



northern *State* university

Course Number and Title: Popular Culture and Society
SOC-492-N02 MWF 2:00-2:50pm, NMJ 338
Term: Fall 2015

Instructor Information

Instructor Name: Kristi Brownfield
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Office: TC 354
Office Hours: MW: 12PM-1:45PM
TTH: 12PM-2PM
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Other times available by appointment

Course Information

Catalog Description: Human social life is portrayed in and produced through popular culture media such as film, television, books, or video games. The course examines key concepts of the studies of popular culture by examining how is portrayed in media and shaped by status categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Students are introduced to content analysis and use it to produce research about contemporary media trends.

Course Prerequisites: None

Required Textbooks and Materials:

Kidd, Dustin. 2014. Pop Culture Freaks: Identity, Mass Media, and Society. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Response Time Expectations

E-mail Response Times: M-F: Within 12 hours
Weekends: Within 24 hours

Grading Response Times: 24-48 hours

Course Goals and Objectives

The goals for this course are:

Students will be able to: (a) demonstrate an understanding of basic sociological terms, concepts, and theories for analyzing popular culture; (b) apply fundamental principles of social scientific

investigation to the study of popular culture; (c) develop communication skills by participating in oral presentations to the class; and (d) interact with peers to complete collaborative projects.

The objectives for this course are:

Popular culture surrounds us. It has been labeled different things; dismissed as trivial entertainment, a tool of deception that creates couch potatoes and fashion victims concerned only for consuming, and even as an agent for social change. In this course we will take a step back and look at (mostly American) popular culture sociologically to understand how ideas and ideologies are transmitted, how popular culture is contested terrain, and the subcultures that are devoted to popular culture. We will investigate popular culture from both sides of the equation: production/distribution and consumption, with an emphasis on understanding the themes and meanings present in the media we consume.

Each time I teach this class, I do so with a particular “theme” in mind. See if you can guess the theme for this semester!

Instructional Methods

This is a writing intensive class. Class time will be spent in discussion, during which we concern ourselves with understanding the readings and with learning how to “read” and analyze all sorts of other things, including snapshots, ads, fashion, grocery store shelves, rock videos, public performances, social norms, blockbuster movies, and Starbucks—to name just a few!

In order to be prepared for class, thus, you will need to spend your time outside of class doing a lot more than just reading. You will need to be writing and also be “out-in-the-world” doing some data collection of your own. You will also need a ways to take pictures that can be shared with the class. A camera, or a cell phone equipped with a camera, will do nicely.

Electronics are welcome and, on some days, will be encouraged in this class. However, your electronics use should be *related* to this class and should not be disruptive to other students. This means please turn off cell phone ringers. Do not play music or videos. No headphones. Be respectful of the classroom as a learning environment. Please note that if you’re being disruptive or I notice your inattention you will be required to write a thousand-word essay about a sociological concept of my choosing.

Attendance Policy

The attendance policy for this course is: I expect students to attend class every day and to come to class on Mondays having reviewed the assigned readings for that week, which we will discuss as the week progresses. I keep track of attendance, participation in classroom discussions, and visits to my office, all of which I take into consideration if your final grade is borderline. The more often you are here, participate, and come see me if needed, the more likely I am to raise a borderline grade. The more frequently you are absent without telling me why, or you come in late, the less likely I am to raise a borderline grade.

Do not be late for class. Being late is disruptive and disrespectful. If you are not on time, you will not be recorded on the attendance sheet and will receive an absence. If you have a legitimate concern about being on time regularly, please come talk to me as soon as possible!

All students are required to complete the online “Attendance Confirmation” through WebAdvisor at the start of the fall and spring semester. No Financial Aid refunds will be processed until Attendance Confirmation is completed and registrations will be cancelled if not done by Friday, September 4, 2015.

Tuition and fees must be paid in full by Friday, September 4, 2015.

Please contact the Finance Office in the Krikac Administration Building, (605)626-2566 or email nsustudentaccounts@northern.edu if you have any questions.

Academic Success Support/Starfish

As your instructor, I am personally committed to supporting YOUR academic success in this course. For that reason, if you demonstrate any academic performance or behavioral problems which may impede your success, I will personally discuss and attempt to resolve the issue with you. I may also refer your case using Starfish, which is an online student success program. Starfish will allow me to send you various performance updates, concerns, and referrals. If you receive a “flag” in Starfish, please come see me or seek assistance and support from your advisor or other resource staff member on campus. Please make sure to update your Starfish profile at the beginning of each semester (including a photo and up-to-date contact information). The Starfish link is located in D2L at the very top left corner of the homepage. My goal is to make your learning experience in this course as meaningful and successful as possible.

If you have questions regarding Starfish, please contact the Student Success Center at 605.626.2633 or studentsuccess@northern.edu.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct run contrary to the purposes of higher education and will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, copying answers or work done by another student (either on an exam or an assignment), allowing another student to copy from you, and using unauthorized materials during an exam. Northern State University's policy and procedures on cheating and academic dishonesty as outlined in the Northern State University Student Handbook apply to this course. The consequences for cheating and academic dishonesty in this class include receiving no or reduced credit for the assignment and failing the course. Students may also fail the course after receiving failing or reduced grades for affected assignments.

Above all, be sure that everything you write is in your own words. When you do use the words and ideas of others, cite them properly. Passing other's words and ideas off as your own is dishonest and the essence of plagiarism. Stick to your primary sources, and your analysis of them, and you'll be fine. See Chapter 3 of Storey and the Northern State University Student

Handbook regarding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. The consequence for cheating and academic dishonesty in this class is failing the course

Evaluation and Assignments

Weekly Analyses: 10 points each x 10 weeks = 100 points
 Group Project and Presentation: 100 points
 Critique Portfolio: 25 points each x 4 critiques = 100 points
 Midterm Essay: 100 points
 Final Essay: 100 points
 Total points possible: 500 points

Grading Scale:

450 and above: A
 400-449: B
 350-399: C
 300-349: D
 299 and below: F

Midterm and Final Essays:

There will be two short take-home essay exams in the course. Exams should be typed using 12-point, double-spaced font. The short answer questions will cover material from the readings, lectures, class discussions, movies, or online materials and *will be cumulative*. You are expected to do your own work! No blocks of quotes from the course materials! No use of Wikipedia! You will be given the option to either take the “traditional” written midterm/final exams OR take a “creative” option. More information (and past examples) about this option will be available as we get closer to the dates of the exams.

Midterm essay: 10/09/2015

Final essay: TBD (either December 7 or during the scheduled final exam period)

Weekly Analyses:

Students are expected to finish all the readings before class and participate in the discussion of the reading materials in class. In addition to in class discussions, the readings will be posted weekly on a forum in D2L. Everyone is expected to post a 200-word response analyzing aspects of the readings in relation to assigned films or television shows. You are required to post analyses at least ten times out of the twelve weeks of readings. Each week’s readings and prompt will be posted on Friday mornings and you will have a week until the next Friday (9am) to post a response. These will be semi-directed assignments. For example, your assignment may be something like this:

Week 13: Cybercultures

PCF CH8

To watch [PICK TWO]: *Virtuosity* (1995), *Grandma’s Boy* (2006), *The Guild* season 1 (2007)

Analyze: Discuss the ways in which technology is represented within these films/webseries.

How does the ability to use technology interact with the presentation of self for the characters?

You will always be given three options to choose from and you will be required to pick two of the three. You may also choose to pick one and write about an outside option; however, if you choose this, you must complete 250 words for that week's assignment and include a brief discussion of how your outside pick fits both the weekly prompt and the assigned option you chose.

These assignments are read and will be given comments to help you improve your analytical abilities but will be solely graded on the following criteria:

- (a) Does the writing assignment meet the required length?
- (b) Does the writing assignment address the prompt?

If both (a) and (b) are complete, you will receive the full ten points. If, for example, (b) is complete but you only write 180 words, you will receive partial credit. If (a) is complete but your writing does not address the topic, you will receive partial credit. You will receive a zero for weeks in which the assignment is not completed.

At least two of the three options every week will be available on Netflix. There is a Netflix streaming account for this class; however, due to Netflix's limitations, only two people may stream at the same time in different locations. So I would ask that you please be responsible in your use of the class Netflix account. That includes:

- (a) Not sharing the account information with anyone not in the class
- (b) Only using the account for class-related viewing (and I do check the past viewing logs to see if anyone is watching things not assigned)
- (c) If you have your own Netflix account, please use that instead

The class Netflix account information is:
 Username: kristi.brownfield@northern.edu
 Password: SOCNSU492

Analysis Papers:

You are required to turn in a portfolio of four critiques of popular culture artifacts. Each critique should be 500-750 words long and should analyze the artifact looking one of the following: a) the context of production and distribution, b) meanings, themes, and ideologies present in the artifact, or c) the context of consumption. You will be given specific prompts for each critique to follow and an example critique will be provided on D2L.

Critique One: Due 09/11/2015
Big Hero 6

Critique Two: Due 10/23/2015
How to Get Away With Murder, "Pilot" (season 1, episode 1) and "It's All Her Fault" (season 1, episode 2)

Critique Three: Due 11/06/2015
Beyoncé by Beyoncé

Critique Four: Due 11/23/2015

Red Sonja Volume 1: Queen of the Plagues, Gail Simone and Walter Geovani

Group Project and Presentation:

The majority of what we will talk about in class will be based in American popular culture. You will be asked to branch out in a semester-long group project on popular culture around the world. Groups of 2-3 students will work together to research a country in a different region of the world (South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, or Australia) and make a PowerPoint presentation of fifteen to twenty minutes in the last three weeks of class. I will allow only one country per group on a first-come, first-serve basis (i.e., the first group to claim “Ireland” is the only group allowed to discuss popular culture from Ireland). I will also only allow two European countries. The presentation should be on a piece of popular culture present (for example Japanese animation, or anime) within that country; topics you should touch on in your talk should be things like:

The origin and history of the artifact (i.e., the first anime ever made and how anime became popular)

The cultural ideologies present in famous pieces of popular culture (i.e., what the movie *Akira* says about Japan in the 1980s)

Images and themes about race, class, gender, and sexuality within popular culture (i.e., how are women constructed within anime)

Essentially, this presentation should demonstrate **WHAT** the cultural artifact is, **WHY** it is considered a piece of *popular* culture, and **HOW** the artifact reflects the ideologies, signs, symbols, attitudes, anxieties, beliefs, and so forth of the culture that produced it. You will also be required to turn in a one page summary that details exactly what each group member did to research and prepare for this presentation. This paper must be signed by each group member to receive credit. Be sure to work together on this as everyone in the group will be receiving the same grade!

I ask that students turn their work in digitally through D2L. If you have issues uploading or accessing D2L, you may also email an attached copy of your work to [kristi.brownfield@northern.edu]. All work should be sent by 9:00am on the day that it is due. Assignments should be turned in as PDF or Word (.doc or .docx) files. No other formats will be accepted.

Student Expectations

It is vitally important that you play an active role in the learning process. As a result, your participation in class discussions threads is required.

The 4 P’s of student involvement in class are:

1. Preparation (read the assigned material)
2. Presence (routinely log in to D2L and attend class)
3. Promptness (post thoughts, ideas, comments, etc. regularly) and
4. Participation (get actively involved).

The student is expected to participate in the course via e-mail exchanges (or other communication) with the instructor, by reading the assigned readings, submitting comments to

the discussion forums, submitting assignments, and completing assignments in a timely fashion. Students are expected to check their e-mails daily and the announcements at least every 48 hours.

ADA Statement

ADA Statement: Northern State University is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for students with physical, learning, mental health and/or other types of disabilities. Accommodations for students with disabilities are made only in consultation with the Director of Disability Services. If you believe you have a disability, either temporary or permanent, requiring accommodation in this or any course, contact Doris Stusiak (contact information below). NSU can show you how to secure proper documentation and help you arrange appropriate accommodations with your instructors as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Doris Stusiak, Director of Disability Services
Student Center Room 240 – 2nd Floor
Phone 605-626-2371
Fax 605-626-3399
Email Doris.Stusiak@northern.edu

Please contact Ms. Stusiak (2371) or email Doris.Stusiak@northern.edu if you have any questions.

Diversity Statement

Northern State University strives to build an academic community of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who are committed to sharing diverse ideas in a mutually respectful environment. We value open discourse and consideration of multiple perspectives on issues of regional, national, and international importance, in which individuals are free to express their points of view. Our goal is a diverse learning community with equal opportunity for all. During the semester students will be able to share thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about their own experiences. We will also read articles and books that will offer academic perspectives. The differences in these perspectives will add depth and richness to this course. Please be respectful of those differences. Here are some ground rules for discussion I expect people to follow in class:

1. Acknowledge your privilege! We all have advantages and information we have been given that colors our perceptions of the world and how the world works. Understand and acknowledge those privileges, from white privilege, to male privilege, to class privilege, to able-bodied privilege, to heterosexual privilege, and many other types of privileges.
2. Be willing to listen to the perspective of others – *especially* when they come from different backgrounds and experiences.
3. Acknowledge that discrimination – both individual and institutional – exists. Acknowledge that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and other such prejudices exist and affect the lives of people every day.
4. We do not blame victims for their experiences of oppression.
5. We do not demean or put down anyone in this class for their experiences.

6. Anecdotes are not the best form of evidence to use for your claims. Anecdotes are a *type* of evidence and should be judged alongside other evidence such as scientific research or collected testimonials. If your claim begins with “I saw someone once” or “I knew someone who” be ready to back your claim up with other evidence.
7. The classroom will be a safe space to discuss issues that are often sensitive and the cause of strong emotions. If a student within the class makes a comment they do not wish repeated outside of the classroom, please preface your remarks saying so and the class will agree to the student’s wishes.

Freedom in Learning

Under Board of Regents and University policy student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the academic dean administratively in charge of the class to initiate a review of the evaluation.

Tentative Course Schedule

The tentative schedule for this course is outlined below. Please note, the instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule at any time. PCF: Pop Culture Freaks

Week 1 (Aug 26, 26, 27): Introduction to Pop Culture

Read: PCF CH1

To Watch: She’s All That (1999, Netflix), School Daze (1988, Netflix), Brooklyn Nine-Nine season 1 episodes 1 (“Pilot”), 8 (“Old School”), 14 (“The Ebony Falcon”)

Analyze: Discuss how the two options you chose to watch reflect the decade (e.g., the 1980s, 1990s, 2010s) that produced them.

Week 2 (Aug 31, Sept 2, 4): Doing Sociological Research

Read: Maasik, Solomon: Popular Signs, or Everything You Always Knew About American Culture (but Nobody Asked)

To Watch: Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988, Netflix), Avalon High (2010, Netflix), Power Rangers (1993, Netflix) season 1 episode 1 (“Day of the Dumpster), episode three (“High Five), episode eight (“Switching Places”)

Analyze: If you were to create a research project on change in children’s film and television over time, what research questions might you ask? Why would you pick those questions? How might those questions be formulated in feminist ways?

Week 3 (Sept 9, 11): Reading and Interpreting “Signs” of Popular Culture

Read: Goewey: “Careful, You May Run Out of Planet”: SUVs and the Exploitation of the American Myth

Due: Critique #1, Sept 11

Week 4 (Sept 14, 16, 18): American Idols and American Icons

Read: Wasko: Corporate Disney in Action
PCF CH7

Week 5 (Sept 21, 23, 25): Race and Ethnicity

Read: PCF CH2

Fung: Looking for my Penis [<http://www.richardfung.ca/index.php/?articles/looking-for-my-penis-1991/>]

Browse: Racebending [<http://www.racebending.com/v4/>]

Week 6 (Sept 28, 30, Oct 2): Social Power

Read: PCF CH3

Week 7 (Oct 5, 7, 9): Gender

Read: PCF CH4

Tannen: There is No Unmarked Woman

[<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/nyt062093.htm>]

Collection of Twilight parodies and spoofs [<http://www.squidoo.com/twilight-spoof>], Ladies, Don't Let Anyone Tell You You're Not Awesome by Sarah Rees Brennan

[<http://sarahtales.livejournal.com/188663.html>]

Due: Midterm Exam (Oct 9)

Week 8 (Oct 14, 16): Sexuality

PCF CH5

Week 9 (Oct 19, 21, 23): Ability

PCF CH6

Due: Critique #2 (Oct 23)

Week 10 (Oct 26, 28, 30): The Body**Week 11 (Nov 2, 4, 6): Crime and Punishment**

Due: Critique #3 (Nov 6)

Week 12 (Nov 9, 13): Subcultures and Countercultures

PCF CH8

Read: Mullens: Get a Life? [<http://cinema.usc.edu/archivedassets/097/15727.pdf>]

Browse: Fandom_Wank [http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/]

Week 13 (Nov 16, 18, 20): Group Country Presentations

Week 14 (Nov 23): Country Group Presentations, Due: Critique #4 (Nov 23)

Week 15 (Nov 30, Dec 2, 4) Group Country Presentations

Week 16 (Dec 7) TBD (Presentations if needed)

Due: Final Exam TBD (either Dec 7 or during the scheduled final exam period)