Study of popular culture is a way of understanding how power circulates within culture. In this course, we start by interrogating the concept of culture as it has been traditionally defined, with a capital “C,” to signify a certain set of meanings and expressions largely determined by elites to suit elite interests. This categorization of culture as “high Culture,” disseminated from the “top down,” has come under attack by scholars of communication and media studies who are interested in forwarding a more democratic notion of culture in which multiple taste cultures exist and in which power can be understood to flow from the bottom up as well. To get at this broad transformation, this course situates cultural production in historical and contemporary contexts in order to examine its economic, social, political, and technological implications. In addition, we consider how the reception of popular culture by audiences impacts the formation of identities, value systems, attitudes and opinions, as individuals and as members of communities (e.g., consumers, fans, youth, citizens, etc.). In part, this involves following an historical trajectory of how the fields of media studies, communication, and cultural studies have intersected with respect to popular culture as an object of study.

We have three objectives before us: 1) to become familiar with a number of influential and important theoretical approaches to media criticism (including key terms and related concepts); 2) to develop an understanding of how these theoretical frameworks have been used to analyze and make sense of popular culture; 3) to consider these frameworks and their central concepts in your own thinking about popular culture and why it matters in your everyday lives.

**Required Reading:**

Additional reading posted on Blackboard under “Course Content”

**Evaluation:**
- 30% **Exam 1**: in class exam, scheduled for Thursday, February 17.
- 30% **Exam 2**: in class exam, scheduled for Thursday, March 31.
- 20% **Exam 3**: in class exam, scheduled for Tuesday, April 26 *(final’s week: 12:45 – 2:00 p.m.)*
20% **Writing Assignments:** there will be four short writing assignments (500-600 words, 5% each). Details for each one will be provided.

***NOTE: to pass this class, students MUST turn in four writing assignments. Failure to submit any of these papers will result in a grade of F for the course.***

For all written assignments, students are to compose their essays on Blackboard under Discussion (you may write your essay in word, then cut and paste, but please do not attach a document). Make sure you edit/proofread your written assignment before submitting it. Your grade will partly be based on your ability to follow the norms and conventions of writing using Standard English style and conventions.

**LATE written assignments will result in a drop of one letter grade.**

**PLAGIARISM is not tolerated and will result in failing the assignment and possibly the course.**

Here is how the University defines plagiarism:

*Plagiarism:* Knowingly copying another's work or ideas and calling them one's own or not giving proper credit or citation. This includes but is not limited to reading or hearing another's work or ideas and using them as one's own; quoting, paraphrasing, or condensing another's work without giving proper credit; purchasing or receiving another's work and using, handling, or submitting it as one's own work.

**Classroom Behavior:**

*Attendance and participation:* Students are expected to attend the lectures and to arrive on time. There will not be credit for attendance; however, attendance will be taken for the class records. It is highly recommended that you read the assigned reading in advance of class in order to follow the lectures. The lectures will be structured with the assumption that you have read. (It might harder to follow if you do not read first!)

*Disruptions:* I consider lateness to be a significant disruption to class. Please be on time to class. I also ask that you plan your schedule so that you will not need bathroom breaks in the middle of class (with the exception of emergencies, of course). There will be a lot of AV materials shown in this class. This is not a signal that you don't need to pay attention and that you should take a bathroom break! Finally, cell phones, blackberries, ipods and other electronic devices are not to be used in class. Laptops can be used to take notes and to refer to your readings. However, if you wish to spend your time surfing or email during class, you do not need to come to class for that. The professor and TA will monitor usage of computers.

*Email:* Email is convenient but it does not provide a substitute for attendance or office hours. Please do not use email to:

1) ask routine information that is already on the syllabus.
2) ask what you missed in class when you are absent. (You should check with a classmate first! If you need further clarification, then make an appointment with the professor or TA.)
3) discuss in-depth a major problem. Please come to office hours or make an appointment to set up a time to talk.
**Evaluation Standards:**

A = Excellent. Work is outstanding in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Writing demonstrates impressive understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Includes skillful and precise use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, and fluent expression, which is well organized and grammatically polished.

B = Good. This work demonstrates a thorough and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Written work reflects competence, but is somewhat general or a bit vague, or otherwise lacking in precision, and stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Although analytical, writing presents more description than analysis. Arguments are solid but not thoroughly original or polished. Source materials, examples, illustrations are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread.

C = Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates somewhat fragmented understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Shows acquaintance with reading and ideas, but not intellectual engagement. Written work is choppy and arguments somewhat difficult to follow, examples are vague or irrelevant, and ideas are imprecise. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations, are incomplete or expressing some significant errors or weaknesses. Writing/articulation veers toward underdeveloped ideas, off-topic sources or examples, personal anecdotes, creative writing etc., or may be loaded with typos and other technical errors.

D = Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express acquaintance with readings, discussions, themes, and ideas. In short, the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Written work is choppy, fractured and unclear. Arguments follow little logical development, or work presents little discernable argument whatsoever. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

F = Failed/Unacceptable. This work does not demonstrate understanding of topics, ideas, and readings. This also includes the grade for work not submitted or attempted, or work that has been plagiarized.

**University Policies:**

Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University's policies. For more information on this serious breach of conduct, see: [http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html](http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html)

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 see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310
For more information on these policies, see:
Affirmative Action:
http://www.admin.msu.edu/aac
Disability Services:
http://www.admin.msu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability
Equal Opportunity Statement:
http://www.admin.msu.edu/admin/hoc/pols/cy/ch3/ch3p7.htm

READING SCHEDULE:
All readings are due for the date indicated; NOTE: BB indicates readings to be found on Blackboard.

**Wk 1:** 1/11

Intro and course overview

1/13

*Mass culture critique*
Storey, chpt 2, “The ‘Culture and Civilization’ Tradition”
MacDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture” BB

**Wk 2:** 1/18

*Cultural democracy*
Gans, “New Introduction” to Popular Culture and High Culture BB
Storey, chpt 1, “What is Popular Culture?”

1/20

*Introducing structuralism and semiotics*
Storey, chpt 6, “Structuralism and Post-structuralism” (pp 111-125)

**Wk 3:** 1/25

*Reading ads and blue jeans*
Streetee. “Semiotics and Media”
http://www.uvm.edu/~streetee/semiotics_ads/introduction.html (up to ideology); also see definition of terms:
http://www.uvm.edu/~streetee/semiotics_ads/terminology.html#author42966
Fiske, “The Meaning of America” BB **

1/27

*Marxist approach to cultural analysis*
Storey, “Marxisms,” (pp. 59-82)
Rus: selections from Marx for Beginners BB

**Wk 4:** 2/1

*Ideology and the political economy of media*
Althusser: “Ideology” BB
Giroux: “Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?” BB
Recommended: Chandler, “Marxist Media Theory”
http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/ Marxism/marxism.html

2/3

*Hegemonic routines*
Storey, chpt 1 (revisit pp. 10-11)
Meyer, “Masculinities in The O.C.” BB

**Wk 5:** 2/8

*Media culture and the triumph of the spectacle*
Kellner, “Spectacle, Ideology, Catastrophe” BB
2/10 No Class: **********WINTER CARNIVAL**********

Wk 6: 2/15

**Celebrity production**
Stahl, "A Moment Like This: American Idol & Narratives of Meritocracy" BB

2/17

**Exam 1**

Wk 7: 2/22

**Intersections: class, race, gender, sexual orientation on TV**
Screening: Class Dismissed: How TV Framed the Working Class

2/24

**Psychoanalytic criticism**
Storey, chpt 5, "Psychoanalysis" (pp. 91-104)
Daniel Kluge, "Psychoanalysis and Film"
www.dispp.com/papers/kluge.htm

Wk 8: 3/1

**Power, pleasure, the gaze: feminist criticism**
Storey, chpt 5, "Psychoanalysis" (104-107)
http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreet/powerpose/introduction.html

3/3

**Gender studies**
Storey, "chpt 7, "Gender and Sexuality" (pp. 134-140)
During, "Feminism's Aftermath: Gender Today" BB
Press, "Gender and Family in Television's Golden Age and Beyond" BB

Wk 9: 3/15

**Hegemony and popular music: subverting or selling out?**
Storey, "Popular Music" BB
Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?" BB

3/17

**Articulating cultural studies**
Storey, chpt 4, "Marxisms" (pp. 82-88)
Storey, chpt 6, "Structuralism and post-structuralism" (pp. 128-133)

Wk 10: 3/22

**The politics of representation and signifying practices**
Screening: Representation and the Media
Hall, selectness from "The Work of Representation"; "The Spectacle of the Other" BB

3/24

**Critical race analysis**
Storey, chpt 8, "Race, Racism and Representation" (pp. 167-171)
Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes" BB
Perry, "Who(se) Am I? The Identity of and Image of Women in Hip Hop" BB

Wk 11: 3/29

**I want my hip hop on MTV**
Rose, "Introduction" to The Hip Hop Wars BB

3/31

**Exam 2**
Wk 12: 4/5  
*The politics of racial humor*

Haggin, “In the Wake of ‘The Nigger Pixie’: Dave Chappelle and the Politics of Crossover Comedy” BB

Jenkins, “Award Conversations About Uncomfortable Laughter”


4/7  
*There's something queer here*

Screening: *Celluloid Closet*

Storey, Chpt 7, “Queer Theory” (pp 160-164)

Muñoz, “Pedro Zamora’s Real World of Counterpublicity: Performing an Ethics of the Self” BB

Wk 13: 4/12  
*Confusing boundaries: daytime talk and reality TV*

Moorti, “Cathartic Confessions or Emancipatory Texts?: Rape Narratives on The Oprah Winfrey Show” BB

4/14  
*Confusing boundaries: Lady Gaga*

Cho, “Lady Gaga, Balls-Out: Recovering Queer”


In Media Res, “Lady Gaga’s Gender/Queerness” (4 short essays):

- Keller: “I’m not a feminist...I love men’: Rethinking Lady Gaga’s Postfeminist Rhetoric and its Potential for Social Change”
- Fairclough: “Mainstreaming the Avant-Garde: Gender and Spectacle at GAGAKOH”
- Moore, “Lady Gaga and the High Heels of New Feminism”
- Nasioñski, “Answering the Feminist Call: Lady Gaga’s ‘Telephone’ as Pop Art”


Wk 14: 4/19  
*Postmodernism: “logic” of late capitalism*

Storey, chpt 9, “Postmodernism”

4/21  
*Satire TV and participatory democracy*

Gray, “Watching the Simpsons: Domestic Parody, Genre, Genre and Critical Intertextuality” BB

Baym, “Networked News: Stewart, Colbert, and the New Public Sphere” BB

4/26  
*Exam 3*  
(12:45-200)