

Course Outline

CMNS 3500 - 3 Credits

Special Topic in Communication and Public Relations: Power and Language

Fall 2026

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:15

Old Main 1762

The campuses of Thompson Rivers University are located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwepemc Nation within Secwepemcul'ecw. As we share knowledge, teaching, learning and research within this university, we recognize that this territory has always been a place of teaching, learning and research.

Instructor: Christine Adam

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Office: 1841 Old Main

Office Hours: Wednesday afternoons, or by appointment

Calendar Description

Students examine the relationship between language and power through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), applying both frameworks to public discourse across written and spoken genres. Through an individual analysis, a live panel discussion, and a follow-up project built on feedback, students investigate how language constructs authority, contests claims, and shapes public debate. The course concludes with a self-assessment case documenting competency, excellence, growth, and risk-taking.

Course Description

CMNS 3500 introduces two frameworks for analyzing language in public life: Critical Discourse Analysis, anchored in Fairclough's dialectical-relational model, and Systemic Functional Linguistics, based on Halliday's metafunctions. The course is organized around three major projects that move from individual written analysis to live spoken discourse to revision under feedback. Students first conduct an individual discourse analysis, then take part in a recorded panel discussion as either a live speaker or an asynchronous responder, and finally extend their own panel contribution into new work shaped by feedback from the instructor and their peers. A final self-assessment asks students to make the case for their own grade based on this body of work.

Educational Objectives/Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain core concepts of SFL, including the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.
2. Evaluate the clarity, tone, and credibility of public discourse across varied genres.
3. Deconstruct the linguistic strategies used in contested and false claims in public debate.
4. Construct and defend a position on a public issue using SFL-informed language choices.
5. Revise and extend one's own communication in response to feedback, applying CDA and SFL concepts to strengthen linguistic and rhetorical choices.
6. Reflect critically on the ideological role of language in shaping public discourse and power relations.

Prerequisites

None. This course is a standalone entry point; no prior Communications coursework is required.

Texts/Materials

All readings will be available on the course website, organized by week.

Student Evaluation

Assessment in this course is a collaborative, ungrading process.

There are three major projects:

- Project 1: an individual discourse analysis (written)
- Project 2: a panel activity, in which students take part as live panel speakers or as asynchronous video responders
- Project 3: an individual continuation of your own panel topic, incorporating feedback from the instructor and from your async responders

The final submission is a self-assessment, in a format of your choice, in which you will propose a final grade based on the evidence of your work, class engagement, and instructor feedback, documenting competency, excellence, growth, and risk-taking.

Use of Technology

This course draws on written texts, public discourse, and recorded panel discussion, and is delivered in an in-person format using Moodle for submissions and a course website for materials.

[Panel recordings for Project 2 hosted via Kaltura — platform unconfirmed]

Students are expected to engage critically with AI's role in language and public discourse as an object of study; use of AI for assessed work must be disclosed and aligned with course policy, which will be discussed in the first week of class.

Class Cancellations

Note that I do not anticipate any class cancellations. If something unforeseen occurs and I need to cancel class, I will place an announcement in Moodle as soon as possible.

Accessibility Services

TRU's Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy (BRD 10-0) outlines the university's responsibilities to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Accessibility Services at TRU 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 Accessibility Services at 250-828-5023 or as@tru.ca for support. Students and faculty now have access to a user-friendly student services portal. After students are approved for academic accommodations for the upcoming semester, they can log into the student services portal with their TRU credentials and send their accommodation letter directly to their instructor(s). See Accessibility Services for more information.

Academic Honesty and Attendance

Students must be familiar with and follow the following TRU policies:

- Academic Integrity, Policy ED-5-0. Resources for compliance with this policy can be found at the Academic Integrity Centre website.
- Student Attendance, Policy ED 3-1

Students should expect these policies to be enforced in this course. All policies can be found online at <https://www.tru.ca/policy.html>