

**INTRODUCTION TO POPULAR CULTURE
POPC 1600, Spring 2012**

MWF, 1:30-2:20 P.M. (OLSCAMP HALL 203)

INSTRUCTOR: **CORY BARKER** **OFFICE:** 8G HANNA HALL (NW CORNER OF COLLEGE & WOOSTER)
BARKERC@BGSU.EDU **HOURS:** THURSDAYS, 12:00-2:00 P.M.
419.372.1830

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to introduce you to a variety of critical approaches used in the study of popular culture. Although this course will draw on your familiarity with popular culture, we will approach the subject from a scholarly perspective. The overall objective is to explore how popular culture, in all its various forms, not only reflects the world around us but also how it influences the way we perceive the world. Every day we are exposed to thousands of images, sounds and experiences that we understand as natural – as just the way the world is. But this everyday life we take for granted is anything but natural. It is both the product and the creator of a shared worldview. We will examine a wide range of subjects (such as film, television, music, advertising, the internet, and geography) using a wide range of critical approaches (such as genre theory, gender studies, semiotics, and political economy), so we can better understand how contemporary American culture shapes our lives.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Explore the connection between popular culture and social values
 - Improve communication skills by reading about, writing about, and discussing popular culture
 - Understand the role of popular culture and the way it reflects and influences culture and society
 - Examine the social and cultural context of popular culture products and practices
-

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Popular Culture: A User's Guide, 2nd edition (2010), Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman; **IN SYLLABUS AS PC**
 - Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard; **IN SYLLABUS AS BB**
-

GRADING SCALE:

- A = 1000-900 pts; B = 899-800 pts; C = 799-700 pts; D = 699-600 pts; F = 599-0 pts
 - Total points for the course = 1000
-

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

100 pts **Participation and attendance**

- 50 pts = participation: class discussions, group work or small additional assignments, etc.
- 50 pts = attendance (taken at every class)

100 pts **In-class quizzes:** 10 quizzes, each worth 10 points

100 pts **Reading responses:** 5 one-page responses, each worth 20 points

25 pts **Essay proposal:** 3-page proposal, including topic, approach, thesis and sample bibliography

75 pts **Textual analysis assignment:** 3-page textual/semiotic analysis of pop culture text

100 pts **Essay:** 6-page essay applying theories and concepts from class to pop culture text

100 pts **Exam 1:** The first exam will be administered on Wednesday, February 8, 2012. It will consist of objective questions such as multiple choice, subjective questions such as short answer, and one or two long and/or short essays.

200 pts **Exam 2:** The second exam will be administered on Friday, March 16, 2012. It will consist of objective questions such as multiple choice, subjective questions such as short answer, and one or two long and/or short essays.

200 pts **Exam 3:** The final exam will be administered during final exam week on Tuesday, May 1, 2012 at 1:15 p.m. in our regular classroom. It will consist of objective questions such as multiple choice, subjective questions such as short answer, and one or two long essays.

CLASS SCHEDULE :

WEEK 1	
1/9	INTRODUCTIONS
1/11	WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE AND WHY STUDY IT? READING: PC, PAGES 1-15
1/13	SEMIOTICS: FOUNDATIONS READING: N/A
WEEK 2	
1/16	MLK, JR. DAY – BGSU OFFICES CLOSED AND CLASSES CANCELLED
1/18	SEMIOTICS: BARTHES AND CULTURAL MYTHS READING: PC, PAGES 149-181
1/20	SEMIOTICS: SIGNS OF CONSUMPTION READING: GOEWY, “CAREFUL YOU MAY RUN OUT OF PLANET” (BB) AND KRON, “THE SEMIOTICS OF HOME DÉCOR” (BB)
WEEK 3	
1/23	POLITICAL ECONOMY: MARXISM READING: STOREY, “MARXISMS” PAGES 59-61, 70-79 (BB)
1/25	POLITICAL ECONOMY: THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL READING: PC, PAGES 109-130
1/27	HEGEMONY, PART ONE READING: STOREY, “MARXISMS” PAGES 79-82 (BB)
WEEK 4	
1/30	HEGEMONY, PART TWO READING: MAHER, “WHAT DO WOMEN WATCH?” (BB)
2/1	GLOBALIZATION AND AMERICANIZATION READING: PC, PAGES 321-350
2/3	NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY READING: PC, PAGES 219-241
WEEK 5	
2/6	EXAM ONE REVIEW READING: N/A
2/8	EXAM ONE READING: N/A
2/10	CLASS CANCELLED, INSTRUCTOR ILLNESS
WEEK 6	
2/13	ESSAY AND RESEARCH TUTORIAL READING: N/A
2/15	GENRE THEORY

	READING: JOHNSON, "THE WESTERN" (BB)
2/17	GENRE: TEEN DRAMA IN-CLASS SCREENING: THE O.C., "PILOT" READING: N/A
WEEK 7	
2/20	GENRE: TEEN DRAMA READING: N/A
2/22	GENRE: SUPERHEROES IN-CLASS SCREENING: MISFITS, "PILOT"
2/24	GENRE: SUPERHEROES READING: BRING A SUPERHERO COMIC OF YOUR CHOICE
WEEK 8	
2/27	GENRE: CLASS CHOICE
2/29	FORMULA, FORMATS AND REALITY TELEVISION IN-CLASS SCREENING: <i>SURVIVOR: HEROES VS. VILLAINS</i> , "BANANA ETIQUETTE" ESSAY PROPOSALS DUE
3/2	REALITY TELEVISION AND CULTURAL DISCUSSION READING: PROSE, "VOTING DEMOCRACY OFF THE ISLAND" (BB)
WEEK 9	
3/5-3/9	SPRING BREAK – BGSU CLASSES CANCELLED
WEEK 10	
3/12	HEROES AND CULTURAL VALUES READING: RAY, "THE THEMATIC PARADIGM" (BB) AND ENGLE, "WHAT MAKES SUPERMAN SO DARNED AMERICAN?" (BB)
3/14	CELEBRITIES AND CULTURAL VALUES READING: BRENNAN, "CELEBRITIES WHO AREN'T REALLY CELEBRITIES" (BB)
3/16	EXAM TWO REVIEW READING: N/A
WEEK 11	
3/19	EXAM TWO READING: N/A
3/21	IDENTITY AND THE BODY READING: PC, PAGES 183-202
3/23	GENDER, IDENTITY AND THE BODY: WOMEN READING: DEVOR, "GENDER ROLE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES" (BB) AND "UNREALISTIC BODY IMAGES" (BB) TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE
WEEK 12	
3/26	GENDER, IDENTITY AND THE BODY: MEN READING: PC, PAGES 183-202
3/28	RACE: CONSTRUCTING RACE AND STEREOTYPES READING: PC, PAGES 90-95, HOOKS, "SELLING HOT PUSSY" (BB)
3/30	RACE: CLASS AND IDENTITY CONCERNS READING: PARENTI, "CLASS AND VIRTUE," (BB) AND DYER, "COLOR OF VIRTUE" (BB)
WEEK 13	
4/2	RITUAL AND CEREMONY IN-CLASS SCREENING: FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, "PILOT" READING: N/A
4/4	RITUAL AND CEREMONY READING: N/A
4/6	AUDIENCES AND RECEPTION THEORY READING: PC, PAGES 95-107

WEEK 14	
4/9	<i>SUBCULTURES AND COUNTERCULTURES</i> READING: PC, PAGES 257-285 AND SPITZ, "GOTH: SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOLS, THE CURE AND THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS" (BB)
4/11	<i>FANDOM: STEREOTYPES AND ACTIVITIES</i> READING: THRUPKAEW, "FAN/TASTIC VOYAGE," (BB) AND PARIS, "BLACK BART SIMPSON," (BB)
4/13	<i>FANDOM: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND NEW MEDIA</i> READING: JENKINS, "INTERACTIVE AUDIENCES?" PAGES 135-140 AND 149-151 (BB)
WEEK 15	
4/16	<i>NEW MEDIA: CONVERGENCE</i> READING: JENKINS, "WORSHIP AT THE ALTER OF CONVERGENCE," (BB)
4/18	<i>NEW MEDIA: SOCIAL MEDIA</i> READING: BURGESS, "ALL YOUR CHOCOLATE RAIN ARE BELONG TO US?" (BB)
4/20	<i>PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE</i> READING: PC, PAGES 287-317, RETTBERG, "'FRESHLY GENERATED FOR YOU, AND BARACK OBAMA..." PAGES 451-458(BB) AND BARLOW, "CYBERHOOD VERSUS NEIGHBORHOOD" (BB) FINAL ESSAYS DUE
WEEK 16	
4/23	<i>POSTMODERNISM</i> <i>IN-CLASS SCREENING: COMMUNITY, "MODERN WARFARE" AND "REMEDIAL CHAOS THEORY"</i> READING: N/A
4/25	<i>POSTMODERNISM IN POPULAR CULTURE</i> READING: N/A
4/27	<i>FINAL EXAM REVIEW</i> READING: N/A
FINALS	
5/01	FINAL EXAM, 1:15-3:15 P.M. , IN OUR REGULAR CLASSROOM

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation and Attendance (100 points)

Participation in class is voluntary but is worth 5 percent of your final grade. Attendance is expected but is not the same as participation, in other words just coming to class is not enough of an effort to get the participation points as well. You will receive points for coming to class, but are expected to be prepared to discuss that day's readings and topics.

In-class Quizzes (100 points)

Twelve times during the semester we will have a quiz during the first five minutes of class. The quizzes will be only one question and will cover that day's assigned readings. If you are late to class, you cannot make up the quiz. However two of the lowest quiz scores will be dropped, so only 10 of them will count for a total of 100 points.

Reading Responses (100 points)

Five times throughout the semester days you will be required to turn in a one-page written response to a reading. Your responses should BRIEFLY summarize the main points of the article, but also express well-formed opinions of the article and pose 2-3 discussion questions. Responses should be turned in to me at the beginning of class the day the reading is scheduled on the syllabus. You are permitted to pick any assigned article for your responses, but you must do **two of them before spring break (the week beginning 03/05/12) and three after that date**. This will hopefully keep

you engaged in the readings throughout the semester and also prevent a major backlog of responses at the very end once April comes around.

Essay Proposal (25 points)

Write a 3-page proposal for your final essay. The point of the essay proposal is twofold: First, to encourage you to start thinking about and researching your chosen topic sooner rather than later and secondly, it allows me to provide feedback at an early stage.

The essay proposal must include:

- A statement of your topic and the theoretical approach/concept you will use
- A rough outline of your thesis (what you will be arguing/proving)
- A sample bibliography
 - At least three, academic, peer-reviewed sources
 - **NO** internet sources permitted
 - You may include readings from the class or “non-academic” sources (newspaper articles, magazine articles, etc.) in the final essay, but they **DO NOT** count toward the three that are required for the proposal

Length: 3 pages (12 point font, standard 1 inch margins)

Textual Analysis Essay (75 points)

Between the essay proposal submission and final essay submission, you will be required to write a 3-page textual/semiotic analysis essay on the popular culture text you plan to discuss in your final essay (i.e. the film, television series, advertising campaign, etc.).

Your textual analysis should fall in-line with the overarching argument of your final essay. Therefore, if you’re writing about racism in the television series *Lost* for your final essay, your textual analysis essay should tackle a specific episode of *Lost* that you believe fits your argument about it being racist.

The purpose of this assignment is to help you grasp what it means to analyze a popular culture text in an in-depth way before the final essay. It is also designed to serve as the groundwork for your final essay (minus the scholarship you’ll be using to supplement your textual analysis). You may use portions of this assignment in your final essay. So if you do well on this assignment, you will have much less work to do for the final essay.

Final Essay (100 points)

For your final essay, you are required to select a specific aspect of popular culture for analysis. How does this element of popular culture shape the way we understand the world around us? You are not restricted to the theories and concepts from this course, but it is suggested that you do. The aspect of popular culture may be anything you find interesting – historical, contemporary, media based, subcultural, etc. – but you may not, however, simply repeat an argument made in class or the readings.

By the time you reach your final essay, you should have already crafted a thesis that combines a theoretical approach with textual analysis. Your theoretical approach should help support the arguments you made in your textual analysis essay and vice versa.

Example essay topics:

- Class biases in *Project Runway*
- Appropriation of nerd culture in *The Big Bang Theory*
- *Toy Story 3* and corporate hegemony

- Marxism and the Vans Warped Tour

You must have an original thesis and you must use at least three scholarly sources – no internet sources. If you need help finding research, please let me know at any time and I will try to suggest some starting places.

Length: 6 pages *minimum* (12 point font, standard 1 inch margins).

Three in-class exams (100, 200 and 200 points respectively, for a total of 500 points)

This course will have three exams. Details on the specifics of the exams will be given at a later date.

CLASS POLICIES

University Academic Honesty Policy:

The Code of Academic Conduct (Academic Honesty Policy) requires that students do not cheat, fabricate, plagiarize or facilitate academic dishonesty. For details, refer to:

- *BGSU Student Handbook* (http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/book/Student_Handbook.pdf)
- *The Academic Charter, B.II.H* (<http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/file921.pdf>)

Attendance Policy:

Attendance will be taken every class, and more than one week's worth of unexcused absences (your "free passes") will lower your participation grade; students with an excessive number of unexcused absences may have their overall grade reduced, up to a failing grade for the course. "Free passes" are to be used for: minor illness (one week or less), oversleeping, work conflicts, interviews, etc.

- The only absences that are excused are those due to:
 - Severe weather (see the university's policy at <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/execvp/file8135.pdf>);
 - Religious holidays (with notification in advance; see the university's policy at <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/file919.pdf>);
 - Participation in athletic events (with notification in advance and documentation);
 - Major illness (more than one week) or family emergencies (with documentation).

First Day Attendance Policy:

In accordance with the University's First Day Attendance Policy, instructors in the Department of Popular Culture will record the names of students who do not attend the first session of this class and request that they be "dropped" so that seats are made available for other students. An exception will be made if a non-attending student has an excusable circumstance and has contacted the instructor prior to the first class meeting.

Makeup Examination / Late Assignment Policy:

- For **unexcused** absences on days when assignments are due / exams given:
 - Makeup exams will be written exams, and must be made up within 1 week of the class missed
 - Late assignments / makeup exams will be marked down one letter grade per class missed
- For **excused, brief** absences (one week or less) on days when assignments are due / exams given:
 - Makeup exams will be written exams, and must be made up within 1 week of returning to class
 - Late assignments / makeup exams must be completed within 1 week of returning to class
- For **excused, extended** absences (over one week) on days when assignments are due / exams given:
 - Makeup exams will be written exams, and must be made up within 2 weeks of returning to class
 - Late assignments / makeup exams must be completed within 2 weeks of returning to class
- It is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor with ample time to schedule and complete makeup examinations by the deadlines listed above

Disability Policy:

The requirements and teaching methods of this course can be modified to make learning easier for students with disabilities. A student who requires accommodations must do the following at the beginning of the semester:

1. Verify their eligibility through the Office of Disability Services for Students, 413 South Hall, 419-372-8495, (<http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/disability/index.html>) and
2. Take the documentation to the instructor and discuss the accommodation(s).

Recording/Electronic Devices Policy:

Students cannot use recording devices or other electronic devices (cell phones, laptop computers, etc.) in class without permission.