

Communication 357/557 Syllabus: Media and Popular Culture (or, Media/Popular/Culture)

Summer 2015

From June 15 - July 10

Course website: D2L

Instructor: Alex Ingersoll - alex.ingersoll@uwsp.edu

Course Overview and Objectives

Popular culture is based on conditions of cultural mediation that have only become widespread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the rise of mass literacy and electronic broadcast media. These forms of mediation—books, newspapers, electronic, and digital media—have come about through intensely commercial processes associated with increased corporate conglomeration and for-profit communication. This course is an introduction to and survey of various methods to analyze the field of popular culture, not only as culture created “by the people” or as culture created to “manipulate” people, but as a space in which meaning and the very possibilities for understanding reality and the world are produced. Popular culture is the location where the reality of the people is made, understood, and potentially transformed.

Popular culture does not just shape our sense of the world through its representations but also through the forms of its technologies and how those technologies shape our practices of communication and daily living. Popular culture re-makes our sense of what is real in the world, which in turn affects what we think is possible and desirable as well as who we think we are, what we want, and how we are connected to the spaces in which we live. This means that when we criticize popular cultural representations and technologies we are engaged in the effort to redefine what kinds of media we want to share with others as we attempt to build the world together. Therefore, this course requires you to analyze the world from the perspective that it was created by us—that humans have made the world the way it is. By the end of this class, students will demonstrate:

- An understanding of a variety of theoretical positions that inform the study of popular culture and make connections between popular culture and larger social struggles and changes.
- The application of these theories to one or more “texts” of popular culture.
- An understanding that media, technology, and popular culture not simply as entertainment, but as the building blocks of identity and the social construction of reality.
- An understanding of some of the most contemporary debates about popular culture and cultural theory and why they matter.

Required Texts and Materials

- Moore, A. & Gibbons, D. 1986. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics.
- Other materials will be available online (D2L or web links).

Grade Breakdown

A (100-93.5%) A- (93.4-89.5%) B+ (89.4-86.5%) B (86.4-83.5%) B- (83.4-79.5%) C+ (79.4-76.5%)
C (76.4-73.5%) C- (73.4-69.5%) D+ (69.4-66.5%) D (66.4-59.5%) F (<59.4%)

Keywords Assignment:	20%	Ongoing
Essay 1:	20%	By June 26
Essay 2:	20%	By July 3
Final Project:	40%	By July 10

1. Keywords Assignment (15%)

-This will be an ongoing assignment that will require you to develop working definitions for concepts and terms that appear in the readings and other class materials. I'll provide additional information on D2L regarding this assignment.

2. Two Short Essays (20% each)

-These essays should be at least 1,000 words and should use one or several of the paradigms discussed in class to discuss and analyze a media "object" (e.g., TV show, movie, music, video game, anything that can be thought of that mediates human relationships). Each of these essays can be completed AT ANY TIME up until their due date and should speak to the readings, examples, and debates of the class.

3. Final Project (50% Total)

-For your final research paper, you will select a specific phenomenon, text, institution, problem, etc. and a significant conceptual question from the course readings that your topic relates to and extends. You will develop a very short proposal of your paper ahead of the final due date.

Your paper will be written in multiple stages:

1. Proposal and Thesis (10%) July 3
2. Final Paper (30%) July 10, Noon

General Requirements

There are a number of expectations that are common to each class at UWSP but I want to emphasize:

1. If you plagiarize the work of others, you will fail the course. Please be aware of what plagiarism entails (<http://www.plagiarism.org>). See me if you have any questions.
2. Creating an environment of mutual respect is *paramount* to successful work. While difference of opinions and vigorous debate are highly encouraged, you will be expected to refrain from using disparaging remarks (e.g., sexist, racist, homophobic language). The material presented in class may challenge you and I expect you to approach these materials in the spirit of the wider educational environment. The selection of these materials are intended to spark a healthy discussion and I expect mature and respectful interactions. All reactions will be welcomed in class and respected, and they will be received in the spirit of extending discussion rather than forestalling it.
3. Late assignments are **not accepted**. Please don't be surprised by technical difficulties (my computer crashed, printer ran out of ink, not enough batteries, etc.). Don't wait until the last minute to do your work. If you do, you will be rushed, your work will suffer and you won't have time to deal with the *inevitable* computer issues.

Communicating with me: The best way to talk to me is via email. I'm usually quick to respond but be sure to ask questions about assignments more than 24 hours before they are due. If you are having problems completing the assignments, you need to communicate the issues with me at least 24 hours before the assignment is due so we may lay out alternative courses of action.

Finally, this is a reading and writing based class. I realize that it's easy to get lost or slip by without doing the readings. Please try to stay on top of the work, even if you don't think you're right or some of the readings confused you (some are quite difficult and their "meaning" is contested even by "experts" - if you think you're understanding everything clearly I'd suggest reading more closely). If you're confused by something, you're probably not the only one. *Engaging with a challenge is a GOOD thing!*

A Note on the Readings:

We will be reading a number of secondary readings of theorists and theories as well as the primary texts of those theorists themselves. Some of the readings assigned in this class are difficult primarily because they use a specialized language in order to critique popular culture. This is not designed to torture you but is instead designed to get you to think about popular culture in terms outside of what you consider to be "common sense." As a result, you should NEVER give up on the readings because they "don't make sense." They are selected to challenge you.

Community Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

UW-Stevens Point values a safe, honest, respectful, and inviting learning environment. In order to ensure that each student has the opportunity to succeed, we have developed a set of expectations for all students and instructors. This set of expectations is known as the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, and it is intended to help establish a positive living and learning environment at UWSP. Read more here: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Pages/rightsandresponsibilities.aspx>

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education in general and UWSP in particular. Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is taken very seriously. Don't do it! The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. For more information, see the UWSP "Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures" section of the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, Chapter 14, which can be accessed here: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Assistive Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyInfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way that I can. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here: <http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

This syllabus is subject to change as my opinions change and evolve, especially with your help and guidance.

Course Schedule

WEEK ONE

Cultural Analysis: An Overview

- 6/15: -Introduction and overview of class
-Brian L. Ott & Robert L. Mack, "Cultural Analysis," p. 134-161.

Mass Culture and Popular Culture

- 6/16: -Dominic Strinati, "Mass Culture and Popular Culture," p. 2-44

What is Popular Culture?

- 6/17: -John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. Section 1: What is Popular Culture? p. 1-14.
-Raymond Williams, "'Culture' and 'Masses,'" p. 25-32.
-John Storey, *Cultural Theory...* Section 3: Culturalism & Stuart Hall, p. 37-57.
-Stuart Hall - "Encoding/Decoding," (from *Media and Cultural Studies Keyworks*) 137-145.

The Frankfurt School

- 6/18: -John Storey, *Cultural Theory...* Section 4: Marxisms, p. 59-91.
-Horkheimer and Adorno - "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," p. 3-19.
-Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 96-102.

WEEK TWO

Ideology

- 6/22: -Croteau and Hoynes, Selections from "Media and Ideology."
-Louis Althusser - "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus," (from *Media and Cultural Studies Keyworks*) 80-86.

Culture and Communication

- 6/23: -James Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication" p. 13-36.
-Marshall McLuhan, Selections from *Essential McLuhan*, p. 222-260 (optional: 146-177).

WEEK SEVEN: Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes?

- 6/24: -Moore and Gibbons - *Watchmen* (books I-XII)
-Jamie Hughes, "Who Watches the Watchmen?": Ideology and "Real World" Superheroes

- 6/26: -Essay 1 DUE

WEEK THREE

Consumer Society and Mass Consumers

- 6/29:** -Guy Debord, Selections from *Commodity as Spectacle*, p. 109-114.
-John Fiske, "Popular Discrimination" 215-222.
-Dick Hebdige, Selections from *Subculture*, 355-371.

Identities and Articulation

- 6/30:** -Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," p. 227-239.
-Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," p. 18-22.
-Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" p. 285-293.

Technology, Progress, Convenience

- 7/1:** -Jennifer Slack and Greg Wise - Selections from *Culture and Technology: A Primer*.
-Jay Caspian Kang, "Should Reddit Be Blamed for the Spreading of a Smear?" 1-10.
- 7/3:** -Essay 2 DUE
-Thesis and Proposal DUE

WEEK FOUR

(New) Media

- 7/6:** -Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects," p. 1-22.
-Geoffrey B. Pingree and Lisa Gitelman, "What's New about New Media?" p. xi-xxii.
-The Onion - America's Finest News Source, "Print is Dead At 1,803," 1-3.
-Martin Fackler, "In High-Tech Japan, the Fax Machines Roll On," p. 1-3.
-Steven Kurutz, "The New Audio Geeks," p. 1-5.

Audience Interactivity

- 7/7:** -Mark Andrejevic, "iMedia: The Case of Interactive TV," p. 135-60.
-Gilles Deleuze - "Postscript on the Societies of Control,"
<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/netzkritik/societyofcontrol.html>
-Charles Duhigg, "How Companies Learn Your Secrets," p. 1-15.
-DEADLINE FOR VISUAL ESSAY

- 7/10:** -FINAL PAPERS DUE BY NOON