Ohio University - Athens
Tentative Syllabus for Spring 2001

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A Little About Your Instructor
I thought it might be nice to provide a small introduction to myself since we will be spending a quarter together. A certain amount of mystique is always good, so I won't tell you everything (besides, I'm sure that you wouldn't be interested anyway). For starters, I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon and Washington) and received my Bachelors degree in sociology from Oregon State University, and my Masters degree from the University of South Florida (again in sociology). I have spent the last five years at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale working on my Ph.D. and should be finished sometime this year. My major research interests in sociology include religion, culture, popular culture, work, organizations, social thought, social movements, and science and knowledge. My master's thesis was a formulaic analysis of the lyrics and major themes of Conservative Christian speed/thrash metal music. My dissertation (the book that is written for the Ph.D.) will incorporate interviews, participant observation, and secondary literature to analyze the production of contemporary evangelical Christian culture, especially popular culture, and how various tensions within the industry are recognized and mediated. My hobbies include snow skiing, playing softball, listening to music (everything from Mozart to Nine Inch Nails), reading, computers, and playing the guitar (both electric and acoustic).

Course Description
"Sociology, what's that?" I have been asked this question numerous times as an undergraduate sociology major and a Ph.D. student. Most confuse sociology with social work (a field that is actually an offshoot of sociology) or some type of counseling. Although sociologists may participate in these activities, the field is much broader.

Sociology is the study of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. It investigates the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, their information, development, and interactions. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob, from crime to religion, from the divisions of race, gender, and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, from the sociology of work to the sociology of sport. In fact, few
fields have such broad scope and relevance. This is nice because sociologists are largely free to conduct research in any area that interests them. It is a field that synthesizes from all of the other social sciences including psychology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, economics, and history. Furthermore, sociology has generated other disciplines including social work, criminal justice, and communication studies. All of these were, at one time, part of the field of sociology.

Although there are many subspecialties in sociology (religion, crime, science, etc.) this class will be focusing on popular culture in society, how it affects society and how society has affected it. The study of popular culture is a relatively new area of exploration. Most scholars up until the 1960's viewed the study of popular culture as irrelevant since popular culture was seen by many as "uncouth," and "vulgar."

This course is designed to provide an opportunity for the student to develop a general sociological understanding and perspective with which to evaluate, interpret, and understand popular culture. We will begin by discussing how and when the academic study of popular culture began and what theories have been instrumental in the field. Then, we will discuss popular culture and social change, locating popular culture within its historical context. After this, we will investigate the social meaning of popular culture, trying to understand the content and messages in various forms of popular culture. Finally, we will consider the social organization of popular culture, exploring how it is created, produced, distributed, and consumed. The lectures, readings, and discussions will use examples from several of the popular arts.

**Course Prerequisites**
12 hours of sociology including Sociology 101.

**Course Objectives**
Students in this course will be able to:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the basic sociological terms, concepts, and theories for analyzing popular culture.
2. Display basic knowledge of how popular culture reflects and contributes to social change.
3. Interpret the meaning of popular culture.
4. Apply an organizational approach to analyzing the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of popular culture.

**Course Requirements**
Each student is responsible for completing all class assignments, exams, and readings. This means that if you are absent, you should check with me as soon as possible to make sure that you did not miss any assignment changes, etc. Each student is also responsible to attend each class period.

**Exams**
Each student will take three semester exams. The semester exams will probably consist of multiple choice and essay questions. I warn you, my lectures will deviate from the assigned reading materials extensively (although the lectures will often use the readings for examples). The exams will cover both the lecture and reading material. Therefore, you must read the material and attend the lectures. **LATE EXAMS WILL NOT BE GIVEN** unless the student receives prior permission or an emergency warrants the situation. **Make up exams will be all essay in format.**

**Research Paper and Assignments**
Each student will be responsible for turning in one research paper (8-12 pages in length). There are two
basic requirements for the paper: (1) the paper must be sociological, and (2) it must analyze some form of popular culture (It should be about some form of commercial entertainment, entertainment media, commercial fads/fashions, sports or games). What do I mean by a paper being sociological? Simply that it must concentrate on the effects people have on one another. This course is organized around three sociological approaches to popular culture: (1) popular culture and social change, (2) the social meaning of popular culture, and (3) the social organization (creation, production, distribution, & consumption) of popular culture. Your papers should adopt one of these approaches. A standard topic might involve selecting a genre, e.g., disaster movies, and then, (1) analyzing the genre's meaning, or (2) discussing the industry which produces the genre. Simply put, the paper must develop some sort of analysis; profiles/biographies of stars is not acceptable. Again, you must write using at least one of the perspectives below:

1. **Writing from a social change perspective**
   In this perspective, you would write about how a cultural object changes as society's views and values change. You must show how a cultural object has changed, and how these changes are reflective of societal change. A good example to base a paper on using this perspective is Hubbard's article on romance novels. Typically, a research project from this perspective chooses a cultural object (like romance fiction) and breaks time up into periods (like the 50's, the 60's, the 70's and the 80's) and shows how societal values changed between each of the periods, how the cultural object changed between each of the periods, and how and why the changes in the cultural object reflect the changes in society between those periods. Students doing this type of research may use novels (e.g. detective fiction), movies (e.g. horror films), music lyrics (e.g. heavy metal), magazine ads, etc., and will want to collect their own data. You will need to collect **at least 10 pieces of data** (e.g. 10 song lyrics, 10 movies, etc.). Some examples of this perspective would be to determine how women's roles have changed in horror films, advertising, etc., or how action movies have portrayed African-Americans from 1970-2000, etc.

2. **Writing from a social meaning perspective**
   In this perspective, you would write about how a cultural object reflects society's values and beliefs and/or what messages particular cultural objects are conveying. You are not concerned with shifts over time unlike the social change perspective. A good example to base a paper on using this perspective are the Brown article on blues, spirituals, and thrash metal music, and Gerson & Lund's article on Playboy magazine. Students doing this type of research may use novels (e.g. detective fiction), movies (e.g. horror films), music lyrics (e.g. heavy metal), magazine ads, etc., and will want to collect their own data. You will need to collect **at least 10 pieces of data** (e.g. 10 song lyrics, 10 movies, etc.). Some examples of this perspective would be to determine how women and men are portrayed in contemporary television advertising, how minorities are portrayed in prime-time television, etc.

3. **Writing from a social organization perspective**
   In this perspective, you would write about how a cultural object is affected by changes in the industry that produces it. You will be taking a historical approach, but unlike the social change perspective, you will not be showing how changing cultural objects reflect changing societal attitudes. Rather, you will argue that changes in cultural objects occur because the industry changed. In essence, you will be doing a historical overview of an industry. A good example to base a paper on using this perspective is the Powers, Rothman, & Rothman article on the movie industry. Students doing this type of research will rely on library research. Some examples of this perspective would be to determine how punk music emerged and changed due to changes in the music industry, how the proliferation of cable programming (among
other things) has effected what the broadcast networks air on TV, etc.

You may wish to complete two short assignments leading up to your paper so that you will stay on track and receive proper feedback about your paper from me. You will not receive points for turning in the assignments, instead, think of it as a favor that I am doing for you to help you with your paper. You do not have to turn in the assignments, but I recommend doing so. You must turn in your assignments by the date listed in the syllabus, late assignments will not be accepted.

A few things should be mentioned about the paper. First, put your paper and all previous assignments into a folder before turning the material in. Second, you may use any style format (e.g. MLA, APA, etc.) you wish. This assignment is due BY 4:30, FRIDAY, JUNE 1ST. I WOULD RECOMMEND TURNING THE PAPER IN DURING CLASS ON THE 1ST. LATE PAPERS TURNED IN BETWEEN JUNE 2ND THROUGH JUNE 7TH WILL BE ASSIGNED A MAXIMUM OF 70 POINTS. PAPERS TURNED IN LATER THAN JUNE 7TH WILL RECEIVE 0 POINTS!!

Methods of Evaluation
Grades will be determined by adding up all points earned from the exams and the research paper. The breakdown for grades will be as follows:

- 3 Exams worth 50 pts. each
- 1 Completed paper 100 pts. total

Letter grades will be assigned to course grade percentages in the following manner:

- A 95-100%
- A- 90-94%
- B+ 87-89%
- B 83-86%
- B- 80-82%
- C+ 77-79%
- C 73-76%
- C- 70-72%
- D+ 67-69%
- D 63-66%
- D- 60-62%
- F Under 60%

You can calculate your current grade at any point in the quarter by dividing the number of points you have earned by the total amount of points possible and referring to the scale above. Thus, if you achieved a “42” on the first exam and a “40” on the second exam, then you would calculate your current grade as follows: 42 + 40 = 82 divided by 100 (50 for the first exam and 50 for the second exam) = .82 Using the scale above you can see that you are currently earning a “B-”.

Some Further Guidelines
Here are a few guidelines which should be of help in this course:

First, if you have any questions, please ask. Chances are if you do not understand something, half the class does not either. I will not think you are stupid because you ask questions. On the contrary, if you
knew all about sociology, you would not be here in the first place. Also, your questions tend to liven up
the class and make it more interesting for all of us. If for some reason you do not feel like asking the
question during class, stop me after class. If you do not have time after class please make an appointment,
we can find another time.

Second, I expect you to exercise proper manners while in class. This means that you should not talk
during class to another student while I or another student is addressing the class. This means that you
should arrive on time and not leave early. This means that you should not sleep in class, read the
newspaper, listen to music, etc. NOTE: THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO
SUBTRACT POINTS FROM ANY STUDENT WHO REFUSES TO EXERCISE PROPER
MANNERS IN CLASS. FURTHERMORE, POINTS MAY BE SUBTRACTED IN THE
AMOUNT THAT THE INSTRUCTOR SEES FIT. IF MEMBERS OF THE CLASS LEAVE
EARLY, THE INSTRUCTOR MAY, AT HIS DISCRETION, BEGIN ADMINISTERING POP
QUIZZES TOWARD THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD.

Third, I consider your class participation to be very important. Please feel free to ask questions offer
suggestions and/or comments, etc. If you disagree with me, fine. Feel free to say so. I only ask that you
provide a rational and/or evidence for your position. In other words, don’t simply say, “I disagree with
you because I just don’t think you are correct,” give me a reason why you disagree.

Fourth, cheating of any kind is not allowed. Any student who appears to the instructor to be cheating will
receive an automatic "F" for the entire course and s/he will be turned in to the appropriate academic
authorities.

Fifth, each and every class is important. My lectures do not always follow the text. I may disagree with
the text and may present material not found in the text. Lectures count more than text on exams.
Therefore, YOU SHOULD ATTEND EACH AND EVERY CLASS.

Finally, I do not grade on a strict curve. This means you have more to gain by cooperating rather than
competing with each other. I would like you to get to know the students in your discussion group really
well. You should exchange addresses and telephone numbers with each other and try and form a study
group. As a group you can help each other with the class material, particularly in studying for exams.
You also can come into my office as a group and we can talk over things that are not clear.

**Text & Other Readings**

*Required*
1. Course packet of readings available from Grade A Notes.
2. Other Articles and Misc. that may be assigned from time to time

**COURSE OUTLINE**

P= Packet Readings, I = Internet Readings

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UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION

3/26-3/30  Week 1 (Taking Popular Culture Seriously)
            P 2. Dwight MacDonald "A Theory of Mass Culture."

4/2-4/6  Week 2 (Perspectives on Popular Culture)
Reading:   P 1. James Curtis "From American Graffiti to Star Wars."
            P 4. Yahlin Chang "Cross Over, Beethoven."

UNIT 2: SOCIAL CHANGE

4/9-4/13  Week 3 (The Historical Emergence of Popular Culture)
Reading:   P 1. Joseph Gies "Automating the Worker"
            P 2. Richard Turner "The Ad Game"

4/16-4/20 Week 4 (How Popular Culture Reflects Social Change)
Reading:   P 1. Jan Harold Brunvand "New Legends for Old."

********** EXAM 1: FRIDAY **********

UNIT 3: SOCIAL MEANING

4/23-4/27  Week 5 (Methodological Perspectives on Meaning)
Analysis.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! ASSIGNMENT 1: TOPIC & BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (TUESDAY)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

4/30-5/4
Week 6 (Determining The Meaning of Cultural Objects)
Reading:

5/7-5/11
Week 7 (Gender, Racial, & Ethnic Stereotypes in Popular Culture)
Reading:
P 1. Jane Caputi & Susan Nance "One Size Does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female in America."
P 2. Ray Hanania "One of the Bad Guys?"
P 3. Christopher Geist & Angela Nelson "From the Plantation to Bel-Air: A Brief History of Black Stereotypes."
P 4. David A. Kaplan. "Download Some Manners, Upgrade Your Career."

5/14-5/18
Week 8 (Consumption & Media Effects)
Reading:
P 2. Brian Siano. "Evidence Connecting Media Violence on Society is Exaggerated."

*************** EXAM 2: WEDNESDAY ***************

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UNIT 4: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
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5/21-5/25
Week 9 (Creation of Popular Culture)
Reading:
P 1. Howard Becker "Art Worlds."
P 2. Jeff Giles. "Suddenly a Star."
P 3. David Anson & Ray Sawhill "The New Jump Cut."
I 4. J. Michael Strazynski. "What is an Executive Producer?"

5/28-6/1
Week 10 (Production & Distribution)
Reading:
History and the Politics of Motion Pictures.
P 5. John LeLand & Allison Samuels "Taking to the Streets."
I 6. Summary of the Barnes & Noble Lawsuit
I 7. ABA, Independent Bookstores Sue Barnes & Noble and Borders
I 8. The Clayton Act
I 9. The Robinson-Patman Act

********* NO CLASS ON MONDAY ***********

!!!!!!!!! FINAL PAPER DUE (FRIDAY)!!!!!!!