In this course we will closely examine advertisements as a specific type of mass media text, from the twin perspectives of language and semiotics. (Semiotics is the study of signs, any units that bear meaning, either verbal or non-verbal.) Semiotics is an unusually flexible tool for studying mass media texts, because it encompasses both internal, structural analysis of texts and external, social analysis (intertextuality, social codes and conventions, etc.), and it permits us to use a single unified set of terminology and concepts to discuss verbal material as well as music, sound effects, visual images, etc. And advertising is the most semiotically dense medium of communication that plays a major role in contemporary international society.

Student assignments will involve weekly written assignments based on ads or other media texts, two 3-page “mini-papers”, and one major term paper. Weekly assignments will often involve creative adjustment of existing ads, seeking to slant them toward a different audience or for a special purpose, without requiring artistic skills.

COURSE TEXTS:
• Daniel Chandler, Semiotics: The Basics (Routledge, 2007, 2nd ed.)
• Guy Cook, The Discourse of Advertising (Routledge, 2001, 2nd ed.)