

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

COMS 473 (L01): Popular Culture

WINTER 2020: January 13 to April 15 (excluding Feb. 16-22 and April 13)

Lecture: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 to 10:45

Instructor:	Dr. Samantha Thrift
Office:	SS-210 In-person office hours cancelled until further notice. Contact via email.
Office Phone:	(403)- 220-5320
Email:	samantha.thrift@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	D2L available through MyUofC portal
Office Hours:	Tuesdays 1:00 to 2:30 pm or by appointment

Course Description

Introduces critical tools for deconstructing and evaluating the social significance of popular cultural texts, including music, television, film, advertising, memes and viral content. Particular focus on audience reception as a key method for understanding fan practices and subcultures.

Additional Information

This course takes a communication studies approach to examining popular culture and for thinking critically about how popular culture informs our personal politics, consumption practices, and common-sense ideas about the world. Beginning with the question “what is popular culture?”, we will trace historical categories of high and low culture and their evolution, in order to better understand contemporary definitions and forms of “the popular.” Students will explore the theoretical frameworks contributing to popular culture studies, with particular focus on the concept of “power” and how it is connected to patterns and practices in representation, production, consumption, identity, community, counterculture, and cultural values. Prerequisite: COMS 371.

Objectives of the Course

- To develop a solid understanding of the key concepts, issues and ideas related to popular culture studies.
- To apply communication theory to the explanation of popular culture examples, events, and occurrences.
- To examine how popular culture texts function ideologically to construct identities and differences, and how such ideologies are received (i.e., adopted, resisted, or re-conceived).
- To understand how to become a pop culture producer in an ethical and mindful way through participation in a Wiki-Edit-A-Thon on the topic of Canadian popular culture.

Textbooks and Readings

The required textbook is available at the campus bookstore. Additional readings will be posted to the COMS 473 website on D2L.

O'Brien, Susie & Szeman, Imre. (2014). *Popular Culture: A User's Guide, fourth edition*. Toronto: Nelson Education.

Please note that the instructor will be teaching from the FOURTH EDITION of this book. Students are advised to use the fourth edition as well, as pagination may not match between editions. If students are using previous editions of the text, it is the student's responsibility to check for missed content.

Students may use either the print or electronic version of the textbook. Information for purchasing the e-book will be available on D2L.

Copies of the course text are also available on library reserves at the TFDL. Check the University bookstore for used print copies for a reduced cost.

Policy on the use of Electronic Communication Devices

The in-class use of computers for activities other than note-taking purposes will not be tolerated. Therefore, cell phones and other electronic communication devices must be set to mute upon entering the classroom and should not be used in the classroom or during class time. If students engage in non-course related online activity during class, the professor will request that they power down their device for the remainder of class time.

No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Email

When corresponding with the instructor via email, students should include the course name (ex. Pop Culture or COMS 473) in the subject line. If you do not include the course name in your email's subject line, your message may get overlooked in the instructor's inbox and go unread! Please maintain a respectful tone in your correspondence with the instructor.

~~Email is most useful for short, specific inquiries. If you have detailed questions on the course material, assignments, or grades, visit the instructor during office hours.~~

~~The instructor will respond to emails during the week, usually on a first-come, first-served basis. Emails sent in the evening or on weekends will not be read (or replied to) until the next working day.~~

Email inquiries will be responded to on a first-come, first-serve basis. If deemed appropriate by the course instructor, a virtual meeting (via Zoom or Skype) can be held with the student to address the issue.

NOTE: Email submissions of work will NOT be accepted unless otherwise specified.

Online submission of work is now standard, and specific methods of submission have been identified by your professor. Please review those instructions below ("Assignments and Evaluation").

Assignments and Evaluation

All assignments and exams weighted 10% or more must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

If you miss a required course component, please contact your instructor as soon as possible.

Weight	Course components	Due
15%	Quiz 1	February 12
20%	Quiz 2	March 11
10%	Pop Goes Canada: Evaluating Wikipedia Entries	February 24
20%	Pop Goes Canada: Create a Good Article	March 18 March 20
5%	Meme Analysis Peer Review	April 8 Cancelled
30% 35%	Internet Meme Analysis	April 15

In-Class Quizzes (35%) due: Feb. 12 (15%) and Mar. 11 (20%)

Student engagement with the course materials is key to success in COMS 473. As such, there are two in-class quizzes this semester, which will test students' comprehension of the assigned readings, lecture content, and issues raised during class discussion. Quiz 1 will cover course content up to February 12th, while Quiz 2 will include content covered from February 24th to March 11th. Quizzes are closed-book and will be comprised of multiple choice questions.

In the case of illness or bereavement, the grade for a missed quiz will be added to the grade for the other quiz.

Pop Goes Canada: Wikipedia Edit-A-Thon (30%)

Students will assume the role of pop culture producers with the Wiki-Edit-A-Thon assignment. A Wiki-Edit-A-Thon is a Wikipedia editing marathon that trains people how to edit on Wikipedia so that entries can be fact checked, relevant content can be uploaded, and/or new entries can be created. Wiki-Edit-A-Thons have been carried out by online communities and organizations, educational institutions, and/or community groups. For example, the Art + Feminism collective, which has run Wiki-Edit-A-Thons since 2013, uses these events as a way to narrow the Wikipedia gender gap and improve coverage of marginalized topics and communities (artandfeminism.org).

This semester, students will develop their critical media literacy by learning how to evaluate Wikipedia entries, cultivating basic editing skills, and writing a "good article" – all on the topic of Canadian pop culture. This is a group assignment.

Evaluating Wikipedia Entries (10%) due: February 24

Following a workshop on Wikipedia, students will work with existing Wikipedia entries to evaluate their quality, based on overall content, citation practice, and source material. Students will submit two annotated Wikipedia entries plus a short (2-3 page) written summary of their analysis of these entries.

Create a Good Article (20%) due: ~~March 18~~ **March 20 (4pm via D2L Dropbox)**

Following a second workshop on Wikipedia, students will create a "sandbox" in which to improve an existing Wikipedia entry on some aspect of Canadian pop culture. The success of this assignment will depend on the group's research, evaluating of sources, citation practice, and adherence to Wikipedia's guidelines and policy.

Wikipedia entry creation is a fundamentally collaborative process. On March 16, students will have in-class time to engage in peer review of each other's entries. More information provided in class.

The March 16th in-class Wikipedia collaboration has been made optional. If groups elected not to participate, then they do not need to include discussion of that exercise in the written summary of the "good article" creation process. Groups will not be penalized. Updated assignment guidelines have been posted to D2L.

~~Meme Analysis Peer Review (5%)~~ April 8 **Cancelled**

~~In-class time will be provided for sharing and discussing a draft version of your final paper in peer groups. Students need to prepare a complete (intro, body, conclusion, bibliography) draft of their final essay and bring TWO copies to class. You will keep one copy to work with during the workshop and submit the other copy to the instructor. The draft will be evaluated for its level of completeness (more details to be provided in class). Drafts will not be returned to students.~~

~~Workshop attendance is important, as your grade is based on your attendance and participation.~~

The 5% for the Peer Review will be shifted to the grade for the Meme Analysis, which is now be weighted at 35%.

Internet Meme Analysis (35%) due: April 15

Students will write an analysis (1200-1500 words, double-spaced, 1" margins) of an Internet meme, in which they will be asked to critically examine its popularity or "success." Following discussion and reading about memes and viral content, students will be encouraged to choose their own internet meme to analyze OR they may use an example from the list supplied by the instructor (on D2L). A theoretical article by Limor Shifman is provided for students to read as a starting point for the assignment (which must be used and cited in the paper), and students are encouraged to do additional online research about their own chosen internet meme. More information about the assignment to follow in class.

When submitting the paper, students must include their name, ID number, course number & name, the professor's name and date of submission on a cover page or the first page of the document (aligned top left corner). In addition to these formatting requirements, students must also include a properly formatted works cited page (APA or MLA style).

Essays will be submitted by 11am on April 15th via D2L Dropbox.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Please note that tests and examinations will only be deferred in the case of documented illness, bereavement, or varsity team travel. **Tests and exams will not be rescheduled due to travel and vacation plans, work obligations, or other scheduling conflicts.**

~~Lecture slides, when used, will be posted to D2L after the lecture.~~

Lecture content will continue be posted to D2L, and will be posted at the start of regularly scheduled class time. Your instructor will work to ensure that course materials are as

comprehensible as possible given the transition to the online format, including more detailed slides and/or voice-over narration of slides.

Submission of Assignments

Where indicated, COMS 473 assignments will be submitted via D2L dropbox using the following file name format: 473–LastNameFirstName–Title of Assignment.docx.

For assignments due in hard copy, please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or 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.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments and hand in your essays directly to your instructor or tutor. If you are unable to do so, please use the drop box 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. **Note:** It is your responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that you submit the proper version (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission).

Be prepared to provide photo ID to pick up assignments in SS 320. Private information related to individual students is treated with the utmost regard by University of Calgary faculty. Student assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty, and personal information is collected in accordance with the ***Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act***. Please note that instructors may use audio or video recorded for lesson capture, assessment of student learning, and self-assessment of teaching practices.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of 5% or a partial letter grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Assignments submitted one week or more after the due date will not be accepted, unless accommodations have been arranged with the instructor.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should provide supporting documentation to support their request; however, instructors may not require that a medical note be presented. For the policy on supporting documentation the use of a statutory declaration, see Section M.1 of the *University Calendar*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html>. Also see FAQs for Students: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/appeals/student-faq>

Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

Grading & Department of Communication, Media and Film Grade Scale

Final grades are reported as letter grades. In this course, percentage grades will be used for the essay assignments, while raw scores will be used for quizzes and peer review.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, letter grades will be converted to the midpoint of the percentage range, as shown in the final column of the table below.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations*
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	F	0 - 49.99%	0%

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

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. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

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. **In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin.** Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, please consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, 3rd floor, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success?utm_source=ssc&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=redirect

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

Academic Misconduct

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

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics>

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferrals of exams and course work, requests for reappraisals, and other matters, please see the relevant sections in the *University Calendar*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html>

Student Support Services and Resources

Please visit <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk.

For resources on D2L, visit <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students>. IT support is available at itsupport@ucalgary.ca or by calling 403-220.5555.

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

Lecture Date	Topic & Reading	Deadlines
Jan 13	Course Introduction	
Jan 15	History of Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 2	
Jan 20	History of Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 2 (conclusion)	
Jan 22	Pop Goes Canada, Pt. I Evaluating Wikipedia Entries Workshop	- form groups
Representation & Pop Culture		
Jan 27-29	Representation(s) in Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 3	
Feb 3	Identity & Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 6	
Feb 5	Screening: TBA	
Feb 10	Community & Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 7	Reading Quiz 1 (Feb. 12)
Feb 12	**Reading Quiz 1	
Feb 17-19	Reading Break (No Class)	

Producing Popular Culture		
Feb 24	Pop Goes Canada, Pt. II Sandbox Article Workshop	Evaluating Wikipedia (Feb 24)
Feb 26	Producing Pop Culture Textbook Ch. 4	
Mar 2	Screening: <i>No Logo</i> (2003)	
Mar 4	Subcultures & Countercultures Textbook Ch. 8	
Mar 9	Participatory Culture(s) Reading on D2L.	Reading Quiz 2 (Mar. 11)
Mar 11	**Reading Quiz 2	
Consuming Popular Culture		
Mar 16	Pop Goes Canada In-class collaboration time (OPTIONAL)	Good Article (Mar. 20)
Mar 18	Consumer Culture Textbook Ch. 5	
Mar 23	Consumer Culture Textbook Ch. 5 (conclusion)	
Mar 25	Celebrity Reading on D2L.	
Mar 30	Celebrity Reading on D2L (conclusion)	
Apr 1	Fandom Reading on D2L.	
Apr 6	Fandom Reading on D2L (conclusion)	Essay Peer Review (Apr. 8)
Apr 8	**Essay Peer Review Cancelled – Replaced with individual work time/online consultation with instructor	

Apr 13	No Class (Easter Monday)	Internet Meme Analysis (Apr. 15)
Apr 15	Course Conclusion (Essays due)	