COMM 340-500
TR 8:00-9:15am
HECC 105

COMMUNICATION AND POPULAR CULTURE

Instructor: Dr. L. G. Dorsey
Office: Bolton 309E/Coke 202B
Office Hours: T 3:45-4:45pm, and by appointment
(Please make an appointment as my office hours are subject to last-minute changes due to
University and College of Liberal Arts-related meetings.)
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Course Description
Survey of theories and concepts of popular culture; dynamic relationships between pop culture
and television, film, sports, politics and leisure; junior or senior classification, or approval of
instructor.

Core Curriculum: Creative Arts
This course is part of the core curriculum in creative arts. As such we focus on appreciation and
analysis of creative artifacts and works of human imagination. We synthesize and interpret
artistic expression, and enable critical, creative, and innovative communication about works of
art, in this course, popular works and texts.

This course focuses on the role popular culture plays in shaping national ideology. We will
study various rhetorical and critical theories and then apply them to popular texts, such as
television shows, films, magazines, comic books, etc. Specifically, we will take a rhetorical
perspective in this course and examine popular culture texts throughout history to uncover how
we all use them, and are used by them, to communicate and to construct our understandings of
gender, ethnicity, race, class, the American Dream, and other cultural markers in 21st century
America. Also, as this course examines media and popular culture, such texts might contain
suggestive and crude language, sexual situations, and intense violence.

In this course we will engage in
critical thinking which involves creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis,
evaluation and synthesis of information
communication which involves effective development, interpretation and expression of
ideas through written, oral and visual communication
teamwork which involves the ability to consider different points of view and to work
effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal
social responsibility which involves intercultural competence, knowledge of civic
responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global
communities.

Learning Outcomes
Students who satisfactorily complete this course should have developed their Critical Thinking,
Communication, Teamwork, and Social Responsibility skills that will allow them to:

• Explain how several rhetorical and critical methodologies work
• Apply those methodologies to a broad number of texts critically
• Interpret how those methodologies explain the persuasive potential of those texts
• Analyze how popular culture artifacts in films, television shows, and advertising construct social knowledge about race, gender, identity, and ethnicity
• Articulate argumentative positions identifying the persuasive power of popular culture artifacts through written, visual and oral communication.
• Work cooperatively as a team on achieving COMM 340 learning outcomes

Texts & Equipment needed for class
*iClicker (instructions for use at—https://www1.iclicker.com/school/texas-university/#students)*

Course Requirements
*Exam #1 = 35 points
*Exam #2 = 35 points
*Exam #3 = 35 points
*Exam #4 = 35 points
*Group analysis project 20 points
*Participation = 20 points
*Analysis Paper = 20 points

Exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and/or matching questions. The questions do not just test your memory; they test how well you have understood and synthesized ideas. The Exams cover readings, lectures, and discussions. Exams in class will be taken on Scantron forms with a #2 pencil. If you forget your Scantron form on a Scantron Exam day, you cannot take the Exam.

Make-up Exams will only be given with no penalty for University-excused absences and will be given following Student Rules 7 (see http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07). If you do not have a University-excused absence, you will be docked two letter grades on the Make-up Exam. The Make-up Exam could be in essay format, covering the readings, lectures, and discussions—you will need a Blue Book, if so. Any late work must be accompanied by University-recognized documentation and follow Student Rules 7 for its acceptance by the Instructor; otherwise, late work will receive zero credit.

Information about the Analysis Paper, Group Analysis Project and Participation are in the FAQ section below.

All course requirements must be completed in order to receive a grade for the course.

Grading Scale
A = 200-178    B = 177-158    C = 157-139    D = 138-120    F = 120-0

Grades can be found on the eCampus class site.

Class Schedule (subject to modification)
Tue 8/30—Introduction to Popular Culture; Read Sellnow, Ch. 1
Thu 9/1—Rhetoric; Feminism; Read Sellnow Ch. 2 (pgs. 34-39) and Ch. 7

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Tue 9/6—Visual Perspectives; Read Sellnow Ch. 9
Thu 9/8—Advertising; Read Marcellus, “Nervous Women”

Tue 9/13—Good Girls; Read Do Rozario, “Disney Princess”
Thu 9/15—Bad Women; Read Sherwin, “Deconstructing the Male” [find at eCampus class site]

Tue 9/20—Exam #1
Thu 9/22—Tough Chicks; Read Eammons & Mocarski, “She Poses, He Performs”

Tue 9/27—Understanding Narrative and Dramatic Perspectives; Read Sellnow, Chs. 3 & 4
Thu 9/29—The Myth of the American Frontier; Read Bayers, “The US Mint”

Tue 10/4—Comic Books; read Emad, “Reading Wonder Woman’s Body”
Thu 10/6—He-Men; read Tragos, “Monster Masculinity”

Tue 10/11—Exam #2
Thu 10/13—Understanding Media-Centered Perspectives; Read Sellnow, Chapter 10

Tue 10/18—Black Male Body; Read Schroeder, “Passing for Black”
Thu 10/20—Black Female Body; Read Rebollo-Gil & Moras, “Black Women and Music”

Tue 10/25—The Other; Read Cheung, “Anxious”
Thu 10/27—Cultural Outlaws; read Field, “Family Values” (only pages 611-622)

Tue 11/1—Exam #3
Thu 11/3—No Class [Instructor attending CCAS Conference]

Tue 11/8—Understanding Neo-Marxist Perspectives; Read Sellnow, Chapter 6
Thu 11/10—Technology I; Read Salter, “Virtually Yours”

Tue 11/15—Technology II; Read Weinbrenner, “Technology and Morality”
Thu 11/17—50s Science Fiction; Read Anisfield, “Godzilla” [find at eCampus class site]

Tue 11/22—Post-Modern Science Fiction; Read Delgado, et al., “High Tech Bodies”

**Thursday 11/24-Friday 11/25 (Thanksgiving Holiday)**

Tue 11/29—Horror; Read Birch-Bayley, “Global Media & Zombies”
Thu 12/1—America and War, Owen, “Saving Private Ryan”
**Thu 12/1—Analysis Paper Due by 11:00am**

Tue 12/6 (Redefined Day as Thu)

**Group Analysis Project uploaded to Ecampus by 11:00 a.m.**
Exam IV Review

Final Exam period: Exam IV
**Reading Bibliography (subject to modification):**


Schroeder, Patricia. 2010. “Passing for Black: Coon Songs and the Performance of Race.”

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**FAQs**

**How do I get the articles from the Library?**

1) Go to the University Libraries home page at [http://library.tamu.edu/](http://library.tamu.edu/).

2) In the “Quick Search” box, copy and paste in the **full article title** (without quotation marks), and click “Search.”

3) Make sure the correct article appeared.

4) Click the “PDF Full Text” link to access the article.

5) If you want to save it and read it later, right click on the article itself select “Print,” then change the print selection to “Save as PDF,” and save it to your computer.

6) If you still can’t find the article, seek a reference librarian’s help.

**I know there are only two articles on the eCampus site, but where are they?**

1) After logging in to the class site, click the “Content” tab and open the folder called “A Couple of Readings.”

**Is there any extra credit available in this class?**

1) No.

**How do I need to study the readings?**

1) Read the articles/textbook before class so that you can maximize your understanding of the lecture.

2) In the textbook, look for key theoretical concept terms—**green bolded**—and know them (TV show titles and movie titles are italicized but those are not key theoretical concept terms).

3) In the assigned articles, look for key concept terms, and read the articles looking to answer two questions:
   a) what is the claim that the article’s author is making about **what** the popular culture text is communicating?
   b) what is the evidence that the article’s author is making about **how** the popular culture text is communicating?

4) For example, if the article is about Jennifer Lopez and gender, race, and sexuality, **what** does the author identify as the messages being communicated by Lopez’s body regarding gender, race, and sexuality? And what does the author say about **how** Lopez’s body communicates those messages (theoretically/literally)? Keep in mind that each article might have several answers for
the “what” question and will have several answers for the “how” question that you will need to know.

5) You should write the answers to those 2 questions for each article. Writing the answers out allows you to study just from your answers; with those written answers you shouldn’t have to re-read the article for an exam.

*If I study a lot will I get a good grade?*
1) Studying “a lot,” whatever that means, does not ensure a good grade. For example, studying “a lot” while Instagramming, Tweeting, and/or other distractions doesn’t work that well.
2) You need to “study smart”—early preparation, focused direction, in manageable chunks of time, and using the information above—to augment whatever it is you normally do to study for an exam.
3) In addition, you need to participate fully in the class discussions and activities to reinforce your learning of the material.

*What’s the best way to take notes?*
1) It is imperative that you come to class and take notes in the way that best maximizes your learning style.
2) Do not just copy terms from the slides—actually write down what the Instructor says about those terms, write down the examples he uses to explain those terms—be detailed.
3) If you write your notes during class, make sure you type them later before the next class period. This allows you to “cement” the knowledge in your head because you are sort of taking notes twice. Moreover, this timely “second pass” through your notes gives you an opportunity to find out if you actually have an understanding of the lecture; if not, you have time to get clarification from the Instructor.

*How can I contact you?*
1) Send email to l-dorsey@tamu.edu.
2) Do not send email to me through the eCampus internal email system as I will not be checking it.
3) I will respond to emails within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.
4) If you e-mail a question that is answered already on the syllabus, there will be no response.

*How do I get the notes if I was sick?*
1) Ask classmates if you could get their notes, and/or get the notes from a friend.
2) The Instructor does not give his personal notes/slides to students.

*Will the calendar/schedule ever change?*
1) It could change in order to take advantage of speakers who may become available. I reserve the right to make adjustments. All adjustments to this calendar will be announced in advance via TAMU email. As always, check TAMU email at least twice a day.

*If I don’t wind up with the grade that I want or need after the semester is over, can I ask for my grade to be raised?*
1) Basically, when you go to the Instructor after the course is done or almost done and say, “I need a particular grade because [fill in the blank],” you’re asking for an arbitrary elevation of your grade. The Instructor cannot arbitrarily change your grade as that is unethical.

**Where will I take a makeup exam?**
1) Hard copy makeup exams for students with University-recognized documentation (Student Rules 7) that is considered satisfactory to the instructor will be held on Wednesday mornings at 9:00am in the COMM Undergraduate Office. The exception to this time shall be for students who are enrolled in a TAMU academic course at 9:00 a.m. In those cases, an alternate time on Wednesdays will be designated by the COMM Undergraduate Office. You must arrange your makeup exam with the Instructor first, then the COMM Undergraduate Office.

**When can I look at my exam?**
1) Exam grades will be posted in eCampus within a few days of taking the exam.
2) You must make an appointment with the Instructor to look at your exam.
3) You have up to three class periods after your grade is posted to come look at that exam.

**How does attendance work?**
1) You will need a functioning iclicker as attendance will be taken at some point during the class session. There will be no attendance designation via paper.
2) You should arrive on time as late arrivals, even in this large room, are disruptive. Students who disturb the class or the instructor because of tardiness are subject to a reduction in their final course grade (10 points per disruption/disturbance).
3) Plan to attend all class sessions because attendance and attention relates directly to your learning.

**What is Second Life?**
1) It is a virtual world in which TAMU exists and where we will hold two classes later in the semester.
2) Go to this website, [http://its.tamu.edu/Systems-Software/Second-Life](http://its.tamu.edu/Systems-Software/Second-Life), to learn about establishing an account and signing in, and how to orient yourself within the virtual TAMU campus. You should do this before March 1st.

**What are guidelines for the Analysis Paper?**
1) The Instructor will provide an artifact for you to analyze.
2) You will write a 2 page analysis of that artifact using a theory from the textbook and/or a theory from class.
3) Structure the paper like this:
   a) Times New Roman 12 point font, 1 inch margins
   b) paragraph 1 on page 1: summarize the theory you’re using (demonstrate your knowledge; cite your sources from the textbook, readings, and/or lecture)
   c) paragraph 2 on page 1: make a claim as to how the artifact is persuasive using the theory; provide evidence from the artifact to support the claim you’re making
   d) paragraph 1 on page 2: make another claim as to how the artifact is persuasive using the theory; provide evidence from the artifact to support the claim you’re making
   e) paragraph 2 on page 2: reflect on how you now perceive popular culture after taking this course

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e) poorly written papers from a stylistic and/or grammatical perspective will lose 0-20 points
f) poorly written papers from a theoretical perspective will lose 0-20 points
g) upload the paper to the class’s Turn-It-In folder in eCampus by the due date/time

This paper must demonstrate your Critical Thinking skills. As a point of reference, the university-level, Critical Thinking outcome is defined as “students have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to (a) evaluate, analyze, and integrate information from a variety of sources; (b) use appropriate strategies and tools to represent, analyze, and integrate information; and, (c) develop critical, reasoned positions.” For further information, please see the TAMU Undergraduate Catalog, [http://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/student-learning-outcomes/](http://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/student-learning-outcomes/).

**What are guidelines for the Group Analysis Project?**
1) Together as a group, you must choose an artifact for analysis. (Groups will be assigned in class.)
2) Together as a group, you will either create a slideset in powerpoint OR create a video that illustrates an analysis of that artifact using a theory from the textbook and/or a theory from class.
3) The slideset may have no more than 10 slides (not including a slide of introduction and a slide for references.) It will be uploaded into Ecampus. A rubric for assessment of the slideset will be posted in Ecampus OR the video may be no longer than four (4) minutes. It will be posted to YouTube. The URL will be uploaded to Ecampus. A rubric for assessment of the video will be posted in Ecampus.
4) Remember that these are visual mediums, and therefore this project will have a low ratio of text to visual elements.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
1) Disruptive and/or disrespectful behavior is not acceptable and subject to grading deductions (10 points per disruption/disturbance), as well as dismissal from class.
2) Laptops may be used for note-taking in class; phones or tablets may only be used when related to class use.
3) Other technology use—Facebooking, tweeting, etc.—that is not related to class is prohibited. For each occurrence of unauthorized technology use, 10 points will be deducted from your final grade.

**How does Participation work?**
1) During various class periods, there will be activities that will require student input via his/her iclicker. The Instructor will alert you as to which particular activity during a class period will count toward your Participation points. Participation points will range between 1-4 points per designated class activity.
2) Please bring your iclicker to class as that will be the only means used to register your Participation during activities.
Please Note The Following:

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement**
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit [http://disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu).

**Academic Integrity Statement and Policy**
"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do." For additional information, please visit: [http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu).

**Class Material Use**
The materials, notes, and lectures produced for this course are protected by federal copyright law. Distribution of these materials in any way, including digital versions of documents and information, may constitute a violation of copyright law, the Texas A&M University Student Code of Conduct (see TAMU Student Rule 24), and/or the Aggie Code of Honor (See Student Rule 20).

**Student Learning Outcomes**
Texas A&M University has identified student learning outcomes that describe our institutional commitment to your educational goals. These include the ability to demonstrate critical thinking, effective communication, and social, cultural, and global competence . For further information, please see the TAMU Undergraduate Catalog, [http://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/student-learning-outcomes/](http://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/student-learning-outcomes/).