COMM 5304 Cultural Studies
Spring 2016
Times M 7-9:30pm (alternating weeks, blended with online)
Meeting Dates: 1/25, 2/8, 2/15, 2/29, 3/21, 4/4, 4/18, 5/2, and 5/9
Room: O’Connor Building, Rm. 222

Professor David Gurney
Office: Bay Hall Rm. 326
Office Hours: MW 10am-noon, T 1-2pm, & by appointment

Phone: 361-825-5991
david.gurney@tamucc.edu

Course Description:
This course examines theoretical approaches to cultural studies; it focuses on interdisciplinary research of media and audiences, covering a range of methods and theoretical frameworks; concentration varies.

About the Course:
This seminar in cultural theory examines key theories and methods used to study popular culture in-depth. It contextualizes the fundamental methods and related theories for understanding the construction of meaning in media such as film, television, popular music, and advertising within the various academic disciplines and traditions of cultural studies. Throughout the course, we will endeavor to connect this critical and intellectual history with contemporary media culture.

Student Learning Objectives: At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to:
1. Understand a variety of frameworks for interpreting popular culture
2. Apply interpretive frameworks and analyze popular culture
3. Create original media criticism and research by applying cultural theories

Required Course Texts:

All additional reserve readings will be made available through the library and/or Blackboard.

Course Policies
» Attendance at face-to-face meetings is mandatory. See grading policy below. Excused absences are only given in cases of genuine hardship. Please contact the instructor should such an occasion arise.
» Late work will be penalized by ten percent of available points for the assignment for each day it is late.
» While in class, please make sure your cell phone is off and stowed away.
» A note on competing media: Laptops are permitted for class-related purposes only, but please do not abuse this privilege. While you may personally feel capable of multitasking during class while still paying attention to lecture and discussion, your surrounding classmates will more likely find your in-class extracurricular activities distracting, so please, for the sake of your peers, respect this restriction.
» Please remember to check your email regularly during the week and monitor the course Blackboard site.
» If you would like to discuss any course readings, lectures, or assignments outside of class, you should feel free to contact me via email or by arranging to visit me during my office hours. If you need to schedule a time to meet outside of office hours, please let me know.
» All writing for this course must be composed using a standard, 12-point font size, and with standard 1” margins.
Course Assignments & Grading:

In-Class Attendance/Participation: 75 points. Attendance is mandatory for our face-to-face meetings and active participation in class is vital to your experience (and grade) in the course. Twenty-five points will be deducted from your participation grade for each class missed. You will receive a midterm report on your attendance/participation grade along with your midterm grade.

Online Participation: 75 points. In our weeks without face-to-face meetings you will be expected to participate in our online discussion forums on Blackboard. These points will be earned based upon how robust your participation is.

Reading Presentations and Critiques: You will choose four weeks for which you will do a reading presentation or critique – one of each, face-to-face and online. The presentations will require you to briefly synopsize and instigate discussion on a reading. The critiques will require you to prepare a shorter but more critical response to a reading, pointing to problems with its argument or avenues it leaves unexplored. Readings with an asterisk (*) next to them are those you may select.

- In-Class Reading Presentation: 50 points. Time: 10-15 minutes.
- In-Class Reading Reaction: 50 points. Time: 3-5 minutes.
- Online Reading Presentation: 50 points. Length: 300-500 words.
- Online Reading Reaction: 50 points. Length: 150-300 words.

Midterm Exam: 150 points. You will have one evening to write a 1250-1600 word response to answer to a question related to the theories we will have covered in the first half of the semester. This will occur between 6pm-10pm on 3/7 and will be done via Blackboard.

Seminar Paper Proposal: 150 points. You will write a 1250-1600 word document that explains both your intended object(s) of study and proposed critical methodologies to be applied. Details to come. Due 3/28 via submission on Blackboard.

Presentation of Seminar Paper: 50 points. In addition to turning in a final paper on the course project, students will introduce their work in a 15-minute presentation to the class. Done in class during our final meeting on 5/2 and during our scheduled exam time on 5/9.

Seminar Paper: 300 points. Students will develop a substantial course project, in most cases a seminar paper, in consultation with the professor. This project will include choosing a subject of media or cultural production and applying a critical methodology in order to research and interpret that subject. Due 5/8 via submission on Blackboard.

Grade Scale: A = 1000-900 points, B = 899-800 points, C = 799-700 points, D = 699-600 points, F = 599 points or lower
Academic Integrity:
University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one's own work. For a more expansive definition of plagiarism please see the relevant passage from the University's student handbook.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in a failing grade (F) for the assignment, at the very least, or a report to the Chair of the Department of Communication and Media, the Dean of the School of Arts, Media, and Communication, and the Office of Student Affairs.

» For the purposes of citation, please follow American Psychological Association (APA) Style Guide. For reference, see: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

Dropping a Class:
I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the class be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. April 10, 2015, is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

Classroom/Professional Behavior:
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Academic Advising:
Students pursuing the Master of Arts in Communication will be paired with a graduate faculty member advisor in their first semester. Students should contact their advisors within the first two weeks of a semester to arrange a meeting during which degree plans, tracks, and opportunities for professional development should be discussed. If there is any question regarding whom a student’s academic advisor is, the student should contact Dr. David Gurney, Graduate Coordinator, for assistance (david.gurney@tamucc.edu; 361-825-5991). To finalize your degree plan and register for graduation, you must also meet with the Graduate Student Academic Advisor in the Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts. This office is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.”
Disabilities Accommodations
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Grade Appeal Process:
Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.
Course Schedule
Readings are to be completed before the under which they are listed. Schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1. January 19-25
Face-to-Face Meeting on January 25
Introduction to the Course and the Concepts of Culture and Popular Culture
Conversation will incorporate material from Storey, Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Week 2. January 26-February 1
No Face-to-Face Meeting
Marxism and the Culture Industry
Storey, Chapter 4
Reserves:
Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. Enlightenment as mass deception*
Benjamin, W. The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*
Cross, S., & Littler, J. Celebrity and schadenfreude*
Smith, A. Nigerian scam e-mails and the charms of capital*

Week 3. February 2-8
Face-to-Face Meeting on February 8
Structuralism and Post-Structuralism
Storey, Chapter 6
Reserves:
Barthes, R. The death of the author*
Sawyer, R. K. A discourse on discourse: An archeological history of an intellectual concept*
Wright, W. The structure of myth & the structure of the Western film*

Week 4. February 9-15
Face-to-Face Meeting on February 15
Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Sexuality
Storey, Chapters 5 & 7
Reserves:
Clover, C. J. Her body, himself: Gender in the slasher film*
McRobbie, A. Post-feminism and popular culture*
Mulvey, L. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*

Week 5. February 16-22
No Face-to-Face Meeting
Gender and Sexuality (continued)
Reserves:
Butler, J. Gender Trouble (excerpts)*
Foucault, M. The history of sexuality, vol. 1 (excerpts)*
Lawrence, T. Disco and the queering of the dance floor*
Sedgwick, E. K. Epistemology of the Closet (excerpts)*
Week 6. February 23-29
Face-to-Face Meeting on February 29
Representation, Race, (Post-)Colonialism
Storey, Chapter 8
Reserves:
hooks, b. The oppositional gaze*
Fanon, F. Black Skin, White Masks (excerpts)*
McIntosh, P. White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack
Said, E. Orientalism (excerpts)*

Week 7. March 1-7
MIDTERM EXAM – QUESTION RELEASED VIA BLACKBOARD AT 6PM ON MARCH 7, RESPONSE DUE BY 10:00PM

Begin work on proposals and Week 8 readings before Spring Break (March 8-11)

SPRING BREAK. March 12-20
No Assigned Readings.

Week 8. March 21
Face-to-Face Meeting on March 21
Modernism and Postmodernism
Storey, Chapter 9
Reserves:
Baudrillard, J. The system of objects*
Jameson, F. The cultural logic of late capitalism*
Lyotard, J. The postmodern condition*

Week 9. March 22-March 28
No Face-to-Face Meeting
Politics of the Popular (Taste)
Reserves:
Bourdieu, P. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (excerpts)*
Holland, S. L., & Novak, D. R. “Food changed my life”*
Sconce, J. Trashing the academy*
SEMINAR PAPER PROPOSAL DUE VIA BLACKBOARD ON MARCH 28
Week 10. March 29-April 4
Face-to-Face Meeting on April 4
Politics of the Popular (Audiences)
Storey, Chapter 10
Reserves:
Bruns, A. The future is user-led: The path towards widespread produsage
Hall, S. Encoding, decoding*
Hebdige, D. From culture to hegemony*
Jenkins, H. Star Trek rerun, reread, rewritten: Fan writing as textual poaching*

Week 11. April 5-11
No Face-to-Face Meeting
Current Thoughts on Modernism, Postmodernism and Audiences
Bird, S. E. Are we all produsers now?*
Childish, B. Remodernism: Towards a new spirituality in art*
Pollard, C. That Future Islands performance...* (if presented, this will be combined with Childish)
Vermeulen, T., & van den Akker, R. Notes on metamodernism*

Week 12. April 12-18
Face-to-Face Meeting on April 18
Recent Developments in Cultural Studies
Reserves:
Andrejevic, M. The work that affective economics does*
Hemmings, C. Invoking affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn*
Morley, D. Cultural studies, common sense and communications*
Ouellette, L., & Wilson, J. Women's work*

Week 13. April 19-April 25.
Seminar Paper Preparation Week
Individual meetings will be scheduled

Face-to-Face Meeting on May 2
Seminar Paper Presentations

Final Exam Week. May 9
Face-to-Face Meeting on May 9
Seminar Paper Presentations

Final seminar papers will be due by 11:59pm on Sunday, May 8.
References


