

COMM 206: Communication and Culture

Fall 2014

Professor: Alison Trope, Ph.D.
Office hours: T/Th 3:30-4:30 (and by appointment)
ANN 310A, trope@usc.edu

ANN L105A
T/TH12:30-1:50 pm

Discussion sections are required. Make sure you are registered for one of the sections based on the schedule of classes. All sections meet on Mondays.

Teaching Assistants: Emma Frances Bloomfield EmmatheTA@gmail.com, Melina Sherman melinash@usc.edu, Kari Storla storla@usc.edu

Course Description:

This course is designed as an introduction to communications as the study of culture. Any study of communication entails an understanding of culture, and vice-versa. As an examination of cultural institutions, ideologies, artifacts, and productions, work in cultural studies and communication is concerned with the integral relationship of cultural practices to relationships of power. Therefore we will focus on some of the key methodologies of cultural analysis and some of the primary themes of cultural study, with an emphasis on how they intersect with central issues in the field of communication. The first half of the course will be devoted to general approaches, key concepts, and over-arching questions, with a particular emphasis on the study of media, popular culture, and communication. The second half will focus more specifically on distinct units of study—gender, pop music, television, radio, brand culture, and others—as individual case studies of cultural analysis. We will pay particular attention to how notions of both culture and cultural study have changed over time, and how those legacies influence contemporary debates around cultural production, cultural identity, and global cultural change.

Course Requirements and Attendance:

Students are required to do all of the reading, attend class regularly, complete all assignments, and contribute to class discussions. Attendance in lecture is important: there is significant material covered in lecture that is not in the reading and you cannot pass the course if you do not attend most of the lectures. In addition, there will be frequent screenings in lecture for which you will be responsible. There are several writing assignments for this class, and because the lectures, discussions, reading assignments and course assignments are all vitally linked, it is critical that you keep up with the schedule. Students who miss **more than four lectures and two discussion sections** will have their grades reduced and risk failing the course.

In addition to weekly lectures, there will be mandatory discussion sections held each week. These sections, led by the TAs, are designed to be opportunities for students to ask questions, rehearse ideas, workshop papers, etc. Because of the size of the course, the sections are helpful sites for more individualized conversation, debate, and review.

Personal computers and wireless Internet are a key part of today's technological culture, but they also can distract you from the class discussion and dampen participation. You may bring your laptops to class **for note-taking**, but please refrain from browsing the internet, updating your Facebook profile, playing games, instant messaging, shopping, tweeting etc. Although you may think you are being discreet, 90% of the time students engaging in such behavior give themselves away (through inappropriate facial expressions, lack of eye contact, out of sync typing, etc.). Use of computer in the classroom is a privilege. If you abuse this privilege, you will be marked absent for that class period and laptops may be banned from the auditorium.

Classroom Conduct and Respect

All students are encouraged to use the classroom as a safe space in which to speak and voice their opinions. My expectation is that you respect not only the professor, but also your classmates when they participate in discussion.

Course Readings/Required Texts:

All readings will be posted on Blackboard as PDFs or weblinks. If you have trouble opening or reading any of the articles, let me know ASAP.

Assignments and Grading:

The final course grade will be based on the following distribution:

Discussion section (attendance, short assignments, pop quizzes)	15%
Cultural Event post	5%
In-Class Midterm	20%
Papers (3)	60% (20% each)

You must complete ALL of these assignments in order to pass the class. **Failure to complete one or more of them will result in an F in the class.**

You will receive details about each assignment/exam separately. **All assignments must be completed and handed in on time. Late papers will be penalized. Emailed assignments will not be accepted. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with the professor in a timely manner, before the paper is due. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out. Remember: this is YOUR responsibility.**

Papers (60% total): There are three papers due in this class. Each paper will be 6-8 pages and should be checked for grammar and spelling, with proper citation practices. These papers are designed to have you think theoretically about issues of culture; while they call on you to utilize readings, they are not intended to be summaries of arguments presented in the course. Rather they are an opportunity for you to think about cultural practices and theories from the readings as they apply to some example or artifact outside of class.

Midterm (20%): This in-class exam will focus on material from readings and lectures covered during week 1-6.

Discussion Section (15%): You will receive periodic assignments and possible pop quizzes during discussion section. The purpose of these assignments is to make sure you are keeping up with the readings. Your TA will be giving you due dates for written assignments in section, and you will turn these assignments in during section.

Cultural Event Response (5%): This assignment offers an opportunity for you to write a short (2-3 paragraphs) analysis of a "cultural event" you attend throughout the semester. Visions and Voices events are highly recommended. Other options may include an art event, such as a visit to a museum or an art exhibit; a musical event, such as a concert or a symphony; a theatre event; a fashion show; a photography exhibit, etc. The response is opportunity for you to relate your own activities to the discussions about culture we will be having in class, and where relevant, to the readings (no citations of readings are required). And, while surely events such as fraternity/sorority rush parties, raves, and other sorts of parties are also "cultural events" and often worthy of our analysis, for this assignment, narrow the definition to the kinds of events that involve a kind of cultural production. You will submit this assignment in discussion section by week 10. If you have questions about events, please email.

[Visions and Voices events](#) are highly recommended and specific suggestions will be made throughout the term.

ALL of your work will be evaluated on the following:

- 1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as evidenced in your written work and participation)
- 2) your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms structured around a clearly stated argument
- 3) your ability to creatively explore and apply theories and methodologies from class readings, lectures, media, and discussions

Course Grading Policy:

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A	outstanding, thoughtful and engaging work
B+/B	above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through
C and below	fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A+	= 97-100	C	= 76-74
A	= 96-94	C-	= 73-70
A-	= 93-90	D+	= 69-67
B+	= 89-87	D	= 66-64
B	= 86-84	D-	= 63-60
B-	= 83-80	F	= 59-0
C+	= 79-77		

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must first wait 24 hours (cooling off period) before appealing it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate. All concerns should be addressed within 10 days of receiving the graded assignment. After that, no appeals will be accepted for review and the grade will be considered final.

Academic Integrity:

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you are turning in is your own and no one else's, and that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class. Do not take this policy lightly!

The School of Communication is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the SCampus policies and procedures detailed in the section titled "University Sanction Guidelines." These policies, procedures and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty. It is particularly important that you be aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this

policy will result in a failing grade in the course, and be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. If you have any doubts about any of these practices, you must confer with the professor.

ADA Compliance Statement

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

ESL Students

Please inform me as soon as possible if you require special accommodations based on your understanding of the English language.

Campus Resources

Center for Women and Men (CWM): The Center for Women and Men provides a safe haven and support system by responding to and preventing acts of sexual violence.

Emergencies: (213) 740-4900
24-Hour Line: (213) 321-3982 (24-hour)
www.usc.edu/cwm

Student Support and Advocacy: Student Support and Advocacy assists students and families in resolving complex issues which adversely affect a student's collegiate experience. Whether personal, academic, or financial, we evaluate and present options to students and facilitate communication and connections with university departments.

STU 201
www.usc.edu/student-affairs/programs/ssa
(213) 740-2421

Trojans Care for Trojans: Trojans Care for Trojans, an initiative within the Division of Students Affairs, empowers students to take action and speak out when they are concerned about a Trojan. It provides support resources and appropriate referrals for Trojans facing personal difficulties. Trojans Care for Trojans encourages students to care for each other and the entire campus community.

University Park Campus Counseling Services: USC Counseling Services is dedicated to providing and referring students with psychological services to assist them during their time at USC. Students may schedule an intake appointment at any time by calling or walking in to the center

Main Line: (213) 740-7711
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/Health_Center/cs.index.shtml

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE (open to revision)

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PART 1: THEORIZING CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Week 1: **Defining Culture**

August 26 Course Introduction
Adam Sternbergh [“What it Means to Be Popular \(When Everything is Popular\)”](#)
Optional: Ralph Rugoff, Circus Americanus

August 28 Raymond Williams “Culture”
Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary”
Matthew Arnold, “Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism”

Week 2: **The Politics of Culture: Ideology and Power**

September 2 Marx and Engels, from “The German Ideology”
Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes toward an investigation)”

September 4 Antonio Gramsci, from *The Prison Notebooks*
Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, “From Carnival to Transgression”

Week 3: **Communicating Culture and the Image**

September 9 James Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication”
Douglas Kellner” Communication vs. Cultural Studies: Overcoming the Divide”

September 11 Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Viewers Make Meaning”
Stuart Hall, “The Television Discourse: Encoding Decoding”
Judith Williamson “Meaning and Ideology”

September 12 Last day to drop without a “W”

Week 4: **Historical Debates and Divides**

September 16 Lawrence Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation"

September 18 George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow"

Week 5: **Taste, Canon, and Cultural Authority**

September 23 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction"
Gael Sweeny, "The King of White Trash Culture: Elvis Presley and the Aesthetics of Excess"

PAPER 1 DUE

September 25 Malcolm Gladwell, "The Coolhunt" *The New Yorker* (3/97)
John Seabrook, "Nobrow Culture" *The New Yorker* (9/99)
Carl Wilson, from *Let's Talk About Love*

PART 2: MEDIA INDUSTRIES AND CULTURE INDUSTRIES

Week 6 **Mass Culture and Popular Culture**

September 30 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

October 2 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"
Dwight MacDonald "A Theory of Mass Culture"

Week 7: **Mass Media and the Nation**

October 7 Michelle Hilmes, "Radiating Culture"
Warren Susman, "The People's Fair: Cultural Contradictions of a Consumer Society"

October 9 Victoria Johnson, "'Essential, Desirable, and Possible Markets: Broadcasting Midwestern Tastes and Values"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: Visions and Voices event
[Voices of South LA: Civic Action and Community Voice](#), 6pm ASC G26

Week 8

Stars and Celebrity Culture

October 14

Graeme Turner “Celebrity, The Tabloid and the Democratic Public Sphere”
Joshua Gamson, “The Negotiated Celebration”

October 16

MIDTERM-IN CLASS

Week 9

Putting Culture on Display

October 21

Sharon Zukin “The Urban Landscape”
Michael Sorkin, “See You In Disneyland”

October 23

Sarah Banet Weiser, “Branding Creativity: Creative Cities, Street Art and ‘Making Your Name Sing’ ”

PART 3: IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND NEW MEDIASCAPES

Week 10:

Subcultures and Politics

October 28

Albert Cohen, “A General Theory of Subcultures”
Dick Hebdige, “Subculture: The Unnatural Break”

October 30

Robin D.G. Kelley, from *Race Rebels*
Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, “Girls and Subcultures”
bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?”

SUBMIT CULTURAL EVENT RESPONSE BY/BEFORE OCTOBER 24 VIA EMAIL TO YOUR TA

Week 11:

Gender as Identity and Practice

November 4

Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”
Susan Douglas, excerpts from *Enlightened Sexism*

November 6

Susan Douglas, “Letting the Boys Be Boys: Talk Radio, Male Hysteria, and Political Discourse in the 1980s”
Michael Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca, “The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Events”

Week 12:

Black and White

November 11

Richard Dyer, "White"
Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain"

November 13

Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves"
Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics"
OPTIONAL: Martell Teasley and David Ikard, "Barak Obama and the Politics of Race: The Myth of Postracism in America"

PAPER 2 DUE

Week 13:

Convergence, New Identity Politics and Participatory Culture

November 18

Mark Andrejevic "Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans"

November 20

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, Joshua Green, "What Constitutes Meaningful Participation?"

Week 14:

Globalism and Cultural Imperialism

November 25

Edward Said, "Orientalism"
Sunaina Maira, "Indo-Chic: Late Capitalist Orientalism and Imperial Culture"

November 27

Happy Thanksgiving

Week 15

Rethinking Activism and Change

December 2

Clemencia Rodriguez, "From Alternative Media to Citizens' Media"
Manuel Castells, "Networking Creating Meaning, Contesting Power"

December 4

Grace Lee Boggs, excerpt from *The Next American Revolution*
Malcolm Gladwell, "[Why The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted](#)"
Jeff Chang & Brian Komar, "[Culture Before Politics](#)"

December 16, 11 am

PAPER 3 DUE*

- **Hard copies of papers should be turned in by or before 11am on December 16. The Annenberg mailroom (ASC 223) will date and time stamp papers turned in before this time. Otherwise, you may turn in your hard copy to me in person between 10-11am on 12/16 in my office: ANN 310A.**