

COMM 3840– Analysis of Popular Culture

Instructor: Dr. Stephanie Brown

Email: stephanie.brown@slu.edu

Office: Xavier 302

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 2:30-4:30 or by appointment

Class Meeting Times: Tuesday/Thursday -12:45-2:00 Xavier Hall G08

What is this class all about?

Do you love watching *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* but wish you could more deeply analyze its gender, race, and class politics? Do you want to irritate your family with intricate explanations of media ownership during Thanksgiving this year? Do you want to discuss taste, fandom, fashion, pop music, *The Lego Movie*, and *Hamilton*? Then, this class is for you!

Over the course of the semester, we will work hone our argumentative, critical thinking, and analytical skills as applied to the media and culture we consume every day. This course does not offer a comprehensive history or overview of popular culture or an introduction to the basics of analyzing the media, rather, it offers more advanced tools and strategies through which to understand and analyze popular culture, media, and communication.

This course fulfills the advanced research requirement for communication majors, and so will focus on methods and theories for researching popular culture. The first half of the semester, we will work through various approaches to pop culture research. The second half of the semester, students will collaborate on a research project examining pop culture producers, texts, and audiences in addition to teaching the class about one aspect of their project.

What are our goals?

- To apply pop culture theory to media texts and practices.
- To close read media texts and to read media texts for ideological underpinnings.
- To identify arguments and evidence in readings.
- To formulate, articulate and provide evidence for arguments in writing and in conversation and to respectfully respond to the arguments of others.
- To question your assumptions about pop culture and embrace nuance.
- To understand key theories and debates surrounding popular culture.
- To understand a range of approaches to analyzing, researching, and interpreting popular cultural artifacts, identities, institutions, and audiences.
- To research the production, representation, and consumption of pop culture.
- To improve writing, speaking, and collaboration skills.
- To understand the role of power and difference in pop culture.

Three warnings about this class:

1) Sometimes students see the words “Pop Culture” in a course title and assume the course consists entirely of watching TV and talking about how great it is. That is not what this class is about. You should be prepared to learn to critically think about, write about, and discuss popular culture.

2) This class takes Critical Cultural Studies as its general theoretical approach. This includes discussion of Marxism, feminism, capitalism and other “isms.” Cultural studies, by its nature, questions and challenges many commonsense assumptions about society and deals with questions of power and knowledge. The course addresses numerous questions about how our lives are controlled and regulated, and how we (as individuals or groups) manage our lives, through various media and technologies of popular culture. This means that you may be asked to critique things you love and challenge beliefs you hold.

Up front, I want to say that I respect your opinions and beliefs, but expect you to be able to engage with ideas that may be uncomfortable in a respectful manner. You are free to agree or disagree with the theories in this course, but you are to do so in a way that thoughtfully considers and engages with the material.

3) Because popular culture is a major part of our identity and lived experience, there is a tendency to want to generalize our experiences as universal. Therefore, throughout the semester, whenever you find yourself wanting to use your own experience as proof or evidence, make sure that you’re:

a) only making an argument about your experience and allowing that others may have different experiences

b) grounding your argument in theory from the course material.

We all also must work to accept and listen to others’ experiences, believe them, and understand that they may differ from our own.

That being said, I won’t tolerate offensive, hateful, or malicious language as a difference of opinion. While this class is a space to grow, learn, and make mistakes, the humanity and worth of groups of people is not a topic up for debate.

Requirements and Grading : 1000 points total

- 100 - Participation/Attendance
- 100 - Reading Summaries (10 of 12 @10 points each)
- 200 – Test 1/Test 2 (100 points each)
- 600 - Research Project
- 200 – Individual Final Paper
- 200 – Group Syllabus
- 100 – Group Teaching
- 25 – Individual Outline
- 25 – Group Final Presentation
- 25 – Group Prospectus / Pitch
- 25 – Group Final Exam Questions

Office Hours Orientation Assignment

I find that students do better, and I get to know students better, if they come to office hours. In order to get you over the hurdle of finding my office and getting used to meeting with me everyone is required to stop by office hours once during the first four weeks of class. Office hours are listed at the top of this syllabus!

Participation

During our first class meeting, we will discuss the importance of class participation, what participation means, and barriers to participation. We will also set norms and expectations as a class. Twice during the semester, you will submit short reflections on your participation in the class, each of which will be worth 25 points. The other 50 points will come from your adherence to our classroom standards of participation, which we will set as a group.

Reading Summaries

For each group of readings, you will bring to class a reading summary, the format of which we will go over in class. These will serve as helpful study guides for tests, help you practice articulating an article's main argument, give us a jumping off point for class discussion, let me know what you're confused about so I can focus on those aspects in class, and make sure everyone is doing the reading and prepared to discuss them in class. You can miss up to two summaries without penalty.

Tests 1 and 2

You will have a take home essay exam over the course content during week 9 in which you will watch and analyze a text we choose as a class, and in-classroom exam two during finals week on the readings assigned to you by your classmates during the second half of the semester. The final will consist of questions formulated by your classmates and by me.

Research Project : [Handout](#)

The research project has three elements about which we will go into in much more detail in class.

1. As a group, you will put together a public “syllabus” about a pop culture event or artefact. We will look at examples in class like the *Lemonade* syllabus and the *4:44* syllabus. This aspect of the project is designed to show how pop culture texts are embedded within multiple overlapping histories, cultural contexts, and social issues. In other words, this allows you to see how expansive a single text can be.
2. As individuals, you will write essays drawing on the research you’ve done for your group syllabus. This aspect will allow you to zero in on a very specific aspect of your artifact and to formulate and articulate an argument based on your research.
3. As a group, you will take over teaching for a day. You will assign one to two texts from your syllabus to the class and design a lecture and discussion around those texts. For the final, groups will also provide questions based on their readings.

What is expected of me and what should I expect of you?

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/policy_academic-integrity_6-26-2015.pdf.

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

Class input on Syllabus Policies

During the first week, I will take recommendations from the class on the following topics and then add them to the syllabus: Media Use in Class | Group Projects | Participation | Expectations of students | Expectations of instructor

Grade Disputes and Rewrites

Blackboard is finicky. At times, it may register a 0 instead of 10s or I make a small error or calculation in the grade book. In these cases, please politely alert me via e-mail as soon as possible so that I may fix your grade. You are responsible for checking that your grades are accurate in a timely manner.

In the cases of grade disputes, 24 hours after receiving a grade, if you genuinely feel you deserve a higher grade, please submit to me via e-mail the details of the discrepancy and your argument for why you believe you have earned a higher grade. This paperwork does not guarantee alterations to your grade.

If you agree with the grade, but would like the chance to earn a higher grade, 24 hours after receiving the grade and after closely reading my feedback, please submit to me your intent to redo the assignment with your plan for revision, referencing the feedback you have received.

Attendance

I won't take official attendance and you can decide if you need to miss class within reason. You all are adults and I do not wish to be the arbiter of valid reasons. That being said, attendance is an important part of doing well in this class and in supporting the learning of other students in the class. If you are excessively absent, it will affect your grade and your ability to pass the class. If you are gone for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student and to find out what we did that day. If something dire is happening in your life that affects your class attendance— such as a sudden death, extended illness, personal trauma, ongoing mental or physical health issues, please let me know as soon as possible so I can help you find resources and make a plan of action to keep up with the course.

If you are in class, I expect you to come on time and stay for the entire period. If lateness becomes an issue, I'll implement a late policy.

E-Mail

I will send updates and announcements via e-mail, therefore you are responsible for checking your SLU email at least once per day. Not seeing an e-mail announcement from me does not constitute an acceptable excuse.

I will make every effort to respond to your e-mails within 24 hours. If you don't hear from me within 24 hours, talk to me in class or send a follow-up e-mail. E-mails should be used to ask quick questions or ask for clarifications. For anything that takes longer than a paragraph, please talk to me in office hours or e-mail me to set up a meeting.

Assignments and Late Work

You must complete all assignments to pass the class. You can drop two reading summaries, so I won't accept them after the due date. For tests, papers, and group work – I deal with extensions on a case-by-case basis and only before deadlines. It is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible to discuss options for completing the assignment/requirement if an unforeseen crisis occurs.

Emailed assignments will not be accepted unless otherwise indicated. All work should be turned in via hard copy or via Blackboard – depending on the directions.

Feedback and Evaluation of Assignments

Timely feedback on assignments is needed in order to assure that students are aware of their progress. For routine assignments, homework, response papers, presentations and exams, feedback will be provided within one week after the due date, provided that students have submitted work in class on the day it was due. For longer assignments such as literature reviews and research project papers, feedback will be provided within 1-2 weeks after the due date of the assignment, depending on the length of the assignment. In the event that these deadlines cannot be met, students should be informed of the delay and the extra time needed in providing quality feedback.

What Do I Do If I Need Help?

Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, ***that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator***, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; akratky@slu.edu; [314-977-3886](tel:314-977-3886)) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: www.slu.edu/here4you and <https://www.slu.edu/general-counsel>.

Disability Services

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also must notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course.

Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability_services@slu.edu or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

****If you don't have documentation** but want to discuss any accessibility concerns, questions, or issues **please set up a time to meet with me** to discuss how I can help to meet your learning needs and goals. Additionally, if you are ever struggling with the class **for any reason**, including but not limited to personal crises, mental health struggles, or food/housing insecurity - please let me know. Even if you don't feel comfortable coming to me with specifics, at least let me know if something is going on that is or will affect your ability to keep up with the class. I am more than happy to work with you on a plan for you to keep up with the class and to direct you toward resources that can help.

Student Success Center

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center assists students with academic-related services and is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331). Students can visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/> to learn more about tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, and academic coaching.

University Writing Services

Students are encouraged to take advantage of University Writing Services in the Student Success Center; getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels. Trained writing consultants can help with writing projects, multimedia projects, and oral presentations. University Writing Services offers one-on-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more information, visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/> or call the Student Success Center at 314-977-3484.

Basic Needs Security

Students in personal or academic distress and/or who may be specifically experiencing challenges such as securing food or difficulty navigating campus resources, and who believe this may affect their performance in the course, are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office (deanofstudents@slu.edu or 314-977-9378) for support.

Furthermore, please notify the instructor if you are comfortable in doing so, as this will enable them to assist you with finding the resources you may need.

Reading/Assignment Schedule

All readings will be available through our class website, through the Library's website or through our Blackboard site. Materials will be uploaded and available at least two weeks before we use the materials in class. **Syllabus and readings are subject to change.**

You will also occasionally be asked to rent and view a film or TV show online. All films/shows will be under \$2 or available on Netflix.

Week 1 – What is Popular Culture and Why Do We Study It?

8/28 - 8/30

Hsu, Hua. Stuart Hall and the Rise of Cultural Studies. *The New Yorker*. 2017.

Holmes, Linda. A Few Notes on Pop Culture Writing. *NPR*. 2013.

Schudson, Michael. How Culture Works. *Theory and Society*. 1989

Week 2 – What is the difference between research, analysis, and theory?

9/4 - 9/6

Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural studies, multiculturalism, and media culture." *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (2011): 7-18.

Kearny, Mary Celeste. "Introduction, or How To Cook an Artichoke." *The Craft of Criticism* (2018): 1-8.

Becker, Ron, "Ideology." *The Craft of Criticism* (2018): 12-22.

Reviews of Hallmark Christmas Movies

-Cassie Belek for *The Washington Post*

- Todd VanDerWerff for *VOX*

- Zachary Jason for *Slate*

Week 3 – Is There Danger in Being "Popular"?

9/11- 9/13

Martínez, Antonio García. Facebook, Snapchat and the Dawn of the Post-Truth Era. *Wired*. 2018.

Maloney, Courtney (1999). The Faces in Lonesome's Crowd: Imagining the Mass Audience in *A Face In The Crowd*. *JNT: The Journal of Narrative Theory*. 29.3.

LISTEN: *Reply All*: Episode 86 -Man of the People. 2017.

WATCH: *A Face in The Crowd*. 1957.

Available for rent on YouTube, iTunes, Amazon, Google

Week 4 – What are texts and how do we analyze them?

9/18 - 9/20

Beltrán, Mary. "Representation," *The Craft of Criticism* (2018): 98-107.

Butler, Jeremy G. "Visual Style," *The Craft of Criticism* (2018): 60-70.

Durham, Aisha. (2012). "Check On It: Beyoncé, Southern booty, and Black femininities in music video," *Feminist Media Studies*

hooks, bell. (2016). "Moving Beyond Pain."

Week 5 - Who makes popular culture? (Part 1: The Culture Industries)

9/25 - 9/27

Jin, Dal Yong. (2012) "Hallyu 2.0: The New Korean Wave in the Creative Industry," *International Institute Journal*.

Flatley, Joseph. K-Pop Takes America: How South Korea's Music Machine is Conquering the World. *The Verge*. 2012.

Wasko, Janet. "The Political Economy of Film," *A Companion to Film Theory* (1999): 221-233.

Kellner, Douglas. "Culture Industries," *A Companion to Film Theory* (1999): 202-220

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodore W. Adorno. "The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception." *Media and cultural studies* (1946): 41.

WATCH: "What is Marxism" - 8 Bit Philosophy

Week 6 – Who makes popular culture? (Part 2: Production Studies)

10/2 - 10/4

DUE: Participation Reflection 1 (Thursday)

Mayer, Vicki, Miranda J. Banks, and John T. Caldwell, eds. "Intro," *Production studies: Cultural studies of media industries*. Routledge, 2009.

Havens, Timothy. "Production," *The Craft of Criticism* (2018)

Warner, Kristen. *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting*. Routledge, 2015.

Henderson, Felicia D. "The culture behind closed doors: issues of gender and race in the writers' room." *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 2 (2011): 145-152.

The LA Times - Authenticity in Casting - From 'Colorblind' to 'Color Conscious'

Week 7 – How do audiences create meaning from pop culture?

10/9 - 10/11

Seiter, Ellen. *Television and new media audiences*. Clarendon Press, 1998.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. 1980.

Bobo, Jacqueline. The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. 1995.

Hills, Matt. "Audiences," *The Craft of Criticism* (2018)

Week 8 – How is popular taste linked to power?

10/16 - 10/18

Blog Post, "Everything Except Country and Rap"

"Upgrading the Situation Comedy" from Newman, M. Z., & Levine, E. (2012). *Legitimizing television: Media convergence and cultural status*. Routledge.

TV Reviews:

Vulture - *Cristela* Isn't as Good as its Star

AV Club - Aziz Ansari Proves He Can be more than a bit character

Vulture - *Master of None* is Your Next Great TV Love

DUE: Topic ideas: Midnight Friday 10/19 on Blackboard

Week 9 – (Fall Break) Group Work

10/25

Talk through projects

Group work time/consultations

Week 10 - Exam Review / Exam

10/30- 11/1

Tuesday: Midterm Review

Thursday: Watch Lego Movie and hand out midterm

Week 11 - Exam

11/6 - 11/8

Tuesday: No Class!

Thursday: Exam Discussion

Exam due by start of class (12:45) Thursday on Blackboard.

Week 12 – Groups 1/2

11/13 - 11/15

Group 1 teaches

Week 13 – (Thanksgiving) Group 3

11/20

Group 2 Teaches

Due: Individual paper topic ideas and sources 11/25 at Midnight

Week 14 – Group 4

11/27 - 11/29

Group 3 and 4 Teaches

Week 15 – Wrap - Up

No class 12/4 - Work on your projects!

Final Class Wrap Up - 12/6

Final Projects and Essays Due Midnight 12/10 on Blackboard