

SOC 306i: Popular Culture in Sociology, Fall 2011
Tuesday, Thursday 8:00am-9:15am
Instructor: Kristi Brownfield

If you need to contact me:

Faner Hall 3433

Monday: 8am-10am

Tuesday/Thursday: 10am-12pm, or by appointment

kabrownf@siu.edu (preferred) or 453-7620 (office)

Sociology Dept. Phone: 453-2494

Class blog: <http://soc306i.wordpress.com> (be sure to check this page frequently for updates, reading lists, and other information – you will also have an assignment based on the blog)

Required Texts:

Storey, John. 2009. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman.

Course Objectives:

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.

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.

Plagiarism:

See the student handbook for a definition of plagiarism. Taking another person's work and passing it off as your own will not be tolerated in this class. You will receive an immediate zero for plagiarized work.

The second attempt at plagiarism will be reported to the university and I reserve the right to give a failing grade for the course at that point.

Electronics:

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.

Acknowledging Differences:

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.

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Statement:

To meet the expectations of this course, persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations are encouraged to bring this to my attention as soon as possible. Written documentation of the disability should be submitted during the first week of the semester along with a request for special accommodations. Contact the SIU Disability Support Services (DSS) to facilitate requests:

Woody Hall B-150, Carbondale, IL 62901, Mail Code: 4705
DSSsiu@siu.edu Ph: (618) 453-5738 Fax: (618) 453-5700 TTY: (618) 453-2293

Emergency Procedures:

Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, on BERT's website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Safety's website www.dps.siu.edu, and in Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

The instructor will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The BERT Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

Course Format:

This is a writing intensive class. Class time will be spent in a common 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.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Blog Discussion Participation: 10 points each x 10 weeks = 100 points
Group Project and Presentation: 100 points
Critique Portfolio: 25 points each x 4 critiques = 100 points
Leading Class Discussion: 50 points
Quizzes and Activities: 50 points
Midterm Essay: 50 points
Final Essay: 50 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

Participation and Attendance:

I expect students to attend class every day and to come to class on Tuesdays having reviewed the assigned readings for that week, which we will discuss with greater specificity as the week progresses. Obviously, students often have other priorities or circumstances that interfere with meeting these expectations. 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.

Blog Discussion Participation:

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 the class blog. Everyone is expected to post a 250-word response analyzing aspects of the readings. Some suggested topics to write about:

- Questions the readings raised for you
- Videos, articles, or other interesting internet-based material that is related to the readings (along with a discussion of how they are related)
- Applying sociological theories and ideas in the readings to popular culture you consume
- Responses and thoughts – connected to the readings – to things other people have posted to the group

You are required to post to the blog at least ten times out of the twelve weeks of readings. To post on the blog you will need to register a (free) Wordpress.com account. You do not have to use your full name, or even your real name, when you do this, so long as I know which account is yours! So, if you decide to name your account 'soc306istudent' that's fine but I need to know that the person posting under the name 'soc306istudent' is actually "John Smith." I will ask you to turn in your account names on a sheet of paper on Tuesday 08/30/2011 (week two).

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. 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!

Critique Portfolio:

You are required to turn in a portfolio of four critiques of *different* popular culture artifacts. The first critique which everyone will complete will be of the book/movie *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer. The other three critiques will be your choice. Each critique should be 500-750 words long and you should pick a different *type* of artifact for each critique. For example, if you choose your second critique to be a movie, the third critique should be a comic book, and the fourth critique should be a video game. You may not analyze the same type of artifact twice within the three artifacts you chose. Your critique 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. An example critique will be provided on the blog.

Critique One: Due 09/15/2011

Twilight, by Stephanie Meyer (look at both the book and the movie)

Critique Two: Due 10/13/2011

Critique Three: Due 11/10/2011

Critique Four: Due 12/01/2011

Leading Class Discussion:

Everyone will be responsible for leading class discussion at least once within the semester with your group on Thursdays. When it is your turn to present, your responsibility is to familiarize the class with a popular culture artifact (e.g., book, movie, comic book) and then relate that artifact to the readings or theme of the week. You should then propose (at least three) discussion questions that encourage the class to analyze the popular culture artifact in the context of the readings. Your group will be graded on:

Originality of artifact presented: to receive full points, bring in something unusual or different; think outside the box; for example, bringing in the *Zombie Fluxx* card game is more unusual than bringing in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (5 points)

Group work: to receive full points, it should be obvious that everyone in your group contributed to preparing to lead the discussion; for example, every should talk, have prepared points, be ready to answer questions about the artifact, and have a good working knowledge of the readings (5 points)

Discussion questions: to receive full points you should have *at least* three discussion questions ready for the class and be prepared to encourage other students to talk about the artifact you bring in, the readings, and other popular culture artifacts we have discussed in class; for example, a group that can only keep class discussion going for fifteen minutes will receive less points compared to a group that keeps class discussion going for fifty minutes (15 points)

Incorporation of readings and previous class discussions: to receive full points you *must* reference readings and previous class discussions, you should tell us how the artifact relates to (mostly) American culture, to your lives, and what the scholars we are reading might have to say

about it; for example, tell us what Karl Marx might say about the comic book *The Walking Dead* (25 points)

Quizzes and Activities:

There will be a variety of different in-class and out-of-class exercises throughout the semester. Examples of potential assignments may be to take pictures of advertising that people wear, a commercial jingle pop quiz, subcultural scavenger hunts, and so forth. If you are not in class the day the assignment is given, you will receive no points!

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!

Midterm essay: 10/20/2011

Final essay: 12/08/2011

Turning Work In:

I ask that students turn their work in digitally through email [kabrownf@siu.edu]. All work should be sent by 8:00am 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.

Late Work:

Turn in your assignments when they are due! **Late work will not be accepted within this class – you will receive a zero if you do not complete your assignments on time.**

Tentative Course Schedule: (topics/readings subject to change)

CTPC = Cultural Theory and Popular Culture

Week 1 (08/23, 08/25): Introduction to Sociology; What is Pop Culture?

Read: CTPC Chapter 1

Week 2 (08/30, 09/01): Reading and Interpreting “Signs” of Popular Culture

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

View: Barbie & Ken & American Girl doll pictures & come to class prepared to talk about what signs of culture you “read” [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/22691138@N05/sets/72157603693131721/>]

Listen to: <http://www.studio360.org/2009/feb/13/barbie/> - NPR’s American Icon show on Barbie

Week 3 (09/06, 09/08): What Popular Culture Tells Us About Being an American

Read: Goewey: “Careful, You May Run Out of Planet”: SUVs and the Exploitation of the American Myth [<http://www.uvm.edu/~jhaig/Myth/SUVs.pdf>], CTPC Chapter 2

Group-led discussions begin this week!

Assignment: each group will be assigned to either read the book OR watch the movie *Twilight* in preparation for week 5

Week 4 (09/13, 09/15): American Idols and American Icons

Read: Wasko: Corporate Disney in Action [<http://www.scribd.com/doc/54459570/17/Chapter-17>], CTPC Chapter 3

Read: Guillermo, Emil. William Hung: Racism, or Magic? [<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/g/a/2004/04/06/eguilermo.DTL&type=printable>]

View: Blog post with pictures from Amy Spencer's female American pop icons shoot in Glamour magazine [<http://www.killahbeez.com/2009/03/05/amy-spencers-female-american-pop-icons/>]

Watch: I've Got a Crush on Obama [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>]

Due: Critique One: *Twilight*

Week 5 (09/20, 09/22): Gender and Popular Culture

Read: CTPC Chapter 7, Tannen: There is No Unmarked Woman

[<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/nyt062093.htm>], Gibson: Warrior Dreams (available on course reserves)

View: 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>]

Assignment: Have read the book or seen the movie *Twilight* as assigned in your groups and be prepared to talk about gender representations, gender expectations, femininity and masculinity in *Twilight*!

Week 6 (09/27, 09/29): Race, Ethnicity and Popular Culture

Read: CTPC Chapter 8, Sullivan: Rap and Race It's Got a Nice Beat, but What about the Message?

[<http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/33/5/605.short?rss=1&ssource=mfc>], Fung: Looking for my Penis

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

View: 5 Things That Killed Hip-Hop [<http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/editorials/id.723/title.5-things-that-killed-hip-hop>]

Week 7 (10/04, 10/06): Culture and Social Power

Read: CTPC Chapter 4

Watch: The O'Reilly Factor, Hannity, Special Report with Bret Baier, On the Record with Greta van Susteren, Fox Report with Shepard Smith, Dr. Drew, The Rachel Maddow Show, Daily Show, Colbert Report

Week 8 (10/13, No class 10/11 – fall break): Advertising

Read: CTPC Chapter 5

Watch: Killing Us Softly 4 (in class 10/15 – NO PRESENTATIONS)

Due: Critique Two

Week 9 (10/18, 10/20): Advertising

Read: Marchand: Parable of the Democracy of Goods [<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/marchand.html>], Twitchell: What We Are to Advertisers [<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/asr/v001/1.1twitchell.html>],

Blakeslee: If You Have a "Buy Button" in Your Brain, What Pushes It?

[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/19/science/19neuro.html?_r=1]

Watch: Beauty Pressures [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei6JvK0W60I>]

View: Mac/PC on XKCD [<http://xkcd.com/934/>]

Browse: Adfreak [<http://www.adweek.com/adfreak>]

Due: Midterm essay

Week 10 (10/25, 10/27): Convergence Culture

Read: CTPC Chapter 6, De Kosnik: Piracy is the Future of Television [http://convergenceculture.org/research/c3-piracy_future_television-full.pdf], Green, Burgess: YouTube: Online Video and Co-Created Value [http://convergenceculture.org/research/C3_youtube_co-create.pdf]
Browse: Futures of Entertainment blog [http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/]

Week 11 (11/01, 11/03): Consuming Culture

Read: CTPC Chapter 9, Jones: "Fake" News Versus "Real" News [http://www.odu.edu/al/jpjones/Fake%20News.pdf], Miller: Real vs. Fake News [http://boston.com/community/blogs/culture_club/2011/06/real_vs_fake_news.html?p1=Features_link5]

Week 12 (11/08, 11/10): Subcultures and Countercultures

Read: Mullens: Get a Life? [http://cinema.usc.edu/archivedassets/097/15727.pdf]
Browse: Fandom_Wank [http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/]
Watch: "Poker Face" by Talitha78 [http://talitha78.livejournal.com/196085.html], Women's Work by Luminosity and sisabet [http://sockkpuppett.livejournal.com/442093.html], Origin Stories by Giandujakiss [http://giandujakiss.livejournal.com/360051.html]
Due: Critique Three

Week 13 (11/15, 11/17): Cybercultures

Read: CTPC Chapter 10
View: Articles of War: Wikipedia's Lamest Edits [http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/wikipedia-lamest-edit-wars/], Wikipedia Idiots: The Edit Wars of San Francisco [http://www.sfweekly.com/2008-02-13/news/wikipedia-idiots-the-edit-wars-of-san-francisco/], Washington's politicians edit Wikipedia [http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/media/article728983.ece]

Week 14 (11/22, no class 11/24 – Thanksgiving Break): presentations

Week 15 (11/29, 12/01): presentations

Due: Critique Four

Week 16 (12/06, 12/08): presentations

Due: Final essay