

Pop Culture: SOC 459
Spring 2013
Instructor: Holly Sevier

What do video games, planking, clog dancing, and Superman have in common? The answer is that they all lie in the realm of the popular. This course represents an opportunity to critically examine the materials, beliefs, and practices of ordinary life while developing skills as an effective communicator. The readings and multimedia material presented to the class will help us form questions about the many roles pop culture plays in our lives, provide a theoretical sociological background for our ideas, and give us a springboard for developing effective written and oral communication skills. This course is offered with an “O” focus and as such active participation in class discussions—as well as in a number of skill-building exercises—is required.

Goals of Class:

The goals of this class are two-fold:

- 1) To develop the critical perspectives and theoretical tools relevant to interpreting and analyzing the materials, beliefs, and practices of ordinary life; and,
- 2) To develop essential skills, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to becoming successful oral communicators.

In addition to the above goals, there are four program-level learning goals that we can strive to achieve. In brief, these are:

- 1) Ability to conceptualize sociological ideas and apply theory to the topic at hand.
- 2) Ability to collect and report relevant data, findings, or information.
- 3) Ability to analyze and interpret data, findings, or information.
- 4) Ability to write and present clearly and effectively.

Homework:

A regular reading routine is essential for this class. Each week we will have a number of small but engaging readings and you will need to make brief notes in order to be prepared for class discussions. Reading notes on the highlighted readings will need to be turned in on time as per the syllabus. Reading notes may be prepared and handed in on other readings/multimedia for extra credit. In addition, you will need to submit the two term essays (5 pages each) in a timely fashion and prepare for the oral communication exercises. While the amount of writing is small, the expectation is that work will be of a high standard both grammatically and in content, with points deducted for absent, late, or sub-par work.

Textbooks for Course:

Mix it Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, Society Author: David Grazian
Confessions of a Public Speaker Author: Scott Berkun
Food Rules: An Eater's Manual Author: Michael Pollan

Section 1 (January 8th, 10th, 15th, 17th)

- 1/08 Syllabus and Introductions. Plugging in to Webster 101. OC Exercise 1.
Concepts for discussion: What is culture? 'High' versus 'Low' Culture. Why study popular culture?
- 1/10 Homework: Discuss expectations for course and for student conduct. Three approaches to the sociology of popular culture. In-groups vs. Out-groups. Small group exercise on insider language.
- 1/15 Homework: How to take notes from readings. Review ASA rules for correct citation. Intro to Essay 1. Topics for semester (group exercise).
- 1/17 Homework: Discuss plagiarism. The X Factor: How do we Measure 'Popular'? Who Owns the Media? Documentary: *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, 1992. Reading Notes #1 Due.

Section 2 (January 22nd, 24th, 29th, 31st)

- 1/22 Homework: Discuss concept of critical thinking. Superman and Wonder Women: Ideology, Hegemony, Resistance. OC Exercise 3: Group debate on conflict theory topics.
- 1/24 Homework: motivate and de-nerve. Group debate on conflict theory topics continued. OC Exercise 4: 60 second introduction to semester topic.
- 1/29 **Idea Honing for Essay 1.** Homework: Review in-text citation conventions and how to construct a bibliography.
- 1/31 Reading Notes #2 Due. Media: *Avatar*, 2009. Repeat of OC Exercise 2.

Section 3 (February 5th, 7th, 12th, 14th)

- 2/05 Homework: Review skills, attitudes, and behaviors of a successful oral communicator. 1st practice presentation: a 2 minute speech (OC Exercise 5). Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.
- 2/07 1st practice presentations continued. Group activity: idea matrices.
- 2/12 I Can't Believe it's Not . . . Entirely Made of Chemicals: Food in Popular Culture. Documentary: *Food, Inc.*, 2008. **Essay 1 Due.**
- 2/14 Reading Notes #3 Due. Diamonds are Whatever: Keeping up with the Joneses. Monopolization, stratification, socialization of desire.

Section 4 (February 19th, 21st, 26th, 28th)

- 2/19 How to create an effective PowerPoint presentation. Sci-Fi, Fans, and Fandom. Counter-culture resistance.
- 2/21 Homework: the art of rhetoric. Group debate on food marketing. Instructor feedback. Review concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, Resistance. Group activity: idea matrices.
- 2/26 Homework: Review of debate. Baywatch in Bhutan: Globalization of Culture. **10 New Words Due.**
- 2/28 Multimedia PowerPoint presentations. Reading Notes #4 Due.

Section 5 (March 5th, 7th, 12th, 14th)

- 3/05 Drug and Alcohol Culture: Mass Participation or Minority Aberration? Review/access online CDC data. Homework: Effective communication styles and death by PowerPoint.
- 3/07 2nd practice presentation (10 students): a 3-minute speech with visual aids. (OC Exercise 6). Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.
- 3/12 **Idea Honing for Essay 2.** Music of students' choice.
- 3/14 2nd practice presentation (10 students). Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric. Reading Notes #5 Due.

Section 6 (March 19th, 21st, April 2nd, 4th, 9th)

- 3/19** Everything Bad is Good for You: Virtual Worlds and Gaming. Group debate on gaming. **Essay 2 Due.**
- 3/21** Homework: What to Do when Everything Goes Wrong.
- 4/02** Final Presentations: A 5-minute speech (OC Exercise 7) for 7 students. Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric. Group activity: idea matrices.
- 4/04** Pop will Eat Itself: Cultural Consumption and Pop Culture in Everyday Life.
- 4/09** Reading Notes #6 Due. Final Presentations continued. Media: *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, 2010.

Section 7 (April 16th, 18th, 23rd, 25th, 30th)

- 4/16** Group debate on 'authentic' island vacations. Homework: Review skills, attitudes, and behaviors of a successful oral communicator.
- 4/18** Final Presentations continued. Finish watching selected media.
- 4/23** Final Presentations continued. Finish watching selected media.
- 4/25** Focus Group activity.
- 4/30** Summary of class and pot-luck.

OC Exercises

In order to become successful oral communicators it is essential that we build up a body of skills, attitudes, and behaviors. There are several exercises we will do in class that will minimize the distress you may feel at having to give a presentation in front of people, and will prepare you to make presentations in an efficient, effective, and comfortable manner.

Exercise 1: Introduce yourself to the person next to you. Listen to them introduce themselves and write down three things you think the class may want to know about them. Read the three things to the class.

Exercise 2: Watch media, pausing every ten minutes to analyze and discuss. Every student contributes at least one comment. Repeat exercise in subsequent classes.

Exercise 3: Debate in teams of 3 or 4. Instructor feedback.

Exercise 4: Informal 60 second introduction to semester topic. Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.

Exercise 5: Presentation practice 1. A 2-minute speech presented in front of the class. Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.

Exercise 6: Presentation practice 2. A 3-minute speech with visual aids. Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.

Exercise 7: Final Presentation. A 5-minute speech. Instructor and peer feedback using OC rubric.

Grading

As this class gives you the opportunity to earn an Oral Communication focus, you will be expected to communicate every time you come to class. We will be working towards a final oral presentation, with practice presentations to help you build up your confidence and learn first-hand the strategies that lead to oral communication success.

- 5% of your grade will be based on attendance. Showing up to class is key to success. A roster will be available at the beginning of class for you to sign. 1-2 absences are excusable. 3-5 absences you will lose 1%. >5 absences you will lose 2.5% and you will need to meet with me. >10 absences and you will fail.
- 5% of your grade will be based on your ability to learn, accurately spell, and fit into speech 10 new college-level terms or words. As this is based on your own personal learning curve, you need to find the words yourselves from within the weekly assigned readings or other appropriate sources. Words need to be posted on the website under the New Words tab so we can discuss them if necessary. There is no shame in not knowing a word or term. This is a place of learning.
- 15% of your grade will be for reading notes which are due at the beginning of class as per the dates on the syllabus. Notes on additional readings may be submitted for extra credit. Blank reading notes sheets can be downloaded from the class webspace or picked up in class.
- 5% of your grade will be for participation in class discussions and debates. The best way to participate in class is to read the assigned readings ahead of time and come prepared with questions and ideas to discuss. The class will be a welcome place to discuss ideas, make empirical observations, debate issues, and voice your dissent, all while maintaining a respectful and professional demeanor.
- There will be two short essays due during the semester, each five pages long, each worth 20% of your grade. You will be docked half a grade for each day the paper is late. Early submissions are welcome and present an opportunity for you to correct your work for a higher grade.
- 30% of your grade will be based on your individual oral presentations. That's 5% each for OC exercises 5 and 6, and 20% for your final presentation. You will receive feedback from both your peers and myself on all three presentations using the rubric as a guide.

Lame Excuses: college is no place for insubstantial or poorly documented absences, tardy assignment submissions, sub-par work that fails to improve over the course of the semester, a poor attendance record, or a no-show for your designated presentation dates.

Use of Technology in the Classroom:

Webster 101 is a newly developed innovative classroom that facilitates collaborative learning. The classroom features eight student tables that allow students to share their laptop, iPad, or other device displays. This environment will likely be new to you; the following points will help you get the most out of this experience:

- Please bring laptops, iPads, and/or other connectable devices to all classes in this room. We will learn how to connect to the table monitors in the first few sessions.
- Students should be aware of any personal information on their desktops when connecting devices to monitors.
- Other than during designated periods of online research, random web surfing is not permitted while the class is in session.
- Notes must be taken at every lecture. For this to be possible you will need paper and a pen on the table in front of you. There's no school like the old school.
- Cellphones may be left in your bags on stealth mode or placed on the table FACE DOWN.