

**FALL 2012**

**SOCIOLOGY 142**

**CSU FRESNO**

Sociology of Popular Culture Schedule # 74745 (3 Units)  
General Education, Multicultural/International  
3:30-4:45 PM T Th SA 153

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Office: Social Science, Room 221  
Hours: MWF 10 - 11 am, T Th 1-2 pm

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course we will examine how popular culture is becoming increasingly central to social life in the United States and around the world. Popular culture includes the beliefs, practices, and objects that are part of everyday traditions, and has enormous significance in the formation of public attitudes and values. Popular culture includes mass-produced culture, such as popular music and films, mass-marketed books and magazines, large-circulation newspapers and other parts of the culture that are shared by the general populace (Gans 1999). In this course we will use a variety of sociological perspectives to examine the role of media and popular culture in everyday life, with a particular emphasis on the organization of the mass media industry, the relationship between cultural consumption and social status, and the social significance of leisure activities such as sports, going to the movies, and shopping. Specific course topics will include the blurring of boundaries between entertainment and news; the commodification of all aspects of modern life; the obsession with celebrity; high culture versus popular culture; and the interconnections between social inequality and popular culture.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES and ASSOCIATED STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Prerequisites: Enrollment in this course requires that you've completed G. E. Foundation and Breadth Area D. If you are a sophomore or freshman, you need to dis-enroll from this course immediately.

The primary objective of the course is to provide students with the tools to critically analyze these various forms of popular culture and understand them within a broader social context. This course provides you, the student, with the opportunity to:

1. develop a greater understanding of pop culture's influence on society and social issues  
*SLO: students will engage in a combination of research methods to assess popular culture's influence on young people and convey their findings in a research paper.*
2. develop critical thinking skills with respect to the content of pop culture.  
*SLO: students will write a thought paper, employing McLuhan's four questions regarding new media as they pertain to a particular pop culture artifact.*
3. examine theoretical paradigms that analyze pop culture and develop a more complex, multi-faceted view of popular culture.  
*SLO: students will engage theory via in class discussion of the different paradigms presented.*
4. enjoy a classroom environment that is interesting, supportive, structured, friendly, and cooperative.

## **METHOD OF INSTRUCTION**

The course will consist of three lectures per week and will include film presentations. Some lecture time will be devoted to discussion of concepts and topics brought up in lecture, from the readings, or from the films. Class sessions will be of a dialectical nature, meaning a high level of interaction between students and instructor, with in-depth discussion of concepts and issues. Such discussion will require adequate preparation on the part of students prior to the class session. Students are expected to have read the assigned materials before class.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

This course has two required texts, listed below. Both are available at the Kennel Bookstore, and may be found on Amazon.com and other on-line used book sellers.

Lane Crothers. *Globalization & American Popular Culture, Second Edition*. Rowan and Littlefield Publishers

John Storey. *Inventing Popular Culture*. Blackwell Publishing

Any additional required and/or supplemental reading materials, handouts, etc., will be posted on Blackboard (BB). This course assumes a working knowledge of Blackboard, the Internet, and computers. Please access the resources on the Blackboard site, if you lack these skills, prior to asking for assistance. "Learn by doing" should be your mantra as a college student.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS**

There are four required components for this course, of which two will be assessed through grading:

1. Read the assigned texts. You are responsible for reading the assigned materials prior to the week's lectures. Your ability to complete the assignments for this course is contingent upon reading the assigned texts.
2. Attend class and take notes. The greatest retention of information comes from reading it, hearing it, and writing it.
3. Essay assignments. Over the course of the semester, you will be asked thought questions pertaining to pop culture and its influence on society, based on course readings and lecture material. Details of each essay are posted on Blackboard in the assignments folder. Due dates are detailed in the Lectures and Readings Schedule on the syllabus.
4. McLuhan Four Questions paper. Details forthcoming in a handout (which will be available on Blackboard in the assignments folder).

Writing assignment guidelines for typed essays:

1. Always identify by your full name, course number, and date at the upper left hand corner of the front page.
2. Use double spacing (Do NOT press "Return" twice between paragraphs - that's quadruple spacing).
3. Make sure you've included a reference list (This is not needed for the reflection papers).
4. Do not include a cover sheet or any form of binder for type-written papers.
5. Proofread your document thoroughly. Make sure to read through your document prior to submitting it. Ask yourself for each sentence, "Does this sentence make sense?"
6. For quotations: do not alter the material in direct citations unless you indicate that you have done so with ellipses and brackets. Use appropriate punctuation in the quotation. If you want to augment a quotation use ellipses . . . to cut material out of it and use brackets [ ] to insert material.
7. If you paraphrase you must include an in-text citation, even if you do not directly quote. Students can be accused of plagiarism if they do not cite the original author and/or if they try to pass other peoples' ideas off as their own. Try to get used to using citations and references in your writing as this is a crucial skill for success in college writing.

Points will be deducted from assignments for failing to follow these guidelines.

## **GRADING**

Grades will be based on the typical academic criteria of demonstrating understanding of the material through application and communication. Grades will be based on the standard university scale: 100 - 90 % = A; 89 - 80 % = B; etc.

NOTE: Class attendance will not be factored into grading. However, you will find it exceedingly difficult to pass the course and understand the material if you don't come to class. No extra credit assignments will be given. The grade you receive is the grade you've earned. Contestation of a grade on either an individual assignment or for the course must be presented to your instructor in writing, with an argument explaining why you think the grade should be changed.

NOTE: A re-examination of course work may result in further deduction of points, as a rigorous analysis may find flaws or mistakes in the course work that might have been missed in the initial grading. Do not assume that contesting a grade will result in gaining additional points or maintaining the existing grade.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

Since we all will have something to say, but may be saying vastly different, even contradictory things, the following guide-lines will be adhered to while in this course:

- Acknowledge that prejudice and discrimination based on race, class, sex, sexual orientation, age, and physical differences exist.
- Acknowledge that all of us have learned misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups, whether we belong to a majority or minority group, from the mass media and other sources.
- Assume that people in this class are doing the best they can do.
- Never demean, devalue, or in any way "put down" people for their experiences, back-grounds, or statements. This does not mean that you can't disagree, only that you do so with respect.
- Don't interrupt. Listen before speaking.

The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and intellectual growth. Therefore, the goals of the course will be met, in large part, by giving respect and consideration to all. This means that we will pay full attention to lecture, discussion, or workshop activity during class sessions. Reading and writing irrelevant material, talking about unrelated issues, sleeping, listening to head-sets, making or receiving phone calls, text-messaging on cell phones, web-surfing on a laptop, and any other distracting activities – including eating, gum popping, or chewing tobacco will not be tolerated. **THE USE OF WORD PROCESSING AND/OR TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVICES IN THIS CLASS IS PROHIBITED.** If you require the use of a laptop to take notes, you must provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to me, and then we will discuss the use of the device. Failure to comply with this policy for any of the above infractions will result in being removed from class for that day and a grade of zero for any assignment due for the week of the infraction.

I encourage you to speak, as class discussion is an effective way of exploring issues in this course, but please direct all your comments to the entire class. To help facilitate a safe and productive learning environment, we will adhere to the following policies:

- University policy on cheating and plagiarism will be observed (see the *Catalog* or the *Schedule of Courses* for description of policy).
- If you have any medical or learning disability that might affect your work in this course, it is your responsibility to inform Professor Jones and to contact the University's Service to Students with Disabilities in the Library at 278-2811 so that reasonable accommodations can be made.
- University policy on incomplete grades will be observed (see the *General Catalog* or the *Schedule of Courses* for description of policy).
- You are expected to attend all scheduled class sessions. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were away. Being absent does not excuse you from anything that was discussed or due in class. Lecture notes are not disseminated. When you have a serious and compelling medical condition or when a death or serious illness in the immediate family that prevents attending class, you are responsible for contacting Professor Jones as soon as possible after the missed class. You are also responsible for providing documentation of the reason for the absence upon returning to class.
- Students are expected to take examinations at the scheduled date and time. If you miss an exam, you will have the opportunity to make it up during "dead week" at the end of instruction.
- All assignments must be turned in on time and in paper copy form. Electronic transmission of papers other than the weekly precis papers will not be accepted, unless arrangement is made with Professor Jones. Late assignments will NOT be accepted - no exceptions. You are to have done the assignments well in advance of class time, which means you cannot wait until the last minute to do the work for this class.
- If you need to leave early, please let Professor Jones know at the beginning of class that you will be doing so. Please do not just get up and leave.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

(Refer to University Catalog or Schedule of Courses for more information.)

**Honor Code:** Members of the California State University, Fresno academic community adhere to principles of academic integrity and mutual respect while engaged in university work and related activities. You should:

- understand or seek clarification about expectations for academic integrity in this course
- neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on examinations or other course work that is used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
- take responsibility to monitor academic dishonesty in any form and to report it to the instructor or other appropriate official for action.

**Cheating and Plagiarism.** Cheating is the actual or attempted practice of fraudulent or deceptive acts for the purpose of improving one's grade or obtaining course credit; such acts also include assisting another student to do so. Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating that consists of the misuse of the published and/or unpublished works of another by misrepresenting the material (i.e., their intellectual property) so used as one's own work? (University Catalog). In other words, do your own writing; when you use another person's ideas or words, reference the material. Possible penalties include but are not limited to failure on the assignment, failure in the course, and/or expulsion from the university. For more information on the University's policy regarding cheating and plagiarism, refer to the Class Schedule (Policy/Legal Statements) or the University Catalog (University policies).

**Disabilities.** If you have any medical or learning disability that might affect your work in this course, it is your responsibility to inform me and contact the University's Service to Students with Disabilities in the Library at 278-2811 so that reasonable accommodations can be made.

**Computers.** At California State University, Fresno, computers and communications links to remote resources are recognized as being integral to the education and research experience. Every student is required to have his/her own

computer or have other personal access to a workstation (including a modem and a printer) with all the recommended software. Computer labs on campus are available (e.g., SS202, PHS107).

**Copyright policy:** Copyright laws and fair use policies protect the rights of those who have produced the material. The copy in this course has been provided for private study, scholarship, or research. Other uses may require permission from the copyright holder. The user of this work is responsible for adhering to copyright law of the U.S. (Title 17, U.S. Code). To help you familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, the University encourages you to visit its copyright web page. Digital Campus course web sites contains material protected by copyrights held by the instructor, other individuals or institutions. Such material is used for educational purposes in accord with copyright law and/or with permission given by the owners of the original material. You may download one copy of the materials on any single computer for non-commercial, personal, or educational purposes only, provided that you (1) do not modify it, (2) use it only for the duration of this course, and (3) include both this notice and any copyright notice originally included with the material. Beyond this use, no material from the course web site may be copied, reproduced, re-published, uploaded, posted, transmitted, or distributed in any way without the permission of the original copyright holder. The instructor assumes no responsibility for individuals who improperly use copyrighted material placed on the web site.

### **COURSE OUTLINE: LECTURE AND READINGS SCHEDULE**

<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic Outline / Readings / Assignment</u>
Week 1		<i>Introduction to the Course</i>
	Aug. 23	Readings: Crothers, Ch. 1
Week 2		<i>Historic origins/development of mass communications/transportation</i>
	Aug. 28	Readings: Storey, Ch. 1
	Aug. 30	
Week 3		<i>Social Theory</i>
	Sept. 4	Readings: Storey, Ch. 2; “Harry Potter and the functions of pop culture” (BB pdf)
	Sept. 6	
Week 4		<i>Theory (continued)</i>
	Sept. 11	Readings: Storey, Ch. 3; “Beyond Contexts” (BB pdf)
	Sept. 13	
Week 5		<i>Leisure and Pop Culture</i>
	Sept. 18	Readings: Storey, Ch. 4; “Zombies, Malls and the Consumerism Debate” (BB URL)
	Sept. 20	<b>Due: Essay on sports</b>
Week 6		<i>Folk vs. Pop</i>
	Sept. 25	Readings: Storey, Ch. 5
	Sept. 27	

<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic Outline / Readings / Assignment</u>
Week 7		<i>Marxism and Identity Politics</i>
	Oct. 2	Readings: Storey, Ch. 6
	Oct. 4	
Week 8		<i>Psychoanalysis and Pop Culture</i>
	Oct. 9	Readings: Storey, Ch. 7
	Oct. 11	
Week 9		<i>Pop Culture and News Media</i>
	Oct. 16	Readings: “Celebrity Status” (BB pdf); “Methods of Media Manipulation” (BB pdf)
	Oct. 18	<b>Due: Essay on advertising</b>
Week 10		<i>Movies</i>
	Oct. 23	Readings: Crothers, Ch. 3; “Inner city exhibition and the Genre Film” (BB pdf)
	Oct. 25	
Week 11		<i>Music</i>
	Oct. 30	Readings: “The Last Pop Star” (BB pdf); “Popular culture as oppositional culture: Rap as resistance” (BB pdf); “The words have changed but the ideology remains the same” (BB pdf)
	Nov. 1	
Week 12		<i>Television</i>
	Nov. 6	Readings: “Star Trek fandom as a religious phenomenon” (BB pdf); “How to act your age when you watch TV” (BB pdf); “Come into my Parlor” (BB pdf)
	Nov. 8	<b>Due: Essay on television</b>
Week 13		<i>The Undead</i>
	Nov. 13	Readings: “The meaning of zombies in pop culture” (BB URL); “Why are zombies so popular?” (BB URL); “Zombies in pop culture” (BB URL)
	Nov. 15	
Week 14		<i>The Undead (continued)</i>
	Nov. 20	Readings: “Vampires and Zombies: A pop culture study” (BB URL); “Vampires and Zombies: No mere pop culture trend” (BB URL)
	Nov. 22	<b>Due: Essay on zombies</b> NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Holiday)
Week 15		<i>Comic Books and Video Games</i>
	Nov. 27	Readings: “Culture and Stigma: Popular Culture and the Case of Comic Books” (BB pdf)
	Nov. 29	

<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic Outline / Readings / Assignment</u>
Week 16		<i>Globalization</i>
	Dec. 4	Readings: Crothers, Chs. 2 & 4
	Dec. 6	
Week 17		<i>The Future of Pop Culture</i>
	Dec. 11	Last day of instruction Readings: Storey, Ch. 8; Crothers, Ch. 5
	Dec. 13-14	Faculty Consultation Days
Final Exam		Thursday, Dec. 20 5:45-7:45pm <b>McLuhan Paper Due</b>

A FINAL NOTE: This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. You are responsible for knowing any minor changes I make in the Lecture and Reading Schedule. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent and acquire missed lecture notes from a classmate. Thus, as stated before, class attendance is critical to your successful completion of the course and to your overall understanding of the content of the course.