

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

COMS 473 (L01): Popular Culture

WINTER 2023: January 9 to April 12 (excluding Feb. 19-25, Apr. 7 & 10)

Lecture: MW 15:30 to 16:45

This course is in-person (room SS 541).

Instructor:	Dr. S. Thrift (she/her)
Office:	SS 210
Email:	samantha.thrift@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
Office Hours:	Mondays, 1:30-3:00pm (or by appt via Zoom)

Course Description

Introduces critical tools for deconstructing and evaluating the social significance of popular cultural texts, including music, television, film, advertising, memes and viral content. Particular focus on audience reception as a key method for understanding fan practices and subcultures.

Emphasis will be given to critical and intersectional approaches to examining popular culture. Readings will include foundational and contemporary texts that comprise the field.

Additional Information

The weekly schedule of topics and readings can be found at the end of this outline or on D2L. Students are responsible for reading and following all course and university policies discussed in this outline. Prerequisite: COMS 371.

Objectives of the Course

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- define “popular culture” within different societal and historical contexts.
- identify significant theoretical frameworks used in the study and critique of popular culture.
- communicate a solid understanding of the key concepts, debates, and ideas arising from the field of popular culture studies in written, oral, and/or creative formats.
- independently and collaboratively apply critical communication and media theories to popular culture examples, texts, and artifacts.
- assess how popular culture texts function ideologically to construct identities and differences, and how such meanings are received (i.e., adopted, resisted, or reconceived).

Textbooks and Readings

A digital course pack has been prepared and will be available on the COMS 473 D2L course website, under the “Reading List (Leganto)” tab.

Learning Technologies and Requirements

In order to complete courses, University of Calgary students are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security and malware updates, with current antivirus software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection, and a current and updated web browser;

- A webcam (built-in or external), and a microphone and speaker (built-in or external) or headset with microphone (for online synchronous courses only).

If you need access to other software programs to complete assignments, your instructor will provide relevant information and links.

If you have technical difficulties, contact IT support services. See

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/student-campus-services-information-technologies-it.html>

Policy on the Use of Electronic Communication Devices

Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones may be used in class and tutorials only:

- for course-related purposes;
- if their use is not distracting others;
- if their use does not negatively impact the learning environment.

No audio or video recording is allowed in any class without the instructor's explicit permission.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's policy on the recording of lectures, which is outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html>, and carefully review the section on Instructor Copyright at the end of this outline.

Email

When corresponding with the instructor via email, students should include the course name (ex. Pop Culture or COMS 473) in the subject line. If you do not include the course name in your email's subject line, your message may get overlooked in the instructor's inbox and go unread. The instructor will respond to emails during the week, usually on a first-come, first-served basis. Emails sent in the evening or on weekends will not be read (or replied to) until the next working day.

Email is most useful for short, specific inquiries. If you have detailed questions on the course material, assignments, or grades, please make an appointment to visit the instructor during regular office hours (noted on p. 1) or via Zoom appointment.

Please maintain a respectful tone in your correspondence with the instructor. To refresh yourself on email etiquette, review [How to Email Your Professor \(Without Being Annoying AF\)](#) by Laura Portwood-Stacer.

Assignments and Evaluation

Weight	Assessed Components	Due
40%	<p>Pop Reflections (4 x 10%)</p> <p>Based on that week's material and discussion, students will submit a brief reflection on the topics and issues raised. These brief responses should reflect on the concepts/theories raised by the material, further expand on an example analyzed in class, and/or make connections between ideas we discussed in class to a new pop culture example.</p> <p>Four submissions are due, each weighted at 10%. There are two submission dates (noted at right); two reflections should be turned in on each date. In terms of format, students must submit at least <u>two</u> reflections in written/essay-style format (1.5-2 pages, double-spaced, using 12-pt TNR font). The other two reflections may take a creative format, such as a blog post, short video, video essay.</p> <p>ALL reflections must demonstrate correct APA or MLA citation practice. Details in class.</p>	<p>First two submissions due: Feb. 17 (11:59pm)</p> <p>Second two submissions due: Mar. 24 (11:59pm)</p>

20%	<p>Star Gazing: Close Reading of Celebrity Women</p> <p>In weeks 8 & 9, we will be studying the gendered and raced politics of celebrity, including celebrity women’s self-representations on social media. In these weeks, students will work in small groups (4-5) to select a social media post made by a female celebrity and conduct a close reading of the post by applying ideas and concepts from these lessons to the image. The goal is to demonstrate understanding of celebrity as a gendered and raced phenomenon, the working of the “gaze” in celebrity self-representation, and audience’s perception(s) of celebrity authenticity and agency. Groups will be formed before the reading break and in-class time will be given to this exercise.</p> <p>The final submission is a 3-4 page (dbl-space) written analysis or creative format submission (ex. zine, group video) that applies the key concepts from these weeks to the chosen example. Students may also incorporate additional relevant, scholarly sources that contribute to the analysis (consider week 4’s article by Carol Dyhouse on Hollywood glamour). The final submission must include a properly formatted bibliography (APA or MLA).</p> <p><i>Group members will receive the same grade on assignments; however, the instructor reserves the right to award differential grades based on group peer reviews or information indicating significantly uneven contributions by group members.</i></p>	Mar 17 th (11:59pm)
10%	<p>Essay Peer Review</p> <p>An in-class essay peer review session will be held April 3. This interactive session allows you to discuss, troubleshoot, and solicit feedback about your study, so you might revise and strengthen your ideas before submitting the final version of your paper on April 12.</p> <p>For this session, students should complete a full rough draft (intro, body, conclusion, bibliography) of their essay and bring it to discuss.</p> <p><u>Upload a copy of the rough draft to the D2L Dropbox by 3pm on April 3rd.</u> The draft will be evaluated for its level of completeness and overall quality (more details to be provided in class).</p> <p>NOTE: Attending the peer review is vital, as part of your grade is based on your active participation in the session.</p>	April 3 (Draft due to D2L dropbox by 3:00pm)
30%	<p>Research Essay (6-8 pages)</p> <p>For this essay, you are invited to select one of the lecture topics covered in class for further research and analysis. Your essay should focus on a specific example of the phenomenon being studied. For instance, an essay on “celebrity” should focus on a particular type of celebrity <i>and</i> a specific person (ex. “Internet celebrity” and KSI). A study of “anti-fandom” could focus specifically on analyzing racist social media backlash against the casting of Black actors in <i>The Little Mermaid</i> or <i>LOTR</i>. The aspect of popular culture you choose may be anything you find interesting from the course: historical, contemporary, genre-based, subcultural... and so forth. Ultimately, the essay should investigate how this aspect of popular culture shapes the way we understand the world around us.</p>	April 12 (11:59pm)

	<p>Keep in mind that the essay must do more than simply repeat an argument made in class or in the readings; our class discussions should serve as a springboard for additional research. To this end, your essay must have an original thesis and you must use (at least) four scholarly sources, including two from the course reading list. If you need help finding research materials, please see me and I will try to suggest some starting places.</p> <p>In 6-8 pages, your essay must demonstrate an informed, scholarly understanding of the pop culture phenomenon being studied through the application of cultural theories and concepts to your example.</p> <p>The final submission must be double-spaced and meet standard formatting guidelines (12-pt font, TNR; use APA or MLA citation practice).</p>	
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Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Note: You must complete all assignments and exams or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

If you miss a required course component, please contact your instructor as soon as possible, though make-up assignments are generally not permitted (barring exceptional circumstances).

Submission of Assignments

Please submit all assignments by uploading them to the designated D2L dropbox. Include your name and ID number on all assignments. Be sure to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to submit the proper version.

Private information related to individual students is treated with the utmost regard by University of Calgary faculty. Student assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty, and personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. Please note that instructors may use audio or video recording for lesson capture, assessment of student learning, and self-assessment of teaching practices.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of 5% or a partial letter grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Assignments seven days or more (unexcused) late will not be accepted and will receive a grade of zero.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. For the full policy on Student Accommodations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-accommodation-policy>

Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors.

Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization and proper documentation of

research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

Grading & Department of Communication, Media and Film Grade Scale

The following table outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. Final grades are reported as letter grades. For components graded using percentages or numerical scores, those values will be used directly in calculating the final course grade, while for components graded using letter grades, the letter grades will be converted to the midpoint values listed in the final column of the table below in calculating the final course grade.

In this course, letter grade percentage equivalents will be used for all written assignments, while point scores will be used for the Peer Review.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations*
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	F	0 - 49.99%	0%

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. **In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin.** Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support>

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including lectures, course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed, or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

To ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes & electronic versions of textbooks), all students are required to read the *University of Calgary Policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright* at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-material-protected-copyright-policy> and the requirements of the Copyright Act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>). Students who use material protected by copy-right in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the *University of Calgary Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics>

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferral of term work, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

For information about deferrals of final examinations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>

For information about requesting a reappraisal of course work or of a final grade, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

Student Support Services and Resources

Please see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk. For resources on D2L, Zoom, Yuja, etc., see <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/resources-for-students/>. (Find the topic menu under the icon to the left of the ELEARN banner.)

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

The Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings will be posted on D2L in advance of the first day of class.