



## Master of Arts in Humanities

# SEMIOTICS

- Theory and history of semiotics
- Cultural semiotics: media, art and translation
- Sociosemiotics: communication, subculture studies
- Biosemiotics: zoo- and ecosemiotics
- 2-year interdisciplinary programme
- International students and teaching staff
- Instruction in English
- Tuition-waiver scholarships

### Why semiotics

Semiotics is the science of revealing sign systems by identifying the limits of any given discourse. Sign processes, or semiosis, make the world meaningful.

Independent of the object of enquiry, whether in the humanities or the hard sciences, semiotics provides the tools for rendering explicit the observer-dependent status of enquiry. Semiotics negotiates the subjectivity of the researcher across all academic practices. Semiotics is thus a general methodology for humanities and life sciences.

The programme provides an interdisciplinary background and gives a theoretical base for the application of semiotic ideas, methods and models to a wide variety of disciplines and scientific study.



*I came to semiotics interested in the study of meaning, and to Tartu with the wish to live abroad. I found a programme and a city with personality – both are unique, stimulating, and independent. Most students have to choose between living where they want and studying what they want, but Tartu is the centre of current semiotic research and a beautiful city with a thriving, open culture. Both of my wishes came true here.*

**Montana Salvoni (USA)**



*I'm Ingrid from South Africa and I came to Tartu specifically because Master's programmes dedicated to semiotics are quite rare. I chose semiotics because it's one of the few fields where you don't have to apologize for wanting to take an interdisciplinary approach; it's basically required. I hope to find ways semiotics has been used to investigate visual communication to develop an approach to issues of why we make certain decisions in graphic design (or other modes of visual communication) and why some result in clearer communication than others.*

**Ingrid Lezar (South Africa)**

### Excellent international career prospects

- Graduates can apply their expertise in professions that require a complex knowledge of cultural analysis, e.g. semiotic consulting companies, marketing or media.
- Practical applications of semiotics include translation and editing, design and architecture, advertising and communication strategies.
- Employees of international organizations, where tolerance and management skills are vital, can improve their professional education.
- Semiotics is particularly relevant to advanced study in many research areas, where semiotic understanding and semiotic interpretation is proving to be of remarkable value. Programme graduates can continue on to doctoral studies and research.



# Why study Semiotics in Tartu

The University of Tartu is one of the key semiotic centres in the academic world today. The tradition of excellence in semiotic theory in Tartu was established by **Juri Lotman**, the founder of **the Tartu-Moscow School** and the oldest continuing journal of semiotics, **Sign Systems Studies**.

The University of Tartu is one of the few institutions in the world teaching full Master's and PhD degree programmes in Semiotics **since 1993**. It's the only university in the Baltic States that belongs to the **top 3% of the world's best universities**. In addition, a total of 20 scientists of UT belong to the top 1% of the most quoted scientists in the world.

Located in Tartu, the University of Tartu is Estonia's **leading centre of research and training**, offering excellent student town atmosphere, modern learning facilities and unique study opportunities under splendid mentorship of world-class scholars.

The University of Tartu comprises more than **16 000 students**, out of whom 1000 are international students. The Semiotics programme has had students from **all over the world**, from Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Greece, Italy, Ukraine, etc. Department of Semiotics collaborates and is regularly visited by **outstanding professors** in the field of Semiotics: Patrick Seriot, Paul Bouissac, John Deely, Dinda Gorlee, Claus Emmeche, Göran Sonesson and others.

Also, UT runs the oldest and biggest library in Estonia with a collection of more than 4 million items and up to 60 000 users. The finest collection of semiotic materials in Tartu includes **the memorial library of Thomas Sebeok**, and **the archive of Jakob von Uexküll**.



*The University of Tartu's place in the world of semiotic development is unique. The two main ideas underlying the full-scale development of semiotics today – Umwelt, and Modelling System – came from Estonian researchers connected with Tartu: Jakob von Uexküll and Juri Lotman; and it was the combination of these ideas in the work of Thomas Sebeok, after his meeting with Lotman in Tartu, that became the principal basis of the full-scale semiotics as "the doctrine of signs" as the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened.*

**John Deely**

## National Quality Award

MA in Semiotics programme was selected by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research as one of the winners of the 2008 national competition of the most attractive international Master's programmes in Estonia.



TO BE ALIVE IS TO BE SEMIOTICALLY ACTIVE!

Thomas Sebeok

## Content of the programme

The study process is divided into **four semesters**, out of which three semesters are for lectures and seminars and the fourth semester for the thesis writing.

**The basic module** courses give an overview of the historical and current theoretical problems, and basic concepts in semiotics. One of the module's focuses is on the theoretical texts of the Tartu-Moscow School, and works of J. Lotman and J. v. Uexküll to stress the traditions, importance and position of Estonia in the history of semiotics. Students will learn the main qualitative methods of semiotic analysis and the possibilities to apply them in the interpretation of modern cultural phenomena.

**The culture module** deepens the students' knowledge of cooperation of cultural semiotics with other disciplines, and focuses on understanding the key concepts of cultural research. The other two courses in this module are more practical, discussing translation and transfer processes in culture, and teaching students to analyse various performative events with semiotic tools.

**The nature module** is dedicated to a thorough understanding of relations between nature and culture, environmental studies, the works of several predecessors of biosemiotics and communication of various species. **The society module** adds another layer to the interdisciplinary education, focusing on social processes, semiotic competence, development of subcultures, the influence of ideology on communication processes and the main questions of political semiotics.

During the study process the stress is both on lectures and on independent work, including discussions in the seminars, preparing short analyses and group work.

## Curriculum structure:

General module	30 ECTS
Specialty modules	54 ECTS
Elective courses	6 ECTS
Master's thesis	30 ECTS
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>120 ECTS</b>

## General module:

- History of Semiotics: Basic Concepts and Classical Works
- Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School
- Readings of J. von Uexküll and J. Lotman
- Methodology of Semiotic Analysis
- Master's Seminar

## Specialty modules:

### 1. Semiotics of Culture (18 ECTS):

- Cultural Semiotics and Theories of Culture
- Semiotic Analysis of Art and Multimedia
- Semiotics of Translation

### 2. Biosemiotics (18 ECTS):

- Biosemiotics
- Ecosemiotics: Cultural Interpretations of Environment
- Zoosemiotics: *Umwelt* and Animal Communication

### 3. Sociosemiotics (18 ECTS):

- Sociosemiotics and Social Theories
- Communication and Power
- Semiotic Analysis of Subcultures

**Master's thesis:** individual research paper, written under the supervision of a professional semiotician.

**Elective courses:** can be chosen from courses currently available at the University of Tartu.

**Language of instruction:** English

**Programme duration:** 2 years (three semesters of study, and one semester for writing the Master's thesis).

## Address for inquiries:

### Department of Semiotics

University of Tartu  
Jakobi 2, 51014 Tartu, Estonia  
Telephone (+372) 737 5933  
Ms. Katre Väli, katre.vali@ut.ee  
Skype: katrevalisem

### International Student Service

University of Tartu  
Ülikooli 18, 50090 Tartu, Estonia  
Telephone (+372) 737 6109

## General admission requirements:

- Bachelor's degree or equivalent in social sciences, natural sciences or humanities.
- English language requirement: applicants for whom English is not a native language need to provide proof of English language proficiency (minimum B2 level according to CEFR).

## Application process:

1. Submit the online application. The form is available at [ut.ee/apply-master](http://ut.ee/apply-master).

You will receive an automated confirmation of your online application submission with login information to track your application status.

2. Mail the required and properly prepared documents by the indicated deadline to:

**International Student Service, University of Tartu, Ülikooli 18, Tartu 50090, Estonia.**

Applicants will receive confirmation upon receipt of their application and its status. Only complete applications will be considered by the Admission Commission and students accepted into the programme will be notified of their admission by 3 June at latest.

## Documents to be submitted:

- Online application;
- Motivation letter – guidelines and evaluation criteria are included in the online application form;
- Official copy of the Bachelor's diploma or its equivalent and Diploma Supplement (transcript/grade list) in the original language;
- Official translation of the Bachelor's diploma and Diploma Supplement into English, translation certified;
- Proof of English language proficiency. Detailed information on accepted tests and scores is available at [ut.ee/requirements](http://ut.ee/requirements);
- Copy of applicant's valid identification document.

## Application deadline: April 16

\* Applicants in the process of graduating, with diplomas issued later than the set deadlines (e.g., in July), must submit the application form and the most recent Transcript of Records by the required deadline.

## Tuition fee and scholarships:

The programme fee of 3520 EUR/year covers tuition, some study materials, and supervision and advising of thesis preparation. Admission is based on a ranking list. Majority of top ranked applicants will be offered tuition-waiver scholarships.

\* Publications are meant for informational purposes only. Please refer to the university website for current official information.



**Juri Lotman**  
(1922–1993)

was a leading scholar in theory of culture, Russian cultural studies, and semiotics. He studied in St. Petersburg as a student of Vladimir Propp, and worked at the University of Tartu from 1950 until his death. In 1964 he became the editor-in-chief of *Sign System Studies*. His books include *Lectures on Structural Poetics* (1964), *The Structure of Artistic Text* (1970), *An Analysis of the Poetic Text* (1972), *Semiotics of Film* (1973), *Universe of the Mind* (1990), and *Culture and Explosion* (1992). Lotman was a founding member of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, and he became vice-president of that association in 1968.



**Jakob von Uexküll**  
(1864–1944)

was a Baltic German philosopher and biologist, and an alumnus of the University of Tartu, whose work is nowadays included among the major classics of semiotics. One of his most important books regarding semiotics is *The Theory of Meaning* (1940). His concept of *Umwelt* describes the modelling systems of all organisms.



**Thomas Sebeok**  
(1920–2001)

was an American semiotician and linguist who contributed to many fields of semiotics, particularly to the expansion of the purview of semiotics to include non-human communication systems. He established zoosemiotics as a field, was a principal influence in the establishment of biosemiotics as a field, and he showed, in the context of semiotic studies, the importance of issues addressed by the philosophy of mind. He was the editor-in-chief of the central semiotic journal *Semiotica*, and a strong supporter of Tartu semiotics – as expressed, for instance, in his publication *The Estonian Connection* (1998).



**The Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics** was led by Professor Juri Lotman of the University of Tartu, and established a series of publications and conferences in Estonia in the 1960s. The school made a programmatic entry into international science in 1973, when J. Lotman, V. Ivanov, V. Toropov, A. Pjatigorskij and B. Uspenskij collectively published *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures*. The theses laid the foundation for semiotics of culture as a separate discipline, the primary aim of which was “the study of the functional correlation of different sign systems”. From here it follows that Russian culture, Estonian culture, or your own culture, are all equally valuable to science, and each of them adds something to the understanding of human culture as such.

**The Department of Semiotics of the University of Tartu** was established in 1992. Its staff – faculty and researchers – include 20 scholars. The number of students with semiotics as their major is currently 150. Semiotics is taught on BA, MA and PhD level. In the past studies have been in Estonian and Russian, currently in Estonian and English. The department belongs to all key networks in the field (International Association for Semiotic Studies, European Semiotic Society, Semiotic Society of America) and has connections with the semiotic centres in the region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Russia), and of the world. To date, the Semiotics Honorary Doctors of the University of Tartu are Thure von Uexküll and Umberto Eco.

