

**University of Calgary  
Department of Communication, Media and Film**

**Communication and Media Studies COMS 473 L01  
POPULAR CULTURE**

**Fall 2017**

**Wed., Sept. 13 – Wednesday, Dec. 6**

**Lecture: W 12:00-14:45**

<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Samantha Thrift
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<b>Web Page:</b>	D2L available through MyUofC portal
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Mondays, 10-11; Thursdays, 10-11

**Course Description**

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, globalization and cultural values. The critical tools learned in this course will equip students with the ability to deconstruct and evaluate the social and cultural significance of popular cultural texts, including television, film, public performance, dance, advertising, internet memes, social networking, and more.

**Additional Information**

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 build clear communication skills and understanding through group project work, oral presentation, written expression, and exam question design.

## **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.

## **Internet and electronic communication device information**

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.

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

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

All assignments and exams weighted more than 20% must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Weight	Course components	Due
10%	Participation	Sept. 27, Oct. 18, Nov. 1, Nov. 22, Nov. 29
20%	Internet Meme Analysis	Oct. 11
25%	Consumer Culture Study	Nov. 8
15%	Group Presentation	TBA
30%	Take home final exam	Dec. 6-13

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

**Participation (10%)** due: Sept. 28, Oct. 19, Nov. 2, Nov. 23, Nov. 29

As a 400-level course, students are expected not only to read their assigned chapter/articles before lecture, but also to come to class ready, willing and able to discuss the key ideas, debates, themes and examples from the readings. The participation grade is meant to facilitate this goal, by requiring students to submit two questions based on that day's assigned readings. Each submission must have one multiple-choice question (including one correct and four incorrect, but plausible responses; the correct response should be marked) and one essay-style question. Each submission is worth 2 points ( $x 5$  submissions = 10 points total). If a student submits only one question, they will be awarded 1 point. A student will not receive credit for a multiple choice question if they do not supply the 5 response options. The reading questions are due on the dates specified above.

The questions will be collected and reviewed by the instructor; those deemed to be particularly excellent may be included on the in-class final exam.

**Internet Meme Analysis (20%)** due: October 11

Students will write a short analysis (approx. 1000 words, double-spaced, 1" margins) of an internet meme in which they will be asked to critically examine its popularity or "success." Following a general discussion in class about internet memes, students will be encouraged to choose their own internet meme to analyze OR they may use an example from a list supplied by the instructor which will be available via D2L. A theoretical article will be 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).

**Consumer Culture Study (25%)** due: November 8

Write a 5-6 page analysis drawing on relevant course readings (ex. Textbook Chapter Two, Malcolm Gladwell, Anne Norton). This assignment may be undertaken individually or in pairs. Topics will be reviewed in class and posted to D2L.

**Group Presentation (15%)** Schedule TBA

Working in groups (4-5 students), students will be expected to give a 15 minute presentation applying a particular theory (or key concept from a theory) to a recent cultural artifact, such as a film, television episode, song, current event, or meme. The cultural artifact should be from 2013 onward and, if you choose to show a clip, it must be limited to 2-3 minutes in length. As part of the 15 minute presentation, students must also lead a class discussion about their analysis that generates interest and engagement from their classmates. This can be done through discussion questions, leading a class activity, or other strategy. Groups will be marked on their ability to present ideas clearly, think critically, and demonstrate their understanding of a theory/position. Groups must also submit a signed "task list" that details each member's contribution to the project (a sample task list will be provided for reference). A schedule of presentation times will be developed in the first two weeks of class.

**Take-home Final Exam (30%) December 6-13**

A take-home final exam (multiple choice & short essay response) will be distributed on the last day of class, December 6<sup>th</sup>. Students will have one week to write the exam. It must be returned by 3:00pm on Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> either to my office or to the department drop-box at SS 320. The exam question sheet must be returned with your responses.

Exams not received by 3pm on December 13th will result on a failing grade on the exam. If unavoidable extenuating circumstances (ex. a conflict with a registrar scheduled final exam) prevent the timely submission of the take-home final exam, students should speak with the professor well in advance of the due date.

**Submission of Assignments:** 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 be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at marked final exams in SS 320. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that the proper version is submitted (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission). Including a version date in your file name may be useful.

**Policy for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. However, exams not received by 3pm on December 13th will result on a failing grade on the exam.

**Student Accommodations:**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework 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) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

## **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will 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. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

## **Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film**

Final grades are reported as letter grades. In this course, point scores will be used to evaluate participation assignments, while percentages will be used for all other assignments.

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, final grades are based on percentages, which will be translated to the corresponding letter grade as shown in the chart below (ex. a calculated percentage score of 84% will receive a final letter grade of B+).

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations**
<b>4.00</b>	Outstanding	<b>A+</b>	96 – 100%	98.0%
<b>4.00</b>	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	<b>A</b>	90 – 95.99%	93.0%
<b>3.70</b>		<b>A -</b>	85 – 89.99%	87.5%
<b>3.30</b>		<b>B+</b>	80 – 84.99%	82.5%
<b>3.00</b>	Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	<b>B</b>	75 – 79.99%	77.5%
<b>2.70</b>		<b>B-</b>	70 – 74.99%	72.5%
<b>2.30</b>		<b>C+</b>	65 – 69.99%	67.5%
<b>2.00</b>	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	<b>C</b>	60 – 64.99%	62.5%
<b>1.70</b>		<b>C-</b>	55 – 59.99%	57.5%
<b>1.30</b>	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	<b>D+</b>	53 – 54.99%	54.0%
<b>1.00</b>		<b>D</b>	50 – 52.99%	51.5%
<b>0.00</b>	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	<b>F</b>	0- 49.99%	0%

\* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

\*\* 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.

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

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436>. If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

## **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 (e.g., surveys, interviews, or observations) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

## **Important information, services, and contacts for students**

<b>For information about . . .</b>	<b>Visit or contact . . .</b>
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Calgary Police Service</b></li><li>• <b>Emergency Text Messaging</b></li><li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li><li>• <b>Safewalk Program</b></li></ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> <b>403-220-5333</b> <b>403-266-1234      Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a>

• <b>IT help line</b>	403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> • <b>Writing Support Services</b> • <b>Student Services Mobile App</b>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> • <b>Faculty of Arts Reps</b> • <b>Student Ombudsman</b>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b> • <b>Counselling Services</b> • <b>Health Services</b> • <b>Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</b> • <b>Online resources and tips</b>	<b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a> 403-266-HELP (4357) <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a> If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.

### **Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings**

To be posted on D2L prior to the first week of class.