

Politics and Popular Culture  
Political Science 330  
Spring 2013

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**Office Hours: M, W and F 10:00 to 11:00 and by appointment**

**Course Objectives:**

1. Students will develop a sense that knowledge and belief are socially constructed and are conditioned by the social context in which they are learned.
2. Students will learn about basic cultural and behavioral processes that underlie cultural learning and political order.
3. Students will understand the ways in which popular culture represents a locus of the learning and negotiation of political ideas and beliefs.
4. Students will learn to recognize the political and social content of popular cultural materials.
5. Students will examine the relationship between popular culture, political power and legitimacy and explore the role of popular culture in political change and stability.

**Introduction**

This course presumes that a powerful determinant of political behavior in any society is the way culture shapes human activity. That is, human beings necessarily must develop a way to help the world make sense. Without a framework for such understanding, human action is constantly problematic, human emotion is incomprehensible and social life impossible. To allow humans to establish and maintain satisfying and productive social relations, it is necessary to establish a common set of meanings and patterns of interaction which make purposeful and moral action possible.

These interactions are to be understood in a normative context. That is, they are characterized by definite but not always explicit values which members of a culture feel in varying degrees obligated to hold. These values are expressed through communication and manifest in symbolic action whereby members of a society reaffirm and recreate the institutions, commitments and beliefs which characterize the social order. Together, these symbols, commitments, values, meanings, and patterns of interaction prescribe the range of possible human activity within a given society.

Politics is among the behaviors that are shaped by culture. While power relations are grounded in material as well as cultural factors, the experience of politics depends to a large extent on the symbolic context in which the citizen operates. Indeed, any citizen's understanding of his or her place in the political order depends fundamentally on the symbols, narratives and rituals that define and express the society's basic political beliefs. Furthermore, the use of symbols for the expression of authority and the mobilization of interests is as fundamental to the operation of any political system as the use of economic incentive and physical coercion.

This course contends that political symbolic action extends to popular culture. While ideologies and belief systems are directly inculcated in formal institutions such as schools, corporations, and government, individuals are also exposed to the precepts of political culture through popular culture. Television, radio, literature, movies and the internet all include symbolic communications and actions which express current and prevailing ideas, values and social relations. These expressions often serve to reinforce the power of the dominant groups in a society but can be sources of innovation and change. In an era when human beings in advanced industrial societies increasingly devote time to the consumption of popular culture, it becomes increasingly important to recognize that popular culture supports or challenges existing social organization.

### **Writing Intensive**

This is a writing intensive course. It includes assignments that require students to engage in writing as a process, work in multiple drafts, revise written work, complete ungraded writing assignments and produce a certain quantity of written work. As such, the quality of writing will be a significant factor in evaluating all graded assignments.

### **Learning Disability accommodations**

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

### **Books**

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, **The Social Construction of Reality**, (Random House, 2013)

David J. Jackson, **Entertainment & Politics**, (Peter Lang, 2009)

Jeffrey P. Jones, **Entertaining Politics**, second edition, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

Evgeny Morozov, **The Net Delusion**, (Public Affairs, 2011)

### **Evaluation of Student's Work**

The student's grade will be determined on a 300 point basis through the following assignments:

Course Journal	80 points
Annotated bibliography	30 points
Thesis statement and outline	20 points
Draft	50 points

Research paper final draft  
Instructor evaluation

100 points  
20 points

### **Course Journal**

- Students will keep a course journal. There should be at least two entries per week. The entries should be typewritten and submitted as e-mail attachments.
- Unless otherwise specified, at least one entry per week should be a response to the assigned reading. This could be a summary of what a student read during the week, a question prompted by the reading, a commentary on the content of the reading or some other indication of an effort to do and engage the reading.
- Periodically, students will be instructed to write journal entries in relation to activities or discussions in class. In the absence of such prompts, an entry can be a response to the material assigned for a class in a given week or other material relevant to the subject matter of the course. This could entail a summary of the class discussions, the identification of questions raised by the class meeting but not answered, or **writing in support of graded assignments in the course**. Comments and feedback will be provided periodically but **individual entries will not be graded**.
- Grading of the journal will be based on the following criteria:
  1. The quality of the observations, insights or questions presented in a given journal entry
  2. The degree to which the entry incorporates material from the course or applies concepts or ideas from the course to materials that do not derive from the course
  3. The clarity and effectiveness of the writing

### **Research Paper**

Each student will complete a research project regarding the political or ideological elements of some part of popular culture. The specific focus of the research will be determined by the student in consultation with the instructor. Research can be done on:

- specific forms of popular culture (e.g. television shows, movies, music)
- issues that have political dimensions that are manifest or “negotiated” in popular culture (e.g. race, gender, religion, war, violence)
- use of popular culture for political actions or goals

The final project will be at least 20 typewritten pages, will be completed using the writing process described below. In completing this assignment, students will be required to submit the following prior to completion of the final draft which will be **due on 4/23**:

1. **Preliminary statement** identifying topic and explaining what the student anticipates doing **DUE: 2/12**
2. **Annotated bibliography** that provides the bibliographic information on each of their selected sources and a paragraph summarizing the content of the source and describing why the source appears to be useful or was chosen. There should be at least 10 entries in the annotated bibliography. **Due 3/14**
3. **Thesis statement and outline** -This requires a clear statement of the principal thesis of the paper and a good topic outline for the entire paper. The quality of the outline will be judged on how easy it would be for the writer to construct the paper with only the outline in front of him or her. Single page outlines will be ineligible for full credit. **Due 3/28**
4. **Complete preliminary draft** - **Due 4/9**

### **Instructor Evaluation**

Each student will be evaluated by the instructor for his or her participation, involvement in and contributions to the course. This portion of the grade will reflect all activities in the course that are not otherwise specified in the syllabus including attendance and participation in class discussion. It will also include the oral presentation of the research projects which will be scheduled for the last week of the semester.

### **Course Outline and Readings**

#### **I. Introduction (1/15)**

#### **II. Culture**

**Read: The Social Construction of Reality, pp. 19-150 to be completed by 1/22.**

- A. Structure, culture and power relations (1/17)
- B. Social construction of meaning (1/22-1/24)
- C. Language, texts and discourses (1/29)
- D. Culture and behavior (1/31)

#### **III. Popular Culture, Politics and Democratic Citizenship**

- A. Political functions of culture (2/5-2/12)
- B. Democratic citizenship (2/14)
- C. Postmodernism and political engagement (2/19-2/21)

#### **IV. Genres**

- A. Television and politics

**Read: Entertaining Politics, pp. 3-109, 167-184, 207-252 to be completed by 2/26**

1. Television, ideology and behavior (2/26)
2. Deconstructing TV (2/28)
3. The "New Political" television (3/12)
4. Entertainment and citizen engagement (3/14)

B. Music

Read: **Entertainment & Politics**, pp. 1-52, 84-151 to be completed by 3/19

1. Socialization and ideology (3/19)
2. Popular culture and sociopolitical change (3/21)

C. Censorship (3/26)

D. Globalization (3/28)

E. The Internet

Read: **The Net Delusion**, entire to be completed by 4/4

1. Cyber-utopianism and cyber-centrism (4/2)
2. Cyberculture, identity and privacy (4/4)
3. Cyberculture and democratic citizenship (4/9)

V. Research projects (4/16-4/23)