HU 3860: Popular Culture

Meeting: Monday-Thursday, 9:35 am - 10:50 pm, Fisher 125
Professor: Dr. Jnan Blau
E-mail: jablau@mtu.edu
Telephone: My Office, 487-1084; Department of Humanities, 487-2008
Office: Walker 344
Office Hours: by appointment

Required Texts:
Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making us Smarter.*
McLaughlin, Thomas. *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular.*
Niedzviecki, Hal. *Hello, I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity.*

*Additional readings, including web-based readings, will be assigned*

Course Description:
What is popular culture? What can we learn—about culture in general, about others, about ourselves, and about communication—by studying popular culture? Is it possible to both celebrate and critique popular culture? What role does the media play in popular culture? What role do each of us, as consumers and even as "fans," play in popular culture?

This course explores these very questions, as well as many others related to them. We will take seriously the notion that we can learn much from a sustained and thoughtful engagement with popular culture. We will read key writings by several prominent writers. We will have lively, thoughtful discussions about popular culture matters.

This will be a readings-centered course, with most assignments designed to reinforce your understanding of the material. Throughout the course, you will have plenty of opportunities for interaction, discussion, in-class presentation, group work, and more. Thorough preparation and active participation on your part is expected.

Final Grade Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>921-1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>821-870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>721-770</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>600-670</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-599</td>
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Course Graded Requirements:

There are four components that will factor into the grade you will earn in this course:

1. Two Short Reflection Papers in which you grapple, in writing, with the course material
2. Four Comprehension Quizzes in which you demonstrate, in class, your careful engagement with the course material
3. One Group Presentation on a relevant pop culture topic or phenomenon
4. APPTitude: Attending class; being well prepared for class by closely reading and thinking about the assigned materials; Participating in class discussions and activities; and being thoughtful both in class discussions and in written work

Points Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pts</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Reflection Papers</td>
<td>2 @ 200 pts = 400</td>
<td>(40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Quizzes</td>
<td>4 @ 50 pts = 200</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPTitude</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1000 (100%)</td>
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Attendance and Participation Policy (more on APPTitude)

Attendance:

Punctual, consistent attendance is essential for your success in this class—and, more importantly, for a fully realized learning environment for us all.

Attendance will be taken daily.

Students are allowed three "free" absences throughout the semester. These absences are for you to use for whatever reason, no need to discuss with me. Additional absences MUST be excused by the Dean of Students Office—NO EXCEPTIONS. I will not discuss additional absences unless you have been to the Dean's office first.

Participation:

I understand that, for personal and/or cultural reasons, different people participate differently in a class. I will try to account for this as much as possible. Nevertheless, I am quite aware that attendance does not necessarily equal participation. In order to derive the best learning experience from/for our class, it is absolutely essential that you come to class having read the assigned material and prepared to engage it in the classroom.

I am a pretty good judge of participation in my classes—by which I mean, I can usually tell, from your in-class participation, speaking and writing assignments, etc., if you are putting the necessary energy into this class.

Ultimately, it is in your best interest to take this class and its content seriously. Our experience together as learners—and your grade—will be strongest if you attend and participate to the fullest extent of your abilities.
A Note on Assignments and Make-Up Work

All assignments will be described in detail and distributed before they are due. All of the assignments will be made available online at http://www.humtu.edu/~iablau/hu3860/. If you need a handout or reading, you will always be able to find all handouts and readings online.

There will also be a class listserv, which I will use to contact/communicate with you: popcult-I@mtu.edu. So, please be sure to check your mtu.edu email account often.

Make-up work will only be allowed under special circumstances (which must be documented by the Dean of Students), as discussed with me (beforehand, if at all possible).

Communication is always key: communicating with me about any problems or delays that interfere with your work in this class will be crucial, and absolutely necessary, when it comes to any make-up work.

Another (Important) Note:

The best way to do well in this class is to not only read all the materials assigned but to also take notes as you do so. Write down important points and interesting ideas. Also, note anything that may be unclear to you (what is not clear can actually be as useful to your learning as what is clear). Be sure to bring these notes to class every day. Please, do not be shy; regarding our readings and class material, share with us not only what excites you but also what confuses you—chances are you will help more than just yourself!

One Other Note

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please inform me and contact the Student Affairs Office (487-2212) so that we may make appropriate arrangements. Please do this early in the semester; do not wait until problems arise.

The Last (but an Important) Note

Unless you come and talk to me and indicate otherwise, I will assume that you have carefully read this syllabus and that you have understood and are willing and able to abide by its content.
Week One:
June 30
Introductions & Syllabus
Jul 1
Course Overview/Themes
Jul 2
Jensen, “Fandom as Pathology” (WR)
Jul 3
Jenkins, “Get A Life!” (WR)

Week Two:
Jul 7
Jenkins, “Get A Life!” (WR)
Jul 8
McLaughlin, Chapter 1
Comprehension Quiz 1
Jul 9
Meet the Culture: Star Trek & Trekkie Culture
Video: “Trekkies”
Jul 10
Finish and Discuss “Trekkies”
SRP 1 assigned

Week Three:
Jul 14
Class Cancelled
Jul 15
Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” (WR)
SRP 1 due
Jul 16
Carroll, “Introduction to ‘Cultural Misunderstandings’ ” (WR)
Comprehension Quiz 2
Jul 17
Meet the Culture: Phish & Phan Culture
Optional Reading: Blau, “The Phish Phenomenon Offstage” (WR)
Week Four:
Jul 21
Multimedia Presentation: "Intercultural Communication in/and Music"
Peart, "Township Jive" (WR)

Jul 22
Holt, "World Music" (WR)
Frith, "The Discourse of World Music" (WR)
SRP 2 assigned

Jul 23
Negus, "Industry" (WR)
Croteau & Haynes, "New Media Giants" (WR)

Jul 24
Video: "Before the Music Dies"

Week Five:
Jul 28
Video: finish and discuss "Before the Music Dies"
SRP 2 due

Jul 29
McLaughlin, Chapter 2

Jul 30
Meet the Culture: The Cultural Politics of Indie
McLaughlin, Chapter 3
Blau, "Exclusion Matters" (WR)
Frere-Jones, "A Paler Shade of White" (OL)
"So You Wanna Fake..." (OL)
[http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/indierock/indierockfull.html]

Jul 31
Niedzviecki, Introduction & Chapter 1
Comprehension Quiz 3
**Week Six:**
- Aug 4  
  *Niedzviecki, Chapters 2 & 3*
- Aug 5  
  *Niedzviecki, Chapters 5 & 6*
- Aug 6  
  *Niedzviecki, Chapter 7*
- Aug 7  
  *Johnson, Introduction & Part I*  
  *Comprehension Quiz 4*

**Week Seven:**
- Aug 11  
  *Johnson, Part II & Afterword*
- Aug 12  
  *Niedzviecki, Chapter 8 & Conclusion*
- Aug 13  
  *Group Presentations*
- Aug 14  
  *Group Presentations*