South Central College

AMST 120 Introduction to Popular Culture

Common Course Outline

Course Information

Description
This course is designed to introduce students to a variety of critical approaches used in the study of popular culture. Popular culture has been variously reviled as lowbrow entertainment, condemned as propaganda, and dismissed as ephemeral frippery. Its consumers have been denounced as ignorant rubes, cultural dupes, and couch potatoes. However, popular culture not only reflects the world around us, it profoundly influences how we perceive the world. As the cultural space in which fantasies are given form, it imbues social norms with much of their power. In this course, students will move beyond simply consuming popular culture to explore how it reflects and constructs widely shared (and fiercely contested) beliefs, ideologies and social realities. They will examine a wide range of subjects (such as film, television, video games, advertising, and the internet) using a variety of critical approaches (including genre theory, audience reception theory, and cultural hegemony theory) to better understand how contemporary American culture shapes our lives. (Prerequisite: Must have a score of 78 or higher on the Reading Comprehension portion of the Accuplacer test or completion of READ 0090.) MNTC 5, 7: History and the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Human Diversity.

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<th>Instructional Level</th>
<th>Associate Degree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Credits</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td>64.00</td>
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Types of Instruction

Instruction Type: Lecture

Credits/Hours: 4.0/64

Pre/Corequisites

Prerequisite: Must have a score of 78 or higher on the Reading portion of the Accuplacer test or completion of READ 0090.

Institutional Core Competencies

1. Analysis and inquiry: Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze information from multiple sources
and to raise pertinent questions regarding that information.

2 Critical and creative thinking: Students will develop the disposition and skills to strategize, gather, organize, create, refine, analyze, and evaluate the credibility of relevant information and ideas.

3 Foundations and skills for lifelong learning: Students will display an understanding of learning as a lifelong process through demonstration of a desire to learn, the willingness to apply learning to other areas of their lives, the ability to think and act independently, be willing to take the initiative to get projects done, and demonstrate the ability to reflect upon what has occurred and how it impacts the student and others.

4 Intercultural knowledge and competence: Students will recognize and understand the rich and complex ways that group and individual inequalities and interactions impact self and society.

5 Written and oral communication: Students will communicate effectively in a range of social, academic, and professional contexts using a variety of means, including written, oral, numeric/quantitative, graphic, and visual modes of communication.

**External Standards**

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<th>Title</th>
<th>MN Transfer Goals</th>
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<td><strong>Target Standards</strong></td>
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**Goal 5: History and the Social and Behavioral Sciences** - To increase students' knowledge of how historians and social and behavioral scientists discover, describe, and explain the behaviors and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, events, and ideas. Such knowledge will better equip students to understand themselves and the roles they play in addressing the issues facing humanity.

5a - Employ the methods and data that historians and social and behavioral scientists use to investigate the human condition.

5b - Examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods and cultures.

5c - Use and critique alternative explanatory systems or theories.

5d - Develop and communicate alternative explanations or solutions for contemporary social issues.

**Goal 7: Human Diversity** - To increase students' understanding of individual and group differences (e.g. race, gender, class) and their knowledge of the traditions and values of various groups in the United States. Students should be able to evaluate the United States' historical and contemporary responses to group differences.

7a - Understand the development of and the changing meanings of group identities in the United States' history and culture.

7b - Demonstrate an awareness of the individual and institutional dynamics of unequal power relations between groups in contemporary society.

7c - Analyze their own attitudes, behaviors, concepts and beliefs regarding diversity, racism, and bigotry.

7d - Describe and discuss the experience and contributions (political, social, economic, etc.) of the many groups that shape American society and culture, in particular those groups that have suffered discrimination and exclusion.

7e - Demonstrate communication skills necessary for living and working effectively in a society with great population diversity.

**Course Competencies**

1 Define "Popular Culture" and identify reasons for its study

Learning Objectives
Differentiate between "High" and "Popular" (low and middlebrow) culture
Chart the historical development of mass media in America

Learning Objectives
- Identify ways in which media technologies and forms of popular culture develop in tandem
- Summarize the emergence and impact of successive media technologies: the printing press, newspapers, radio, film, television, the Internet, and social media
- Distinguish between "broadcasting" and "narrowcasting"
- Evaluate the changing media landscape, including the globalization of culture and the increasing importance of user-created content

Evaluate the American culture industry

Learning Objectives
- Summarize the contours of the contemporary culture industry in the U.S.
- Identify the impacts of media consolidation on the production of popular culture, including the marginalization of critical perspectives
- Evaluate claims of political and ideological bias in the mass media
- Examine ways in which popular culture and political campaigns intersect in the U.S.

Explore the cultural impact of advertising and its contribution to consumerism

Learning Objectives
- Summarize the historical development of advertising and identify techniques used by advertisers to promote their products
- Define "consumerism" and describe its role in American society
- Evaluate ways in which popular culture contributes to consumerism
- Analyze the intersection of consumerism with racial, gender, and class-based differences

Apply critical approaches to the study of popular culture

Learning Objectives
- Summarize and apply the "dismissive" view of Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis
- Summarize and apply the "cultural dupe" view of the Frankfurt School
- Summarize and apply the "encode and decode" view of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall
- Summarize and apply Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony
- Identify ways in which marginalized members of society contest and reinterpret popular culture

Apply the basic concepts of Genre Theory

Learning Objectives
- Identify the four main stages of genre development: Primitive, Classic, Parodic, and Revisionist
- Describe ways in which particular film and television genres have progressed through the phases
- Explain and evaluate the function of parody and satire as counterhegemonic cultural forces
- Summarize stereotypical genre elements in a particular genre of film or television

Evaluate the role of popular culture in constructing social realities

Learning Objectives
- Explain the concept of Social Constructivism using examples from popular culture
- Explore the contribution of popular culture to "common sense" elements of the American worldview
- Describe and evaluate ways in which popular culture helps to establish and perpetuate ethnic, racial, sexual and class-based stereotypes
- Identify and evaluate examples of popular culture which challenge and undermine cultural conventions

Explore the character and cultural significance of so-called "reality" television

Learning Objectives
- Summarize the history and current dimensions of "reality" television
- Identify ways in which "reality" programs are manufactured and edited
- Evaluate the ideologies which are represented by specific examples of "reality" television
- Describe ways in which "reality" television reinforces and challenges racial, gender, and class-based stereotypes
9 Examine the significance of celebrities in contemporary American culture

Learning Objectives
Summarize the history of celebrity and psychological reasons for its appeal
Identify the roles which celebrities occupy in American culture (including fame, gossip, endorsement and advocacy)
Evaluate ways in which celebrities reinforce and challenge racial, gender and class-based stereotypes
Assess the image of a particular celebrity and how he or she achieved and exploited celebrity status

10 Describe the role that heroes (and anti-heroes) play in contemporary popular culture

Learning Objectives
Explain the "hero myth" and articulate a philosophical understanding of "heroism"
Examine ways in which "heroism" has evolved in the history of popular culture, including the recent prominence of anti-heroes on American TV
Evaluate different ways "heroism" is understood based on racial, gender and class-based identities
Identify and critically assess a personal hero from American popular culture

11 Analyze the importance of super-heroes in contemporary popular culture

Learning Objectives
Summarize the emergence and historical development of comic-book super-heroes
Explore ways in which super-heroes challenge and perpetuate cultural stereotypes
Propose and evaluate possible explanations for the continuing popularity of super-heroes
Compare the cultural role of super-heroes with that of gods in other societies

12 Explain the significance of fan communities in popular culture

Learning Objectives
Summarize the history of "fandom" in American popular culture
Identify common elements among and differences between fan communities, including racial, gender and class-based diversity
Describe ways in which fans identify with characters, collaborate with each other, and interact with creators
Describe and critically analyze a particular fan community

13 Evaluate the depiction of violence in popular culture and its connection to violent behavior

Learning Objectives
Summarize the history of depictions of (and restrictions on) violence in popular culture
Explore the psychological reasons why viewers consume violent media, including differences based on class, race and gender
Evaluate the claim that media violence contributes to an increase in real-life violence
Describe and analyze the violence in a particular movie, video game or television show

14 Analyze the ideological differences between Action Films and Romantic Comedies

Learning Objectives
Summarize the cinematic history and genre tropes of action films and romantic comedies
Analyze ways in which the two genres perpetuate and challenge gender stereotypes and other cultural ideologies
Evaluate specific example of the two genres, identifying ways in which they conform to or contradict genre conventions
Identify ways in which the two genres are similar and ways in which they differ

15 Present an analysis of a specific pop cultural artifact

Learning Objectives
Describe the creator, content and intended audience of the artifact
Identify the genre to which the artifact belongs and the stage it represents
Summarize common dominant and counterhegemonic interpretations of the artifact
Explain ways in which fans have understood and responded to the artifact

16 Evaluate the emergence and cultural impact of popular conspiracy theories

Learning Objectives
Summarize the history of conspiracy theories in recent American history
Describe the interaction between conspiracy theories and related trends in popular culture
Evaluate proposed explanations for the origin and acceptance of conspiracy theories