussion.

2. *Response Papers*

You will write six response papers dealing with class themes, topics, or discussion. Each paper will be app. 3 to 5 pages long. Broadly speaking, these response papers will allow you to engage our study of the senses by attending to and reflecting upon your own sensory perceptions and/ or those of friends, colleagues, family members, etc. I will provide more specific guidelines over the course of the semester as we prepare for each response paper.

3. *Sensory Journals*

Over the course of the semester, I would like each of us to document a range of sensory perceptions that we experience and to put these into narrative form. The idea is to actively reflect upon our experiences and to bring them into dialogue with those of our colleagues and with the themes we are exploring in the class. I would like you to have at least one entry each week (you are, of course, free to do much more, if you like).

4. *Project Proposals and updates*

Mid-way through the semester, you will turn in a brief descriptive proposal of your final research project. I expect this to be app. three pages long. You are not completely bound by this proposal. Rather, the proposal is an opportunity to start organizing your thoughts for the final project. This will provide you a concrete basis for describing your project to your colleagues and to me. I am happy to meet and discuss any ideas that you might have prior to your submitting the proposal.
5. **Final Project**

There are several options available for the final project. Feel free to craft your own distinct project from the following:

a) **Standard Class Paper**

This paper will be the result of your analysis, interpretations, and reactions to class readings and discussions. Key to this approach is the development of a clear thesis statement that is supported with substantial reference to the class materials.

Proposals for this option should include a clearly stated premise as to why you are pursuing this line of inquiry, a discussion of how you intend to approach it, and a preliminary discussion of the readings that will help you refine your thinking on this subject. The paper should be approximately 12-15 pages, double-spaced, and conforming to a conventional academic format and reference system.

b) **Applied Analysis Paper**

This paper will seek to apply/test specific insights of the class readings and discussions to the interpretation and analysis of a particular work (literary, musical, film, event, etc.). Key to this approach is selecting a topic that you think allows for a substantial discussion of the significance of sensory domains in the production, experience, and/or reception of this particular work.

Proposals for this option should include a clearly stated premise as to why you are selecting this work, a discussion of how you intend to approach it, and a preliminary discussion of the readings that will help you refine your engagement with this subject. The research paper should be approximately 12-15 pages, double-spaced, and conforming to a conventional academic format and reference system.

c) **Individual or Group Sensory Ethnography**

This paper will be the result of your own research design and implementation. This option can be the outgrowth of the response papers, especially if you find one topic particularly engaging and productive. Possible topics include the various sensory-scapes and the meanings that people invest in them that we will be exploring throughout the class.

Proposals for this option should include a clearly stated focus for your research project, a discussion of the methods you intend to employ, and a preliminary discussion of the readings that will help you refine your engagement with this project. **Be warned: this can be the most fun yet demanding option. It is not recommended for procrastinators!**

d) **Other thoughts or projects that might come to your mind.** Be sure to discuss them with me prior to submitting your proposal.

### Composition of final grade:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/ participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading notes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>6 short response papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory Journal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Project proposal/ discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research project</td>
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### Grading Scale:

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<tr>
<td>93-97</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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Required Readings:


Additional articles will be posted on Moodle.

**Note on Academic Integrity**

It is your responsibility to become familiar with the College’s policy on academic honesty ([http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/catalogue/2009_2010/academic_program/academic-honesty.cfm](http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/catalogue/2009_2010/academic_program/academic-honesty.cfm)). For all graded assignments, your work must be your own. You should cite authors for their contributions to your thinking or your writing. If you copy text from published or unpublished sources not your own without proper citations or any material from the internet, or if you purchase or receive a paper in full from another source, this constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating. You will receive an “F” grade for this course.

**Attendance Policy**

*I expect you to attend every class*. Absences will lower your attendance/participation grade and you will not receive credit for any missed reading notes. That said, I recognize that situations might arise where you will not be able to attend class. I strongly encourage you to contact me (and all of your professors) in such events. Failure to communicate your situation within three days will give you a zero for the assignment grade.

For excused absences, the student must provide supporting documentation. Such documentation must come from a physician, nurse, military supervisor, athletics coach or supervisor, or whoever has the authority to explain your absence. You must supply documentation and make arrangements to make up any missed work within three days.

**Syllabus of Lectures and Readings**

**Week 1**  
Thursday 9/8  
Introduction and course overview  
Readings:  

Response Paper 1 assigned

**Week 2**  
Tuesday 9/13  
Initial Considerations on “Making Sense of Culture”  
Readings:  
Thursday 9/15  
Readings:  
  Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  

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**Week 3**

Tuesday 9/20  
**The Body and Embodiment**

Readings:  

Thursday 9/22  
Readings:  
  Cambridge: Harvard University Press.  

Encounter 1: Susan Golden, School Street Yoga Studio  

**Response Paper 2 assigned**

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**Week 4**

Tuesday 9/27  
**Senses of Place**

Readings:  

Thursday 9/29  
Readings:  

Encounter 2: David Gulak, Barrels Community Market
### Week 5

**Hearing, Listening, and Sounding**

**Readings:**

**Thursday 10/6**

**Readings:**

**Response Paper 3 assigned**

### Week 6

**Power and the senses**

**Readings:**

**Thursday 10/13**

**Readings:**

### Week 7

**Sensescapes**

**Readings:**

Meeting: Tower room Miller Library
Thursday 10/20  

**Readings:**

Encounter 3: Lauren Lessing, Colby Art Museum

Proposals for Final Projects are Due Oct. 20

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**Week 8**

**Tuesday 10/25**

**Reordering Sensory Experience**

**Readings:**
  [http://www.evelyn.co.uk/hearing_essay.aspx](http://www.evelyn.co.uk/hearing_essay.aspx)

**Movie:** *Touch the Sound*

Thursday 10/27  

Encounter 4: Alan Von Herrmann

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**Week 9**

**Tuesday 11/1**

**Readings:**

Thursday 11/3  

**Readings:**

Response Paper 5 assigned
### Week 10

**Tuesday 11/8**  
**Disordered Senses and Sensory Disorders**

**Readings:**

**Thursday 11/10**

**Readings:**

### Week 11

**Tuesday 11/15**

**Readings:**

**Thursday 11/17**  
No class: AAA conference

### Week 12

**Tuesday 11/22**  
**Encounter 5: Chuck Lakin, coffin builder for green funerals**

**Readings:**
Thursday 11/24  No class: Thanksgiving Break

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**Week 13**  
**Branding the Senses**  
**Tuesday 11/29**  
**Readings:**


**Thursday 12/1**  
**Readings:**


**Response Paper 6 assigned**

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**Week 14**

**Tuesday 12/6**  
**Wrap-up**

**Final projects are due by Friday, Dec. 16.**