

CMN 3270: Communication & Popular Culture (3 credits)

Fall 2019, Section 001

Coleman Hall 1771

T/TH 9:30-10:45

Instructor: Dr. Marita Gronnvoll

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1:00-2:00; Wednesday, 12:00-2:00; Thursday 8:30-9:30; and by appointment

Catalog Description

This course will examine texts normally not thought of as persuasive in an effort to examine how popular culture, as manifested through various forms of discourse, exerts influence on various audiences.

Course Overview

This course examines popular culture and the emergence of mass culture in the United States. It starts from the premise that popular culture, far from being a frivolous or debased alternative to “high culture”, is in fact an important site of popular expression, social instruction, and cultural conflict, and thus deserves critical attention. We examine theoretical texts that help us to “read” popular culture, even as we study specific forms and artifacts of popular culture: from television shows to Hollywood movies, graphic novels to advertisements, and popular music to fiction. Throughout the course, we ground what we call “culture” in political, economic, and social contexts. We pay special attention to the ways popular culture mediates and produces pleasure, disgust, satisfaction, and fear and to how popular culture influences and is influenced by political and social structures.

Objectives

- To examine the history of studying popular culture
- To explore different understandings of popular culture as a concept
- To investigate popular culture as understood by the communication discipline
- To discuss how culture and communication are related to the social and political contexts of contemporary life
- To gain a respect for and understanding of popular culture texts as barometers of social life
- To critically analyze the influences of popular culture in everyday life

Policies

The Department of Communication Studies has published a document outlining student standards and expectations. All students are expected to be familiar with this document. It can be accessed by following this link: <http://www.eiu.edu/commstudies/standards.php>

Email Policy: Email is a crucial tool for us to be able to communicate regarding class activities. Thus, there are expectations we all need to adhere to.

- 1) It is a University requirement that you check your email EVERYDAY. This is the only way that I, and the University community, have to communicate with you outside of class. Missing an important class announcement because you failed to check your email is not an excuse for missing deadlines or changes in class activities or assignments.
- 2) Check your syllabus for answers to questions before you email me. If I do not respond to an email it is likely because the information you seek is on the syllabus.
- 3) Because professionalism is a quality that employers claim is often lacking in college graduates, we will use this class to hone and refine these qualities. I expect all electronic communication to be civil, courteous, and professional. I will not respond to emails that do not include an appropriate greeting with MY name (Dr. or Professor Gronnvoll, not Mrs., Miss, or Ms.) and a sign-off with YOUR name. An email is not the same as a text or a tweet so please don't treat it that way.

Preparation: The success of this class is based in part on your willingness and ability to be a motivated self-starter by studying your texts, diligently working through the PowerPoint lectures, and managing your time with regard to written assignments, quizzes, and exams. It is important that you carefully and thoughtfully complete all reading assignments prior to the beginning of the lecture. You will be administered quizzes to determine your level of preparation.

Readings: The readings for this course vary in length, difficulty, and origination. Due to the diverse nature of our texts, there will be some day-to-day variation in terms of your reading load. Some of the essays are complex and will likely challenge you – they are not included to frustrate you – they have been chosen because they are strong examples of the positions we are discussing, and they lay out arguments in ways that are especially nuanced and sophisticated. Do not be unduly concerned if you don't "get it" the first time around. Some of these concepts require re-reading and discussion before you'll begin to fully grasp the author's thought process.

Our activities in class will be based upon my assumption that you have read and thought about the material. With this in mind, you should plan to give yourself plenty of time to read carefully, take notes appropriately, and be prepared to ask questions when necessary. You are expected to complete and process, to the best of your ability, any assigned readings before coming to class and to bring that reading to class with you. Do not give up on a reading just because you're feeling challenged by it; read the entire assignment and come to class with questions. I cannot stress enough that you are required to read for this class. **IF YOU DO NOT READ, PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS.** It's a waste of my time and yours.

Required Readings

- Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure, *Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture*
- Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad is Good for You*
- Additional readings uploaded to D2L

Academic Integrity: Learning and teaching take place best in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and openness. All members of the academic community are responsible for supporting freedom and openness through rigorous personal standards of honesty and fairness. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the very purpose of the university and diminish the value of an education. Academic honesty is particularly at issue for on-line courses where students are basically operating on the honor system.

Standard I. Eastern students observe the highest principles of academic integrity and support a campus environment conducive to scholarship.

Violations of this standard:

- A. Conduct in subversion of academic standards, such as cheating on examinations, *plagiarism*, collusion, misrepresentation or falsification of data.
- B. Theft or the unauthorized possession of examinations; alteration, theft, or destruction of the academic work of others, or academic records, library materials, laboratory materials, or other University equipment or property related to instructional matters or research.
- C. Submitting work previously presented in another course unless specifically permitted by the instructor.
- D. Conduct which disrupts the academic environment; disruption in classes, faculty offices, academic buildings, or computer facilities.
- E. Complicity with others in violations of this standard.

It just isn't worth it not to do your own work. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you will fail the class. Why take the chance?

Class Climate: The types of issues we will discuss in this class will, at times, be controversial. Some of you will undoubtedly have strong reactions to some of our readings and issues—strong reactions are not discouraged. However, the ways in which reactions get framed and presented must be respectful and civil. In order for us all to glean the most from this course, we must create an environment in which individuals feel comfortable speaking their minds and relaying their experiences. Constructive criticism and responses are welcome (and expected). Disrespect of any kind—including discriminatory speech that creates a hostile environment with respect to race, sex, gender, sexuality, national origin, age, religion, or ability—cannot be tolerated.

Texting, IM'ing, Social Media and stuff you know you shouldn't be doing during class:

Electronic devices such as cell phones, laptop computers, and iPods have transformed our lives in many pervasive and positive ways. But, they have also become a serious issue in the classroom. Texting, surfing the Internet (i.e, Facebook, downloading music), and listening to iPods shows great disrespect for me and for your fellow students who are distracted by this conduct. In keeping with this climate of respect, **please turn off all phones and iPods (or similar devices) before class begins. If you take notes on a laptop, I expect you to show**

respect for me and your classmates by not surfing the Internet or cruising Facebook during class.

Grade disputes: There are times when students receive a grade that they genuinely believe to be in error and/or unfair. Should this occur, there is a strict procedure that must be followed. First, we will abide by the “**24-hour rule.**” This means that after you’ve received the grade, you must reflect upon it for 24 hours before you attempt to e-mail me or talk to me about your grade. Second, after 24 hours have passed, you must e-mail me to request an appointment to talk to me on-line about your grade.

720-800=A

640-719=B

560-639=C

480-559=D

0-479=F

After one week all grades are final!

A Note about Grades: I realize that grades are a high priority for most students. Please be aware of where you stand throughout the semester. Do not wait until the last few days of the semester and then suddenly have a panic attack because your grade is not where you thought it would be. Once the semester is over, it’s over, and no more points will be allotted. I will not accept appeals for more points, or to be “bumped up” to the next letter grade. I do not curve grades.

Students with Special Needs: Students with special needs (as documented by the Office of Disability Services) should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester in order to arrange any necessary assistance.

The Student Success Center: Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Assignments

Active Participation: This course will be a challenging one and will benefit students who are motivated to read, write, and engage in discussion. Merely attending class is not the same as actively participating. If you attend everyday but rarely engage in the materials in a way that is responsive to others in the class, you will earn a poor participation grade by the end of the semester. Likewise, if you are not in class, you certainly cannot engage our discussions fully. So, come to class **PREPARED** – meaning having read and ready to speak about what you have read in an engaged manner. Please speak out, speak often, and speak intelligently. But if you *haven’t* read, you forfeit your right to participate in the discussion for the day. **200 points**

Because participation is so crucial for the success of this class, there are two different scores that go to your ultimate participation grade. They are broken down as follows:

Weekly Journal Entries: Each weekend, you will have an opportunity to write a journal entry that connects concepts we have discussed in class to examples of popular culture texts that you have consumed for that week. You will complete 5 journal entries for the semester, and your journal will be due to the D2L Dropbox on Monday. It is up to you when you complete your journal entries, but you *must* complete five. Please keep track of where you are so that you always know how many entries you have left to complete. Please note: The Dropbox for each week will begin accepting entries on Friday afternoon and will stop accepting entries on Monday at midnight. 5 entries @ 20 points each, total **100 points**.

In-class participation: Although I do not have an attendance policy, it is to your ultimate benefit to be present in class every day. Your in-class participation points are based on your contribution to class discussion, your regular class attendance, and your respectful behavior to your classmates and to me (e.g., giving others your full attention, not texting or playing around on-line during class, etc.). These points are given entirely at my discretion and are not subject to dispute at the end of the semester. **100 points**

Reading Quizzes: Most weeks there will be a reading quiz delivered in class. These quizzes are designed to encourage you to keep up with your reading. Please do not contact me prior to class to ask if there will be a quiz in order to determine whether or not it's "worth it" to come to class. It's always worth it. **(11 @ 10 points/ea., lowest score dropped, total 100 points)**

Unit Response papers: These 3-5 page papers will react to the readings and class discussion we've had during the corresponding unit. "A" quality papers engage in higher-level thinking, making connections between readings, discussing the ways in which the readings disagree with each other (if they do), finding connections between readings and class discussions, and make applications to issues in the world. I expect you to write about every reading and film during the unit, and I expect you to relate some theme that stretches across the readings to some real world issue. Please note: Simply writing one paragraph and filling the rest of the page with "packing peanuts" (e.g., big heading, lots of white space) will earn a zero for the assignment, no matter how insightful that paragraph is. You are required to write two papers for any two units of your choice (e.g., fandom, TV, film advertising, etc). **(2 due @ 50 points/ea., total 100 points)**

Leading Class Discussion: At the end of the second week of class, you will sign up for one day to lead class discussion with a group. You will submit to me **at least one day in advance** (NOT midnight in an e-mail attachment!) a comprehensive outline of your presentation plan, and a list of discussion questions that you plan to use. ***You will be expected to draw on additional research for your presentation, and include those sources in a bibliography attached to your outline.*** Your goal is to educate the class in a way that will hold their interest. To that end, you must create a multi-media presentation **not** read from a wordy PowerPoint presentation. Our topics are all interesting and engaging, so do your part not to avoid making them boring! Your presentation should include questions designed to spur class discussion, and should be timed at approximately 30 - 40 minutes. You will be graded on professionalism, the level of enthusiasm you bring to the presentation, how well you engage the class, and how interesting your presentation is. **(100 points)**

Mid-term and Final exams: There will be a mid-term and a final exam in this class. The exams will be comprised of multiple choice, true/false, matching vocabulary, and short answer essays. **(100 points mid-term, 200 points final, total 300 points)**

Reading Schedule

Note: It is expected that you will read the text(s) BEFORE coming to class for the day, that you will take notes on your readings, and that you will bring the readings with you to class so we can discuss them fully. We may alter some of the readings as the semester progresses depending upon the needs of the class.

CC: Common Culture

EBG: Everything Bad is Good for You

D2L: Additional readings posted to D2L

UNIT #1: Setting the Stage

Reading/Assignment

8/20: Course Introduction

8/22: What is Popular Culture?

D2L: Hall

8/27: "The Sleeper Curve"

EBG: Introduction; *D2L*: Will

UNIT #2 - Television

8/29: Television Culture

D2L: Fiske

9/3: Modern viewers

EBG: pp. 62-90

9/5: Reality TV

D2L: Lovelock

9/10: Docu-comedies

D2L: Thompson

9/12: Satire and "fake" news

CC: Jones, pp. 178-201

9/17: *Hannah Gadsby: Nanette*

UNIT #3 - Fan Culture

9/19: *Hannah Gadsby: Nanette* discussion
Fanfiction

TELEVISION UNIT PAPER DUE

D2L: Jenkins

9/24: Sports fandom

CC: Barash, pp. 361-370

9/26: Female fandom and "snark" fandom

D2L: Harman & Jones

10/1: *Trekkies*

10/3: *Trekkies* discussion

10/8: Fan-fiction and "mommy porn"

D2L: Paris

10/10: **Mid-term exam**

UNIT #4 – Film

10/15: Film and American Culture
10/17: Film and American masculinity

10/22: Contemporary chick flicks
10/24: *Zombies!*

10/29: *Night of the Living Dead*
10/31: *Night of the Living Dead* & Bishop discussion

11/5: Documentary film
Paradise Lost
11/7: *Paradise Lost* continued

11/12: *Paradise Lost* & Adkins discussion

UNIT #5 – Advertising

11/14: “Advertising’s Fifteen Basic Appeals”

11/19: Good advertising?
11/21: *The Illusionists* & discussion

11/25-11/29: **NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK**

12/3: Where are we now?

12/5: Review & evaluate

FINAL EXAM, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 11, 2019, 8:00-10:00

FANDOM UNIT PAPER DUE

CC: Pollack, pp. 453-463
CC: Rothe-Kushel, pp. 463-486

D2L: Radner
CC: Bishop, pp. 507-523

D2L: Adkins

FILM UNIT PAPER DUE

CC: Fowles, pp. 54-72

CC: Calfee, pp. 73-85

ADVERTISING UNIT PAPER DUE

EBG: pp. 184-199