

HSS 404-019 Spring 2023
Wednesdays/Fridays 10am-11:20am
Central King Building 315

[Course notes will be available via the Active Workspace.](#)

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Office hours: W/F by appointment, in my office or via [Webex](#).

Course Description

Memes have existed in some form since the early days of the Internet, but the modern memetic ecosystem is vast and varied, full of distinct genres of memes for purposes ranging from political to commercial to philosophical. In this course, you will gain a basic foundation in the media, genres, and rhetorical situation surrounding meme production and learn to produce effective, engaging, rhetorically sophisticated memes.

Prerequisites: Engl102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite. Restrictions: Registration requires senior standing.

Learning Outcomes

During this course you will:

- Learn the underlying communication theory necessary for analysis of memes
- Analyze the rhetoric of memes, memetic discourse communities, and memes as ideological practice
- Learn to navigate the scholarly literature on memetics
- Study a discourse community of your choice in order to interpret its memes
- Write an analysis of a topic in memetics
- Create memes tailored for a discourse community, building on the theory you have studied

Required Texts and Materials

[Wiggins, Bradley. The discursive power of memes in digital culture: Ideology, semiotics, and intertextuality. Routledge, 2019. ISBN 978-1-13858-840-0.](#)

Technology

You will be expected to bring an Internet-capable computing device to every class; it will be extremely difficult to access and write about memes without one.

Attendance

Participation in in-class activities, discussions, and workshops will contribute to your knowledge, ability, and performance. At a minimum, this means showing up on time, being prepared, and actively contributing to class discussions. Your level of engagement with the material will subsequently impact how much you get from the class.

You may miss up to one week of class without penalty. Every subsequent unexcused absence will result in a reduced participation grade. If you are absent for legitimate reasons (family emergency) you must provide a doctor's note or a note from your dean.

Do not come to class sick. I will excuse absences made due to illness, so be sure to email me ASAP.

Information about Learning Structure

Full Class Lectures, Discussions, and Exercises

We will prepare for full-class discussions with readings from our textbook. Not only will you need to submit discussion questions for each discussion-oriented class date where we discuss textbook concepts or materials, but you will also often be required to come to class with relevant memes. Be prepared to take notes and participate. You must come to every class having read the text for that class.

You will submit regular pass-fail projects based on the assigned readings and coursework.

If you have questions, contact me via email. I will respond to your emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. Please plan accordingly. Remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence. This means to include an appropriate SUBJECT line and your NAME in all emails. I will not respond to emails that do not include the sender's name.

NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf> (Links to an external site.).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.

If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu

Accessibility Needs

If you are in need of accommodations due to a disability please contact Scott Janz, Associate Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources & Services (OARS), Kupfrian Hall 201, to discuss your specific needs. A Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the OARS authorizing your accommodations will be required.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center (in the basement of Central King Building and online) is available for one-hour individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs.

Feel free to schedule an appointment using this link.

For more information, please visit <http://humanities.njit.edu/writingcenter>[Links to an external site.](#)

Grading

Participation: Active Discussion & In-Class Exercises (25%):

- For an A (90-100), you will be expected to attend all classes (with no more than 2 unexcused absences), fully participate in all discussions and classroom exercises, engage with your fellow students and the teacher throughout the semester, and complete at least 90% of in-class writing exercises at a satisfactory level.
- For a B (80-89), you will be expected to attend all classes (with no more than 3 unexcused absences), participate actively in most discussions and exercises, and engage with your fellow students and the teacher for much of the semester. You will complete at least 80% of in-class writing exercises.
- If you feel that your participation work may go unrecognized, please submit a summary of your participation throughout the semester along with any extenuating circumstances.

Presentation of Scholarship (10%):

You will need to research scholarship on memes in order to properly understand your research topic(s). You will present on at least one paper in meme studies to the class in the second half of the semester, and must upload your slides under Assignments by your scheduled presentation date.

You will be responsible for downloading, reading, glossing, and leading a ten-minute PowerPoint presentation of the key points of the paper. Each student will need to sign up for one presentation. Pick a paper on a topic in memetics that you are keenly curious about.

- For an A, you should make full use of all relevant analytical tools we have discussed at that point in the semester, clearly articulate the **context**, **thesis**, and **evidence** of the paper, and **break down the memes discussed in the paper using the framework provided by the author**. You may freely disagree with their conclusions and argue your own, but you must summarize their viewpoint first. You must provide an effective, clear, easy-to-follow visual presentation, and must show comprehension of the paper.
- For a B, you should make some use of relevant analytical tools discussed at that point in the semester, and should explain the context, thesis, and evidence of the paper reasonably well. Your presentation should be clear and easy-to-follow and should be fairly accurate.
- For a C, you should make use of analytical tools, and should explain the content, thesis, and evidence of the paper somewhat effectively. Your presentation should not be confusing or misleading.

Key Concept Tests (25%)

We will discuss all assigned readings in class, so you will be able to make sure you understand how key concepts apply to memetics. The two Key Concept Tests will test your knowledge of the concepts in memetics which we have covered, and will test your ability to apply that knowledge. They will be open-book in nature, which will help you a lot more if you do the readings.

Memetic Analysis Paper

You will write a sequence of interconnected assignments about a topic in memetics throughout the semester. You will have to do both research into the existing memetic scholarship and analysis of discourse communities and the rhetorical function of memes. Whatever topic you select, you will need to complete certain milestones as you propose, research, write, and revise it. These milestones are pass/fail events, allowing you to obtain credit as you research rather than remaining uncertain of your progress until the semester's end. These milestones are also opportunities to meet with the professor during or after class to confirm you are on the right track.

Proposal with Annotated Bibliography (10% - PASS/FAIL, meet with professor to discuss)

You will write an introduction to a topic in memetics that you are interested in surveying and analyzing. In about 500 words, identify the topic, explain your initial understanding of it, and provide a working thesis. Additionally, provide relevant scholarship (minimum of ten sources), each annotated with a paragraph of analysis explaining how it illuminates your topic.

You may use up to 2 chapters of Wiggins's textbook as cited sources, and you may use up to 3 works cited in Wiggins's textbook as cited sources. Determine which questions about your topic

cannot be answered by the analytical tools presented in the textbook, and then find relevant scholarship that can help you answer those questions.

Examples of successful past topics include:

- An analysis of the r/marvelmemes subreddit and how it memed in response to the releases of Eternals and Spider-Man: No Way Home.
- An analysis of #NBA Twitter's use of memes both to communicate about NBA fandom and about #NBA Twitter users' lives.
- An analysis of meta-memes in the KnowYourMeme.com community as a way to comment upon and pressure the admins of the community.
- An analysis of the memes circulating among medical students on r/medschoolmemes.

Finished Memetic Analysis Paper (30%)

This paper is a semester-long research project on a topic in memetics; the finished paper will be between 15 and 25 pages in length, not including bibliography (about 4500-7500 words), will draw on at least ten scholarly sources (you may use Bradley Wiggins' textbook and other course readings as no more than five of your sources), and will take one of three forms: primary research and documentation of the memetics of a discourse community, analysis of a meme developing and propagating across discourse communities, or discussion of a topic in memetics.

Examples of successful research paper topics include:

- An analysis of the r/marvelmemes subreddit and how it memed in response to the releases of Eternals and Spider-Man: No Way Home.
- An analysis of #NBA Twitter's use of memes both to communicate about NBA fandom and about #NBA Twitter users' lives.
- An analysis of meta-memes in the KnowYourMeme.com community as a way to comment upon and pressure the admins of the community.
- A history of the development of IroniC Doge memes from 2010 to 2020.
- An analysis of the memes circulating among medical students on r/medschoolmemes.
- An overview of recent meme-based advertising campaigns.

You will be expected to document your examples and case studies using permanent links. Remember to cite and explain the scholarship you use to analyze and explain the discourse community's behavior and memetics. You will draw upon existing scholarship to meaningfully analyze the topic or community, providing rigorous and systematic analysis of the topic or community, explaining relevant discursive communities in terms of their online infrastructure, their digital culture, their demographics and social patterns and hierarchies, their rules and patterns of behavior, subcommunities within the community, tensions and faultlines and patterns of disagreement, etc.

You will explain how agents meme (the role memetics play in their discourse, patterns of meme use, specific memes and syntaxes common to the community, how their use of memes interacts

with other discourses and memetic ecosystems, etcetera) and will explicitly analyze memes from the community or relating to the topic, contextualize them, break them down, and explicitly discuss their discursive role.

You will advance a clear and meaningful thesis supported by an argument that draws on well-founded and explicit evidence. Your paper must be organized in a meaningful and logical way, providing background and relevant analytical tools, performing analysis, and coming to a conclusion.

Assignment Submission and Revision

All assignments must be submitted on Canvas. I will not accept emailed work. Specific formatting guidelines will vary according to each assignment, so please follow the explicit guidelines found on individual assignment sheets. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late class work and homework will only be accepted if your absence is excused.

Every assignment will either come with a rubric or be graded pass/fail on the basis of clear requirements; pass/fail assignments are worth the full amount, while graded assignments are worth 50-100%. Nonsubmission is worth 0%. You will frequently work on projects during class time and receive feedback during the writing process. If an assignment has a specified due date for credit, you must upload it by that time and be prepared to discuss it that day in class.

Major graded written assignments will be graded during a one-on-one meeting, whether in-person in class time or office hours, or remotely to accommodate flexible schedules. You will receive a rubric-based grade at the beginning of the grading meeting, and then we will discuss the most efficient ways you can improve your grade by revision.

Please contact your classmates for missed work.

Final Grade Calculations

Because all unsubmitted work will receive a 0, while all good-faith attempted work cannot receive a lower grade than 50%, it is in your best interest to submit every assignment on time, even if your submissions are flawed. At the end of the term, your total work will be evaluated according to the university's grading scale.

A = 100-90

B+ = 89-87

B = 86-80

C+ = 79-77

C = 76-70



D = 69-60



F = 59-0

Incompletes will only be given under considerable extenuating circumstances (physical/mental health absences, military service, child care needs, etc.).

Schedule of Classes

<p>Week 1: Introduction to Memetics <i>Sep 6-8</i> 📖 Exercise 1: Making and Revising Memes</p>	<p>Welcome to course, anchoring expectations, discussing discourse communities and meme genres we wish to study throughout the semester. Defining memes. Introducing discourse communities, genres, KnowYourMeme, meme generators.</p> <p>Bown, Alfie and Dan Bristow, eds. <i>Post Memes: Seizing the Memes of Production</i>.</p>
<p>Week 2: Memes as Stories <i>Sep 11-15</i> 📖 Exercise 2: Role-based analysis of Memes</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 1: Dawkins Revisited: A Brief History of the Term Meme and Its Function</i> de Saint Laurent, C., Glăveanu, V. P., & Literat, I. (2021). Internet memes as partial stories: Identifying political narratives in coronavirus memes. <i>Social Media+ Society</i>, 7(1), 2056305121988932. Johann, Michael, and Lars Bülow. "One Does Not Simply Create a Meme: Conditions for the Diffusion of Internet Memes." <i>International Journal of Communication</i>, 20 Mar. 2018</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> Dawkinsian memes vs Internet memes, spreadable media, virality, reproducibility, remixing, semiotics, ideology, intertextuality, partial stories, narrative analysis, partial stories</p> <p>Identify a Dawkinsian meme within a discourse community you are part of, then identify examples of ideology, semiotics, intertextuality, and reproducibility & remixing in Internet memes.</p>
<p>Week 3: Memes in Discourse Communities, Memes as Speech Acts <i>Sep 18-22</i> 📖 Exercise 3: Memes in discursive context: data to collect 📖 Exercise 4: Analyzing memes with speech act theory</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 2: The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture</i> Grundlingh, L. (2018). Memes as speech acts. <i>Social Semiotics</i>, 28(2), 147-168.</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> Discourse, discourse community, memory traces, digital culture, participatory culture, ideology vs material conditions, false</p>

	consciousness, collective social understanding, ideological practice, signs, the medium is the message, intertextuality and remix, speech act, locution/illocution/perlocution
<p>Week 4: Memes as Genre, Structuration <i>Sep 25-29</i></p> <p> Exercise 5: Analyzing Emergence of Memes</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 3: Memes As Genre</i> Olofsson, Simon. "\$GME to the Moon: Mapping Memetic Discourse as Discursive Strategy in Reddit Trading Community r/WallStreetBets during the GameStop Short Squeeze Saga." Stockholm University, Master's thesis, 20 Aug. 2021. Barnes, Riesenmy, Trinh et al. "Dank or not? Analyzing and predicting the popularity of memes on Reddit."</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> Genre, duality of structure, structuration, maintenance - elaboration - modification, spreadable media, emergent memes</p>
<p>Week 5: Test 1 <i>Oct 2-6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full review on Oct 4 of topics covered ● Your opportunity to make sure you know how to define all the key concepts <i>and can use them</i> ● Anything we've covered previously in class can be tested
<p>Week 6: Imagined Audience, Identity, & the Rhetoric of Memes <i>Oct 9-13</i></p> <p> Exercise 6: Close Reading & Rhetorical Analysis of Memes</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 7: Identity.</i> Miltner, Kate. "'Real Men Stand for Our Nation': Constructions of an American Nation and Anti-Kaepernick Memes." <i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i>, vol. 44, no. 4, Aug. 2020, pp. 290-311 Kassing. (2020). Messi hanging laundry at the Bernabéu: The production and consumption of Internet sports memes as trash talk. <i>Discourse, Context & Media</i>, 34, 100320</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> essentialism and constructivism, instability and construction of identity, resonance, identity and memetics in discourse communities, outgroup construction, self-writing</p>
<p>Week 7: Memes and Pragmatics, Memes as Interrupted Communication <i>Oct 16-20</i></p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 4: Political Memes</i> Wiggins, <i>Chapter 6: Audience</i></p>

<p> Exercise 7: Imagined Audiences, Gricean Pragmatics, & Analysis</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 8: Internet Memes as a Form of ... Art?</i> Dimitrov, Dimitar, et al. "Detecting Propaganda Techniques in Memes." Accessed 27 March 2023. Jilly Boyce Kay (2019) Introduction: anger, media, and feminism: the gender politics of mediated rage, <i>Feminist Media Studies</i>, 19:4, 591-615, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2019.1609197 Wiruma et al., "Invisible Meaning on Spongebob Meme."</p> <p><i>Topics:</i> Death of the real, hyperreal, simulacra, imagined audience, fraction of selection, dominant/negotiated/oppositional decoding (ask me about fanfiction), self-writing, media narrative, pastiche, Dada, surrealism, alienation, disillusionment, the readymade, the cooperative principle, maxims of quantity/quality/manner/relevance</p>
<p>Week 8: Memes & Copyright, Citation, Commerce <i>Oct 23-27</i>  Exercise 8: Citing memes</p> <p>Proposal assigned Presentation assigned Final paper in memetics assigned</p>	<p>Wiggins, <i>Chapter 5: Commercially Motivated Strategic Messaging and Memes</i> Read before class: Matalon, L. J. (2019). Modern problems require modern solutions: Internet memes and copyright. <i>Tex. L. Rev.</i>, 98, 405.</p> <p>Review in class: Sample Papers in Memetics</p>
<p>Week 9: Test 2 <i>Oct 30-Nov 3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review session on Nov 1 • Test on Nov 3
<p>Week 10: Proposals <i>Nov 6-10</i></p>	<p>Full class meetings canceled for one-on-one proposal grading & feedback sessions. Sessions will occur during class time in our classroom, or during my office hours, or remotely. If you can only meet during class times, you will be prioritized for grading during class hours. Outside your scheduled grading time, you are excused from these class meetings. Be prepared to tell me which of your sources you intend to present upon next week.</p>
<p>Week 11: Presentations of Scholarship <i>Nov 13-17</i></p>	

Week 12: Paper Draft Support <i>Nov 20-24</i>	
Week 13: Final Papers Due <i>Nov 27-Dec 1</i>	Full class meetings canceled for one-on-one grading sessions. Grading sessions will occur during class time in our classroom, or during my office hours, or remotely. If you can only meet during class times, you will be prioritized for grading during class hours. Outside your scheduled grading time, you are excused from these class meetings.
Week 14: Revision and Review <i>Dec 4-8</i>	
Week 15: Revision and Review <i>Dec 11-13</i>	