

Syllabus – Fall 2014

COMM 499: The Business and Culture of Celebrity

Professor: Chris Smith

Time: TBD

Classroom: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

The circulation of celebrity images in global communication networks—and the efforts to package and monetize these flows in consumer society—are defining features of contemporary times. This course seeks to place these central dynamics of everyday life within broader historical perspective so as to better appreciate their role in reproducing the dominant social order.

Readings will include a classic essay by philosopher Walter Benjamin; a selection from *The Image* by Daniel Boorstin; more recent work on the psychology of celebrity from *The Mirror Effect*, by Dr. Drew Pinsky; and various approaches to utilizing celebrities for the marketing of consumer brands as found in recent legal, marketing, and PR literature. These readings will be bolstered by additional social-scientific analyses of celebrity, including those that seek to appreciate its role in social identity formation, its connection with networks of economic, juridical, and political power, and its impact on inter-personal communication.

Course Goals

1. To familiarize students with a representative range of social scientific research on celebrity – spanning sociology, media effects, and cultural studies.
2. To formulate the celebrity as a useful tool for introducing students to the study of (post-) modern communication networks.
3. To offer students opportunities to reflect and write critically about the role of celebrity in contemporary cultural experience.
4. To offer students practical exposure to media and corporate industry professionals who work to create, manage, and extend celebrity capital within the commercial marketplace.

Competencies and Evaluation

Participation	10%
Blog Posts	30%

Midterm Papers	30%
Final Group Presentations	30%

Course Readings

Required (Available USC Bookstore):

1. *Celebrity Diplomacy*, Andrew F. Cooper
2. *Starstruck*, Elizabeth Currid-Halkett
3. *Private Parts*, Jeff Jarvis
4. *Celebrity, Inc.*, Jo Piazza
5. *The Mirror Effect*, D. Pinsky & S.M. Young
6. *Hollywood Left and Right*, Steven J. Ross
7. *The Future of Reputation*, Daniel J. Solove

Course Reader (Available at Magic Machine Copies)

Reading Schedule

(Course Reader= CR); (Blackboard=BB); (Handout=HO)

Week 1

A:

Introduction – Roundtable Meet & Greet

B: Historical Background & New Debates

Reading:

(CR) L. Braudy, “The Dream of Acceptability,” *Stardom & Celebrity*, Ch. 15

(CR) W. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”

(CR) L. Friedman, *The Horizontal Society*, Introduction, Ch. 1

Week 2

A: Celebrity Critique, Pt. 1

Reading:

(CR) D. Boorstin, *The Image*, “From Hero to Celebrity”

(CR) C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, “Changing Modes of Making It”

(CR) S. Doonan, “Kim Kardashian: Why Does She Fascinate Us? We Used to Revere Scientists and Surgeons!”

(CR) C. Hedges, “The Man in the Mirror”

B Celebrity Critique, Pt. 2

Reading:

(CR) M. Rowlands, *Fame*, Chs, 1 & 6

(CR) N. Gabler, “Celebrity: The Greatest Show on Earth”

(CR) P. Noonan, “Is ‘Octomom’ America’s Future?”

(CR) B. Stephens, “Celebrity Culture vs. the Right Stuff”

(CR) J. Queenan, “Icons Aren’t What They Used to Be”

Week 3

A: Celebrity Capital, Pt. 1

Reading:

(BB) Barrie Gunter, *Celebrity Capital*, Ch. 1: “What is Celebrity Capital?” (Note: This is a working manuscript with Bloomsbury Press and not yet published. Cite accordingly.)

***Paper #1 Assigned; Due TBD**

B: Celebrity Capital, Pt. 2

Reading:

E. Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck*, Ch. 2

Week 4

A: Celebrity Capital, Pt. 3 – A Case Study

Reading:

E. Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck*, Ch. 3

(BB) R. Ricard, “The Radiant Child”

(BB) G. Tate, “Flyboy in the Buttermilk”

Screening: *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*”

B: Celebrity Capital, Pt. 4

Reading:

(BB) M. Hayward, et. al., “Believing One’s Own Press: The Causes and Consequences of CEO Celebrity”

(BB) A. Ranft, et. al., “The Costs and Benefits of CEO Reputation”

(BB) J. Wade, et. al., “Star CEOs: Benefit or Burden?”

Week 5

A: The Psychological Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 1

Reading:

E. Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck*, Ch. 4

(CR) K.O. Ferris and S. R. Harris, *Stargazing: Celebrity, Fame, and Social Interaction*, Chs. 2-3

B: The Psychological Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 2

Reading:

(CR) J. Halpern, *Fame Junkies*, Chs. 5-7

Week 6

A: Celebrity, Privacy and Reputation, Pt. 1

Reading:

D.J. Solove, *The Future of Reputation*, Chs. 2-3; 7-8

(CR) E. Gould, “Exposed”

B: Celebrity, Privacy and Reputation, Pt. 2

Reading:

J. Jarvis, *Public Parts*, pp. 2-14; 43-77; 115-161

J. Piazza, *Celebrity, Inc.*, Chs. 2, 11

Week 7

A: Celebrity, Privacy and Reputation, Pt. 3

Reading:

D. Pinsky & S.M. Young, *The Mirror Effect*, Chs. 3 & 7

E. Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck*, Ch. 8

(BB) J. Gould, “The Secret World of Lonelygirl”

B: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 1

Reading:

(BB) Barrie Gunter, *Celebrity Capital*, Ch. 3: “The Consumer Capital of Celebrity” (*Note: This is a working manuscript with Bloomsbury Press and not yet published. Cite accordingly.*)

Week 8

A: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 2

Reading:

E. Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck*, Ch. 7

(CR) K. Miloch, “Introduction to Branding”

B: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 3

Reading:

J. Piazza, *Celebrity, Inc.*, Introduction, Chs. 3, 5, 6, 8, 12

(BB) Ian Sanders, “The Search for another Hit”

Week 9

A: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 4

Reading:

(BB) C. Kripalani, “Trendsetting and Product Placement in Bollywood Film...”

(BB) K. Hung, K. Chan, C. Tse, “Assessing Celebrity Endorsement Effects in China”

B: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 5

Reading:

(CR) D. Carter, “Athlete Branding”

(CR/BB) M. Futterman, “...Pele Awaits His Payday”

(BB) A. Elberse & M. Golod, “Maria Sharapova: Marketing a Champion”

Week 10

A: The Consumer Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 6

Reading:

(BB) J. Summer & M. J. Morgan, “More Than Just the Media...”

(BB) K. Hung, “Nike and Liu Xiang: Crisis Management in Celebrity Endorsement”

(BB) F. Miller & G. Laczniak, “The Ethics of Celebrity-Athlete Endorsement”

B: The Political Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 1

(BB) L. Erenberg “More Than a Prizefight”

(CR) J. Fiske, *Media Matters*, “Figuring People,” pp. 67 – 74

(BB) S. Cottle, “Mediatized Rituals”

***Paper #2 Assigned; Due TBD**

Week 11

A: The Political Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 2

Reading:

S. J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, Introduction, Chs. 5, 9

(BB) D. Kellner, “Barack Obama and Celebrity Spectacle”

B: Celebrity Diplomacy & Philanthropy, Pt. 1

Reading:

A. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, Chs. 1-2; Conclusion

(CR) A. Trope, “Mother Angelina: Hollywood Philanthropy Personified”

Week 12

A: Celebrity Diplomacy & Philanthropy, Pt. 2

Reading:

J. Piazza, *Celebrity, Inc.*, Ch. 10

(CR) J. Traub, “The Celebrity Solution”

(CR) S. Malcomson, “Shakira’s Children”

(CR) S. Paternoso, “Shakira’s Colombian War”

B: The Health Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 1

Reading:

(BB) S. Chapman & J. Leask, “Paid Celebrity Endorsement in Health Promotion”

Week 13

A: The Health Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 2

Reading:

(BB) Case studies of celebrity health campaigns

B: The Health Capital of Celebrity, Pt. 3

Reading:

(BB) E. Michel-Kerjan, “Creating Value Through Cause-Related Marketing and Celebrity Advocacy”

Week 14

A:

Group Presentations

B:

Thanksgiving Holiday – Class Suspended

Week 15

Group Presentations

**Final Case Study Write-up DUE:
TBD**

Participation

Class discussion is a critical part of the effectiveness of this course. This is a seminar course, where we collectively grapple with issues and challenges to communication management today. Each individual is expected to be actively involved in class discussion during each class period. The primary assessment will be the quality of those contributions to the group effort.

Good contributions are:

- thoughtful
- analytical
- constructive to the group effort
- topically relevant
- linked to the readings assigned for that day*

Poor contributions:

- simply restate what someone else has already said
- take the discussion on a tangent
- do not respect the other participants
- show that the individual has not done the assigned readings*

This 10% will be based on **overall contributions throughout the semester based on my judgment of overall frequency and quality**. If you skip class, don't expect a high participation grade. If you want to know how you are doing on class participation, don't hesitate to ask me.

Blog Posts

Class participation will be augmented by course blog contributions. The course blog is located on blackboard and will be an opportunity to present and discuss current topics in marketing communications outside of class. Everyone will contribute at least six unique posts on a topic related to the course, and will make a substantive response to at least four blog entries posted by other students during the semester. Be creative and showcase your insights. Your contributions should be concise, insightful, and provocative.

Here are two good resources for writing effective blog entries:

<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/how-to-write-effective-blog-posts/>

<http://gillin.com/blog/2009/12/five-tips-for-effective-blog-writing/>

Midterm Papers

You will receive details about each assignment separately. All assignments must be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction. 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 me in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out. Remember: this is YOUR responsibility.

Final Group Presentations

Students will work in small groups on a project to develop a case study related to the topics covered in class. The theme you select may be commercial, cultural, social scientific, or another area proposed by the group. Tailor it to your shared interests, and to practical real-world situations and concerns. A one-page synopsis of the project should be submitted by the midpoint

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of the term. Students will present their projects to the class during the last two weeks of the semester. Presentations must be business-like (20 min, 10 min Q&A), and include visual aids.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ATTENDANCE

Students are required to do all of the reading, attend all classes, complete all assignments, and participate fully in class discussion. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class meeting. Attendance grade may be affected by your promptness and level of attention during class lecture. You are allowed two absences without explanation, after which there is a deduction off the final grade for each unexcused absence.

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. I expect you to use computers for note-taking purposes only, and to avoid using other mobile devices during class time. Any deviation will result in laptops being banned from the classroom and participation grades being impacted.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

You are responsible for the material covered in class and in the reading. You will be evaluated on the following:

- The level of your engagement with the class materials (as demonstrated in your written work and class participation)
- Your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms
- Your ability to creatively explore the theories and materials presented in the class

All of your work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales:

- How well it demonstrates an understanding of the readings and lectures of the class
- How well it articulates and structures its argument

COURSE GRADING POLICY

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A+/A outstanding, insightful work and analysis, showing an understanding beyond the basic course material

A-/B+ above average work, demonstrates effort and understanding

B/B- average work, needs improvement on ideas and argument

C+/C shows little effort, lacks clarity and/or argument

C- and below meets the bare minimum, shows little understanding of material

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.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS:

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 STUDENT ACCOMODATIONS:

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

Instructor notes:

I would like this to be a true seminar. I would like to engage you in a course where you learn from each other. I will give brief talks at the beginning of class, at least in the first few weeks, drawing on both your readings and other material. I will not repeat the readings in my talks. I want to know what you think about what you've read. I do not agree with all the perspectives in the readings, and I will not pretend to be objective, nor will I pretend to think that all perspectives are equally valid, but I appreciate and learn from well-thought-out ideas that are contrary to my own. I would consider the course a failure if you did not develop your own strong perspective regarding our communications environment. I will work with you to structure a class/team project that looks at the real world. And in the latter part of the class, I will seek speakers or lectures appropriate to *your* interests.

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 enforced. It is 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.