

COMMUNICATION & CULTURE M.A. EXAM, 2012

In April 2011, the CMCL faculty approved a change to the length of the MA exam.

Under the **old system**, the exam consisted of a 4000 word response to a question in one topos or research area, a second 4000 word response to a question in a different topos, and a 2000 word response to a question about the relationships between those two areas of research.

Under the **new system**, the basic structure of the exam remains the same (two area questions and one “crossover” question), but the length of all three essays has been equalized at 3000 words apiece.

Because you were admitted to CMCL prior to the rule change, you may choose either one of these options. Please indicate the length of your response at the beginning each essay, so that the MA Committee will know how to assess your exam. You may choose to write either under the old system OR the new system, but you may not combine both.

PART I. TOPOS-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS (CHOOSE TWO)

>> Question in Rhetoric & Public Culture

Plato’s mistrust of the body’s role in shaping judgment has impacted Western culture for thousands of years. Compare and contrast how the body mattered to at least two premodern thinkers’ understandings or definitions of rhetoric. Then, choose at least one modern or postmodern reading to consider how these attitudes have persisted, transformed, and/or been challenged in some significant way. In conclusion, clarify why a nuanced appreciation for the role of bodies in public culture matters to rhetoric and vice versa.

>> Question in Film & Media Studies

The MA exam reading list for Film and Media Studies contains work by a number of scholars who aim to account for the impact of what was considered at one point in history to be an emerging communication technology. In this essay, discuss how three of these scholars: 1.) understand the relationship between new technologies and their predecessors and 2.) articulate the ways in which these changes transform subjectivities by contributing to new forms of thought and social practice. Last, assess which approach(es) you see as most productive for your own work going forward.

>> Question in Performance/Ethnography

The encounter between the ethnographer and members of the society under study is at the heart of ethnography as both an ethical practice and an aesthetic product. What critical aspects of this encounter distinguish it from other forms of social interaction? In what ways does the nature of this encounter influence the ethnography produced? Using the work of at least three authors as examples, discuss the role of the fieldwork encounter in the production of ethnographic knowledge.

PART II. CROSSOVER QUESTIONS (CHOOSE ONE, BASED ON THE TOPOI YOU SELECTED IN PART I OF THE EXAM)

>> Question in Rhetoric & Public Culture and Performance/Ethnography

Michael Warner suggests that, theoretically, publics might be imagined as consisting of anonymous strangers whose mere attention is sufficient to constitute participation in a public. This provocative suggestion is both reflected and contested by research from scholars of rhetoric as well as performance and ethnography. Engage at least two readings from both RPC and P/E lists to establish an argument about the kinds of participation that Warner accounts for, as well as the kinds that don't fit very well into this rubric, yet remain relevant in terms of how publics are constituted. In your answer, be sure to clarify how you define "public," as well as how you define "participation." Conclude by emphasizing what is at stake in how we imagine what constitutes participation in publics.

>> Question in Film & Media Studies and Rhetoric & Public Culture:

Scholars on the readings lists for Film and Media Studies (FMS) and Rhetoric and Public Culture (RPC) are concerned with how style and power intersect. Drawing on at least two readings from both lists, clarify how these terms are defined and the ways they intersect, when they do. Then, make an argument about what you perceive is at stake for FMS and RPC more broadly in thinking through these concepts: are these stakes different, conflicting, complementary, or something else all together?

>> Question on Film & Media Studies and Performance/Ethnography:

The relationship between the performed text and the audience has been a key concern in both film and media studies as well as performance and ethnography studies. Discuss some of the compelling differences and similarities between the approaches to this relationship in these two fields of study. Using the work of at least two authors for comparison, talk about the theoretical assumptions these authors make within the context of their discipline when they address the interaction between the text, the performance of the text, and audiences.