COMM 4240: Rhetoric & Popular Culture
SPRING 2022 - Tuesdays/ Thursdays 2:00 - 3:20 — GAB 112

Professor: Dr. Suzanne Enck

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30-4:30; Wednesdays 2:30-4:00; Other times by appointment. You can drop in to my office in GAB 309-F or connect via Zoom: 6214180510

Suzanne’s E-mail: suzanne.enck@unt.edu, but please contact me through Canvas with course questions/ concerns.

COURSE OVERVIEW
This course explores the ways in which popular culture — the everyday messages to which we are exposed, especially through mass mediated platforms — is a dominant persuasive, rhetorical influence in most people’s lives. This course is neither 15 weeks of celebration nor condemnation of mediated artifacts and mass culture. Rather, we will take a detailed look at popular artifacts and phenomena to explore the effects they might have on our understandings and performances of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, politics, & more. The main goal of this course is to make students more aware of popular culture’s myriad influences in our everyday lives so that those influences may be accepted or resisted more consciously, thoughtfully, and deliberately.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

☐ To understand the power and influence of popular culture in a global environment.

☐ To explore connections between communication, culture, and ideology.

☐ To improve our abilities to describe, interpret, and evaluate the popular culture(s) we encounter daily; or put another way, to improve your popular culture literacy.

☐ To bolster critical thinking and analytical skills by identifying relevant issues, critically evaluating rhetorical situations (and cultural contexts) and articulating informed positions / arguments based in credible evidence.

☐ To appreciate, evaluate, and question the complex ways that familiar popular cultural artifacts make and re-make our (social) worlds.
Office Hours and Meetings

On Tuesdays from 3:30-4:30 and Wednesdays from 2:30-4:00, I will host student drop-in times in my office, GAB 309-F. You can also opt to meet via Zoom, if you’d rather. If I'm already meeting with another student, it may take some time before I can join the Zoom room; but, I will try to let you know about how long I'd expect the wait time to be by posting a message in the Zoom waiting room.

Please join me to discuss the readings, ask questions about course concepts or assignments, or just talk about how college is going for you.

If posted meeting times do not work for you and you’d like to set up a different time to meet, please send me a Canvas message and we’ll compare schedules.

Creating an Inclusive (Yet Challenging) Class Climate

As this course is dealing with a variety of cultural identities, expressions, performances, and privileges, it is imperative that we each consider the orientation from which we engage these topics, and the manner in which we voice our thoughts on such matters in the public space of the classroom (even if the classroom is hosted online). While it is not my job (or desire!) to police your individual worldviews, it is my responsibility to create a space that is respectful and open to a variety of viewpoints and to push everyone to think beyond their immediate life experiences and consider how others experience the world. It is my hope that each of us will speak to the issues raised in class ways that are thoughtful, authentic, and rooted a growth mindset.

The online space is one that offers its own range of opportunities and challenges. You will be asked to write Daily Reflections about the assigned readings/viewings/concepts and make strong arguments (claims supported with strong reasoning and backing). You are not being graded based on your agreement with particular viewpoints on the world — you are being graded on your capacity to effectively understand and use concepts to analyze popular culture texts. In your responses to each other (e.g., in discussion boards), I do not expect everyone to agree with each other (what a boring world that would be!) — but, when you disagree with someone, please focus on their argument (their claim supported with reasoning & backing). Think about how they’re using a concept well (or perhaps not making the strongest connection). While affirmations of each other are certainly encouraged, we’re going to all work toward pushing each other (respectfully) toward a more robust understanding of concepts, theories, practices, and experiences.

Learning and growing demands vulnerability and trust — please do not share your peers’ words or posts outside of this course (unless you’ve asked for and received permission from your peers).

Required Readings

All assigned readings will be available to you through Canvas — you do not need to purchase anything for this course.
Assignments & Grading

Exit Tickets - 30%

Educational scholars strongly suggest that “frequent, low-stakes assessments” improve learning tremendously. For each day of reading/viewing, there will be an opportunity to earn points for this component of your grade.

These assignments will always ask you to reflect on a particular daily reading. If you are in class, you will be given an Exit Ticket assignment to fill out before you leave class that day. If you miss class for any reason, you may complete an Alternative Exit Ticket (AET) through Canvas. This option will show up as a “quiz” on Canvas by midnight prior to the day you plan to miss. If you are completing the AET, this will be due by 5pm on the day you missed class.

Each Exit Ticket/AET is meant to help engage more deeply with the readings (and to help you extend and build upon course terminology as we move through the course).

We will have 20 days of readings and you will be expected to complete at least 15 assigned Exit Tickets/AETs by the day those readings are assigned. If you do more than 15 reflections, your best 15 will be counted toward this portion of the grade (and any Exit Tickets/AETS submitted by the deadline posted in excess of 15 will count toward extra credit for the course).

Two Exams - 20% x 2 = 40%

Exams require you to demonstrate command and mastery of course concepts. Both exams will be open-book/note and be open on Canvas during our class time on the two scheduled exam days. You’ll receive study guides ahead of time and the Exit Tickets/ AETs are structured to help you prepare for the types of questions that you’ll see on the exams. Due to the nature of the course, the exams will consist of short answer & essay questions.

Exam 1 - Thursday, March 3, 2022
Exam 2 - Thursday, April 14, 2022

Final Project - 30%

This final project offers you an opportunity to explore issues raised by the materials from this course in a more in-depth manner. You will have two options for this final project:

1) A 3-minute video analysis that draws popular culture texts together with a narrative voice-over to makes an argument related to rhetoric and popular culture + 3 page theoretical foundations paper.

2) A 8-10 page theoretically grounded research paper that analyzes a popular culture artifact (or set of artifacts).

Either option will ask you to combine rhetorical scholarship with a particular argument related to a popular culture artifact (or set of artifacts). You’ll decide what works better for your skillset and interests. I will ample support, guidance, and feedback.

Proposal Deadline: March 10
Final Project Deadline: Thursday, May 12

Question: What if I don’t agree with the grade I’ve received?

Answer: I’m happy to reconsider my assessment of your graded work. Occasionally, I miss something when I’m grading and I’m open to a strong argument. If you want me to reconsider a specific grade, you’ll need to submit a written memo detailing your argument for why your grade should be higher within a week of receiving your grade. This memo needs to demonstrate complete arguments (including claims, warrants, and backing). Do keep in mind, that in asking for a reassessment of your work, the reassessment may result in a higher, equal, or lower grade.

Please note: Claiming that you “worked really hard” or “need a certain GPA” does not count as an argument for increasing a grade based on the standards of a given assignment.

Question: “But will there be EXTRA CREDIT?”

Answer: Occasionally, as opportunities arise, I will alert you to them and you can do extra Exit Tickets extra credit. The maximum amount of Extra Credit a student can earn is 5% added to the final course grade.
Policies & Expectations

Deadlines:
There’s a good amount of flexibility built into the schedule of the course since students can skip up to 5 Exit Tickets and/or complete AETs if they miss class. The deadlines are designed to keep students on track with scaffolded assignments.

If you are having trouble meeting deadlines or managing the workload, please reach out to Suzanne — I am here to help you and want to support your learning needs as much as possible.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that all students have read and understand the Dean of Students’ expectations regarding academic honesty and integrity. It is of utmost importance that you understand what is meant by cheating, facilitating academic dishonesty, fabrication, plagiarism, etc. It is also important for you to understand your rights should I or any other instructor accuse you of academic dishonesty. Every graded assignment requires you to do original, independent, and creative work.

In addition to copying someone else’s words or ideas, reusing your own work from other courses is considered academic dishonesty — you might be permitted to extend research from other classes, but you must clear this with your instructors before proceeding with such research. **You may re-use writing you’ve done IN THIS COURSE for other assignments IN THIS COURSE, if it’s relevant to the project (e.g., if you have an explanation in one of your Exit Tickets that you’d like to use again in an exam or final project, you’re encouraged to do so).**

Frequently, you will be asked to summarize and synthesize various course readings and additional research. Even if you are not quoting text directly, you need to indicate when you are using another scholar’s thoughts/ideas/concepts/paradigms/etc. by putting their name and publication year in parentheses after the idea. Violation of these expectations will result in swift & severe consequences (typically, failure for the assignment and possibly, failure for the course).

For an excellent resource for both avoiding plagiarism and integrating sources effectively, see Harvard’s Guide for Using Sources. Ways to avoid plagiarism suggested in their guide include keeping your writing and sources separate (in a different file or a different color font), keeping a source trail, quoting your sources properly, and not only paraphrasing carefully but also acknowledging sources explicitly when paraphrasing.

**A note on open-note/reading exams:** I will highly encourage you to study together for exams and support each other as you’re each on your own learning journey. Everyone’s work on the exam answers needs to reflect their own understanding of the materials. I will ask each of you to sign an honor code at the beginning of each exam, indicating that you will not reveal the exact questions to each other and/or share your answers to any exam questions. Any evidence that suggests that students have violated these expectations will be investigated thoroughly and will lead to consequences (including failure for the assignment and reporting the incident to the Dean of Students).
E-mail & Canvas:
Students are expected to check their Canvas often in order to stay current with course communications. If you have a question outside of class, please contact Suzanne through the Canvas message system.

If you are experiencing problems with the Canvas system (e.g., if you can’t log on or access the system), please contact the UNT Help Desk immediately: 940-565-2324 or helpdesk@unt.edu.

Incompletes:
In accordance with University policy, a student can only receive a course grade of “I” if the student 1) has completed at least 75% of the coursework, 2) is passing the course, and 3) has a justifiable and documented reason beyond the control of the student for not completing the work on schedule (e.g., serious illness, military service).

SPOT Evaluations:
The Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) evaluation is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you online at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SPOT to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Disclaimer:
This syllabus should not be considered a binding contract on the part of the professor, who reserves the right to change any aspect of the course without prior notice.

Acknowledgments:
Syllabi are often influenced by others in the field who do good work as teachers and mentors. I am especially indebted to the following people for their influence on this syllabus: Megan Morrissey, Barry Brummett, Jeff Bennett, Cara Buckley, Ragan Fox, Claire Sisco King, Wendy Hessford, Jamie Skerski, and Isaac West.
How Can I Support YOU?

Course Accessibility

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we’ll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Statement from the Office of Disability Accommodation:
The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class.

I will happily set up a meeting to discuss how to best meet your accommodations.

For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation’s website at http://www.unt.edu/oda. You may also contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.

If you are feeling lost or overwhelmed...

1. Show up for Office Hours.
   These times are set aside just for me to meet with students. Please take advantage of these opportunities — I want to help you succeed!

2. Make an appointment with Suzanne.
   You are more than welcome to message Suzanne through Canvas or set up a meeting or phone call to discuss questions, concerns, and ideas. Many issues and questions can easily be resolved this way.

3. Contact the Writing Lab.
   This is a great resource to talk about your ideas, improve the organization of your writing, or work on your grammar and writing skills. Check the Writing Center’s website for more information about their summer online meeting options: writingcenter.unt.edu. You can also contact them by phone at 940-565-2563 or e-mail: WritingCenter@unt.edu.

Title IX Support for Victims of Violence

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance.

UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to UNT’s Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

NOTE: Your professors are mandated reporters if we learn about incidents of sexual misconduct, dating violence, stalking, or other forms of gendered violence. If you reveal that you have experienced such violence during your time at UNT, faculty will let the Victim’s Advocate know and they will reach out to you to offer support.
### Date: Tuesday, January 18
**Introduction to Course & Getting to Know You:**
- Introductions
- Review of syllabus, calendar, assignments, and expectations.

**Readings/Viewings:**
- Log onto Canvas
- Complete Introduction Survey

### Date: Thursday, January 20
**What Is Popular Culture?**
- What do we mean by culture and ideology?
- What relationships circulate between everyday life & culture?
- How do our subject positions orient us toward understanding culture?
- What kinds of “reading positions” might we adopt in consuming popular culture?

**Readings/Viewings:**
- John Storey - “What is Popular Culture?”

**What’s Due:**
- Exit Ticket #1 (AET #1, if not in class)

### Date: Tuesday, January 25
**Rhetorically Understanding & Critiquing Culture**
- Understanding relationships between texts, sources of meaning, contexts, & audiences
- Understanding Relationships between identities, cultures, power, and discourse.
- How do popular cultural artifacts work to foster cultural cohesion, differences, and values?
- How has the proliferation of media voices and production outlets affected the capacity for popular texts to influence cultural attitudes?

**Readings/Viewings:**
- Jeffrey Nealon & Susan Searls Giroux - "Culture"

**What’s Due:**
- Exit Ticket #2 (AET #2, if not in class)

### Date: Thursday, January 27
**Imaging & Everyday Life**
- How can the social dimensions of “everyday photography” and videos help enable broader connectivity?
- What connections might we make between “banal imaging” and public/cultural memory?
- How does Ibrahim’s notion of “banal imagining” help break down hierarchies between “high art” and the everyday?

**Readings/Viewings:**
- Yasmin Ibrahim — “Instagramming Life: Banal Imaging and the Poetics of the Everyday”

**What’s Due:**
- Exit Ticket #3 (AET #3, if not in class)

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**MORE READINGS TO COME…**

Based on survey interests of class.