Popular Culture Syllabus

Instructor: Kristin Scott
Class Meetings: T/TH – 2:00 PM to 3:20 PM / Room 316
Office Hours: Room 307 / T & TH – 1:00 – 2:00 PM
or during other times by appointment
Phone: (773) 318-5731
E-mail: kscott65@gmail.com
Required Text: Common Culture, 5th ed., by Petracca & Sorapure
* All other reading assignments will be provided to you via handout or online at the class blog.

Class Blog Site: http://popculture08.wordpress.com/

Catalog Description:
Interdisciplinary investigation of relationships between American life and popular culture; includes defining popular culture and high culture; roles of formulating popular culture in films; role of advertising in popular culture; stereotypes of the sexes and ethnic groups; role of sports in American life; popular music and its audience; and television. Writing assignments, as appropriate to the discipline, are part of the course.

Course Objectives:
• Explore different types of contemporary American culture.
• Examine the various elements of popular culture and how they inform or reflect our attitudes, behavior, and society, in general.
• Learn strategies to connect cultural knowledge to everyday life and practices.
• Learn to develop thoughtful and critical analyses of culture both verbally and in writing.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the semester students who have successfully completed the course will:
• Understand the differences and intersections between popular (mass) culture and high culture.
• Become familiar with the role and impact popular culture has on American life.
• Be able to identify examples of the portrayal of various ethnic, racial, and other stereotypes in popular culture.
• Know how to effectively identify and communicate their understanding of culture in broader social contexts.

Grading:
Grading for this course will comprise of three parts:
Attendance 10%
Weekly Blog Assignments 40%
Midterm Case Study Essay 30%
Group Case Study Presentations 20%
Grading Scale:  
90%-100%  A
80%-89%  B
70%-79%  C
60%-69%  D
59% and below  F

Please note that I do not accept late homework or essays unless previously agreed upon by the instructor.

**Participation:**

Attendance is required – both physically and mentally. You are expected to take an active role in class discussions and online. Also, please make sure your phone is off or on buzz (and buried deep inside your backpack), so it’s not heard while in class. Save your text messaging for after class or at break. I do not want to see anyone text messaging during class.

**Attendance:**

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. If you are more than ten minutes late or leave ten minutes early from class, you will be marked with an absence. You should be in each and every class, though I understand that things sometimes come up. I would appreciate some advanced notice if you know you will be absent, and I expect you to exchange your contact information with a few other classmates so that if you are out, you can contact them for information on what you missed in class. You are responsible for getting the information you missed. Please keep in mind that each time you are absent, you miss a lot of in-class discussion that may affect your overall understanding of the topics being covered and inevitably your performance.

**Harold Washington College’s Policies:**

Students who do not attend at least two of the first three class sessions, and do not notify me of their intention to continue in the class, will be withdrawn from the class as a “no-show”. A “no-show” means your registration for the course has been canceled. **You will not be re-instated.**

If you are continuously absent beginning three weeks before the mid-point of the semester, you will be administratively withdrawn (ADW) from the class. Students who receive an ADW are not eligible to attend class or to be reinstated in the class.

**Academic Integrity**

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If I suspect either, I will forward the materials on to the disciplinary committee. They will hold a hearing and decide whether or not you did cheat or plagiarize, and if so, what your punishment should be. The best case scenario is that you fail the assignment; the worst case is that you are expelled from the college. Academic dishonesty is not worth the penalty it incurs, so don’t do it!

For a description of what constitutes plagiarism please refer to [http://www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).

**Online Weekly Responses:**

Each week, with the exception of weeks in which other major assignments are due, students will be required to post a thoughtful and critical response to readings and/or class discussions via questions posed by the professor in an online class blog discussion forum. Students are expected to not only engage with the topic and/or question, but also with one another, so that it truly becomes a discussion forum. Emphasis will be placed on quality of writing (over quantity) and
one’s ability to contextualize readings (making responses relevant to the broader concepts being studied).

If, for some reason, the blog server (Wordpress) is down, you must still turn in your response on time, in class. I recommend that everyone copy and paste the assignment into a word document and keep a copy of their responses on their computers, just in case the blog server or your internet provider encounters a problem in the middle of your posting. There is nothing worse than spending an hour or more writing a response on the blog and losing it to “technical difficulties” before you hit the send button. If you have a copy of your response on word prior to posting, all you need to do is copy and paste it into the comments section on the blog. **Your blog responses will count as 40% of your final grade.**

**Be warned early on:** if you skip more than two blog responses, your overall final grade will seriously suffer. You have to keep in mind that we will only have about ten blog responses during the entire semester, so missing two or more will automatically lower your response grade by quite a bit, which will, in turn, significantly impact your overall final grade, since these assignments are cumulatively worth 40% of your total grade. It’s always better to write something (and get some credit) than nothing.

**Midterm Case Study Essay:**

About halfway through the semester, you will be required to observe and research some artifact or phenomenon (of your choosing) of popular culture and produce a 4-5 page essay. Details about what is expected in this essay will be handed out at the appropriate time, but involves observation and one outside source to help support your findings or conclusions. The most important aspect of this essay, however, will be formulating a good, solid, and specific question about what it is that you want to know. Therefore, as we go through the first half of this course, if something in particular strikes you as interesting – something that you want to further explore – be sure to start jotting down notes and make a list of questions to which you can later refer. This midterm case study essay will count towards 30% of your final grade.

**Group Case Study Presentations:**

Near the end of the semester, you will be placed into small groups to examine a particular area of popular culture that has NOT been already explored within the class. The primary purpose of this assignment is for you and your colleagues to demonstrate your ability to identify and critically think about previously unexplored examples of popular culture. I will provide a list of basic possibilities (in terms of general ranges of artifacts and/or phenomenon), but it will be up to you and your group to decide what, specifically, you will examine. No written work will be required, other than a summary of what tasks each of you performed and how your group collaborated on the project, as a whole. Your group will present your findings to the class using visual aids (video, music, handouts, internet, etc.) on an assigned date. And the more creative the presentation, the better! More information will be provided to you at the appropriate time.
Reading & Assignment Schedule:

Week One: What is Popular Culture?

Tuesday, January 15th

- Introduction and overview of the course.
- Discussion of culture, popular culture, and high versus low culture.

Thursday, January 17th

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: “Popular Signs: Or, Everything You Always Knew About Culture (but Nobody Asked)” Signs of Culture (handout)

Response Assignment #1 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

Week Two: Reading and Interpreting “Signs” of Popular Culture

Tuesday, January 22nd

Response Assignment #1 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Chapter 1: Reading and Writing about American Popular Culture (p. 1-26), from Common Culture Reader.
- View: Barbie & Ken & American Girl doll pictures & come to class prepared to talk about what signs of culture you “read”
- Listen to: “American Icons: Barbie,” NPR (National Public Radio) – on class blog

Thursday, January 24th

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Omi, Michael. “In Living Color: Race and American Culture” Signs of Culture (handout)

Response Assignment #2 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.
Week Three: American Idols & Icons

Tuesday, January 29th

Response Assignment #2 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Watch: “I Got a Crush . . . on Obama”

Thursday, January 31st

Readings/Viewings:

* Case Study Focus: William Hung

- Read: “Asian ‘American Idol’: Stereotype or Star?”
- Watch: William Hung’s “She Bang – on American Idol”

Response Assignment #3 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

Weeks Four & Five: Advertising

Tuesday, February 5th

Response Assignment #3 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: “Advertising’s Fifteen Basic Appeals” (73-91). Common Culture Reader.
- Watch: “Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood & Corporate Power”

Thursday, February 7th

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Steinem, Gloria. “Sex, Lies and Advertising” (123-143) Common Culture Reader.
- Watch: “Christine Aguilera’s New Pepsi Video”
Response Assignment #4 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

Tuesday, February 12th – NO CLASS (HOLIDAY) / Lincoln’s Birthday

Response Assignment #4 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Pozner, Jennifer L. “Images of Women In Advertising” (105-114) Common Culture Reader.
- Watch: Jean Kilbourne, “Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising’s Image of Women”

Response Assignment #5 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

Week Six: Food Culture

Tuesday, February 19th

Response Assignment #5 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewing:

- Take: the Food Pop Culture IQ Quiz

Thursday, February 21st

Readings/Viewings:

- View: Food Porn photos from Flickr.

Response Assignment #6 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.
Week Seven: Urban Legends & Mythical Characters

Tuesday, February 26th

Response Assignment #6 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Perry, Julie. “A Look at Urban Legends: the Gothic Outweighs the Enlightened”
- Listen to: Commentary: Living Urban Legends, NPR (National Public Radio)

Case Study Essay Assigned:

Proposals DUE (next class) Thursday, February 28th.

Essays DUE Tuesday, March 11th.

Thursday, February 28th

CASE STUDY PROPOSALS DUE! (1-2 paragraphs)

Readings/Viewings:

- Watch: “Superman Tribute,” “Wonder Woman Spin Transformation,” and “Catwoman Attacks”

Response Assignment #7 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

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Week Eight: Popular Music (not to be confused with Pop-Muzik)

Tuesday, March 4th

Response Assignment #7 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- View: bell hooks, Pt8 Cultural Criticism (rap music)

Thursday, March 6th

Readings/Viewings:
• View: Dead Prez – Hip Hop, Hip Hop Violin, and Missy Elliot – She’s a Bitch
• View: “Nore feat. Daddy Yankee: Oye Mi Canto” and “Don omar – reggaeton latino”

FINISH CASE STUDY ESSAYS: DUE NEXT CLASS!

Week Nine: Sports

Tuesday, March 11th

CASE STUDY ESSAYS DUE!

Readings/Viewings:

• Read: Ciociola, Laura. “Hints of Pop Culture: From Nike to Disney, U.S. brands are becoming household names and influencing tastes,” The St. Petersburg Times International Journalism Practicum.

Thursday, March 13th

Readings/Viewings:


Week Ten: SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, March 18th & Thursday, March 20th: NO CLASS!

Weeks Eleven & Twelve: Films & Television

Tuesday, March 25th

Readings/Viewings:

• Read: Seger, Linda. “Creating the Myth,” (317-326), Signs of Life (handout).

Thursday, March 27th
Readings/Viewings:


Response Assignment #8 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

**Tuesday, April 1st**

Response Assignment #8 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:


**Thursday, April 3rd**

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Samuels, Robert. “Keeping It Real: Why We Like to Watch Reality Dating Television Shows” (193-201) Common Culture Reader.
- Watch: “I Love New York – Meet the Parents” and “Bigger Loser – Highlights”

Group Presentation Topics Assigned

Response Assignment #9 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

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**Weeks Thirteen & Fourteen: Video Games & Cyberculture/s**

**Tuesday, April 8th**

Response Assignment #9 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Watch: “Grand Theft Auto IV – Trailer”

**Thursday, April 10th**
Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Jenkins, Henry. “Eight Myths About Video Games Debunked” PBS.

Response Assignment #10 (due next class & in response to readings for next class): See and respond to assignment online at class blog.

Tuesday, April 15th

Response Assignment #10 DUE online at class blog.

Readings/Viewings:

- Read: Dibbel, Julian. “A Rape in Cyberspace”

Thursday, April 17th

Readings/Viewings:

- View: The Second Life Sex Bed Case, UK TV.

Work on Group Presentations

Extra Credit Blog Response – Due next week (Tuesday)

Weeks Fifteen & Sixteen: Semester Review & Group Presentations

Tuesday, April 22nd: Review of Semester

Thursday, April 24th: Group Presentations (2-3 groups)

Tuesday, April 29th: Group Presentations (2-3 groups)

Thursday, May 1st: Group Presentations (2-3 groups)