

This syllabus has been provided as a reference tool for students considering this course. It has been modified to follow Senate regulations. Current students enrolled in any undergraduate course must obtain the most recent syllabus from their course instructor or from their course website. This is not the latest version.



Department of English & Writing Studies

Reading Popular Culture English 2017 (002) Fall/Winter 2013-14

Instructor: Dr. Cristina Ionica

Date/Time: Tuesday 7:00pm-10:00pm

Location: Somerville House 3345

Prerequisites

No prerequisites. Senior courses numbered 2000-2199 are open to any full-time student who has completed first-year studies, and to any part-time student who has completed a 1.0 first-year course.

I would be very happy to exchange ideas with you on any topic related to the course. I usually spend around 20 minutes with each student (particularly when we discuss essay topics), so it would be better to e-mail me beforehand and schedule an appointment, to make sure that you do not have to wait. If you cannot meet with me or your TA during our office hours, e-mail us to make alternative arrangements.

Course Description

What's popular about pop culture? How do we understand popular culture as more than just bestsellers and blockbusters? What might be the connection between Starbucks, Punk Planet, West Edmonton Mall and Tokyo street hockey? What are the semiotics of subcultures such as skateboarding, punk and hip hop? In this course you will learn to analyze popular culture. You will be introduced to some of the major thinkers and theorists in cultural studies and explore how the study of popular culture reveals "culture" as both all around us and in process. We will think about what it means to be a part of popular culture, to make culture, to consume it and to use it. We will take up a diverse range of texts including, but not limited to, music, film, cartoons, graphic novels and television. We will also examine spaces of everyday life such as shopping malls and the architecture of the university itself. Finally, we will also look at how popular culture is global or how popular culture is different depending on where you are.

Note: English 2017 (Reading Popular Culture) may not be counted as a principal course in any English program, with the exception of the "General Minor in English Literature".

Non-Essay Designation. Western University considers a minimum of 5000 words a requirement for a full-year essay course. Because the brief writing assignments you are required to submit for evaluation in English 2017 falls well under that minimum, this class has a non-essay designation. However, you are still required to submit assignments that challenge and improve your writing skills.

Objectives:

Successful students who complete the course will be better able to:

- Move from a consumer’s perspective on popular culture to an analytic, critical perspective;
- Think, speak and write clearly and coherently about the construction and consumption of material culture (literature, film, television, music, etc.) as functions of the socio-historical environment;
- Understand the complex ways in which popular culture both reflects and influences societal values and ideas;
- Understand and discuss both conservative and progressive aspects of popular culture;
- Understand and formulate connections between popular culture, theory, and history;
- Approach popular culture both as critics and creators;
- Ask significant questions that can generate debate;
- Respond critically to research materials about popular culture in general or about specific popular culture products;
- Write research essays that use secondary source materials effectively and present complex arguments in a clear, well-organized manner.

Course Materials

Required Texts:

Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman, *Popular Culture: A User’s Guide, 2nd Edition* (eds. O’Brien and Szeman)

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Martin Amis, *Money: A Suicide Note*

Additional readings will be made available on Sakai UWO.

Methods of Evaluation

Response Paper (500-750 words)	15%
Creative Assignment (see options below)	15%
Research Essay (1500 words)	25%
Final Exam	35%
Participation	10%

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

Timetable:

FALL TERM 2013

Week 1 (Sept. 10): Introduction 1

Course presentation: readings, objectives, assignments, etc.; Library Research Tips
What Is Popular Culture? Reading: PCG Chapter 1 - "Introducing Popular Culture"
Screening and discussion of coffee-related ads and music videos.

Week 2 (Sept. 17): Introduction 2

Popular Culture: Recent Chronology
Reading: PC G Chapter 2 - "The History of Popular Culture"
Viewing and discussion of ad-style Historical Avant-garde works

Week 3 (Sept. 24): Representation and Social Reality 1

Reading: PCG Chapter 3 - "Representation and the Construction of Social Reality"
Discussion of Response Paper

Week 4 (Oct 1): Representation and Social Reality 2

The Kids Are (Not) OK: Screening and Discussion of *Mysterious Skin* (Gregg Araki, 2004)

Week 5 (Oct. 8): Representation and Social Reality 3

Growing Up Queer: Discussion of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

Week 6 (Oct. 15): Representation and Social Reality 4

American Imperialism: Screening and Discussion of a fragment from *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (Trey Parker & Mark Stone, 1999) - "Blame Canada" Song
The Racial Other: Screening and Discussion of the South Park Episode "Starvin' Marvin in Space"

Response Paper Due.

Discussion of Creative Assignment.

Week 7 (Oct. 22): Representation and Social Reality 5

Fact-checking websites. "The reality-based community."
Screening and discussion of clips from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*
Dark Humour and the Paradox as Critical Instruments

Week 8 (Oct. 29): The Production of Popular Culture 1

Reading: PCG Chapter 4 - "The Production of Popular Culture"

Week 9 (Nov. 5): The Production of Popular Culture 2

Screening and discussion of *Copyright Criminals* (Benjamin Franzen, 2010)

Week 10 (Nov. 12): The Production of Popular Culture 3

Money, Sex, Ads, and Movies: Discussion of Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*

Creative Assignment Due - if you choose to submit a written assignment.

Performances can be scheduled anytime between this date and the end of February, but you need to let me know of your intentions and negotiate a performance date with me by November 12.

Week 11 (Nov. 19): The Production of Popular Culture 4

Lifestyle Marketing: Screening and Discussion of Fragments from *Girls* and *The League*

Week 12 (Nov. 26): The Production of Popular Culture 5

Cops and Firefighters: Screening and Discussion of Fragments from *The Wire* and *Rescue Me*

November 30: Last day to drop this course.

Week 13 (Dec. 3): The Production of Popular Culture 6

Zombies and Vampires: Screening and Discussion of Fragments from *The Walking Dead* and *True Blood*

WINTER TERM 2014:

Jan. 6: Classes Resume

Week 1 (Jan. 7): The Consumption of Popular Culture 1

Reading: PCG Chapter 5 - "The Consuming Life"

Screening and Discussion of an episode from *Mad Men*

Sexism and Racism: Discussion of Controversial Ads

Political Ad Campaigns: Violence against Women; Anti-Totalitarian Ads by Amnesty International

Week 2 (Jan. 14):

Reading: Naomi Klein's "New Branded World" (Link on Sakai)

Reading: Jonathan Franzen's "Liking Is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts" (Link on Sakai)

The Pressure to Buy: Desire and Resentment (Shopping Assistants, Google Search Tracking, Online Shopping Suggestions, Discounts, Boxing Day, Gift Plus Purchase, etc.)

Discussion of Research Essay.

Week 3 (Jan. 21): PopCult, Identity, and the Body

Reading: PCG Chapter 6 - "Identity and the Body"

Screening and Discussion of Music Videos (Artists: David Bowie, Placebo, Marilyn Manson, Lady Gaga, La Roux, The Knife, etc.)

Week 4 (Jan. 28): PopCult, Identity and Community 1

Reading: PCG Chapter 7 - "Identity and Community"

Week 5 (Feb. 4): PopCult, Identity and Community 2

Accented Meanings: Screening and Discussion of an episode of *Flight of the Conchords*

Week 6 (Feb. 11) Subcultures and Countercultures 1

Online Communities and Political Action: Internet Activists

Online Communities and Political Action: Anti-Totalitarian Uprisings

Week 7 (Feb. 17-21): Reading Week

Week 8 (Feb. 25): Subcultures and Countercultures I

Reading: PCG Chapter 8 - "Subcultures and Countercultures"

Week 9 (March 4): Subcultures and Countercultures 2

Screening and Discussion of *The Weather Underground* (Sam Green and Bill Siegel, 2002)
Research Essay Due.

Week 10 (March 11): Space and Place I

Reading: PCG Chapter 9 - "Spaces and Places of Popular Culture"

Week 11 (March 18): Space and Place 2

Screening and Discussion of an episode of *The Office*
Discussion of Final Exam Format.

Week 12 (March 25): Globalization 1

Reading: PCG Chapter 10 - "Globalization and Popular Culture"
Discussion: Human Rights and Cultural Specificity

Week 13 (April 1): Globalization 2

Economic Globalization: Screening and Discussion of *Inside Job* (Charles Ferguson, 2010)
"Austerity Economics": The Math, the Errors, the Results (Links to short articles on Sakai)

Week 14 (April 8): **Revision for Final Exam**

April 8: Classes End

Assignments:

Response Paper: A critical review of one of the shows/ ads/ music videos/ etc. discussed in class. The essay should engage with more than one rhetorical and/or ideological aspect of the text and go beyond the simple exposition of ideas. Secondary research is required (at least 1 material - use essays/articles from books/academic journals rather than short reviews). Advanced essay-writing tips, as well as research tips (finding/evaluating materials), will be provided early on. MLA citation style is required.

Creative Assignment (Choose One): A 750-word creative writing piece OR a performance. A long list of options will be provided later. Here are just a few examples:

- Rewrite (as a parody or pastiche) a TV show scene/ an ad script/ a video discussed in class.
- Write an entirely original text (TV show scene/ music video script/ ad script/ comic strip) that shows awareness of some of the popular culture products and critical/theoretical concepts discussed in class.
- Act (individually or in groups) in an original ad/ show scene/ music video or reproduce an existing ad/ show scene/ music video in a parodic manner. You can perform the piece of your choice in class, during one of the lectures, or record your performance on your phones/cameras and bring it to me on a USB drive, so that we can watch it together in class. I will not deduct marks for the quality of the sound/image - but do make sure that what you say is audible and that your faces and gestures are discernible. With each in-class representation/ electronic file submission, you should provide me with a list of the actors, director, script writer, etc. Each of the participants in the representation should submit a 5-line commentary on the experience, detailing the thinking behind your acting choices, what the experience has taught you, etc. This brief text is due a week after the performance was viewed by the class.

Research Essay: A formal, extended discussion of a theoretical issue related to the study of popular culture, as it is reflected in at least two of the popular culture texts studied throughout the year. The essay should be analytic rather than expository, and it should make clear claims. Secondary research is required (at least 2 materials - essays/articles from books/academic journals). MLA citation style is required. An extended description of this assignment, as well as a list of suggested topics, will be provided in due time. All students who wish to choose a topic that is not on the list should send me a short description of their topic for approval.

Final Exam: A combination of short-answer and essay questions. Short definitions of relevant terms and accurate examples will be required. A close reading section will be included, but there will be no passage recognition involved (the author/title will be provided). The exam will be cumulative and will be written during the exam period (date, time and location TBA).

Participation: Active engagement in class discussion (students should respond both to my questions and to each other's ideas, and comment on in-class performances). Please note that attendance is only an incidental factor in your participation grade (i.e., you cannot participate if you do not attend, but you will not gain participation marks for attendance only).

Late Policy: Late assignments should be left in the English Department drop box outside of UC 173. Please make sure that my name is on the assignment. Unless a student presents a valid excuse prior to the assignment due date, essays will incur a late penalty of 2% per day, up to a maximum of 28% (or 2 weeks). Assignments handed in late will not receive comments. Assignments submitted after the two week period will not be accepted.

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all lectures having completed the readings assigned for the day's class. Please arrive on time. Screenings will take place during class on the dates listed in the schedule below. If you miss a screening, it is your responsibility to obtain the film/ television episode/ music video/ ad/ etc. you missed and watch it on your own time. Taking notes during lectures is highly recommended, as the lectures will introduce new themes and texts not covered by the readings. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate. While I will post my PPTs on Sakai at the beginning of each week, you should NOT expect the slides to sum up everything I say in class, and you should not expect your TA to share his/her notes.

Absenteeism: Excessive absenteeism is grounds for debarring a student from taking the final examination. The 2013 Academic Calendar states: "Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given) on the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course" (p. 35).

Conduct: Private conversations or noise of any kind will not be tolerated. Rude and/or disruptive students will be asked to leave and, in extreme cases, may be barred from the course.

Laptops: The use of laptops is permitted for course-related purposes such as taking notes. However, if you use your laptops for other reasons which distract from the lecture, you may be asked to turn them off or to leave the classroom.

Your iPhone, Blackberry, etc: These should be turned off, or at least put on “silent” before each class. I am not going to interrupt the lecture to point every time someone is using one of these during lectures, but you should be aware that it’s distracting to your classmates and discourteous to your TAs and professor.

Sakai/OWL: This course will have a Sakai OWL space (the new WebCT). Relevant course material will be posted on this site, including lecture slides, assignments, additional readings, and this syllabus. Although I will announce in class when important material will be posted online, it is your responsibility to check Sakai OWL regularly.

Marks: Every effort will be made to return assignments and post grades for assignments on Sakai OWL, within three weeks after they have been submitted. The final exam will not be returned to you.

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:
<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.