# COM329 Horror in the Media & Communication, Fall 2019

**Instructor Contact:**   *Name*: Dr. Knopf ["nope"] (she/her/hers)          *Office*: VH 125g
*Office Hours*: T/Th 11:30-1:00, W 10:30-11:30          *Phone*: 607-753-2530
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**Class Meetings:**       T/Th 1:15-2:30

**Course Description:** Spirits, ghosts, and monsters have been part of fictional narratives, cultural identities, and popular beliefs for thousands of years. Ghosts are not only responsible for popular amusements and irrational fears, they are also an analytical tool and metaphorical construct across the social sciences and humanities. The concept of haunting has become synonymous with the repressed histories, memories, and identities. This course aims to interrogate how representations of horror encode our individual and communal anxieties about the supernatural, social, and political unknown – including fears of victimization, sexuality, ethnicity, identity, transgression, insanity, evil, technology, and isolation. We will focus on the uncanny as expressions of communication anxieties.

**Course Topics**: Medias covered include photography, radio & sound, broadcast & television, Internet, gaming, telephony. Issues covered include journalism, gendered communication, hysteria & psychoses, socio-political anxieties

## Course Objectives/Outcomes:
● Recognize media history in a socio-political context
● Evaluate public, mass-mediated, messages & develop your own messages appropriate for entertainment media
● Read, understand, and apply communication scholarship & theory
● Explain the role of communication in society & your own life

## Texts & Course Materials:
● Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media*
● Readings on Blackboard
● Dedicated notebook

## Assignments/Grade Distribution:
*Test 1*: 15pts          *Test 3*: 15pts   *Personal Horror Concept*: 15pts          *Reimagined Media*: 20pts
*Test 2:* 15pts          *Test 4:* 15pts   *Comm Horror Concept*: 20pts

## Grading Breakdown:
95-100pts = A     90-94pts = A-     85-89pts = B+     80-84pts = B     75-79pts = B-
70-74pts = C+     65-69pts = C      60-64pts = C-     55-59pts = D+    50-54pts = D-     0-49pts = E

## Grade Policies:
If you *find an error* in grading, bring it to the instructor's attention immediately so it can be corrected.  If you have a question about assignment feedback, exam answers, etcetera - ask. It will help you learn. If you *disagree* with a grade earned on written work, you can file a request for reconsideration no sooner than 24 hours after receiving the grade and no later than 1 week after receiving the grade. The original work with all evaluation forms should be re-submitted to the instructor along with a written explanation of why you believe your work warrants reconsideration and a higher grade. The instructor will reconsider your work within 2 weeks; any grade change at that time, including a lower one, will remain final.

"Extra" credit is built into the course and grading scheme. It is never given on an individual basis or as a replacement for regular coursework. But, you can email the professor a picture of your favorite animal before the midterm to receive 2 bonus points.

**Attendance:**

Roll will be called at the start of each class meeting; *please inform the instructor of your preferred name and pronouns if needed.* Haunting is an experience, and so is this class, so attendance is expected, necessary, and required. Everyone, including the instructor, is expected to show up and be prepared for class *on time*. The bulk of your grade in this course depends on you being in class, prepared, and active.

Absences on exam days for religious observances or college-sanctioned events must be discussed *in advance* for accommodations to be made. Emergency absences on exam days require notification to the instructor at the earliest possible time *and* documentation (such as appointment cards or admissions forms for medical treatment) with work being completed *immediately* upon return to classes. To show you are aware of the attendance policy, email the professor a picture of your favorite food before the midterm to receive 2 bonus points.

**Academic Integrity:**

All students are expected to uphold academic integrity standards. Plagiarism is defined as taking the ideas of others and using them as one's own without due credit. Students who cheat in examinations, course assignments, or plagiarize in this course may be disciplined in accordance with university rules and regulations. (College Handbook, Chapter 340)

**Access (Accommodation of Disabilities):**

As part of SUNY Cortland's commitment to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment, we strive to provide students with equal access to all courses. If you believe you will require accommodations in this course, please place a request with the Disability Resources Office at disability.resources@cortland.edu or call 607-753-2967. Please note that accommodations are generally not provided retroactively so timely contact with the Disability Resources Office is important. All students should consider meeting with their course instructor who may be helpful in other ways." (College Handbook, Chapter 745)

**Mental, Emotional, & Physical Wellbeing:**

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, alcohol and/or substance abuse, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance.

If symptoms are related to your course work, please speak with the instructor. If you have communication apprehension (also known as "stage fright") to a degree that can interfere with your success in a communication course that depends on public speaking, speak to the instructor *immediately* to learn management techniques and to discuss possible options to ensure you can complete the course.

If problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis are negatively impacting your mental health and/or interfering with your academic success, SUNY Cortland offers the following resources to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being.

- Counseling Center: Van Hoesen Hall, Room B-44 * 607-753-4728
- Substance Abuse & Prevention Education  Van Hoesen Hall, Room B-1  * 607-753-2066
- Active Minds student club

If challenges securing food or housing are affecting your academic performance, or your emotional wellbeing, you are urged to contact the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs for support (607-753-4721).

**Title IX:**

Title IX, when combined with New York Human Rights Law and the New York Education Law 129-B, prohibits discrimination, harassment and violence based on sex, gender, gender identity/expression, and/or sexual orientation in the education setting. The federal Clery Act and NY Education Law 129-B provide certain rights and responsibilities after an incident of sexual or interpersonal violence. When a violation occurs, victims and survivors are eligible for campus and community resources. Where the College has jurisdiction, it may investigate and take action in accordance with College policy. If you or someone you know wishes to report discrimination based in sex, gender, gender identity/expression, and/or sexual orientation, or wishes to report sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking or relationship violence, please contact the Title IX Coordinator at 607-753-4550, or visit cortland.edu/titleix to learn about all reporting options and resources.

**Diversity:**

SUNY Cortland is dedicated to the premise that every individual is important in a unique way and contributes to the overall quality of the institution. We define diversity broadly to include all aspects of human difference. The College is committed to inclusion, equity, and access and thus committed to creating and sustaining a climate that is equitable, respectful and free from prejudice for students, faculty and staff. We value diversity in the learning environment and know that it enhances our ability to inspire students to learn, lead and serve in a changing world. We are committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive campus through the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff and students. As a community, we hold important the democracy of ideas, tempered by a commitment to free speech and the standards of inquiry and debate. To this end, we are dedicated to developing and sustaining a learning environment where it is safe to explore our differences and celebrate the richness inherent in our pluralistic society. (College Handbook, Chapter 130)

**Inclusive Learning Environment:**

SUNY Cortland is committed to a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment. The course instructor honors this commitment and respects and values differences. All students enrolled in this course are expected to be considerate of others, promote a collaborative and supportive educational environment, and demonstrate respect for individuals with regard to ability or disability, age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/expression, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other aspects of identity. In an environment that fosters inclusion, students have the opportunity to bring their various identities into conversation as they find helpful, but are not expected to represent or speak for an entire group of people who share aspects of an identity. If you have any questions or concerns about this statement, contact the Institutional Equity and Inclusion Office at 607-753-2263.

Communication involves speaking *and* listening (sending & receiving messages). Good communication requires participants to consider various ideas and be willing to be persuaded by others. In this class, we will all practice good communication skills by speaking and listening with respect to those around us. We will be open to opposing viewpoints, even if we are not always persuaded by them. We will make an effort to contribute to discussions and to ensure that others have opportunities to contribute to discussions. We will not use ad-hominem attacks (name calling) when we engage in arguments, nor will we use straw-man fallacies (off topic arguments) just to advance our own viewpoints.

**Etiquette:**

Recent research has suggested that we are not as good at multitasking as we think we are, so to succeed in this class and to help those around us succeed, we will minimize distractions by using technology only in ways that are directly related to coursework and goals. Devices will be silenced and put away when not being used for class purposes.

We will not attend class under the influence of alcohol or other recreational substances. We will also minimize distractions such as late arrivals, early departures, food, drink, bathroom breaks, extraneous conversation, and packing up early before class is over; these not only break our own concentration but also disrupt those around us.

We will come to class on time and prepared with whatever materials are expected of our roles. For the instructor that means, at minimum, lecture notes, related presentation aids, graded student work, the roster, and writing instruments. For the student, that means, at minimum, any relevant texts, work that needs to be submitted, paper), and a writing instrument.

We will practice professional communication styles and habits. Emails will be written in a way that is appropriate for acquiring and maintaining employment.

**Coursework Explained:**

Readings, Lectures, Media Screenings, and Tests – NOTES & JOURNALING

Most classes will be a combination of lecture/discussion and watching television programming or film. Both portions are equally important to the learning experience of the course; both are geared toward improving your media literacy and your communication scholarship.

Lectures and discussions will be based on assigned readings. You will get more out of class time if you come having already done the reading.

Media screenings will be related to the assigned readings and the lecture/discussions. The course is meant to be an integrated multi-media, multi-modal experience.

Tests will be based on the combination of the readings, discussions, and screenings.

To help you prepare for the tests, to encourage you to keep up with the readings, and to guide you in being an active viewer and participant in class**, you are expected to maintain a notebook/journal for the course.**

- *While doing the reading*: Make note of anything you find particularly interesting or insightful. Include your personal reactions/thoughts/connections. This will be especially helpful in class discussions. You will also find it useful to make note of any key information, such as historical developments, names that seem important, and terminology that is significant to the topic.
- *While listening in class*: Build on your reading notes. Add in additional information and points of clarification.
- *While watching media*: Keep track of titles and dates. Write a short plot synopsis. Note what communication, communication-related, or media-related anxieties are being expressed and how the horror/haunting works to express them. Record your thoughts about the production value, aesthetics, or anything else that you think is significant. Try to make connections to ideas, concepts, events, or terms you encountered in the readings or lectures. Make comparisons among different media viewed in or out of class.
  - You might try taking graphic notes – including diagrams, pictures, or doodles that help to capture your impressions or represent ideas.

There will be FOUR tests during the semester; each will be short essay with questions designed for you to demonstrate your ability to critically engage media from a scholarly perspective by applying communication theory and research and knowledge of media history to entertainment content.

The tests will be open-note, using just your dedicated notebook/journal for the course – so the better your notes are, the more you'll have to work with on tests. *If you take notes electronically, please bring print-outs to use for tests. No open laptops, tablets, or phones will be allowed, excepting for accessibility accommodations that have been discussed in advance.* Tests will be graded according to the following criteria:

- ✶ Responses answered the question posed
- ✶ Responses engaged appropriately with specific course material
- ✶ Responses demonstrate understanding of course material
- ▪ Responses were readable (legible and comprehensible)

*WHY TESTS? PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE ACT OF PREPARING FOR A TEST AND ACTUALLY TAKING THE TEST AND RETRIEVING INFORMATION IS A GREAT BOOST TO MEMORY. EXAMS ARE NOT JUST A MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT, THEY ARE ALSO AN IMPORTANT LEARNING INSTRUMENT. EXAMS ARE A CLINICALLY PROVEN WAY TO HELP STUDENTS KEEP UP WITH CLASSWORK – THEY ENCOURAGE ATTENDANCE, PREPARATION AND REVIEW IN WAYS THAT LESS TRADITIONAL OR STRUCTURED MEANS DON'T.*

*The journaling and tests are focused on the course outcomes of being able to recognize media history in a socio-political context, evaluate messages, and apply communication scholarship.*

## Personal Horror Concept

As you know, this course is about horror, or hauntings, or ghosts, or monsters, or zombies… as a trope – a metaphor that we can use to expose, express, or understand social and political injustices or other hidden or unresolved problems. Haunting is a way that race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, economics, age, technology, and health inequities, as well as more personal fears of the unknown, of guilt, of failure, and more, have been expressed through literature, art, film, and scholarship.

For this assignment, you will apply what you have learned to create a concept for a horror narrative (film, theatre, music, art…. whatever) that would act as a metaphor for or a way to uncover a concern of yours – whether personal, social, or political.

*Doing so will help you to think through how the horror or haunting lens functions and* will be practice of how horror movies, shows, and books are created; it connects to the course outcomes of being able to explain the role of communication in society & your own life and to developing your own messages appropriate for entertainment media

*As an example, your professor is personally uncomfortable with failure – her own, anyhow. Perhaps some past failure – something left undone, someone neglected – comes back to seek revenge. Or perhaps each failure, or perceived failure, is manifested through ghostly activity, haunting her until she is driven mad or must learn to accept failure so as to live with it peacefully.*

You don't need to write an entire narrative (though you can if you want to). Just think of a concept that uses the horror genre or haunting metaphor to get at some personal, social, or political anxiety. Some ideas may be for the environment, food safety, drug use, corporate management, the economy, celebrity culture, energy consumption…

Please type these using your best writing skills; format them in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. If you need help with formatting, please let the professor know.

| Relevance to assignment & course [did you answer the charge &/or think of course content?] | 8 pts |
|---|---|
| Clarity of explanation [can others see your point?] | 5 pts |
| Grammar, spelling, formatting | 2 pts |


## Communication Horror Concept

During the course, you will see many examples of how communication anxieties – both interpersonal and technological – are expressed through the horror genre. Your textbook even focuses on the parallels between the ghostly and the mediated.

For this assignment, you will apply what you have learned in this class and others to create a concept for a horror narrative (film, theatre, music, art…. whatever) that would act as a metaphor for or a way to uncover a **communication or media anxiety of yours or of society's– whether personal, social, or political.** Think of any concept that uses the horror genre or haunting metaphor to get at some personal anxiety or social fear related to communication. This can include interpersonal or intercultural contexts, too, and does not need to rely on communication technology.

*Doing so will help you to think through how the horror or haunting lens functions and* will be practice of how horror movies, shows, and books are created; it connects to the course outcomes of being able to explain the role of communication in society and to developing your own messages appropriate for entertainment media

As an example, your professor gets a LOT of email. During the semester, she may get 100 messages in a day, and that's just to her work account that doesn't usually include anything personal from friends or family. She deletes a lot of them because she has to (who has time to read and answer 100 emails in a day) – but there's always those emails that she shouldn't have deleted, the ones that required her attention, or that gave information she needed. What might happen if she ignores the wrong email? Maybe it's one that provided the antidote to the coming zombie apocalypse. Or maybe it's one that spreads a crippling a technological virus if it's not properly read and managed, and soon all of society has collapsed because of the destruction it triggers. What if it was an email that would have warned her of her death, and prevented it? And then, what if that email is part of a chain-letter system, and the terror spreads…?

This should be a little more developed than your Personal Horror Concept, but does not need to be a long story. Think of it more like a short vignette you could tell around a campfire – we'll be sharing them with the class on Halloween!

Please type these using your best writing skills; format them in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. If you need help with formatting, please let the professor know.

| Relevance to assignment & course [did you answer the charge &/or think of course content?] | 12 pts |
|---|---|
| Clarity of explanation [can others see your point?] | 6 pts |
| Grammar, spelling, formatting | 2 pts |
| *Presence and readiness for sharing | 2 pts |

<u>Reimagined Media</u>

You will be experiencing a lot of classic and campy media in this course. Much of what we look at is drawn from the past because by better understanding the past, we have a different understanding of the present. This assignment is designed to have you take your new-and-improved historical knowledge and apply it to the present day.

From infertility to identity theft, and from ransomware to Russians, our modern media and communication technology is wrought with perils, real and imagined, imminent and unlikely. We are also mired in an entertainment media business that is besotted with the reboot, the retcon, the prequel, and the sequel.

Your task: Take any pre-existing media text (film, television show, video game, comic book, etc.) and re-imagine it as a horror movie for the modern age.  You might choose to remake a horror movie (like maybe *The Ring* except instead of a video tape, it's a pay-per-view download), a comedy (*The Truman Show*, except instead of a massive studio set, Truman is trapped in VR run-amok), a romance (*The Notebook* except instead of social differences, one of them is a werewolf), etcetera.

**Your project should include:**

- A written component, using your best writing skills, formatted in 12-point Times New Roman Font, double-spaced:
    - The original media title and plot synopsis (which can be taken from IMDB, Wikipedia, etcetera – so long as it is cited as such, including the url of the source material).
    - Your updated plot synopsis and new title (if you're using a new title).
    - A brief, 1-2 paragraph, explanation of how the horror metaphor or trope works – what does the monster, ghost, ghoul, violence, or whatever, represent?
    - A brief, 1-2 paragraph, of what aspect of course content (assigned chapter or article, discussion content, media example) inspired or influenced your idea.
- A creative component, as appropriate to your interests, skill-sets, and communication/media-related career goals. Possibilities include:
    - An altered (voice over, sound effects, special effects…) or all-new movie trailer.
    - A remade movie poster.
    - A film treatment.
    - A mock social media page for promotion.
    - A movie website (real or mock)

The creative component will be shared in class.

*Grading*

Written work

| Relevance to assignment & course [did you answer the charge& demonstrate learning?] | 5 pts |
| --- | --- |
| Clarity of explanation [can others see your point?] | 5 pts |
| Grammar, spelling, formatting & completion | 3 pts |

Creative work

| Relevance to assignment & course [did you answer the charge?] | 5 pts |
| --- | --- |
| Neatness & completion appropriate for medium used | 2 pts |
| * Presence & readiness to share with the class. | 2 pts |

*This assignment not only will help you to think through how the horror or haunting lens functions and will be practice of how horror movies, shows, and books are created, but will also get you to think critically about how communication works, or malfunctions, in our lives and/or how and why portions of society struggle with developing media technologies. It relates to all the course outcomes of engaging media history, applying scholarship, analyzing and creating media messages, and thinking about how communication affects you and society.*

|         | TUESDAY | THURSDAY |
|---------|---------|----------|
| Wk1 | 8/27: Course introduction | 8/29: Read Introduction (1-20)<br>*Videodrome*, *The Ring* |
| Wk2 | 9/3: Read 'Horror Films Face Evils' (on Bb)<br>*Mothman Prophecies* | 9/5:<br>*Mothman Prophecies* |
| Wk3 | 9/10: Read chapter 1 (21-44)<br>*Supernatural* [1933] | 9/12: Read chapter 1 (44-58)<br>*Supernatural* [1933], Twilight Zone "Night Call" |
| Wk4 | 9/17: **Test #1** | 9/19: **Blackboard assignment instead of class meeting** |
| Wk5 | 9/24: Read chapter 2 (59-91)<br>*The Fog* [1980]<br>**Personal Horror Concept due** | 9/26: Read 'Skeletons Sail' (on Bb)<br>*The Fog* [1980] |
| Wk6 | 10/1: Read chapter 3 (92-110)<br>Twilight Zone "Mr Dingle the Strong" | 10/3: Read chapter 3 (92-110)<br>*War of the Worlds* [1938], *Pontypool* |
| Wk7 | 10/8: Read chapter 4 (124-147)<br>*Murder by Television* [1935], Halloween III | 10/10: Read chapter 4 (147-166)<br>*Murder by Television,* RBTheater "The Pedestrian" |
| Wk8 | 10/15: **Test #2** | 10/17: Read chapter 5 (167-196)<br>RBTheater "The Murderer" |
| Wk9 | 10/22: "Fall Break" | 10/24: Read chapter 5 (196-209)<br>*X-Files* "Wetwired" |
| Wk10 | 10/29: Read '404 Not Found' (on Bb)<br>*X-Files* "2Shy" | 10/31: **Communication Horror Concept due** |
| Wk11 | 11/5: Read 'To Scan a Ghost' (on Bb)<br>TZ"Unusual Camera" Goosebumps"Say Cheese" | 11/7: Read 'Action, Romance, or SF" (on Bb)<br>Discussing re-imagined media project |
| Wk12 | 11/12: **Test #3** | 11/14: **Blackboard assignment instead of class meeting** |
| Wk13 | 11/19: Read 'The Chair Creaks' (on Bb)<br>*The Haunting* | 11/21: Read 'Five Shots' (on Bb)<br>*The Haunting* |
| Wk14 | 11/26: Read 'Ludic Zombies' (on Bb)<br>*Revolt of the Zombies* [1936] | 11/28: "Thanksgiving Break" |
| Wk15 | 12/3: Debrief | 12/5: **Re-Imagined Media due** |
| FinalsWk | Wednesday (12/11), 11am-1pm: **Test # 4** | |

Travel arrangements for breaks and finals week should properly accommodate course responsibilities. Class days immediately before and immediately after break are still class days and final exam times, which are set by the college, are part of the required contact hours for the semester.