

CARLETON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

ANTH 2500A
FALL 2026
“CULTURE AND SYMBOLS”

Instructor: Bernhard Leistle

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3 – 5 p.m., or by appointment

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Brightspace course page link: <https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/448100>

Pre-requisites & Precluded Courses: N/A

Method of Delivery: in person

Class meets: Wednesdays, 11:35 a.m. to 2:25 p.m.

Course Description and Objectives:

In our lives we are constantly surrounded by signs and sign-complexes: Operating the computer, listening to music, watching tv, navigating a car through traffic, listening to a lecture at university – everywhere we are engaged in processes of communication which form our experience of “culture”. For the most part, we take our cultural reality for granted, as objectively given. But from a semiotic perspective culture reveals its man-made, construed character as a system of representations.

The course is designed to introduce students to the science of signs, semiotics, and its application in the analysis of cultural phenomena. Students will become acquainted with basic semiotic concepts such as symbol, icon, index, metaphor, and myth. They also will acquire a first knowledge of how these concepts contribute to our understanding of human thought, consciousness, and culture. Beyond talking about semiotic concepts in the abstract, the course also places emphasis on their application in anthropological analysis. We will be looking among other things at the role of signs in gender, race, advertisement, and politics.

Learning Outcomes: 1. to generate in students an awareness of the crucial role of signs in culture. 2. to enable them to distinguish between different types of signs and to apply semiotic concepts in anthropological interpretation. 3. To introduce students to some classical texts in semiotics and enhance their faculties in reading anthropological literature.

Reading(s)/Textbook(s): All required readings for the course will be available through the ARES tool on the Brightspace website of the course. Students are not required to purchase textbooks or other learning materials for this course.

Course Requirements & Methods of Evaluation:

-readings and other activities in the class schedule (i.e. watching films) are to be completed before the class in which they are scheduled. Students should come to class prepared to discuss their contents. A good way to do this is to think about one or two questions regarding the readings/activities. What did you find remarkable/interesting/hard to understand/objectable? Why do you think this reading/film was assigned at this point, how does it related to what was treated in the course so far? Etc.

Performance in the course will be evaluated based on the following assignments:

-one in-person quiz (10% of total grade): written on paper in Class 4, Sept. 30; format will be short question, essay-style answers; writing time will be 45 min. at the beginning of class

-one in-person midterm exam (20%): written on paper in Class 8, Nov. 04; format short question, essay-style answers; writing time 80 min., at the beginning of class; exam material is cumulative.

-Final paper (30%): due last day of classes, Dec.11; submission through drop box on Brightspace. The paper consists of an interpretation of a sign or semiotic phenomenon of your choice, applying the conceptual approaches you have learned about in the course. Minimum length is 2000 words; use of secondary literature outside of the course is permitted but not encouraged.

-Final exam (30%): during examination period, scheduled by university, date TBA; format short question, essay-style answers; cumulative of all content covered in the course; duration 2 hs.

-Attendance and Participation (10%): 5 % is simple presence at lectures; 5% is based on engagement, assessed through short questions at the end of classes (no response – no points; non-specific response (does not show engagement with course – half points; course-specific response (reflects engagement with course content) – full points)

-Further information on assignments will be provided through Brightspace.

Late Policy:

Papers that are submitted late are deducted 5% per day late (weekends counting as two days), if no accommodation was discussed with me at least one week before the deadline, and no “academic consideration” has been requested through filling out the required form (see <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-consideration-policy/>)

Use of Generative AI and Re-Use of Work:

Re-use of work submitted for credit in another course is not permitted; you are expected to produce original work for this course.

Use of work generated by Large Language Models such as Chat GPT is prohibited in this course. You can use the spell and grammar checking function in Word to check the correctness of the text you wrote, but you are not allowed to use generative AI for “suggesting ideas”, “constructing an outline”, let alone “producing text” through prompts. To learn how to do these things is basic to academic work and if there is anything like “competent use” of generative AI it is built on your ability to conceptualize, structure, and write a coherent text yourselves.

Deferred Exams and Standing in the Course:

In order to be in good standing in the course, and thus be eligible for a deferral of scheduled exam, students have to achieve at least **50% in attendance/participation mark** and have submitted their **final term paper** when applying for deferral.

Conduct in Class

In this course, you are expected to learn from your texts, your teacher and from one another. This requires striving towards understanding each other but it does not imply striving towards finding agreement. Our class will be racially, religiously, politically, culturally, generationally, and economically diverse. We will be of

different gender identifications and sexual orientations and our lived experiences and reactions to the course material will reflect this diversity. Sharing our perspectives and interpretations on the course material will enhance everyone's learning experience and you are encouraged to openly express any disagreements with the authors you will read, with your fellow classmates, or with the Professor in the different participation fora that are available for this course. However, you are expected to conduct yourself in such a way that shows the utmost respect to others who may – or may not – share your views. Derogatory comments and hateful behavior towards others (and their views) will not be tolerated.

Carleton University acknowledges the location of its campus on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. In doing so, Carleton acknowledges it has a responsibility to the Algonquin people and a responsibility to adhere to Algonquin cultural protocols.

Additional Information

In accordance with the Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar Regulations, the letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 67-69	D+ = 57-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 63-66	D = 53-56
A - = 80-84	B - = 70-72	C - = 60-62	D - = 50-52
F= Below 50	WDN = Withdrawn from the course	DEF = Deferred	

Academic Regulations, Accommodations, Plagiarism, Etc.

University rules regarding registration, withdrawal, appealing marks, and most anything else you might need to know can be found on the university's website, here:

<https://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/>

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (<https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline/>). For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at **613-520-6608** or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*).

*The deadline for contacting the Paul Menton Centre regarding accommodation for October/November examinations is **October 1, 2026** and **November 15, 2026** for December examinations.

For Religious Obligations:

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: www.carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

For Pregnancy:

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: www.carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

For Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: www.carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else's work as your own and is a serious academic offence. For the details of what constitutes plagiarism, the potential penalties and the procedures refer to the section on Instructional Offences in the Undergraduate Calendar. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and follow the Carleton University Student Academic Integrity Policy (See <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>). The Policy is strictly enforced and is binding on all students. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Students who infringe the Policy may be subject to one of several penalties.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools (e.g. ChatGPT)

Unless explicitly permitted, either generally or for a specific assignment, any use of generative AI tools to produce assessed content is considered a violation of academic integrity standards.

As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described here with the course instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.

Note: Students can also access resources related to citing Generative AI on the [MacOdrum Library website](#).

What are the Penalties for Plagiarism?

A student found to have plagiarized an assignment may be subject to one of several penalties including but not limited to: a grade of zero, a failure or a reduced grade for the piece of academic work; reduction of final grade in the course; completion of a remediation process; resubmission of academic work; withdrawal from course(s); suspension from a program of study; a letter of reprimand.

What are the Procedures?

All allegations of plagiarism are reported to the faculty of Dean of FASS and Management. Documentation is prepared by instructors and departmental chairs. The Dean writes to the student and the University Ombudsperson about the alleged plagiarism. The Dean reviews the allegation. If it is not resolved at this level then it is referred to a tribunal appointed by the Senate.

Statement on Student Mental Health:

“As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>”

Emergency Resources ([on and off campus](#))

- Crisis/Urgent Counselling Support: 613-520-6674 (Mon-Fri, 8:30-4:30)
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: call or text 9-8-8, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- For immediate danger or urgent medical support: call 9-1-1

Carleton Resources

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: call 613-238-3311, text 343-306-5550, or connect online at <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: call 613-722-6914 or toll-free 1-866-996-0991, or connect online at <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Good2Talk: call 1-866-925-5454 or connect online at <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: for online or on-site service <https://walkincounselling.com>

Important Information:

- Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).
- Students must always retain a hard copy of all work that is submitted.
- Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.
- Carleton University is committed to protecting the privacy of those who study or work here (currently and formerly). To that end, Carleton's Privacy Office seeks to encourage the

implementation of the privacy provisions of Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) within the university.

- In accordance with FIPPA, please ensure all communication with staff/faculty is via your Carleton email account. To get your Carleton Email you will need to activate your [MyCarletonOne account](#) through Carleton Central. Once you have activated your MyCarletonOne account, log into the [MyCarleton Portal](#).
- Please note that you will be able to link your MyCarletonOne account to other non-MyCarletonOne accounts and receive emails from us. However, for us to respond to your emails, we need to see your full name, CU ID, and the email must be written from your valid MyCarletonOne address. Therefore, it would be easier to respond to your inquiries if you would send all email from your connect account. If you do not have or have yet to activate this account, you may wish to do so by visiting <https://students.carleton.ca/>.

Class Schedule ANTH 2500 “Culture and Symbols”

Class 1, Sept. 09 Introduction to the Course

No reading

Class 2, Sept. 16 Types of Signs

Reading:

- Danesi, Marcel 1998. *Sign, Thought and Culture: A Basic Course in Semiotics*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press; ch. 2, 33 - 52

Class 3, Sept. 23 Language and Linguistic Communication

Readings:

- Bühler, Karl 1990 [1934]. *The Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Ch. 2 “The Organon Model of Language”, 30 – 39
- Jakobson, Roman 1960. “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics”. In: Thomas Sebeok (ed.), 1960. *Style in Language*. Cambridge: MIT Press (selections)

Class 4, Sept. 30 Metaphor and Metonymy

Quiz, written in class

Readings:

- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark 2003 [1980] *Metaphors we Live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Selections)
- Martin, Emily 1991. “The Egg and The Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles”. *Signs*, Vol 16, No 3 (Spring 1991), 485 – 501

Class 5, Oct. 07 Mythology and Culture

Readings:

- Barthes, Roland 2012 [1957]. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang. Part II, “Myth Today” (selections)
- Hebdige, Dick 1988 [1979] *Subculture. The Meaning of Style*. London: New York. Ch 1, 5 – 19

Class 6, Oct. 14 Performance and Performativity

Reading:

- Edward Schieffelin 1996. “On Failure and Performance –Throwing the Medium out of the Séance. In : Laderman, Carol/ Roseman, Marina 1996. *The Performance of Healing*. London: Routledge, 59 – 89

Class 7, Oct. 21 Animal Communication

Reading:

- von Frisch, Karl 1953. *The Dancing Bees*. Ch. 11 “The Language of Bees” (selections)
- Bateson, Gregory 1969. “Metalogue: What is an Instinct?” In: Sebeok, Thomas and Ramsay, Alexandra (eds) 1969. *Approaches to Animal Communication*. The Hague: Mouton, 11 – 30
- Film: First Signs of Washoe <https://archive.org/details/thefirstsignsofwashoe>

Oct. 26 – 30 Fall Break, No Classes

Class 8, Nov.04 Signs, the Body and Culture

Midterm, written in class

Reading:

- Straus, Erwin 1966. “The Upright Posture” In: Straus, *Phenomenological Psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 137 – 165

Film: Penn, Arthur 1962. *The Miracle Worker*. <https://archive.org/details/the-miracle-worker-1962>

Class 9, Nov. 11 Gender as Signifying Practice and Performance

- Readings: - Fein, Ellen, and Schneider, Sherry 1995. *The Rules: Time-tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*. New York: Grand Central Publishing (Selections)
- Goffman, Erving 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor. “Introduction” and part of Ch. 1, 1 – 21

Class 10, Nov. 18 Race and Racism in Semiotic Perspective

Reading:

- Smalls, Krystal A. 2020. “Race, SIGNS, and the Body: Towards a Theory of Racial Semiotics”. In: Alim, Salim H. et al (eds.) 2020. *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch 12, 233 - 260

Film: PBS 1985. *A Class Divided*.

https://ocul-crl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_CRL/151vu8f/alma993816916405151

Class 11, Nov. 25 Signs and Political Power

Reading:

- Allert, Tillman 2008 [2005] *The Hitler Salute. On the Meaning of a Gesture*. New York: Henry Holt & Company. Ch. 4 “An Oath By Any Other Name”, 30 – 53

Film: Riefenstahl, Leni (dir.) 1935. *Triumph of the Will*.

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/carletonca/video/16050300>

Class 12, Dec. 02 Signs of Capitalism: Semiotics of Advertisement

Readings: Danesi, Marcel 2013. “Semiotizing a Product into a Brand”. *Social Semiotics* 23 (4), 464 - 476

Danesi, Marcel 2024. *AI Generated Popular Culture: A Semiotic Perspective*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Ch. 11 “AI in Marketing and Advertising”, 127 – 142.

Class 13, Dec. 09 Concluding Discussion and Review

Dec. 11, Final Paper due on Brightspace

Date	Activity
FALL TERM 2026	
August 31, 2026	Last day for receipt of applications from potential fall (November) graduates.
September 2, 2026	Deadline for course outlines to be made available to students registered in full fall, early fall, and fall/winter courses.
September 7, 2026	Statutory holiday. University closed.
September 8, 2026	Academic orientation (undergraduate and graduate students).
	Orientation for new Teaching Assistants.
	All new students are expected to be on campus. Class and laboratory preparations, departmental introductions for students, and other academic preparation activities will be held.
September 9, 2026	Fall term begins. Full fall, early fall, and fall/winter classes begin.
September 15, 2026	Last day for registration and course changes (including auditing) in early fall courses.
September 18-20, 2026	Full summer and late summer term deferred final examinations will be held.
September 22, 2026	Last day for registration and course changes (including auditing) in full fall, late fall, and fall/winter courses.
	Last day to withdraw from early fall courses with a full fee adjustment.
	Graduate students who have not electronically submitted their final thesis copy to Graduate Studies will not be eligible to graduate in fall 2026 and must register for the fall 2026 term.
September 30, 2026	Last day to withdraw from full fall and fall/winter courses with a full fee adjustment.

Date	Activity
October 1, 2026	Last day for academic withdrawal from early fall courses.
	Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for Oct/Nov final examinations from the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Note that it may not be possible to fulfil accommodation requests received after the specified deadlines.
October 9, 2026	December examination schedule (fall term final and fall/winter mid-terms) available online.
October 12, 2026	Statutory holiday. University closed.
October 15, 2026	Last day for receipt of applications for admission to an undergraduate degree program for the winter term from applicants whose documents originate from outside Canada or the United States.
October 16, 2026	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in early fall term undergraduate courses, before the official Oct/Nov final examination period (see examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar).
October 23, 2026	Last day of early fall classes.
	Last day for final take-home examinations to be assigned in early fall courses, with the exception of those conforming to the examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.
	Last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for early fall courses.
October 26, 2026	Deadline for course outlines to be made available to students registered in late fall courses.
October 26-30, 2026	Fall break, no classes.

Date	Activity
October 31- November 1, November 7-8, 2026	Final examinations in early fall undergraduate courses will be held.
November 2, 2026	Late fall classes begin.
November 13, 2026	Last day to withdraw from late fall term courses with a full fee adjustment.
November 15, 2026	Last day for academic withdrawal from full fall and late fall courses.
	Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for December full fall and late fall examinations and fall/winter midterm examinations from the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Note that it may not be possible to fulfil accommodation requests received after the specified deadlines.
	Last day for receipt of applications for admission to an undergraduate degree program for the winter term.
November 20-22, 2026	Early fall undergraduate deferred final examinations will be held.
November 27, 2026	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in full fall term or fall/winter undergraduate courses, before the official December final examination period (see examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar).
November 30, 2026	Last day for receipt of applications from potential winter (February) graduates.
December 4, 2026	Last day for graduate students to submit their supervisor-approved thesis, in examinable form to the department.
	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in late fall term undergraduate courses, before the official final examination period (see examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University

Date	Activity
	section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar).
December 11, 2026	Fall term ends.
	Last day of full fall and late fall classes.
	Classes follow a Monday schedule.
	Last day for final take-home examinations to be assigned, with the exception of those conforming to the examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.
	Last day that can be specified by an instructor as a due date for term work for full and late fall courses.
	Last day for receipt of applications for undergraduate degree program transfers for winter term.
December 12-23, 2026	Final examinations in full fall and late fall courses and mid-term examinations in fall/winter courses will be held. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
December 23, 2026	All final take-home examinations are due on this day, with the exception of those conforming to the examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.
December 24, 2026 at noon through January 1, 2027 inclusive	University closed.