American Studies 203: Popular Culture in America

Instructor: Paul Saiedi
Email: psaiedi@umd.edu
Office: 0132 Holzapfel Hall
Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30pm -1:30pm & by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course examines various dimensions of the production and consumption of popular culture practices, both historical and contemporary, in the United States. One premise of this course is that whether conceived of as peoples' systems of shared meanings, attitudes, and values or as the texts and practices of everyday life, popular culture performances and artifacts are "made." Popular culture forms thus reveal much about who past generations think they were, who we think we are, and who we think others are and were. Popular culture can also reveal much about social and cultural tensions in and across time. A second premise underlying this course is that in their popular culture activities, people create culture and society. In other words, in practices such as music, sports, reading, TV watching, and more, people shape and negotiate cultural messages and values, economic activity, institutions, and the very social relationships that underlay local, national, and international communities. Focusing on the analytical categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation, we shall explore popular culture as a site of cultural production and meaning making.

Course Structure
This course meets two days a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Students will view, read, watch, and experience popular culture as a key part of this course. To accomplish this, students will read postings from the ELMS site and have to spend time watching TV, listening to music, and other forms of popular culture through the internet. Both in class and online engagement are important aspects of this course. To succeed in this course you must not only attend classes and participate, but also engage weekly in reading, researching and writing for the preparation and homework portions of this course. Students are required to participate both verbally and non-verbally in class by showing critical thinking of the readings, projects and discussions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Demonstrate understanding of critical concepts in the study of popular culture.
- Demonstrate understanding of the methods, theories, and sources used by scholars of popular culture.
- Demonstrate critical thinking in the evaluation of sources and arguments in the study of popular culture.
- Identify and assess self-reflexively your own values, beliefs, and practices regarding American popular culture within the terms of class discussions and written arguments.
• Complete a research project/paper on a topic in popular culture, using a variety of sources.
• Formulate a thesis related to a specific topic in the study of popular culture and support the thesis with appropriate evidence and argumentation.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

1. Articles and Chapters: There are no required textbooks for this course. Instead, articles and chapters will be provided in the Course Documents section on the course Blackboard site. I highly recommended and prefer that you print out the articles and bring them to class or bring detailed notes that you took while reading the articles. I understand that printing out the pages can get expensive, but be sure to develop a system that will allow you to refer to main points and quotes from the readings while having an in-depth discussion about them in class.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES:

Keep up with the course readings.
The readings are the foundation of this course. Our classroom discussions, midterm exam, written assignment and final project will all be based on the readings, so if you want to do well in the course, it is crucial that you keep up with the readings.

Come to class prepared.
Readings and assignments are to be completed before class and you must have questions and comments about the readings to ensure full participation credit.

Maintain a respectful classroom environment.
In this class, we will discuss issues dealing with race, gender, sexuality and other sensitive topics. It is important to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable to voice their ideas. Mean-spirited and disrespectful remarks made either to the instructor or other students will not be tolerated. You are entitled to free speech and expression, and I ask you to recognize that everyone has those rights as well. I also ask you to respectfully communicate with your classmates and me.

Turn in assignments on time.
You are required to turn in each assignment at the beginning of class on the day that it is due. If you are not in class on the day the assignment is due, you should email it to me before the class begins. If you do not submit an assignment on time, I will not accept it late.

Contesting a grade
If a student wishes to contest the grade of an assignment they may contact the instructor within 48 hours of the time an assignment is handed back.

Re-Writes.
I always welcome opportunities for students to rewrite their work. Request for a rewrite must also be made within 48-hours time frame.
If you need help, ask!
I encourage students to take advantage of my office hours for questions and concerns about the course. If my scheduled office hours do not work for you, I will be happy to schedule an appointment with you for another time. I am here to help, so please do not hesitate to ask. Remember, my ability to help you will be minimal directly before an assignment is due or at the end of the semester.

Laptops and cell phones
The use of laptops in the classroom for taking notes or accessing information that contributes to our discussion is permitted. Using laptops to surf the web, check Facebook, instant message, or visit any site not pertaining to the class discussion will not be tolerated. If laptop use becomes more of a hindrance than an asset to our discussions, I reserve the right to ban their use in the classroom and/or deduct participation points for the day.

Talking on cell phones or text messaging during class will absolutely not be tolerated. Think of this class as an airplane or a movie theater and turn your phones off when you come in.

Students with disabilities
If you have registered a learning or physical disability with UMD’s Disability Support Services (http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/), please tell me by Thursday, September 6 so we can make suitable accommodations.

Excused Absences
Excused absences include illness, religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of University Authorities, and compelling circumstances beyond the student’s control.

For every medically necessary absence from class, you should make a reasonable effort to notify me in advance of the class. At the next class period, you must bring a signed note (hard copy) identifying the date of and reason for the absence, and acknowledging that the information in the note is accurate.

If you are absent on a day when a test is scheduled, a paper is due, or any other major graded event occurs, you should notify me in advance, and upon returning to class, bring documentation of the illness, signed by a health care professional.

Unexcused Absences
After two unexcused absences, I will deduct from your final grade five points for each subsequent unexcused absence.

Academic Integrity
Violations of expected academic conduct include plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, dishonesty in examinations (in-class or take-home), dishonesty in papers, work done for one course submitted to another, deliberate falsification of data, interference with other students’ work, and copyright violations. These violations are all defined in the University of Maryland’s Honor Code (http://www.jpo.umd.edu/aca/honorpledge.html). Please familiarize yourself with entirety of this code if you have not already.
When in doubt regarding appropriate academic conduct, including scholarly citations and other issues, please consult me rather than waiting for a problem to develop.

“The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html.”

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Participation: 100 points possible**
   - **In-Class Participation:** Regular participation and contributions are expected in each class sessions, and attendance is taken at the beginning of each class. Repeated late arrivals or early departures, like repeated absences, negatively affect your grade. After all, you are asked to contribute substantively to discussion in each meeting of your class, and lateness and absence – as well as unpreparedness – necessarily hinder your ability to do so. 50 points possible
   - **Group Pop Quizzes 50 points possible:** I will give 5 group pop quizzes over the semester. I will create groups in class and you all will have a limited amount of time to complete the written short answer quizzes. These quizzes will help assess completion of reading assignments and allow me to see how you are working with the material we are covering. Each quiz will individually be worth 10 points for a total of 50 points possible

2. **Research Paper 50 points possible:** This research paper will be worked on over the course of the semester. In this paper you will formulate a thesis related to a specific topic in the study of popular culture and support the thesis with appropriate evidence and argumentation. To reach a higher level of analysis in your research paper you will be working on it in a series of sections. Each section will be graded, evaluated, and count toward the overall grade for the paper. The research paper will be completed in the following sections (note: no late assignments will be accepted and you must complete each section before continuing on to the section even if you are not getting credit for it due to a late turn in).
   - **Section One:** For this section of the paper you must pick the object/piece of popular culture that you want to research and in writing tell me in a paragraph or two why you want to study it. 5 points possible
   - **Section Two:** For this section of the paper you must write and turn in the thesis statement for your paper as well as giving me an annotated bibliography of 4 sources you plan on using in your paper using Chicago Notes Style (note: one source must be an article I have assigned in the course documents and your other sources must be scholarly articles or books). This means that Wikipedia and websites are not valid sources for this section of the paper. 5 points possible
• **Section Three:** For this portion of the paper you will need to turn in the introduction of the paper with a thorough outline of the rest of your research paper. A thorough outline will show me how you plan to argue the rest of the paper, show me the sources that you plan on using and where, and hint at how you plan on concluding the paper. 10 points possible

• **Section Four:** For this section of the paper you will need to turn in a rough draft of the paper. The rough draft should be well developed at this point. 10 points possible

• **Section Five:** For this section of the paper you must make a meeting with during my scheduled office hours or by appointment to discuss your paper. Our meeting will most likely last 15 to 20 minutes and you must let me know ahead of time when you plan on meeting with me. 10 points possible

• **Section Six:** For this section of the paper you will submit your final draft for grading. The final draft should be polished, have no grammar or punctuation errors, have a clear thesis in the introduction, and have properly cited sources and formatting. 10 points possible

3. **Midterm 100 points possible:** Your midterm will be take home. It will be made available to you for a predetermined amount of time and you will have to turn it in during that time. During the midterm you will be able to use your notes from class and the readings we have covered. The format of the midterm will be written short answers. There will be a review for the midterm.

4. **Final Project: 100 points possible:**
   For the final project you will work in groups, bringing together multiple concepts, theories, and ideas we have discussed throughout the semester in creating your own piece of Critical Popular Culture! You must pick one of the following options listed below for your final project (note: final project will be presented to the class, specific requirements for the presentation and the projects will be discussed in class). As part of this project your group will need to meet with me twice during the semester, once to pitch your idea and second time to catch me up on your progress. These meeting will count as part of the overall project grade. The meetings can be during my scheduled office hours or by appointment, but you must inform me when you want to meet ahead of time.
   - **Option One:** Create a ten minute long episode of your own reality show
   - **Option Two:** Create a ten minute long romance or action movie
   - **Option Three:** Create a 10 page comic book or zine
   - **Option Four:** Write and preform live or record an original pop-song
   - **Option Five:** If your group has its own idea for another kind of popular culture you may set up a meeting with me to discuss other formats for the projects.

You will have plenty of time to complete this project, but you should be generous with your time and treat it with the seriousness that you would place on a final exam. This project is taking the place of the final for this class; as such it will be graded and taken with the utmost seriousness by your fellow classmates and I.
COURSE GRADING:
Your final grade will reflect your accumulation of X amount of points out of 350. The following scale will designate your final grade:

- **A+** 100%-97%
- **A** 96.9%-93%
- **A-** 92.9%-90%
- **B+** 89.9-87%
- **B** 86.9%-83%
- **B-** 82.9%-80%
- **C+** 79.9%-77%
- **C** 76.9%-73%
- **C-** 72.9%-70%
- **D** 69.9-60%
- **F** 59.9% and below

An A-, A, or A+ indicates excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship. A B-, B, or B+ indicates good mastery of the subject and good scholarship. A C-, C, or C+ indicates satisfactory mastery of the subject and average expected achievement. A D indicates borderline comprehension of the subject and marginal performance. An F indicates failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance.

---

COURSE CALENDAR
(The readings here are subject to change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Week 1 – Personal and Course Introductions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thurs Aug 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Welcome to Popular Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expectations and Syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Course Objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Week 2 – What is Culture?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tues Sept 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Read “A Baseline Definition of Culture”  
  [http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ianzb/courses/phi4804/culturebaseline.htm](http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ianzb/courses/phi4804/culturebaseline.htm) |
Thurs Sept 6

- Read Dr. Jharna Chatterjee “A Short Discourse on Culture”
  [http://www.now2gether.org/topic_files/A_Short_Discourse_on_Culture_SS_final_W.htm](http://www.now2gether.org/topic_files/A_Short_Discourse_on_Culture_SS_final_W.htm)
- **Section One of the Research Paper Due**

**Week 3 – What is Popular Culture & How do We Approach it?**

Tues Sept 11


Thurs Sept 13

- Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, 1981. ELMS
- **Section Two of Research Paper Due**

**Week 4 – Watching the Popular: TV, Gender, Sexuality, & Race**

Tues Sept 18


Thurs Sep 20

- **Section Three of Research Paper Due**

**Week 5 – Watching the Popular: TV, Reality, Class, & Power**

Tues Sept 25

Thurs Sept 27

**Week 6 – Reading the Popular Comics, Zines, Production & Identity**

Tues Oct 2
- **Section Four of Research Paper Due**
- **Section Five of Research Paper Due Between the Dates of Wednesday Oct. 3rd through Friday October 12th.**

Thurs Oct 4
- Zine Making Workshop

**Week 7 – Listening to the Popular Music & Community**

Tues Oct 9

Thurs Oct 11

**Week 8 – Listening to the Popular Music, Race, Gender, & Audience**

Tues Oct 16
- In-Class Movie: Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes

Thurs Oct 18
- **Review for Midterm**
- **Final Draft of Research Paper Due**
- **Take-Home Midterm Will be Emailed at a Date To Be Announced Between Friday Oct. 19th and Sunday Oct. 21**.
### Week 9 – Playing the Popular Video Games, Bodies, & Media Crossovers

**Tues Oct 23**

**Thurs Oct 25**

### Week 10 – Consuming the Popular Food, Pleasure, & Class

**Tues Oct 30**
- Sheldon, Glenn. "What's on Their Plates?: or Feeding the Hungry Mouths: Laborers, Families, and Food in the Late Twentieth Century." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 38.3 (2005), pp. 564-573. ELMS

**Thurs Nov 1**

### Week 11 – Experiencing the Popular Pornography, Labor, Nation, & The Home

**Tues Nov 6**

**Thurs Nov 8**

### Week 12 – Viewing the Popular Film, Nation, & Citizenship

**Tues Nov 13**
- In-Class Movie “Before Night Falls”
- In-Class Discussion

**Thurs Nov 15**
- In-Class Movie “Before Night Falls”
- In-Class Discussion
**Week 13 – Final Project Work & Vacation**

**Tues Nov 20**
- In-class Final Project Group Work

**Thurs Nov 22**
- No Class Thanksgiving Holiday

**Week 14 – Final Project Work**

**Tues Nov 27**
- In-class Final Project Group Work

**Thurs Nov 29**
- In-class Final Project Group Work

**Week 15 – Class Presentations of Final Project**

**Tues Dec 4**
- In-class Final Project Presentations

**Thurs Dec 6**
- In-class Final Project Presentations

**Week 16 – Class Presentations of Final Project**

**Tues Dec 11**
- In-class Final Project Presentations

**Mon. Dec. 17th Final Project Write-Ups Due In-Class from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**