

# **SOC 320: POPULAR CULTURE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

TTh 11-12:15 Admin 303

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## **Course Description**

What exactly do we mean by “popular culture?” How does cultural productions, things like media, music, film, etc., shape our lives and our social identities? This course will explore the experience of living in a media infused culture by considering the role that contemporary technological innovations have on our daily lives. We will use a texts from different disciplines to better understand the current research and understandings of popular culture. This course is designed to give you a look at the interdisciplinary fields of media studies and technology studies with a focus on the contributions of sociology. This course should help you understand the role of and development of popular culture in contemporary social systems.

## **Textbook (Available at the Campus Bookstore and Online)**

Grazian, David (2010) *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. W.W. Norton.  
ISBN: 978-0-393-92952-2

*Additional course readings will be posted on Blackboard*

## **Course Goals**

- To explore the interdisciplinary contributions of the humanistic social sciences and cultural studies to research on popular culture.
- To develop insight into your own use of popular culture and consider your contributions to it.
- To better understand how popular culture shapes individual values, expectations and ideals.
- To develop a critical lens with which to analyze both research and popular culture.

## Course Assignments and Grading

- **Activities (40%):** Regular student participation is required for this course, including participation in class discussions and classroom activities. Students will be required to participate in 5 classroom/virtual activities throughout the semester. Each activity will include an online discussion board component and an in-class discussion.
  
- **Written Assignments (60%):** Written work will include two short essays and a final project.
  - **Essay #1 Due Sept 17<sup>th</sup> (20%): *Analysis of Theory (3-5 pages)***  
For this assignment, you will discuss the different approaches to the analysis of popular culture: functionalist, interactional, and critical. First, summarize each approach and identify a popular culture artifact that you can analyze using each theory. Next, explain how the approach might be used to understand a specific piece of popular culture. Finally, discuss which approach you find the most compelling and why.
  
  - **Essay #2 Due Oct 29<sup>th</sup> (20%): *TV Watching and Analysis (3-5 pages)***  
Spend 30 minutes watching television with a notebook on at least 3 separate occasions. Observe the values, norms and cultural scripts that you see. Begin by summarizing and explaining what you watched. Next, discuss what behaviors, images, people and lifestyles are normalized and shown as valuable? What about those shown negatively? What stereotypes are reinforced? Finally discuss how the values and norms that you identified might shape your own cultural identity and the identity of others around you.
  
  - **Final Project (20%):**  
Your final project will give you an opportunity to demonstrate your learning by selecting from three options: analytic, research or creative project. Details will be provided after mid-terms.

## **Classroom Policies**

The professor reserves the right to change the syllabus and assignments. Changes may be made to accommodate the specific needs of the class.

### **Attendance**

You may have three absences throughout the semester. No excuse is required. More than three absences will result in a loss of points for course participation. Students with extraordinary circumstances are required to meet with me.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty, including the giving or receiving of improper help on examinations or assignments, falsifying records, and plagiarism (the act of stealing and using, as one's own, the ideas or the expression of ideas of another) is not tolerated at Concord University. These behaviors can result in failure of the course or expulsion from the university. Please refer to page 39 of the university academic catalog for the consequences of academic dishonesty.

### **Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Concord University is committed to responding to the needs of students with disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please inform me at the beginning of the semester if you have a disability and are requesting accommodations. Students should register with CU's Disability Services Office, located in the Athens campus Jerry L. Beasley Student Center, Bottom Floor, across from the Campus Post Office. The Disability Services Office phone number is 304-384-6036 or you can email the Director, Nancy Ellison, at [nellison@concord.edu](mailto:nellison@concord.edu) for assistance.

### **Course Readings**

Readings listed for each day of class in the course schedule are to have been read **prior** to coming to that day's class. Additional readings maybe assigned and will be distributed in class or on the course Blackboard site.

### **Student Athletes**

Student athletes are required to notify me in advance to be excused from class and are responsible for making up all missing assignments and readings.

### **Classroom Conduct**

This course is heavily reliant on discussion, which includes difficult dialogue at times. **This is an inclusive and safe classroom.** All discussion points and questions are valued; as such students are expected to treat one another and the professor thoughtfully and with respect. Racist, sexist, homophobic or other pejorative or discriminatory language will not be tolerated and students who insist on such behavior will be asked to leave the classroom.

### **Cell Phones**

Cell phones and other electronic devices ARE allowed in this classroom, but any student using their devices must be prepared to share their activities with their classmates and discuss the implications of technological use in public spaces if asked to by the professor at any time.

## Course Schedule

### ***Module 1: What is Popular Culture?***

Aug 18 - Introduction and Course Syllabus

Aug 20 - Lecture: Understanding Popular Culture

#### **Aug 25 - No Class**

Read: Chapter 1, “The Straight Story: The Social Organization of Popular Culture”

#### **Aug 27 - Activity #1: Getting Started Report**

### ***Module 2: Analytical Approaches***

Sept 1 - Lecture: Functionalist Approaches

Read: Chapter 2, “Friday Night Lights: A Functionalist Approach to Popular Culture”

Sept 3 - Discussion: Propaganda of American Exceptionalism

Video: “Why We Love Capitalism”

Sept 8 - Lecture: Interactional Approaches

Read: Chapter 4, “Six Degrees of Separation: An Interaction Approach to Popular Culture”

#### **Sept 10 - Activity #2: Show and Tell Report**

Sept 15 - Lecture: Critical Approaches

Read: Chapter 3, “Monsters, Inc.: A Critical Approach to Popular Culture”

Sept 17 - Discussion: Understanding Silence

#### **Assignment #1 Paper Due: Analysis of Theory**

Video: “Every Single Word Spoken by a Person of Color in...”

### ***Module 3: Representation and Resistance***

Sept 22 - Lecture: Satire and Comedy

Read: “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift (**Blackboard**)

Sept 24 - Discussion: Cultural Artifacts

Video: “The Colbert Report”

Sept 29 - Lecture: Changing Representations and Attitudes: Introducing The Simpsons

Video: “The Simpsons”

Oct 1 - Discussion: The Simpsons and Social Transformation

Oct 6 - Lecture: Power, Wealth and Status

Read: Chapter 7, “The Rules of the Game: Cultural Consumption and Social Class”

#### **Oct 8: Activity #3: High/Low Culture Report**

#### **Oct 13-15 - No Class, Fall Break**

Oct 20 - Lecture: Going Global: Transnational Popular Culture

#### **Oct 22 - Activity #4: Beyond the Borders Report**

Oct 27 - Lecture: Marginalized Identities - More than Middle America

Video: "ESPN 30 for 30 Rand University"

Oct 29 - Discussion: Race, Class and Identity

**Assignment #2 Paper Due: TV Watching and Analysis**

***Module 4: Popular Culture Sources***

Nov 3 - Lecture: Audience Interpretations

Read: Chapter 8, "The Searchers: Audiences and the Quest for Meaning in Popular Culture"

Nov 5 - Discussion: Music and Meaning in Popular Culture

Video: "Assorted Music Videos"

Nov 10 - Lecture: Cultural Consumption

Read: Chapter 9, "Scenes from a Mall: Experiencing Popular Culture in Everyday Life"

**Nov 12 - Activity #5: Gender Ads Report**

Nov 17 - Lecture: Digital Age

Read: Chapter 10, "Fifteen Minutes: Virtual Reality and the Mediated World"

Nov 19 - Discussion: Gaming and Game Culture

**Nov 24-26 - No Class, Thanksgiving Break**

Dec 1-3 - Final Assignment Class Presentations

**Dec 8: Final Project Due Submitted to Blackboard or at My Office**