

**Communications Studies (COMS) 473 L20**  
**Popular Culture**  
**Spring 2012**  
**Saturday: 13:00 – 17:30**

**Instructor:** Angie Chiang  
**Office** Social Science Building  
**Location:** Room 351  
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**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 2:00pm – 4:00pm  
or by appointment

### **Course Description**

This course will examine a variety of popular culture texts discussing the surrounding theoretical perspectives as presented in the lectures and corresponding readings. These will include feminism, critical race theory, postmodernism, social constructivism and technological determinism.

Exploring texts in television, film, gaming, literature, comics, marketing & advertising, user generated internet content and social media, students will be introduced to critical tools of deconstruction and evaluation and understand the social and cultural significance of popular culture.

*\*Prerequisite COMS 371*

### **Course Objectives**

Through lectures, readings, class discussions, and course assignments, students will:

- Explore a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of popular culture
- Develop critical and analytical skills through the examination of a myriad of cultural texts
- Examine how popular cultural texts function ideologically to construct identities and differences, as well as how such ideologies are either adopted, resisted or reconceived

## **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Students are welcome to use laptops and other electronic note-taking devices in this course. Please be considerate of others during lectures, screenings, and discussions and switch off all iPods, cellphones, etc. whenever you enter the classroom.

Sending/receiving text messages or leaving the class to take calls is disruptive to the entire class and will not be tolerated unless absolutely necessary.

In some weeks, feature-length films or full television episodes will be screened and in the spirit of being as non-disruptive as possible, laptops and all other electronic devices (even with brightness dialed to its lowest setting) are expressly prohibited.

Failure to respect these rules may result in the revocation of your privileges to use devices in the classroom.

## **Textbooks and Readings:**

Readings available online through The University of Calgary Library website. Any remaining readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

Pop quizzes (2 x 5%) **10%**

Blog posts/responses (3 x 10%) **30%**

Written project/essay proposal **15%**

Oral Presentation **15%**

Peer Evaluation **5% (option to replace a quiz)**

Final project **30%**

\*Please note detailed assignment guidelines and marking rubrics will be presented at the first lecture.

*Pop Quizzes* (2 x 5%) – 10%

Two (2) quizzes will be administered randomly throughout the course. Quizzes will test knowledge on readings and/or content presented in lectures. Quizzes must be taken in class and no opportunity for make-up quizzes will be given.

*Blog Posts/Responses* (3 x 10%) 30%

Students are required to post a total of three (3) 'blog' posts as a reflexive tool on Blackboard. Students are expected to keep track of the number of posts completed/not completed and will not be reminded.

Students will post at least 250 words per blog entry. Posts are expected to be critical and reflexive and demonstrate an ability to make connections between the readings, lecture, presentations and/or the texts themselves. Posts can have more of a personal tone than an academic essay, however, correct grammar and spelling is expected. They should be succinct, concise and intelligent – with a definitive conclusion. Students will be penalized for glaring errors or extraneous text. (i.e. long posts will not give you extra marks if content is not relevant)

It is also acceptable and encouraged for students to respond to one another's entries to count as a post.

Posts must be published BEFORE 2:00pm MST on Wednesday of each week. Any content posted after the weekly deadline will count as a post for the following week. Only ONE post can be counted per week. Make-up blogs are NOT permitted unless granted permission ahead of time. Students will receive feedback on their post by the next class with the exception of those posted after the last lecture (June 16).

**NOTE: All students must respect their fellow classmates. Any student using verbal abuse or inappropriate language will be given a grade of zero for the entire reflexive blog portion of the course. Offenses will be determined at my discretion and are non-negotiable.**

#### *Essay/Final Project Proposal 15%*

Students must submit two (2) copies of a minimum, three page, double-spaced proposal regarding their final project. Proposals will be returned the following week. Students are encouraged to submit a proposal for a non-traditional final project employing the themes and issues addressed in class. Should students choose to write an essay, the final paper should be between 15-20 pages in length. Once approved, the proposal will serve as the basis for your final project/essay.

Proposals are due NO LATER than May 19 at the **beginning** of class. Proposals can be handed in at any time prior to this date.

#### *Oral Presentation 20%*

All students will be expected to give a five-minute presentation emulating a TED Talk. Presentations should address a single idea related to an issue presented in a lecture, screening or in a reading. Students will be marked on their ability to present idea(s) clearly, think critically, stimulate discussion and relate to the over-all course objectives. It is acceptable to draw upon issues presented in the blog postings, but students must take the discussion further.

#### *Peer Evaluation (optional) 5%*

Students will have the opportunity to replace a quiz score by evaluating a fellow student's oral presentation. Students will be marked on the level of *valuable* feedback and constructive criticism they can offer. Feedback should be from 100-250 words to be submitted to me via email by 11:59 MST the day of the presentation. Students presenting will have the option decline viewing the feedback from their peers.

#### *Final Project/Essay 30%*

Due Date: June 16, 2012

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

### **Policy for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, **students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**

For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

### **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### **Grading System**

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

(Revised, effective September 2008)

	Grading Scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99
A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, A- would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. F will be converted to zero.

## **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Taylor Digital Family Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

## **Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at the following link;  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

## **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

## **Students' Union**

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see  
<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>

## **Student Ombudsman**

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see  
<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/services/student-services/student-rights.html>

## **Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points**

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

## "SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

### **Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:

<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfieb>

### **Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

*\*Advisory: Some of the content presented in this course may contain course language, nudity, violence or disturbing imagery. Some people may find this content difficult to engage with but as participants in the course it is crucial (and expected) that you will foster a critical distance and be able to contribute to discussion.*

**May 5:**            **Introduction to Popular Culture/ Popular Culture Studies**  
***Course overview/expectations, assignment guidelines and presentation sign up***

**May 12:**        **Television**

*Reading:*        Collins, S. (2008). "Making the most out of 15 minutes: Reality TV's dispensible celebrity". *Television and new media*. 9(2). 87-110.

Lotz, Amanda. (2001). "Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Post Feminist Attributes." *Feminist Media Studies* 1(1): 105-21.

Armstrong, J & Watson, M. (2008). 'Diversity in Entertainment: Why Is TV So White?' *Entertainment Weekly*. (Online)

<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20206185,00.html>

**May 19:**        **The Film Industry**

Reading:        Sontag, S. (1996). "The Decay of Cinema". *New York Times*. (Online)  
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-cinema.html>

*\*Project Proposal due at the beginning of class*

**May 26:**        **Graphic Novels**

Reading:        Botzakis, S. (2011). "To be part of the dialogue: American adults reading comic books." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. 2(2). 113-123.

Kirkman, R. (2003). "The walking dead." Issue 1. Image Comics.  
(Available on Blackboard or online at  
<http://www.newsarama.com/php/multimedia/album.php?aid=31059>)

**Literature**

Reading:        Katsu, A. (2012). "What Does the Success of 'Fifty Shades of Grey' Tell Us About American Readers?" *Huffington Post*. (Online)  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alma-katsu/fifty-shades-of-grey-american-readers\\_b\\_1346366.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alma-katsu/fifty-shades-of-grey-american-readers_b_1346366.html)

**Gaming**

Reading:        Jenkins, H. (n.d.) "Eight myths about video games debunked". *PBS online*.  
(Available at:  
<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/videogamerevolution/impact/myths.html>)

*\*Project Proposal returned at the end of class*

**June 2:**        **Music and Subcultures (selected)**

Reading:        Horn, K. (n.d.) "Camping with the Stars: Queer Performativity, Pop Intertextuality, and Camp in the Pop Art of Lady Gaga". (Online)  
[http://www-copas.uni-regensburg.de/articles/issue\\_11/11\\_11\\_text\\_horn.php](http://www-copas.uni-regensburg.de/articles/issue_11/11_11_text_horn.php)

Greif, M. (2010). "What was the hipster?" *New York Magazine*. (Available online at: <http://nymag.com/news/features/69129/> )

Martine, C. (2011). "Five way to kill a hipster? A critique of anti-hipsterism". *PopMatters*. (Available online at:  
<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/148313-5-ways-to-kill-a-hipster-a-critique-of-anti-hipsterism/P1>)

*\*Presentations begin*

**June 9:**        **Marketing and Advertising & Social Media**

*Reading:*       Calfee, J.E. (1998). “How advertising informs to our benefit”. *Consumers’ Research Magazine*. (Available on Blackboard)

Meier, L.M. (2011). “Promotional ubiquitous musics: Recording artists, brands, and ‘Rendering Authenticity’ ”. *Popular Music and Society*. 34 (4). 399-415.

*\*Presentations continue*

**June 16:**       **User Generated Content/ Participatory Culture**

*Reading:*       Burgess, J & Green, J. (2009). “YouTube’s Popular Culture”. *YouTube : online video and participatory culture*. London: Cambridge. (Selected exerpts TBD) (Available on Blackboard)

Jeffries, L. (2011). “The revolution will be soooo cute: YouTube ‘Hauls’ and the voice of young female consumers”. *Popular Culture*. 33(2) 59-74. (Available on Blackboard)

*\*Final projects due at the beginning of class*

*\*\*Presentations continue*