ENGLISH 253: INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL STUDIES AND POPULAR CULTURE

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
An introduction to the history, theories and methods of contemporary cultural studies. The course will explore key concepts in cultural theory to examine specific aspects of popular culture as well as cultural sites and practices so as to expand upon the analytical and critical thinking skills learned in ENGL 104 and 203. Prerequisite: ENGL 104.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The course is structured to develop your critical ability concerning the social uses and political implications of texts drawn from popular culture (film, music, television, clothing, etc.). In honing the analytical and theoretical tools necessary for a critical perspective, the ultimate goal is to help you interrogate the textual material that saturates your lives in a critical, self-conscious manner, and to then express your ideas in written form. A larger goal, then, is working toward an understanding of how the knowledge, values, and ideals used to define a culture, thus our notions of personal selfhood, are instilled and debated via a forum that transmits its messages to millions of people.

REQUIRED TEXTS
(IG) An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, John Storey
(R) Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, John Storey, ed.
(CC) Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Popular Culture, Petracca & Sorapure
(SUB) Subculture: The Meaning of Style, Dick Hebdige
(H) Handouts

CLASS POLICIES
Attendance: Since participation in class discussion and workshops is crucial to your success in this class, you must attend regularly and be prepared to participate. Excessive absences will negatively affect your grade. You are allowed 3 unexcused absences. Information concerning absences are contained in the University Student Rules Section 7 <http://www.tamug.edu/stulife/student%20rules/Rule7.htm>). The university views class attendance as an individual student responsibility. All students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. Please consult the University Student Rules for reasons for excused absences, detailed procedures, deadlines, and student grievance procedures (Part III, Section 45).

Paper Deadlines: In order to pass this course, you must complete and submit all work. Grades on late papers will drop one letter grade (e.g. A to A-, B+ to B) each DAY (including the weekend) after the due date.

Essay preparation: All drafts (including revisions) must be typed using a standard typeface (e.g., 12 point Courier or 12 Times). Type the draft on white letter size (8 1/2" x 11") paper, using one side per page. Use 1" margins on all four sides (not 1.25", the Microsoft Word default setting) and double space to allow for comments. If you use a word processor, be sure to save your essay on a disk (do not expect your files to be safe if left on TAMUG public-use computers).
Academic Integrity: For many years Aggies have followed a Code of Honor: "Aggies do not lie, cheat, or steal, nor do they tolerate those who do." Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University at Galveston, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the TAMUG community from the requirements or the processes of the TAMUG Honor System. For additional information: <http://www.tamug.edu/honorsystem>.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty members to help maintain scholastic integrity at the University by refusing to participate in or tolerate scholastic dishonesty (including plagiarism, broadly defined as passing off somebody else's work as your own, so make sure to cite all sources whose words or ideas you use in your own work [this includes web pages]). The Aggie Code of Honor and the Scholastic Dishonesty sections in the TAMUG University Rules handbook will be the standard upon which scholastic integrity is maintained in this course. Academic dishonesty infractions could result in failure of this course. On all coursework, assignments, or examinations, the following Honor Pledge shall be pre-printed and signed by the student "On my honor, as an Aggie, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work."

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: 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 accommodation, please contact the Counseling Office, Northen Student Center, or call (409)740-4587.

Family Educational and Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA): FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records by limiting access to these records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their educational records and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. To obtain a listing of directory information or to place a hold on any or all of this information, please consult the Admissions & Records Office. Items that can never be identified as public information are a student's social security number or institutional identification number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPR or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION

- **20% Essay 1**
  A 5-7 page paper that discusses and analyzes the cultural function of a pop text. You’ll need to make sense of the text (what it may intend to achieve/say), how a consumer/fan may use it and how it is positioned in the culture, consciously or unconsciously. Let me know what you have chosen before starting the essay.

- **30% Essay 2**
  A 7-10 page analytical research paper of a pop text. Basically, it is the same as Essay 1; however, this time you must use at least five (5) scholarly secondary sources (either studies of your chosen text or theoretical works related to the topic). Non-academic sources taken from the internet, while allowed, will not count as one of the five sources. At this stage, your analysis should be informed by the theories we will study during the semester. You may have to order the sources through interlibrary loan so don’t put off doing the research until the last moment.

- **20% 10 Pop Reports (PR)**
  A 2 page critical reflection on a pop culture text (broadly defined). This is not a personal reading journal, you are not writing about whether you like/dislike the object under study. I want to see a brief argument presenting a mixture of formal analysis and critical evaluation; it should also show a growing theoretical acumen as the
semester progresses. Try examining different mediums (e.g., film, music, TV, etc.) in each PR to avoid repeating yourself. The report will be graded with a check (✓) or check minus (✗). Each one is worth 10 points (a total of 100); the lower grade (5 pts.) will be given to poorly developed or less substantive work, especially those that simply explain, summarize or catalog details at the expense of analysis.

- **10% Final Paper Presentations**
  A five minute presentation on your final paper topic discussing the subject or object you will examine and the argument you will make about it. You will also turn in a 250-word abstract for the final paper. The presentations will be organized alphabetically. The grade is a score out of 100.

- **20% Participation**
  This is defined as attendance, taking part in class discussion and any in-class collaborative assignments. Low attendance will negatively affect this grade.

**Grading:**

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**Schedule**

**WEEK 1: Defining the Popular**
**IG:** "What is Popular Culture?" (pp. 1-19)
**Handouts:**
   Alison Schneider, "At Chicago Meeting, Defenders of Traditional Curriculum Assume Embattled Air"
   Michael Berube, "The 'Elvis Costello Problem' in Teaching Popular Culture"
   Rita Felski, "Those Who Disdain Cultural Studies Don't Know What They're Talking About"
**R:** "Introduction: The Study of Popular Culture and Cultural Studies" (x-xvii); **CC:** "Why Study Popular Culture?" (1-6)

**WEEK 2: On Reading and Writing**
**CC:** "Active Reading" (6-27)
**CC:** "The Writing Process" (27-46)
**PR/PR #1**

**WEEK 3: "Culture and Civilization" Tradition**
**IG:** Matthew Arnold & F.R. Leavis (21-35); **R:** Arnold, "Culture and Anarchy" & Leavis, "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture" (7-21)
**IG:** "Mass Culture in America" (35-44); **R:** Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture" (22-36)

**WEEK 4: Television**
**CC:** "The Cultural Influences of Television" (156-83)
**CC:** "Interpreting Television" (217-43)
**PR/PR #2**

**WEEK 5: Culturalism**
**IG:** "Culturalism" (45-63); **R:** Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture" (48-56)
**IG:** "CCCS and the Birmingham School" (63-71); **R:** Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (442-53)
**R:** Michael Shudson, "The New Validation of Popular Culture" (495-502); Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy" (613-24)

**WEEK 6: Popular Music**
**CC:** Simon Frith, "Rock and Sensuality" & David Samuels, "The Rap on Rap" (265-88)
**CC:** Alan Wells, "Popular Music: Emotional Use and Management" & John Lewis, "Punks in LA" (296-328)
**PR/PR #3**