

## English 3201G: Introduction to Cultural Studies Winter 2018



Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto, ON, Canada

**Instructor:** Dr. Pauline Wakeham  
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**Class Meetings:**  
Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.  
Thursdays from 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.  
Arts and Humanities Building Room 1B08

**Office Hours:**  
Tuesdays from 3:30 – 4:00 p.m.  
Thursdays from 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Thursdays from 2:30 – 4:00 p.m.

**Teaching Assistant:**  
Mikyla Hindson ([mhindson@uwo.ca](mailto:mhindson@uwo.ca))  
Office Hours: Thursdays from 12:00 –  
2:00 p.m. in ON20C International and  
Graduate Affairs Building

### Course Description:

Welcome to Introduction to Cultural Studies! Because we live in an age of intense media saturation, it is vital to pause and consider what roles culture plays—and what kinds of social, ideological, and political work it performs—in our lives. What is culture? Who makes it and whom does it serve? How does it circulate in the world and become part of our daily practices and habits? This course asks students to think critically about what we mean by “culture” and how we analyze its meanings and effects. To do so, the course offers an introduction to the methods and theories of cultural studies as an academic discipline. After laying a critical foundation by studying key concepts such as “culture,” “sign systems,” “ideology,” and “discourse,” we will then engage with more recent cultural theory that helps us think through some of the most urgent questions today—from feminism, to sexuality, racism, war, catastrophe, and climate change. The key goal of this course is to provide students with a critical tool kit with which to engage with the world as it is unfolding today.

**Antirequisite(s):** The former English 2250F/G.

**Prerequisite(s):** At least 60% in 1.0 of [English 1020E](#) or [1022E](#) or [1024E](#) or [1035E](#) or [1036E](#) or [1042E](#) or both [English 1027F/G](#) and [1028F/G](#), or permission of the Department.

### University Policy:

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

### Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to and/or enrich their knowledge of the field of cultural studies, including its history as an academic field that seeks to work beyond university borders, as well as its methodological approaches.
- To demonstrate how cultural theory might be mobilized to read and analyze diverse forms of cultural practices and works. In other words, to put theory into analytic practice through in-class lectures and collaborative readings of cultural texts, through student presentations and dialogue, and through written analysis.
- To foster the development and honing of students’ academic writing skills through the practice of analyzing cultural texts in written essays.
- To foster the development of students’ distinctive intellectual voices and to encourage their use of cultural theory to think critically about the forms of culture they are interested in and with which they engage in their daily lives.

**Required Texts:**

Custom Course Book Available at the University Book Store

**Methods of Evaluation:**

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date	Length
Why Culture Matters Essay	25%	Feb. 27	5 pages
Group Presentation	12%	Per schedule	25 minutes
Reflection Paper	18%	Per schedule	4 pages
Participation	10%	Ongoing	
Final Exam	35%	T.B.A.	3 hours

**Department Policy Regarding Final Grades:**

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>.

**Assignment #1: The Why Culture Matters Essay**

- For this 5-page essay assignment, students are asked to write about the cultural text or cultural product (i.e. a song, a video game, a film, etc.) that has influenced them the most and to discuss, explain, and argue for why.
- Students are welcome to write passionately about how this cultural text or product has influenced them. At the same time, this essay should also be a scholarly research essay with a proper Works Cited in MLA format. Passionate and personally-inflected writing can most definitely co-exist with scholarly critical thinking and the challenge of this paper is to keep both aspects in play throughout.

- It might be useful to discuss how you first encountered this cultural text or product and what your initial reaction was and whether it has changed over time.

- Students are also required to include the following analytic and research components in their paper:

a.) The specific cultural text or product should be described. Who made it? When? How was it produced and distributed? How did you come to encounter it (i.e. in a movie theatre, on iTunes, or is it an alternative cultural production that you had to seek out through more local or alternative networks)? Does the mode of distribution of this cultural text or product impact how people encounter it?

b.) What is the precise genre of this cultural text or product? If you are talking about a film, what kind of film is it—horror, science fiction, “romcom,” etc.? Here students are **required to locate and read at least two scholarly sources** (i.e. a book carried within Western’s library holdings or an article from a scholarly journal) that help them to provide context about the emergence and development of the particular genre they are discussing and to situate their cultural text or product of choice in relation to this genre. Each scholarly source must be properly cited within the essay. It may also be appropriate to consider how your cultural text or product of choice deviates from the traditions of this genre or blends genres or utilizes the genre in new ways.

c.) The essay should engage in a “close reading” of at least one aspect/scene/portion of the cultural text or product of choice. Here, the essay should discuss in detail visual, sonic, auditory, linguistic, or other elements of the text and explain how they work together to generate and convey meaning. The close reading should elucidate how and why this element impacted you, conveyed an important message, and was vital to the overarching purpose of the work.

d.) Please end your essay with a conclusion that grapples with at least some of the following questions: What does the story of your encounter with this cultural text or product tell you more generally about why and how culture matters? Has reflecting critically on this cultural text or product made you think differently about it? What are the possibilities and challenges of your role as a consumer of culture in today’s saturated media world? How can you exercise agency in selecting, engaging with, and analyzing culture?

### Assignment #2: Group Presentation and Reflection Paper

- The best way to learn something is to actually try doing it through hands-on practice. For this reason, I have designed the course with student presentations throughout. With this assignment, where student presenters, and their classmates, have the chance to think through cultural theory by applying it to cultural texts of their choosing. In other words, rather than reading theory in a state of abstraction, in this class, we will continually try to think about how theory relates to cultural practices and cultural texts—and, thus, to the worlds in which we live. That is the crux of what cultural studies is all about. Student presentations will be an integral part of this process.

- The student presentations will be prepared and delivered in groups. **Each member of the group, however, will receive an individual grade for the group presentation and their individual reflection paper.**

### **Part A: The Group Presentation**

- Presentations should be approximately **25 minutes** in length.
- Each presentation will be required to respond to the assigned theoretical readings for the week in question. Students will be asked to introduce the class to a cultural text of their choosing (a television commercial, a magazine advertisement, a film clip, part of a music video, etc.) and relate that text to the week's readings. Because you cannot assume that everyone in the class will be familiar with the cultural text you are presenting on, the presentation should include a very brief summary of the text and its main features of interest. If you are presenting on a television advertisement, video, or YouTube clip, please ensure that the majority of your presentation is a substantive critical discussion of the cultural text and not a re-playing of the text itself. Please select clips or excerpts of the cultural text judiciously and make sure that you provide adequate contextualization for those clips.
- Please exercise good judgment when selecting a cultural text to show the class (i.e. please do not include material with language or content that some people might find offensive). If in doubt, please consult with the Professor prior to the class presentation.
- **The key to a successful presentation will be to explain the connection between the cultural text and the assigned readings.** The presentation should clearly explain how the chosen cultural text demonstrates, challenges, and/or complicates ideas presented by one or more of the readings.
- **Each presentation must make explicit reference to at least four quotations from the assigned readings for the week (please cite page numbers and provide class members with an opportunity to look the quotations up, or print them on a PowerPoint slide or handout) and then carefully explain how the cultural text connects to, illuminates, or challenges those quotations.**
- Please note that the standards for acknowledging sources in written assignments also apply to oral presentations. Plagiarism is not permitted in oral presentations and will be subject to the same penalties as for written essays.
- Important note: The presentation format is up to the group. Students could deliver an oral presentation with a PowerPoint in front of the class or they could utilize an alternative method of content delivery or combine an oral presentation with some other alternative method. The group could create their own short video as part of their way of introducing the material to the class. The group could create a podcast or write and record a song. The choice is up to you and creativity is encouraged so long as the critical content described above is communicated to the class.
- After the presentation, there will be a class discussion in which presenters are expected to engage with the questions and comments posed by the class and the Professor, and each person's engagement will be reflected in their grade.
- **IMPORTANT: Due to the fact that the schedule for student presentations is quite tight and we have no room for re-scheduling, students are not allowed to miss their scheduled presentation, with the exception of a serious medical or family emergency that is substantiated with official documentation provided to the Academic Counselling Office. In such exceptional events, the Professor reserves the right to set the terms of the make-up assignment. The presentation partners will be expected to proceed with their presentation without the missing student.**

### Part B: The Reflection Paper

- **Exactly one week from the date of the group presentation, at the beginning of class, each student presenter must submit a formal four-page written reflection regarding the presentation.**
- The paper should follow this structure: (1.) an introduction that lays out the topic and trajectory of the paper; (2.) a one-page-page (minimum) discussion of the main arguments/ideas put forth in the assigned readings for the week; (2.) a brief description of the cultural text chosen for the presentation followed by a much more detailed explanation of how the cultural text demonstrates, challenges, or complicates ideas presented by the assigned readings for the week; and (3.) a critical reflection upon the aims and goals of your group's choice of presentation style as well as a consideration of the possibilities and drawbacks of the presentation or what could have been done differently.
- **If the subsequent class discussion prompted the student to refine his/her thinking about the readings and/or the choice of cultural text, such reconsiderations should also be discussed in the reflection paper.**
- The paper should be written in proper paragraph form, with attention to organization, structure, depth and detail of analysis, and spelling and grammar.

### Class Participation:

- The course participation mark will be based on students' attendance and punctuality, thoughtful engagement with course readings, relevant and insightful contributions to class discussion, and respectful engagement with the ideas of other classmates. Preparation for each class involves reading all assigned materials *at least once and preferably twice* before class, making notes about these texts (underlining or marking key passages, reflecting on your responses to the texts, etc.), and preparing potential questions or comments to raise in class.
- Repeated absences from class may result in a formal request to be debarred from writing the final exam, as set out in the Western Academic Calendar: "Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class . . . will be reported to the Dean (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination." Debarment from writing the final exam automatically results in failure of the course.
- A key part of being prepared for and ready to participate in class is bringing hard copies of the assigned readings for the week. We will be working with these texts closely in class discussion, so please bring them with you.
- In particular, students' attendance on the "Theory-in-Practice" days will be a top priority. The course Teaching Assistant will be keeping track of who asks thoughtful questions of the presenters and who makes salient contributions to the class discussion. These factors will strongly influence participation grades because it is important that all students treat the presentations of their peers with respect and thoughtful engagement. You're putting in time and effort to create these presentations, so the goal is that we all honour the work that is being done.

### Important Information Regarding Written Assignments:

- All assignments are due at the **beginning of class** on the scheduled due date. Assignments handed in after the commencement of class on the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty of 1%. Any assignments submitted after the due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments must be submitted either directly to the Professor at the beginning of class or submitted as late and handed in to the secure essay drop-off box outside the English Department office.
- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged with the Professor in advance. For further information, please see the section on “Academic Accommodation” in this syllabus.
- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5” x 11” paper, with 1” margins, double-spaced, and in Times New Roman 12-point font. The title page should include the following information: the title of the essay, your name, the course number, and the date. Please staple your essay pages together rather than using binders or plastic report covers. Essays must be submitted in paper copy. Email, computer disks, and faxes will not be accepted.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation. All assignments that make use of secondary sources should be accompanied with a “Works Cited” page. For information on correct MLA formatting, please consult the PowerPoint Presentation placed on the course OWL site. As well, students may consult the *MLA Handbook*, which is available in the reference section of the D.B. Weldon Library.
- Please retain one hard copy and one electronic version of each of the essays you submit in this class. As well, please retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.

### Final Examination:

The final exam will feature two types of questions:

- 1) **Identifying Quotations:** Students will be asked to identify short quotations excerpted from texts studied throughout the term. In proper paragraph form, students should provide the title of the text as well as the full name of the author. Following that, the written response should explain the significance of the particular quotation to the key themes, concepts, and/or arguments developed in the text. Marks will be assigned for the clarity, detail, and insight of the response, as well as attention to spelling and grammar.
- 2) **Formal Essay Responses:** Essays must have a clear thesis statement and structure consisting of an introduction, multiple body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Marks will be awarded for the strength and originality of the argument; for the ability to mobilize textual evidence to support the argument; and for clarity, coherence, style, and grammar.

### Additional University Policies:

**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](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](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](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Plagiarism:**

- It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If you use a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations.

- When in doubt, please cite your source rather than leaving it out!

- Please also note that the same standards of proper crediting of sources apply to **oral presentations**. Plagiarism is a serious 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>).

- All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course. - For English Department regulations regarding term work, exams, faculty office hours, academic relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please refer to the "Information for Students" on the departmental website at:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>



### Accessibility Options:

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.

- Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: [http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated\\_exams.html](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html).

### Email Policy:

- Students are welcome to contact me via email to ask questions about course readings, class lectures and discussion, and upcoming tests and essay assignments. During the work week, I will respond to such inquiries within 48 hours. Over the weekend, I cannot guarantee that I will

### Class Schedule:

be able to respond until the following Monday. Due to privacy policies, I will not report student grades over insecure channels such as email. If you want to discuss a grade, students must schedule an appointment with me.

**Please Note:** The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the schedule throughout the course of the academic year. Any changes will be announced ahead of time in class and students will be responsible for making note of such amendments. Unless otherwise indicated, weekly readings are to be found in the custom course book.

January 9: Introduction to our Course

January 11: What is Culture?  
 Raymond Williams, "Culture"

January 16: What is Cultural Studies?  
 Lawrence Grossberg, "The Heart of Cultural Studies"

January 18: Capitalism, Class, and Culture

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital"

January 23: Sign Systems, Myth, and Ideology

Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics*

Roland Barthes, "Myth Today"

January 25: Signs Systems, Myth, and Ideology (cont.)

January 30: Biopower and Discourse

Michel Foucault, "Discursive Formations"

Michel Foucault, "Method"

February 1: Biopower and Discourse: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

February 6: Sex, Gender, and Culture

Judith Butler, "Bodily Incriptions/Performative Subversions"

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction" and "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles"

February 8: Sex, Gender, and Culture: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

February 13: Feminism and Culture

Roxane Gay, "Introduction: Feminism (n.): Plural" and "Blurred Lines, Indeed"

Sara Ahmed, "Conclusion 2: A Killjoy Manifesto"

February 15: Feminism and Culture: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

February 20 and 22: Classes Cancelled for Reading Week

February 27: Queering Culture

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now"

Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages"

**Why Culture Matters Essay Due**

March 1: Queering Culture: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

March 6: The Cultural Construction of "Race"

Christina Sharpe, "The Wake"

March 8: The Cultural Construction of "Race": Theory-in-Practice Presentation

March 13: Whose Culture?: Power, Politics, and Cultural Appropriation

Rebecca Tsosie, "Reclaiming Native Stories: An Essay on Cultural Appropriation and Cultural Rights"

March 15: Whose Culture?: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

March 20: Cultures of Shock

Naomi Klein, "Blank is Beautiful: Three Decades of Erasing and Remaking the World"

March 22: Cultures of Shock: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

March 27: Cultures of Nature: Representing Climate Change

Rob Nixon, "Introduction" from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

Timothy Morton, "A Quake in Being: An Introduction to Hyperobjects" and "Temporal Undulation"

March 29: Cultures of Nature: Theory-in-Practice Presentation

April 3: Cultures of Nature: Representing Climate Change

Class Screening of *This Changes Everything*, Dir. Avi Lewis

April 5: Review and Exam Preparation

April 10: Review and Exam Preparation