USLT 498B/AMST 498M: Latino/as and U.S. Popular Culture

Instructor: Dr. Robert Chester  Office: 0132 Holzapfel Hall
Office Phone: 301-405-7621  Office Hours: By appointment
Email: rchester@umd.edu  Meets: Tues and Thurs, 2.00-3.15

Course Description
Using multiple theoretical and historical lenses, this course examines past and present issues pertaining to Latina/os and popular culture in the United States. A diverse ethnoracial constituency with a long history in the United States, Latina/os also represent the fastest growing demographic in contemporary U.S. society. This course is timely, then, in attempting to historicize and explore the political and ideological ramifications of cultural products both by and about U.S. Latina/os. Using theories drawn from cultural studies, visual culture studies, critical race theory, borderlands theory, and feminism, the class will examine multiple texts from a variety of timeframes. As we do so, we will explore such issues as representational exclusion from and inclusion in the “imagined community” of U.S. identity, transnational identifications and cultural flows, ethnoracial stereotyping and resistance to such, and intersections of Latino/a identities with aspects of class, race, sexuality, and gender. This will entail investigations of diverse cultural arenas and media, among them Hollywood cinema, art, television, music, and everyday lived experience. Students will be assessed on their participation in classroom discussions, on several short in-class and take-home assignments, and on two analytical essays of their own conceptualization.

All readings for the course are available through the Course Reserves facility on ELMS Canvas (in the Modules section).

Course Objectives
- Recognize and consider the political and ideological ramifications of popular culture forms in U.S. history and society, especially as they pertain to Latina/o populations.
- Develop a working knowledge of academic and popular conversations regarding the ways in which racialized and gendered identities within Latinidad are created in and reflected by cultural products.
- Recognize and analyze the distinct features of key theoretical approaches to popular culture and apply them to the study of cultural texts by and about U.S. Latino/as.
- Gain an awareness of the roles played by individuals and groups as audience members in “reading” (or “decoding”) popular culture texts.
- Foster and display an ability to analyze and articulately critique cultural forms such as visual media and written texts, and develop original ideas in well-written essays.

Assessment
- Grades will be calculated from a possible 500 points.
- 1) Four short assignments (25 pts each [100])
- 2) Active, insightful participation in each class discussion (100 pts)
- 3) A mid-term essay of 5-6 pages (100 pts)
- 4) A final essay of 10-12 pages (200 pts)
Grading scale for each assignment

- **A** = Demonstrates outstanding mastery of content and application of concepts in completing the assigned work. Written work is clear and free from grammatical and typographical errors, and exhibits original insight and ideas.
- **B** = Demonstrates good understanding of content and concepts in completing the assigned work. Work may contain a few unclear sentences and grammatical errors.
- **C** = Demonstrates acceptable familiarity and understanding. Writing is unclear in several places and concepts are not fully explored.
- **D** = Demonstrates only sketchy grasp of concepts and course content. Poorly written.
- **F** = Does not demonstrate understanding or application of course material and concepts. Does not adequately address the task at hand. Writing is consistently unclear.

I will provide details as each assignment approaches, and we will spend some time in class discussing the ins and outs of each particular essay or assignment. The following schedule may change slightly as we go along. I will, of course, let you know.

**Week 1: Introductions**

**Thu 1/24:**
Introductions.

**Week 2: Theorizing Popular Culture**

**Tue 1/29:**

**Thu 1/31:**

**Week 3: Critical Approaches to Race and U.S. Latino/a Identity**

**Tue 2/5:**
Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Racial Formation,” 53-76.

**Thu 2/7:**


**Week 4: Definitions and Complications**

**Tues 2/12**
Thu 2/14

**Week 5: Framing Cultural Images and Ideologies**

**Tues 2/19**

**Thu 2/21**


**Week 6: Borders**

**Tues 2/26**

**Thu 2/28**

**Film in Class:** *The Fence (La Barda)* (2010)

**Week 7: Focus on Immigration: Harvest of Empire**

**Tue 3/5:**
**Film in Class:** *Harvest of Empire* (dir. Peter Getzels and Eduardo Lopez, 2012)

**Thu 3/7:**
*Harvest of Empire* continued…

**5-PAGE MID-TERM PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

**Week 8: Central American Americans**

**Tue 3/12:**
Thu 3/14:


**Week 9: SPRING BREAK – Tue 3/19, Thurs 3/21: No Classes**

**Week 10: US Conservatism and (Anti-)Latina/o Ideologies**

Tue 3/26:


Thu 3/28:

**Week 11: Gender and Patriarchy**

Tue 4/2:

Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez, “I am Joaquin”
[http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm)

Thu 4/4:


**Film in Class:** *Chicana* (Silvia Morales, 1979)

**Week 12 – Focusing on Latina Bodies**

Tues 4/9

**Thurs 4/11**


**Week 13: Black Latino/as, African Americans, and Cultural Coalition**

**Tues 4/16**


**Thurs 4/18**


**Week 14: Individual Meetings**

**Tue 4/23:**
*Individual Meetings with Instructor to discuss final papers*

**Thu 4/25:**
*Individual Meetings with Instructor to discuss final papers*

**Week 15: Gender, Sexuality, and Latino/a Identities**

**Tue 4/30:**

**Film in Class:** *On the Downlow* (Tadeo Garcia, 2004)

**Thu 5/2:**
Film and discussion continued.
Week 16: Wrapping Up

Tues 5/7: No Class – Work on Final Papers

Thu 5/9: FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Rules, Requirements, and the Like

Participation:
Student participation is essential to maximize our exchange of ideas and get the most out of the class. It also accounts for 20% of your final grade. **Note: Simply turning up does not count as participation, but is only its prerequisite.** I expect to hear from everyone each class, and will be taking note of who is contributing and, importantly, assuming a leadership role in facilitating discussion between students. All class discussion should be conducted respectfully: there is room for all viewpoints to be raised and debated. Participation also extends to watching films, TV, and online clips, both in class and as part of homework assignments. You should give undivided attention to the screen, and all electronic devices, newspapers, etc., should be turned off and put away before the class begins (unless you have a very good reason that I have approved, I don’t wish to see laptop computers in the classroom). In order to participate effectively, you must complete all readings and viewings on time and come to class with points to make and questions to ask. The in-class assignments will also help assess which students are fulfilling the requirements of the course and which are not. **The syllabus is the guide, unless you hear otherwise, follow the syllabus to keep up.**

Papers and format:
I will distribute information on the specifics of each paper as we go along. However, there are some matters of format that apply to each of them. All papers should be **double-spaced**, written in **12 point font, and include page numbers and a title.** All papers must include a works cited page, and must be formatted to the conventions of a recognized academic citation style, preferably Chicago or MLA.

Unexcused absences and lateness:
Absences mean missing a significant portion of the material. Non-attendance means that students will not be eligible to receive participation points for that particular class. Students should also be on time, which means being seated and ready to begin by 2 o’clock. It is students’ responsibility to make up missed classes by borrowing notes from a classmate.

Excused absences:
Satisfactory documentation is required in order for an absence to be considered excused, and it must be presented in a timely fashion (the class period that you return, ideally). Please make a copy of your documentation for me to keep. You are responsible for making up missed material, assignments, and so on.

Late Work
Written work that is late without good reason will be penalized at the rate of 5 points a day (weekends count as one day). If you are absent when an assignment is due, you must e-mail me that assignment by class time and bring a hard copy to the next class to get credit. Late work may
be submitted via email in between classes, with a hard copy again due at the next class. Extensions on assignment deadlines can, in extenuating circumstances, be agreed with me before the due date.

**Additional Notes, disabilities, etc:**
Students with disabilities should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course. Students with scheduling conflicts due to university activities, or with religious or cultural dates to observe, should also speak with instructor early in the semester.

**Academic Integrity:**
The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. The plagiarism policy specifies that all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. Acts of academic dishonesty will be referred to the UMCP Student Honor Council. Penalties for cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty can be severe. All members of the University Community share the responsibility to challenge and make known acts of apparent academic dishonesty.

All the best for a productive and successful semester, Rob.