

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 2017 (650)
Reading Popular Culture
Fall/Winter 2024-25**Instructor:** Nigel Joseph
njoseph3@uwo.ca**Course Day/Time:** OnlineCourse Description

In this course, we pay attention to the way pop culture can address our deepest desires as well as trigger our deepest fears: often both at once. We explore conservative condemnations of the “trashiness” of pop culture as well as analyses that emphasize its democratic potential and capacity to defuse conflict, and we examine the way pop culture alienates us as well as draws us into new communities. The course encourages us to look at representations (films, books, advertisements) as well as practices (shopping, modifying our appearance). We look at the contemporary obsession with an ideal bodily type characterized by slimness, at arguments that lay the blame for this obsession with advertising, and others that claim that the causes lie much deeper. We look at some influential theorists’ arguments about how we watch films and why we get the kinds of pleasure we do from watching them. We explore the new kinds of connectivity as well as the new forms of alienation and separation made available through the new social media.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify and paraphrase arguments made by notable defenders and critics of popular culture
- Offer a range of explanations for the growth and development of popular culture
- Analyze and identify the different ideologies that permeate the productions of popular culture

Course Materials

Course Readings are accessible on Brightspace, and Voicethread lectures will be uploaded once a week. Check Brightspace announcements page for updates.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

In-class Test 1	10%
In-class Test 2	10%
In-class Test 3	10%
Assignment	20%
Response papers	10%
Examination	35%
Attendance and participation	5%

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/Student%20Information.html>.

Additional Information

You can meet me in person during my weekly office hours on Wednesday, between 1.30 and 3.30., at UC 1423. I will also be available on Zoom, but you will have to arrange a time to meet me beforehand (email njoseph3@uwo.ca).

Final exam, tests, assignment and forums:

The final exam will be a three-hour exam which you can do in any three-hour slot during a 48 hour window.

The three tests will each be for one hour (test periods will be spread through the course, and the dates indicated in the outline), again within a 48 hour window.

The assignment will be submitted by a specified date.

The forum comments can be made in the forum section, under topic headings that will be announced. There will be about twelve forums, and you need only contribute to four of them. You can contribute to more than four, and I will take the best four grades into account. Everyone must contribute to the first forum: after that you can pick and choose. 50% of your forum grade will come from responding to another student (so only 50% if you make a comment but do not interact with another student). You may make multiple responses to another student/students (a “conversation” of up to four or five responses on a single topic would be fine). You can also comment directly on the Voicethread lectures. The forums will close by a specified date, so you must make your comments before the due dates.

Test grades, assignment grades and forum grades should be visible on Gradebook within a week from submission.

Statements

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student’s Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

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/>

Academic Support & Engagement <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.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Use of AI, and in general, reliance on the Internet, should be kept to a minimum, especially in forum posts and for the tests and the final examination.

Academic Integrity Tutorial

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Resource tab in the course OWL Brightspace site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday in the second week of term. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial.

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>.

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.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Weeks 1, 2: Introduction: Popular and “high” culture, critiques of popular culture and defences. Adorno and Horkheimer

Weeks 3, 4: Mechanical reproduction, stripping of the aura of “high” art, distracted viewing, pop culture and egalitarianism. Walter Benjamin (**Test 1 at end of week 3**)

Weeks 5, 6: The movies: theories about why and how we watch films; Mulvey and the male gaze; women as objects of sexual desire in classic Hollywood films; looked-at-ness and sadistic voyeurism. Laura Mulvey

Weeks 7, 8: Horror films and why they are so popular; disgust, arousal, and abjection. Barbara Creed

Weeks 9, 10: Pop culture and the beautiful body; being looked at and everyday narcissism. Slimness, advertising, self-control, and anorexia; the aesthetic of the slim body. Jean Kilbourne (at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxYcaFzVX08>) (**Test 2 at end of week 9**)

Weeks 11, 12: Anorexia and the Western tradition of male rationality. Susan Bordo

Weeks 13, 14: Consumerism, shopping malls and planned seduction. Douglas Rushkoff

Weeks 15, 16: Connectivity: more friends than you can handle, or unprecedented isolation and depression? Sherry Turkle

Weeks 17, 18: The Internet and university education. Online teaching, face-to-face interaction, and intellectual growth. Hubert Dreyfus (**Test 3 at end of week 17**)

Weeks 19, 20: Does Internet scanning produce a new kind of reader? Do students read less than they used to, and are they inept readers? Nicholas Carr and Jane Healy

Week 21: Are students better readers than ever before? Small and Vorgan (**Assignment is due by end of week 21**)

Weeks 22, 23: Are we all cyborgs now, and should we learn to love it? Donna Haraway

Week 24: Review