

This syllabus has been provided as a reference tool for students considering this course. It has been modified to follow Senate regulations. Current students enrolled in any undergraduate course must obtain the most recent syllabus from their course instructor or from their course website. This is not the latest version.



Department of English & Writing Studies

Reading Popular Culture English 2017 (001) Fall/Winter 2013-14

Instructor: Dr. Nigel Joseph

Date/Time: Monday 10:30am-12:30pm,
Wednesday 10:30am-11:30am

Location: Talbot College 141

Course Description

In this course, we pay attention to the way pop culture can address our deepest desires as well as trigger our deepest fears: often both at once. We explore conservative condemnations of the “trashiness” of pop culture as well as analyses that emphasize its democratic potential and capacity to defuse conflict, and we examine the way pop culture alienates us as well as draws us into new communities. The course encourages us to look at representations (films, books, advertisements) as well as practices (shopping, being fans, and modifying our appearance). We look at the ideological underpinnings of a typical suspenseful Hollywood blockbuster; and we look at the phenomenon of repression and doubling in film and in fantasy, and at gender performativity and its contradictions. We explore the dominance of the “scopic” in pop culture, a dominance that can be analyzed in terms of such categories as the male gaze in film and the ubiquity of the spectacle, surveillance, and the simulacrum in everyday life. The power of the scopic also explains the contemporary obsession with an ideal bodily type characterized by slimness, and we explore the way body-modifying practices like piercing and tattooing attempt to subvert mainstream norms. We explore the new kinds of connectivity as well as the new forms of alienation and separation made available through Facebook and Internet dating sites, and we examine the way shopping malls are carefully shaped to modify our activities.

Course Materials

Required Coursepack (will be available at Western Book Store). Please bring the coursepack to every class.

Note: A lot of the material will be presented in class on PowerPoint, and later on SAKAI. However, **not all** the material that is presented on PowerPoint will appear on SAKAI, so regular attendance is strongly recommended.

Methods of Evaluation

The two exams will require you to write short essays on topics discussed in class as well as answer a multiple choice question. Tests and exams must be written by hand. No laptops/electronic devices will be permitted, except with special permission. No notes or notebooks may be consulted during the examination.

The in-class assignment should be completed in one hour. The assignment will consist of a short essay and an objective-type (multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, match-the-following etc) test. For the take-home assignment you can use material from the coursepack. Essays must be handed in before or on the due date; no extensions will be granted unless discussed with the instructor at least a week **before** the date on which the essay is due. Please retain a copy of the final draft of each essay; if a submitted essay is lost, you will be asked to submit the duplicate for grading.

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/>

Timetable:

This is a flexible schedule: if the discussion is interesting or takes longer than anticipated, class will spill over into the next hour or week. In general, however, we will stay on track. Materials on which the lectures are based will be either in the coursepack or on PowerPoint.

Sep 9, 11

Introduction: Popular and high culture, conservative critique and cultural populism, brief history of approaches to “culture”: Arnold, Leavis, Frankfurt School, Birmingham school, contemporary American cultural studies; desire, ideology, the spectacle, the **gaze**, the beautiful body in contemporary society, film as important contemporary vehicle of narrative, representations and practices

Sep 16, 18, 23, 25, 30

Adorno, Benjamin, Healy, Bourdieu, Ang, Marcuse/Bloom High culture/low culture; conservative critique of popular culture; radical defenses of our culture; cultural capital

Oct 2, 7, 9, 16, 21

Ideology (and desire): blockbuster films, music video, advertising Ideology (Marx, Althusser); ideological analyses of popular films; the long shadow of the Western; individualism, averageness, taciturnity, American exceptionalism and vigilantism in action blockbusters

In-class assignment Oct 21 (10%)

Oct 23, 28, 30, Nov 4, 6, 11

Looking good and the spectacle of the body; the aesthetic of the slim body; advertising, eating disorders; **Mulvey, Bordo**, Kilbourne (anorexia and deep ideology, or just advertising); cutting up women (Susan **Jeffreys**); **Gimlin, Pitts, Jeffreys**, tattooing and piercing: trauma or therapy?

Nov 13, 18, 20

The male body: bodybuilding, gym subculture, metro sexual men, the new eroticising of the male body in film, **Fussell, Monaghan**

Nov 25, 27, Dec 2, 4

The mall: **Rushkoff**, Kosinski, shopping malls and planned seduction: the spectacle, surveillance, simulacra; the mall as Space for new kinds of community; zombie movies, the mall, and the critique of consumerism

Mid-Year Examination 30%

Jan 6, 8, 13, 20

Horror films and the ambivalent pleasures of watching them: **Creed**, Kristeva, the semiotic, the womb, abjection

Jan 22, 27, 29

Blood and metal: cyborgs at the movies; **Donna Haraway**, Blade Runner, Terminator, Roboco, etc;

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.