

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Centre for Initiatives in Education

# Selected Topics in Popular Culture

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## CIED 1001A (0.5 credits) Winter 2015 Course syllabus

**Instructor:** Susan Burhoe  
**Office:** 1517 Dunton Tower  
**Email:** [susan.burhoe@carleton.ca](mailto:susan.burhoe@carleton.ca)

**Class time:** Thursdays 2:30-5:30 pm  
**Class Location:** 518 Southam Hall

**Course office hour:** Thursday 1:30-2:30 or by appointment [susan.burhoe@carleton.ca](mailto:susan.burhoe@carleton.ca)

**Student mentor:** Jasmine Tsang ([jasminetsang@mail.carleton.ca](mailto:jasminetsang@mail.carleton.ca))

### Overview

This course will explore popular culture in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Each week, we'll investigate case studies that highlight different aspects of modern culture. In this course, you will be introduced to basic cultural theory and learn how scholars approach cultural "texts". How do we "read" the world around us? How do movies, TV shows or comics reflect our cultural anxieties? How can magazines, fashion and films embody power relationships? You will be encouraged to consider the relationship between history and culture, and how various mass cultural products and movements have shaped and reflected our ideas about gender, race, normality, and identity throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide you with the skills and knowledge to:

- Define key concepts related to semiotics and basic cultural theory.
- Discuss these concepts critically and apply them to cultural "texts" such as advertising, TV, comics, movies, fashion, music and social media.
- Analyze pop culture texts to assess how they reinforce or challenge norms of their particular social and historical moment, with particular attention to ideas about race, gender and class.
- Practice analysis in oral and written form through class discussions, group work, and written assignments.
- Identify and describe key concepts and ideas from the class on the final exam.
- Identify a topic of interest for a personal research project about some aspect of popular culture that you feel strongly about.
- Use class and supplementary readings in the development of your research question or thesis.
- Communicate in writing the results of your learning in an observation report and a research essay.

### Textbook

*Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon. Boston: Bedford, 2012. Available at the Carleton University Bookstore.

Other readings will be made available on CuLearn.

## Course website

CuLearn - CIED 1001A - Winter 2015

To access your courses on cuLearn go to <http://carleton.ca/culearn>. For help and support, go to <http://carleton.ca/culearn/students>. Any unresolved questions, contact Computing and Communication Services (CCS) by phone at 613-520-3700 or email at [ccs\\_service\\_desk@carleton.ca](mailto:ccs_service_desk@carleton.ca).

## Weekly Schedule

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### January 8: Intro to Modern Pop Culture

Introduction to the course. Why study this stuff anyway? We'll look at some of the debates high vs. low culture and trace the emergence of popular culture in the 20th century.

- No readings assigned for week one.

### January 15: Pop Goes the Culture

Reading:

- Maasik, Sonia and Jack Solomon. "Introduction- Popular Signs: Or, Everything You Always Knew about American Culture (but Nobody Asked)." *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 1-22.

Movie (in-class): *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*. Dir. Sun, Chyng-Feng, Miguel Picker, and Monique Fordham. Media Education Foundation; Kinetivideo.com, 2002.

### January 22: Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend? Hollywood Glamour

#### Pop Quiz #1

Reading:

- Dyhouse, Carol. Chapter 2 "Hollywood Glamour" in *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*. London; New York: Zed; Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. pgs. 29-47.

This week we'll discuss the expectations for Essay #1 due February 12.

### January 29: Buying-in: Marketing & Identity

Readings:

- Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Science of Shopping". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 97-104.
- Norton, Anne. "The Signs of Shopping". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 104-110.

Movie (in-class): *Frontline: The Merchants of Cool*. PBS: 2001.

### February 5: "Oh... the HORROR!" Comic Books and Moral Panic in the 50s

#### Pop Quiz #2

Readings:

- Medhurst, Andy. "Batman, Deviance and Camp". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 331-346.
- Wertham, Frederic. "What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books" in *Ladies' Home Journal*, November, 1953, pgs. 50-53 & 214-220. Available online: <http://www.seductionoftheinnocent.org/LadiesHomeJournalNovember1953Contents.htm>

### February 12: Rapper's Delight: Hip hop, Race and Culture

#### Essay #1 due

Readings:

- Omi, M. "In Living Color: Race and American Culture". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 625-636.
- Bernstein, Nell. "Goin' Gangsta, Choosin' Cholita". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 661-666.

Movie (in-class): *Blacking Up: Hip-Hop's Remix Of Race and Identity*. California Newsreel (Firm). New York, N.Y.: Films Media Group, [2012], c2010.

### **February 26: Watching the Detectives: Hero and Anti-Hero in Crime Shows on TV**

Reading:

- Garrett, Stephen. "Why We Love TV's Anti-heroes". *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* pgs. 318-322.

Watch: a couple of TV shows to prepare for our discussion. Details to follow.

### **March 5: I Cast "Detect Evil": Role Playing Games and Moral Panic**

#### **Pop Quiz #3**

Reading:

- Lancaster, K. (1994), "Do Role-Playing Games Promote Crime, Satanism and Suicide among Players as Critics Claim?" *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 28: pgs. 67-79.

### **March 12: It's the End of the World As We Know It: Zombies and the Apocalypse**

#### **Essay Proposal due**

Reading:

- Bishop, Kyle William, "Introduction", in *American Zombie Gothic: the rise and fall (and rise) of the walking dead in popular culture*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., c2010. pgs. 9-36

### **March 19: Midterm Test**

#### **Midterm Test**

### **March 26: Epic Fail: TV, the Web & Irony in Modern Culture**

#### **Pop Quiz #4**

Readings:

- Matheson, C. "The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life" in *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.*: pgs. 305-317.
- Plus: visit a site like epicfail.com and choose a video that either makes you laugh or cry or worry about the state of modern culture. We'll discuss!

### **April 2: Miley, Twerking, and the Politics of Race**

#### **Essay 2 due**

Readings:

- Haley Freeman, "Miley Cyrus's twerking routine was cultural appropriation at its worst", [The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/27/miley-cyrus-twerking-cultural-appropriation), Tuesday 27 August 2013.  
[www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/27/miley-cyrus-twerking-cultural-appropriation](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/27/miley-cyrus-twerking-cultural-appropriation).
- Anne Theriault, "What Miley Cyrus Did Was Disgusting -- But Not For the Reasons You Think", Huffington Post, Posted: 08/27/2013 2:37 pm.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/anne-theriault-/miley-cyrus-vm-a-performance\\_b\\_3819177.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/anne-theriault-/miley-cyrus-vm-a-performance_b_3819177.html)

# Course Evaluation

| Component             | Due date                                       | Percent of grade assigned | Track your grade |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Essay 1</b>        | February 12                                    | 15%                       |                  |
| <b>Essay proposal</b> | March 12                                       | 10%                       |                  |
| <b>Essay 2</b>        | April 2                                        | 30%                       |                  |
| <b>Pop quizzes</b>    | January 22, February 5, February 26 & March 26 | 15%                       |                  |
| <b>Midterm test</b>   | March 19                                       | 30%                       |                  |
| <b>Total</b>          |                                                | 100%                      |                  |

## Essay #1: Consumer Culture

15%

**Essay due:** February 12

Choose one of the following assignments. Write a 3-4 page (750-1000 words) analysis, drawing on the relevant readings from “Chapter 1: Consuming Passions” in *Signs of Life in America* and/or the PBS movie *Cool Hunters*, available here: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/> Also consult pgs. 23-64 “Writing about Popular Culture” in *Signs of Life* for advice on writing papers about popular culture and citation rules.

- **Option One: Shopping and Space:** Visit a popular retail store such as Urban Outfitters, Banana Republic, The Gap, Forever 21, Apple Store, Toys R Us. Study the ways in which the store uses spatial design in order to try to influence your behavior and buying habits.
- **Option Two: Cool hunting:** Visit a Web site of a major retailer (such as [www.bercrombieandfitch.com](http://www.bercrombieandfitch.com), [www.ralphlauren.com](http://www.ralphlauren.com), [www.gap.com](http://www.gap.com), [www.diesel.com](http://www.diesel.com), [www.h&m.com](http://www.h&m.com), [www.silverjeans.com](http://www.silverjeans.com), [www.nike.com](http://www.nike.com), [www.adidas.com](http://www.adidas.com), [www.seanjohn.com](http://www.seanjohn.com), or another retailer aimed at the youth market). How does the online “store” attempt to associate their product with “cool” and to encourage youth consumption?
- **Option Three: What’s in a Package?** Visit a popular retail store such as Starbucks, Toys ‘R Us, Forever 21, H&M, Apple Store or the Body Shop and write a semiotic analysis of the packaging you see in the store.

## Essay#2: Reading Pop Culture

**Proposal due:** March 12

10%

**Essay due:** April 2

30%

*Topic of your choosing. More details on the expectations for each component will be provided in class.*

- **Essay Proposal:** Write a 1<sup>1/2</sup> to 2<sup>1/2</sup> page (300-625 words) proposal for your final paper. Be sure to include a bibliography.
- **Essay:** Write a 5-7 page (1,250-1,750 words) analysis of some aspect of popular culture. You can choose to analyze a movie, TV show, magazine, website, youtube video(s) or other pop culture phenomenon.
- Be sure to consult pgs. 23-64 “Writing about Popular Culture” in *Signs of Life* for advice on writing papers about popular culture and citation rules.

## Pop Quizzes

15%

Four Pop Quizzes based on the week’s readings on the following dates: **Jan 22, Feb 5, Mar 5, Mar 26.** Your highest three grades will be used (three x 5% each). These will be brief quizzes consisting of multiple choice and/or true or false questions.

## Midterm test

30%

The test will be held **March 19<sup>th</sup>** and will consist of some multiple-choice questions, short answer questions and an essay question. ***Each week, students will have the opportunity to write brief summary notes at the end of the class.*** I will collect these notes in a folder that you will receive back at the test. You can use them for reference **during** the test.

## Important Note

If you should miss a class it is your responsibility to complete work and readings that you have missed. All tests and assignments must be completed and handed in on due dates. If an assignment will be late due to illness, an official medical document must be submitted to me as soon as possible, and we can then make alternate arrangements.

## Late Papers

Will be penalized 1% per day unless a documented reason is provided (a medical note, or other). Please contact me if you believe you will be late submitting your work.

## Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.”

This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."
- Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

## Grades

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### Course Requirements & Methods of Evaluation

In accordance with the Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar ([www.carleton.ca/cuuc](http://www.carleton.ca/cuuc)), the letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

|             |            |             |             |              |
|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| A+ = 90-100 | B+ = 77-79 | C+ = 67-69  | D+ = 57-59  |              |
| A = 85-89   | B = 73-76  | C = 63-66   | D = 53-56   |              |
| A - = 80-84 | B- = 70-72 | C - = 60-62 | D- = 50- 52 | F = Below 50 |

WDN = Withdrawn from the course (no grade assigned)    ABS = Student absent from final exam    DEF = Deferred exam  
FND = (Failed, no Deferred) = Student could not pass the course even with 100% on final exam.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

## Academic Accommodation

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You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations.

Please review the course outline promptly and write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations.

If you require accommodations for your midterm test in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC not later than two weeks in advance of the test date. Our test is March 19<sup>th</sup>, so you will need to request accommodations **before March 5th**.

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation>.

## ESP/AESP Information

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### **Booking appointments with an Academic Advantage Coach or a Student Advisor**

- Academic Advantage Coach (study support, time management, writing help). Kurt Montgomery is the coach assigned to our course (though you can meet with any of the coaches).
- ESP/AESP Student Advisor (program planning, degree requirements, registration). Stephanie Wagar and Allan Blunt are the ESP/AESP student advisors.

Use our on-line scheduling service for booking appointments.

To book an appointment, visit: [www.carleton.ca/esp/appointments](http://www.carleton.ca/esp/appointments).

### **AESP Coordinators**

Rodney Nelson: [rodney.nelson@carleton.ca](mailto:rodney.nelson@carleton.ca)

Patricia Reynolds: [patricia.reynolds@carleton.ca](mailto:patricia.reynolds@carleton.ca)

### **AESP Program Assistant**

Leslie Cousins: [leslie.cousins@carleton.ca](mailto:leslie.cousins@carleton.ca)