

SOCI 4903
Culture & Society
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:20 – 12:45 PM
Zandria F. Robinson, Instructor

Office Phone: 678-3778
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Office Hours: By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Culture” is a ubiquitous term often used as shorthand to describe a host of social phenomena, from the behaviors and customs of groups, to the production of material objects, to sets of ideas in the public sphere. Because of its rather ordinariness, we often take the interaction between society and culture for granted. That is, how does our society—what might be thought of as our social structure—shape the multiple uses and manifestations of culture we experience? And in tandem, how does culture affect the social structure? This course will consider these two questions, encapsulated in now classic debates between social theorists Karl Marx and Max Weber, through examinations of shared sets of beliefs and ideas, the products of culture, and the rituals and customs of groups. Importantly, it will empirically examine which social phenomena the concept of culture *can* and *cannot* explain.

COURSE MATERIALS

Wendy Griswold, *Cultures & Societies in a Changing World*, 4th edition
Zandria F. Robinson, *This Ain't Chicago*
Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*
Eva Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey & the Glamour of Misery*
Jennifer L. Pozner, *Reality Bites Back*

GENERAL COURSE EXPECTATIONS

I expect you to come to class, to come to class on time, to come to class prepared, and to be attentive and engaged throughout class. I realize that you have classes beyond this class and lives beyond the University, but I expect that you will have done the necessary work before class, including the readings and other assignments as due, with care, effort, and diligence. I expect that you will have eaten before class and that you will not bring a value meal of any sort to class. Small snacks and beverages are permissible, but I expect that they will not be loud or disruptive. I expect that you will not talk while I am talking or while others are talking and that you will be respectful of me and of your colleagues. I expect that you will not use your cell phone in class for any purpose, and I expect that should you need to use your cell phone, you will excuse yourself from class with minimum disruption. I expect that you will take notes by hand in class to increase your cognitive engagement with course discussion and materials as well as to deter you from making Amazon purchases and tweeting during class. (If you have a compelling, learning-related reason why using a tablet or laptop is better for you, please discuss this with me.) I expect that you will not plagiarize. I expect that you will turn assignments in on time, as late assignments are only accepted in the event of the Zombie Apocalypse, and then only in the event that you survive. If I am taken in the Zombie Apocalypse, note that your assignment is still due.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion Questions. Each Tuesday by 8 AM, you will submit at least three discussion questions based on the readings for that week. These questions should be critical questions that are sparked by the reading and should go beyond surface knowledge that can be gleaned from the texts. Questions will be graded on their level of critical engagement with the readings.

Discussion questions are worth 10% of the final grade.

Culture Buzz. In response to the Culture Buzz topic, lecture and discussion, current events in the media, and/or course texts, write a brief, **750-word essay** that critically examines some aspect of the Culture Buzz topic. This essay should not rehash the main points of the Culture Buzz topic, but instead should use it as a starting point to critically reflect on a particular related issue.

Culture Buzz essays are due the Tuesday after the completion of each course section. You should complete **three (3)** Culture Buzz essays. **Each Culture Buzz essay is worth 15% of your final grade for a total of 45%.**

Midterm Examination. The midterm examination will cover all of the course material for the first half of the course, and will evaluate your ability to explicate theoretical concepts vis-à-vis course themes. The examination will occur in class on October 9, 2014 and will require a blue book.

The midterm exam is worth 20% of the final grade.

Final Examination. The final examination is comprehensive, although it will focus on course materials covered in the second half of the course, and will evaluate your ability to apply theoretical concepts to a range of course themes. The examination will occur in class during our scheduled exam time on December 11, 2014 and will require a blue book. **The final exam is worth 25% of the final grade.**

COURSE CALENDAR

This is a suggested reading schedule so that you might pace yourself to keep up with the amount of material. However, I suggest you read ahead as much as possible to glean maximum benefit from the course discussion. The “Major Text” is the text that will be central to our discussions in a particular section of the course, and I strongly suggest bringing the text to class and reading as much of it as possible BEFORE each section of the course.

Theoretical Introductions

Major Text: *Cultures & Societies in a Changing World*

Culture Buzz: What We Mean When We Say Culture

Aug 26: Chapters 1 & 2

Aug 28: Chapters 3 & 4

Sep 2: Chapters 5 & 6

Sep 4: Chapters 7 & 8

Culture & Identity

Major Text: *This Ain't Chicago*

Culture Buzz: *The South Got Something to Say: Southern Culture in the 21st Century*

Sep 9: Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1; **Culture Buzz Essay Due**

Sep 11: Chapter 2

Sep 16: Chapters 3 & 4

Sep 18: Chapter 5 & Conclusion

Culture & Social Capital

Major Text: *Unequal Childhoods*

Culture Buzz: The “Culture of Poverty” Debate

Sep 23: Chapters 1 & 2; **Culture Buzz Essay Due**;

Sep 25: Part I

Sep 30: Part II

Oct 2: Part III

Oct 7: Midterm Examination Review; **Culture Buzz Essay Due**

*****October 9th: MIDTERM EXAMINATION*****

Culture & the Popular Sphere

Major Text: *Oprah Winfrey & the Glamour of Misery*

Culture Buzz: On & Popping with Pop Culture

Oct 16: Chapters 1 & 2

Oct 21: Chapters 3 & 4

Oct 23: Chapters 5 & 6

Oct 30: Chapters 7, 8, & 9

Nov 4: Reality TV Binge; **Culture Buzz Essay Due**

Nov 6: Reality TV Binge

Culture, “Reality,” & Foreal Reality

Major Text: *Reality Bites Back*

Nov 11: Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Nov 13: Chapters 3 & 4

Nov 18: Chapters 5 & 6

Nov 20: Chapters 7, 8 & 9

Nov 25: **Culture Buzz Essay Due**

Dec 2: **Course Wrap-Up and Final Exam Review**

*****The final exam will be held December 11, 2014 from 8 AM – 10 AM.*****

KEY DATES

Culture Buzz Essays: September 9, September 3, October 7, November 4, November 25

Midterm: October 9

Final: December 11