

COMM 206: Communication and Culture

Fall 2015

Professor: Alison Trope, Ph.D.
Office hours: T/Th 2-3pm (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:

Rogelio Lopez (Monday 10 and 11 am, ANN 309)	rogeliol@usc.edu
Kate Miltner (Monday 11am, ANN 309)	miltner@usc.edu
Raffi Sarkissian (Monday 9 and 10am, ANN 305)	raffisar@usc.edu
Wei Wang (Monday 8am, ANN 305)	wangwei1115@gmail.com

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.

Lecture outlines will be posted weekly to help facilitate note-taking (powerpoint slides will NOT be posted). It is highly recommended that you take notes by hand. If you prefer to use a laptop, please make sure you only use it for note-taking. 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 not only your participation, but also that of your peers. Please see Blackboard folder "Lecture Notes" for outlines and current articles that discuss the value of taking notes by hand and some of the problems with using laptops in the classroom. Use of computer in the classroom is a privilege. If you abuse this privilege, **you will be marked absent for that class period**.

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.

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.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

ESL Students

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

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE (open to revision)

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PART 1: THEORIZING CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Week 1: **Defining Culture: Historical Debates and Divides**

August 25 Course Introduction

August 27 Matthew Arnold, "Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism"
Raymond Williams "Culture"
George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow" (pp. 3-13)

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

September 1 Marx and Engels, from "The German Ideology"
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes toward an investigation)"

September 3 Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary"
Antonio Gramsci, from *The Prison Notebooks*

Week 3: **Geographic Ideologies & Boundary Setting**

September 8 Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities"
Edward Said, "Orientalism"

September 10 Mike Davis, "City of Quartz: Power Lines"

September 11 Last day to drop without a "W"

Week 4: **Communicating Culture and the Image**

September 15 James Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication"
Judith Williamson "Meaning and Ideology"

September 17 Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, "Viewers Make Meaning"
Stuart Hall, "The Television Discourse: Encoding Decoding"

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

September 22

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"

September 24

Henry Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars? Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry"
Samantha Close, "Crafting the Ideal Working World"

GUEST: Sam Close

PART 2: MEDIA INDUSTRIES AND CULTURE INDUSTRIES

Week 6 **Everything is Awesome: Mass Culture and Popular Culture**

September 28

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"

PAPER 1 DUE

October 1

Tom Kemper, excerpts from *Toy Story: A Critical Reading*
Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular"

OPTIONAL: Adam Sternbergh ["What it Means to Be Popular \(When Everything is Popular\)"](#)

GUEST: Tom Kemper

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

October 6

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

October 8

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

Week 8 **Stars and Celebrity Culture**

October 13

Joshua Gamson, "The Negotiated Celebration"
P. David Marshall, "Introduction: Celebrity in the Digital Era: A New Public Intimacy"
Anne Helen Peterson, ["Forever Young: How Smosh Plans to Build a Youtube Fame That'll Last"](#)

October 15

MIDTERM-IN CLASS

Week 9

Putting Culture on Display

October 20

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

October 22

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 27

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

October 29

Robin D.G. Kelley, “OGs In Postindustrial Los Angeles: Evolution in Style”
Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, “Girls and Subcultures”
bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?”

SUBMIT CULTURAL EVENT RESPONSE BY/BEFORE OCTOBER 29 10PM VIA EMAIL TO YOUR TA

Week 11:

Gender as Identity and Practice

November 3

Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”
Roxanne Gay, excerpts from *Bad Feminist*

November 5

Sarah Banet-Weiser, “[Popular Misogyny: A Zeitgeist](#)”
Michael Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca, “The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Events”

Week 12:

Race Matters

November 10

Richard Dyer, “White”
Carol Clover, “Dancin’ in the Rain”
Noah Berlatsky, “[What Do We Really Mean When We Talk About Cultural Appropriation?](#)”

November 12

Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”
Kobena Mercer, “Black Hair/Style Politics”

PAPER 2 DUE

Week 13:

Convergence, New Identity Politics and Participatory Culture

November 17

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "How To See Yourself"
Jesse McCarthy, "[The Work of Art in the Age of Spectacular Reproduction](#)"

November 19

Lori Kido Lopez, "Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in *The Last Airbender*"
Megan Wood and Linda Baughman, "Glee Fandom and Twitter: Something New, or More of the Same Old Thing?"

GUEST: Dayna Chatman

Week 14:

Multiculturalism and Global Marketplace

November 24

Jeff Chang, "We Are All Multiculturalists Now: Visions of One America"

November 26

Happy Thanksgiving

Week 15

Rethinking Activism and Change

December 1

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Changing the World" and "Visual Activism"
Sasha Costanza-Chock, "Out of the Closets, Out of Shadows, and Into the Streets: Pathways to Participation in DREAM Activist Networks"

December 3

Jeff Chang, "Who We Be: Debt, Community, and Colorization"

December 15, 11 am

PAPER 3 DUE