

Bellevue College

SOC310 Popular Culture

Sara Sutler-Cohen, Ph.D.

Fall '19 Term: September 16 - December 6

[Email](#)

[Web](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course asks us: What role does popular culture play in our lives? What role do we play in the formation and maintenance of popular culture? We will explore these questions to understand various schools of thought in the vast field of cultural studies as we try and understand what makes the popular, popular. Of interest is also what role popular culture plays in national and international political forums. Can popular culture be subversive? Who breaks dominant traditions in cultural dynamics? What makes underground cultural acts eventual popular trends?



We will most closely examine the influence of U.S. popular culture in globalization and global settings and will explore the formal elements of film and televisual style as well as the relationship between popular culture texts and audiences as well as political platforms. We will pay close attention to the way in which minorities are represented in popular culture, and how marginalized groups subvert the dominant discourse that has traditionally shaped them through a variety of popular culture mediums.

Finally, we will use sociological tools to interrogate the relationship between mass culture and society, with a goal of understanding popular culture's role in strengthening (or eroding) identities based upon race, sexuality, class, gender, patterns of consumption, or other aspects of modern subjectivity. Pop Culture scholar Omayra Cruz (2005) tells us that "...the study of popular culture requires a mindset that can handle...complexity and even contradiction." It is with this *mindset* that we embark on a tour of the popular, no matter what side of it we occupy.

"The reality is it's up to you guys to figure out how the media works and break through."

- Claudia Dreifus

A NOTE ABOUT COURSE CONTENT: Since interdisciplinary academics examine just about every aspect of the social world, we talk about provocative material. When we explore controversial topics, they will always be framed within an academic context. Keep in mind that when we find ourselves in a space outside of our comfort zone, it's an opportunity for learning, and you may be confronted with subject matter that is difficult to watch, see, discuss, or listen to. Please note that you will be responsible for any course material you miss if you choose not to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about content or climate, feel free to speak with me about it right away.



READING REQUIREMENTS:

- All readings & handouts are available on our Canvas site.
- Readings are uploaded in each Week.
- Handouts and resources are uploaded to the course in your Start Here Week

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Any current Sociology Dictionary
- Any writing guide to help you in your quest for mastering college-level writing.

Purdue College's [resources for college students](#).

Student Resources:

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you have medical information to share with me in the event of an emergency, please contact me via email. Emergency preparedness is important! If you need course modifications, adaptations, or accommodations because of a disability, please see me immediately so I can also refer you to our Disability Resource Center (DRC). If you prefer, you may contact them directly by going to B132 or by calling 425.564.2498 or TTY 425.564.4110. Information is also available on their [website](#).

Campus Writing Resources: [Academic Success Center](#) | [Academic Tutoring Center](#)
| [TRiO Student Support Services](#) | [Writing Lab @ BC](#)

EXPLORE THE LMC! The Library Media Center is at your fingertips! I *strongly* encourage you to visit the LMC at least once a week, but you can also access it via the web. Talk to a Reference Librarian at the Library (D-126), by calling (425) 564-6161, or by [email on their website](#).

- [Main Library Media Center](#)
- [For article databases](#)



LEARNING AND COURSE OUTCOMES:

Upon your dedicated participation and subsequent completion of this course, you will:

1. Demonstrate a general understanding of concepts used in popular culture and cultural studies.
2. Show critical analyses of popular culture texts and be able to explain and discuss how the intersections of race, class, and gender are represented and maintained in popular culture texts.
3. Demonstrate a general understanding of the dominant representations and identity constructions of minority people in historical and contemporary analyses of US & global popular culture.
4. Demonstrate a general understanding of production analysis.
5. Demonstrate a critical understanding of textual analysis.
6. Show your understanding of popular culture through a historical lens.

Rules & Expectations:

Check into our online classroom often. No need to check in with me on this one. Make this class work for you on your own time.

Complete readings and homework assignments *on time*. You need to read/review your required material to complete all homework assignments.

You may submit multiple papers leading up to the deadline; *however*, once your paper is graded, it's locked in. I don't grade papers twice! 😊

Standard Late work Policy (these may not all apply to each class):

- You will recognize that every professor has their own approach to late work. This goes together with teaching philosophies and styles, and as such, you want to review and understand the rules. I try to make mine clear but if you ever have questions, post to our Q&A Forum or email me.
- Discussion Boards: Initial Discussion Board Posts (your main Discussion Board homework) are due on Thursdays. You are required to respond to the Initial Posts of two of your colleagues by the Sunday in the week of

the active Discussion Board. Your Initial Post is deducted by five points for each day it's late. After Sunday, the Discussions are closed for that week, and no more late work is accepted.

- Other Homework (except final papers where applicable): There is a two-day grace period for homework assignments. After that, I do not accept late work.
- Exams: If you don't have a midterm or final exam, no worries. Otherwise, note that I do not accept any late midterms or exams. The quizzes I have for my classes are always open until the end of the term.
- Final Paper: There are no late assignments accepted for Final Term Papers (sometimes called Portfolio Assignments) and all Incremental Assignments associated with the Final Paper.

Life happens. We have stressors. We must manage them. That includes traveling for work or pleasure and any problems with your jobs, partners, parents, siblings, friends, kids, other classes, etc. that come up. Please manage your lives so that you can also manage this class. Your life (and your homework) is your responsibility. That said, I allow two assignment extensions per term, and they must be requested before an assignment's deadline. Use those opportunities wisely.

I expect that your behavior in our classroom is respectful. Continued disrespectful behavior in my class will result in your grade lowering. Please keep your postings to discussion boards (DBs) thoughtful and polite. One-on-one conversations should be taken offline, so our DBs don't get clogged. If you find at any point that you are uncomfortable with anything posted to a DB, please email me right away. Be wary of soapboxing in this class; you may be tempted to present your opinion and editorialize but refrain from doing this. We're here to think about the world in a fair, balanced, thoughtful, and nuanced manner. One-way thinking doesn't work here.

Remember: Falling behind can be hazardous to your health!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: In this course, you will be completing assigned readings, participating in discussion board assignments, and completing short homework assignments. The work you do for this class will keep you critically engaged with the world around you from a sociological perspective. There are no exams for this course. Expect to be writing every week. The key to this course is your thoughtful reflection on course material.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and Participation*:	150 points
Critical Reflections (8):	400 points
Main Discussion Boards (5):	250 points
TOTAL:	800 points

The Fine Print:

*Participation points accrue with short assignments in the Discussion Area, such as your Introductory DB. These are labeled **PARTICIPATION DBs**. The Main DB assignments are labeled **MAIN DBs**.

Attendance & Participation: Check in no less than four times per week, be engaged with your discussion board assignments, provoke energetic and polite discussion, listen/read/comprehend actively, work respectfully with your colleagues in class, take loads of notes from your readings, look up words you don't understand, ask questions, think critically about the world around you, etc. Make use of the Q&A Board as well. This is not scored, but even if you don't have questions, you might be able to answer somebody's query – so have some presence there.

All assignments have corresponding general directions, uploaded in your Start Here Week. You can find the rubrics attached to individual assignments. Please note that the rubrics change because I look for intellectual growth throughout the course. So, while an assignment *score* will never change, how these are measured does change.

For all written work: Submit proofread work **only**. Work not proofread will be returned *once* for a rewrite, expected to be handed in within 48 hours. If you need help with your writing, please make use of the following student support services:

- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [Academic Tutoring Center](#)
- [TRiO Student Support Services](#)
- [Writing Lab @ BC](#)

Required Writing Guidelines (emphasis on *required*):

- *You must follow the required writing guidelines in the syllabus. Not doing so will result in a drop in your grade.*
- Twelve-point sized Times font, *double-spaced*.
- 1" margins all around
- APA Citations where appropriate – credit must be given even where any *ideas* presented in the paper are not your own (see notes below about avoiding plagiarism)
- Title pages, footnotes, embedded images or photos, and bibliographies *are never counted* as pages due
- Student information goes at the top left of the page, single-spaced. This means:
 - Name
 - Date
 - Name of class
 - Name of assignment
- No extra spaces between paragraphs.
- Paragraphs contain no less than four sentences.

- Magazines, newspapers, Critical Reflections, and books are *italicized*. Movie titles, article titles, song titles, etc. are “in quotation marks.” Quotes inside of a quotation use ‘single quotation marks.’
- Avoid the universal “we,” “our,” “us” – ask yourself: Can I speak for everyone? If you cannot, do not write it. Also, avoid phrasing such as “nowadays...” and “since the beginning of time.” Be accurate. Know what you’re writing and why.
- *Do not use* Wikipedia, CliffNotes, or other such encyclopedic references or online dictionaries. Wikipedia is not peer-reviewed and therefore, unreliable. Do your own research, please.
- Be sure that no more than 20% of your papers are outside sources. You must be providing your analysis while you draw from the material presented to you in class.

Your written work is evaluated on:

1) Content

- a. You are expected to fulfill the entire assignment. Doing the minimum amount of work expected will likely get you a passing grade, but not an outstanding one. You’re expected to go the extra mile.
- b. Fully developing your argument(s) and making use of examples and evidence to support your argument(s).
- c. The flow of thought throughout the paper, with strong analyses and conclusions, should be consistent throughout your writing. I add points to your final grade for continued improvement.

2) Writing Style

- a. Excellent command of the written English language. In other words, most excellent grammar. **NOTE: If you struggle with grammar and spelling or are an ESL student, please let me know! I’m happy to work with you and point you in the right direction.**
- b. Your demonstrated clarity of thought.
- c. Good organization and attention to detail.
- d. The clear and present persuasiveness of your argument/s.
- e. Your ability to be creative, thoughtful, and clever. Make it an interesting read.
- f. PROOFREAD your work. Please do a spell/ grammar check before you hand it in. Read it out loud to yourself, too! It helps.
- g. Dude, like totally don’t write **colloquially**. A conversation is a conversation. A paper is an entirely different way of presenting your research and ideas. ☺

Preventing Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty occurring when students use information or material from outside sources and do not properly cite those sources. Using papers you have written for other classes is also considered plagiarism (self-plagiarism). Any form of plagiarism is grounds for disciplinary action. It is your responsibility to understand plagiarism and its consequences. Plagiarism occurs if:

- a. You do not cite quotations and attribute borrowed ideas.

- b. You fail to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks.
- c. You do not write summaries and paraphrases in his/her words and doesn't document his/her source.
- d. You turn in work created by another person.
- e. You submit or use your prior work for a current or past course, or work from one current course in another course *without express permission* from your professors. This may also be considered academic dishonesty.
- f. Consequences: If it is determined that you have plagiarized or engaged in other forms of academic dishonesty, you will likely fail the assignment and possibly the course, despite points earned through other work. Acts of academic dishonesty are reviewed for disciplinary action.

Grading:

Please use the following rubric to help explain the grade you're given for a given assignment. I offer comments on your written work and general comments on the Discussion Boards – sometimes more, sometimes less. Please read my comments and do not hesitate to come to me with any questions you ever have on a grade you receive. There is no limit to how many times you email me! My email door is *always* open.

90-100 = A. "A" work shows me you're engaged with all course material by utilizing quotes and ideas. It is writing *completely free* from grammar and spelling errors, demonstrating your command not only of the English language but of the form and flow of a solid piece of written work. I also like to see/read/hear your "writing voice." That is, I want your style to come through! Your arguments should be solid and backed up with intellectual ammunition. You should demonstrate a strong understanding of our readings and the in-class media and how they intersect with one another. Your ideas should be "fleshed out" and not just a series of statements, in other words.

80-89 = B. The "B" tells me you're doing very good work. You may have a couple of grammar issues, but your work is still tidy, and the writing is still strong. You have a firm grasp on the themes in the course, but you may not be as well-versed in the readings and media and/or lecture material as you could be. I should see that you're being challenged and that you're struggling with the course issues and themes, and what they represent to you in an interconnected way. Your understandings of some of the course materials are stronger than others.

70-79 = C. "C" work means that you're not as invested in the material as I would like to see. Your writing is relatively weaker than it could be and you're not thinking as critically as I would like you to. You write the bare minimum of the length requirement. Some of what you point out I may not follow logically, and your use of the course materials may not be as solid as it could be. You omit some of the important points raised in class.

60-69 = D. Ah, the “D.” “D” is for “Don’t Be Discouraged.” I will work closely with each of you as much as time allows, getting you up to speed in class. Your struggles should not be with writing so much at this point, but if they are, please see me immediately. “D” work is not proofread, nor does it deal critically with the themes in the course. It responds, perhaps, to one part of one of the readings but there is the little-to-no integration of material, and you’re not responding to the questions raised in the assignment. Demonstrated an understanding of the course materials is not presented clearly, or at all. (NOTE: A “D” and below may be rewritten **once** if you choose to do so. It must be turned in within 72 hours, and I enter the better grade.)

Grade Spread

A	A 94-100	A- 90-93	
B	B+ 87-89	B 84-86	B- 80-83
C	C+ 77-79	C 74-76	C- 70-73
D	D+ 67-69	D 64-66	D- 60-63
F	59 and below		

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE:

Week One: September 16

Required Materials:

- [Pop Culture Definitions](#)
- [The Public Imagination & Pop Culture](#)
- [How to Read an Academic Journal Article in the Social Sciences \(with accompanying sheet\)](#)

Assignments:

- Participation Discussion Board 1: Setting Goals. Due Sunday, 9/22
- Participation Discussion Board 2: Deviance, Society, and You. Due Sunday, 9/22

Week Two: September 23

Required Materials:

- “What Is Popular Culture?” by John Storey

Assignments:

- Main DB 1: What is Pop Culture? Due Thursday, 9/27, responses by Sunday, 9/30

Week Three: September 30

Required Materials:

- [NPR Pop Culture Archives](#)
 - Choose any three articles from three different years (get there by clicking on “[+] more years” on three different topics embedded in popular culture. You’ll use this work in our Discussion Board this week.
- “Language Ideology in the Discourse of Popular Culture” by Andrew Moody

Assignments:

- Main DB 2: Initial Submission Due Thursday, 10/4; Responses Due Sunday, 10/7
- Critical Reflection 1: The Span of Popular Culture. Due Sunday 10/6

Week Four: October 7

Required Materials:

- "The Mississippi of the North: Trailer Park Boys and race in Contemporary Nova Scotia" by Peter Thompson
- ["Trailer Park Boys YouTube Channel"](#)
 - Strong language, nudity, adult situations, drug use, explicit sexuality. Explore as little or as much as you'd like. If you opt out of watching this film because of content, simply email me and we can work out an alternative. To get the full benefit of the article, you should watch some of it.

Assignments:

- Critical Reflection 2: Trailer Park Boys and Subverting the Dominant Paradigm Due Sunday, 10/13

Week Five: October 14

Required Materials:

- ["Educational divide in vote preferences on track to be wider than in recent elections" PEW Research](#)
- "Perceptions of presidential candidates' personalities in twitter" by Bhattacharya, et. al.

Recommended:

- "The social requisites of democracy revisited" by Lipset
- "The Case for Bigger Government" by Sachs

Assignments:

- Critical Reflection 3: Popular Culture & Politics. Due Sunday, 10/20

Week Six: October 21

Required Materials:

- ["Why Popular Culture Matters in Politics"](#) by Jennifer Rubin
- (Video) ["The Pop Culture Politics of 2016"](#) on *WSJ Video*
- ["Is Popular Culture Influencing our Perception of Justice?"](#) in *Culture Decanted*
- (Film) [Operation Hollywood](#)

Assignments:

- Main DB 3: Initial submission Thursday, 10/24, Responses Due Sunday 10/27
- Critical Reflection 4: War and the Popular Imagination. Due Sunday 10/27

Week Seven: October 28

Required Materials:

- ["\(Chapter 1\) Introduction to Gender & Pop Culture"](#) in *Gender & Popular Culture* by Patricia Leavy & Adrienne Trier-Bieniek
- (Film) [This Film Is Not Yet Rated](#)

Assignments:

- Main DB 4: Initial submission Thursday, 10/31 Responses Due Sunday 11/3

- Critical Reflection 5. Due Sunday, 11/3

Week Eight: November 4

Required Materials:

- “Introduction” from *Selling Women’s History* by Westkaemper
- “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby”: Women’s History in Consumer Culture from World War II to Women’s Liberation” from *Selling Women’s History* by Westkaemper

Assignments:

- Critical Reflection 6. Due Sunday, 11/10

Week Nine: November 12

Holiday November 11

Required Materials:

- “I’m not a racist, and nobody I know is either” by Blackwell, et al in *Culture of Prejudice: Arguments in Critical Social Science* (2015)
- [“Psychology Lessons from Key & Peele” by Tannenbaum \(2015\)](#)

Recommended:

- [\(Film\) “The Slanted Screen” \(2010\)](#)
- [\(Series\) “Chappelle’s Show” \(2003-2006\)](#)

Assignments:

- Critical Reflection 7. Due Sunday, 11/17

Week Ten: November 18

Required Materials:

- None. Take a break!

Assignments:

- Critical Reflection 8. Due Sunday, 11/24

Week Eleven: November 25

Holiday November 28 & 29

Required Materials:

- [\(Video\) “Blacking Up: Hip-Hop’s Remix of Race & Identity \(2012\)](#)
- [\(Video\) “Spirits for Sale: The Commercialization of American Indian Rituals” \(2012\)](#)

For Fun:

- [“The 19 Pop Culture Moments That Defined 2018” by Rahmanan \(2018\)](#)

Assignments:

- Main DB 5: Initial submission Wednesday, 11/27, Responses Due Sunday 12/1

Week Twelve: December 2

No Final Exam for this class – Note Deadlines for the Discussion Board!

Assignments:

- Final Participation DB 3, due Sunday, 12/6

Let’s have a wonderful term!