So why am I here and what exactly am I supposed to learn?

Although it may appear, at first glance, that the topics of communication and culture are distinct and separate, we shall find, throughout the semester, that the two are actually tightly linked together. In fact, it can even be said that communication is culture, and culture is communication.

According to Diana George and John Trimbur in *Reading Culture*, culture can be looked at as a way of life that characterizes a particular group of people at a particular time. “This view of culture offers a way to think about how individuals and groups organize and make sense of their social experience—at home, in school, at work, and at play. Culture includes all the social institutions, patterns of behavior, systems of belief, and kinds of popular entertainment that create the social world in which people live. Taken this way, culture means not simply masterpieces of art, music, and literature, but a people’s lived experience—what goes on in the everyday lives of individuals and groups” (2). Raymond Williams, in *The Analysis of Culture*, goes on to define the theory of culture as “the study of all these relationships between the different elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships” (52). But above all, culture is ordinary.

Communication, according to John Fiske, is an endless list of human activities, from the ways in which we spread information, what we see on television, our hair style, or even the way we dress and our facial expressions. He goes on to state that communication is central to the life of our culture, and without it, culture must die. Thus, if we are to study communication, we must also study culture within which communication is integrated (Fiske 2).

The goals of this class, then, are to explore this link between communication and culture via two particular topics; narrative and the McDonaldization of society. In particular, to a) understand the operation of narratives as cultural communication, b) understand why McDonaldization is not just about a fast-food restaurant, c) appreciate the complexities of culture and communication, and d) to examine the relations between culture and/as communication. By investigating these subjects, it is my hope that we will come to a better understanding of ourselves, our fellow human beings, and the manner in which we exist together in this very big world.

What books do I need to buy for this class?

Richard Kearney: *On Stories*.

George Ritzer: *McDonaldization, The Reader*. 
There may be other reading assignments that you will be required to download off the Web. You will need to bring these articles with you to class.

**How are you structuring this class?**

This class is structured similar to that of a graduate seminar class, that is, I expect you to participate in the class discussions and conversations. It is possible that you will hear, read, and view material that you don't agree with, or are perhaps are uncomfortable with. I encourage the expression of differing points of view in these situations, and expect that each member of the class will be made to feel comfortable in offering their own particular observations. By studying communication and culture, it is hopeful that we will learn to become better communicators ourselves. Part of being a good communicator is learning how to negotiate in the face of differing beliefs and different ways of being in the world. Don't take apposing viewpoints personally. What matters is how well you learn to communicate your feelings and beliefs in a rhetoricly sound and persuasive manner.

**How are you going to grade us?**

The following is a breakdown of how I will be evaluating your performance in this class:

- **Final exam on the readings** – 20%
- **Core writing assignments** – 40%
- **Oral assignments (including class discussion participation)** – 30%
- **Narrative or McDonaldization Sighting** – 10%

**Grading Scale**

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**What kinds of assignments will be required for this class?**

Assignments for this class will include writing assignments, oral communication in the form of Narrative or McDonaldization sightings, presentations and leading class discussions.

Reading assignments will be assigned at least one week period prior to when they will be discussed. You must complete the reading assignments prior to attending class. This will lead to more beneficial discussion.

**What's up with the class presentations?**

You will be doing several presentations in this class, most of it in a very informal manner. Each of you will pair up with a partner to lead a class discussion on a required reading. While there is no particular format that needs to be followed, discussion leaders will be graded on their ability to understand and communicate the reading, as well as engage the class.

**Narrative and McDonaldization Sightings**

To me, the most interesting classes are those in which I can take what is discussed in the classroom setting and see it at work in life outside academia. The narrative and
McDonalization sightings allow us to do just that. Each student will pick a topic from the chapters we will be reading, find an “ordinary” example, and share it with the class. You should be able to clearly express how your sighting relates to the reading. These sightings can be in any format, including photos, music, film, TV clips, etc. Each presentation should take no more than 5 minutes of class time.

Course Policies

Attendance and active participation are expected and required. After 2 unexcused absences, 3% of subsequent absences will be taken off your final grade. It is essential that if you do miss class you have a way to find out what the assignment is. This class has a WebCT page that will have a calendar with all the assignments listed, as well as access to any readings and handouts. You will be expected to print these off and bring them to class.

Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class, your grade will be adversely affected.

All assignments are due on assigned days. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. I know that life can be difficult at times, so if you find yourself in a difficult scheduling or life-jam, please come talk to me. Not doing so may result in a lower grade.

If you have a cell phone or pager, either turn them off or set them to vibrator.

Plagiarism

In our western culture, plagiarism is considered cheating and is a serious academic offense. It is defined as “knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and it covers copying sections, major ideas, or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by other students. If you are in doubt, quote. If you are quoting someone directly then you need to list the information within quotation marks and cite a page number. If you are paraphrasing then you need to cite the person and a page number. If you have any questions, please talk to me or consult the Writing Center.

Is there really still a problem with harassment?

Yes, there really is. MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).