

# COMM 4240: Rhetoric, Culture, & Ideology

Monday/Wednesday, 9:30 a.m. – 10:50 a.m., WH 113

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<b>Office:</b>	GAB 320A
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Monday & Tuesday, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., and by appointment
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A course in “popular culture” could easily turn into merely a celebration of cool things with which we come into contact on a daily basis: movies, TV shows, musical artists, websites, etc. This will not be such a course. Instead, we will start from the assumption that discourse in all its forms engages in social work—that is, discourse is in some important way constitutive of our world and, as such, we must (a) come to terms with that fact and (b) better be equipped to engage it critically. This course in communication and culture will orient you toward such a critical approach to our subject through initial theoretical and analytical readings that will provide the heuristics (or jumping-off-points) for engaging the culture around us. Using extensive readings from an electronic course reader to focus our studies, we will engage key questions about the relationship between communication and culture and work through case studies that are simultaneously rigorous and familiar.

**Prerequisite(s) for non-majors:** COMM 2140

**Prerequisite(s) for majors and pre-majors:** COMM 3010

**Course Objectives:** This course is geared toward helping students do several things.

1. Understand the rhetoricity of U.S. popular culture.
2. Understand the connections between communication and culture.
3. Improve students' ability to describe, interpret, and evaluate popular culture(s) encountered daily; or put another way, to improve one's popular cultural literacy.
4. Bolster critical thinking and analytical skills. Students should be able to identify an issue, critically evaluate a situation, formulate a position and answer research questions in a precise and nuanced manner.
5. Appreciate, evaluate, and question the complex ways in which familiar popular cultural artifacts make and re-make our (social) world.

**Classroom Climate:** Some of you will undoubtedly have strong reactions to some of our readings and issues—strong reactions are not discouraged. However, the ways in which reactions get framed and presented must be respectful and civil. In order for us all to glean the most from this course, we must create an environment in which individuals feel comfortable speaking their minds and relaying their experiences. Constructive criticism and responses are welcome (and expected). Disrespect of any kind—including discriminatory speech that creates a hostile environment with respect to race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, religion, or ability—cannot be tolerated.

**Assignments/Evaluation for this Course:** Your grade is based on your successful completion of ALL of the following assignments. Failure to complete a major assignment will result in a *failing grade for the course*.

1. **Participation** (10% of final grade): This is a crucial element in this course. We will spend the bulk of our time discussing the ideas raised in the readings and raised in class. I'll be the first to admit that I don't know everything. As such, I will try to act mostly as a facilitator and each of you will bear some responsibility for the educational experience of the entire class. The key criteria for assessing class participation are the *amount* and *regularity* of contributions and the degree to which contributions are *thoughtful, informed, constructive, and on topic*. Attendance also figures into this portion of the grade, but only as a prerequisite for in-class participation. To adapt an old saying from *G.I. Joe*: showing up is half the battle. Participation counts as 100 points.
2. **Exams** (25% of final grade): There will be two exams. The midterm exam is worth 10% of the final course grade; the final exam is worth 15%. Exams require you to demonstrate command and mastery of course concepts. Memorizing terms the night before will not be enough to succeed; rather, you *must* retain concepts and be able to apply them in different contexts. Exams are cumulative in that you're expected to continue demonstrating knowledge/retention of prior concepts/materials. Exams make up 250 points.
3. **Quizzes and Assignments** (15% of final grade): There will be regular quizzes (basically every day we do a reading). If you do the readings, you'll be fine. If you don't, you won't. Bombing a quiz or two isn't a big deal ... the problem comes when you make a habit out of that. There will also be small, ad-hoc assignments (e.g., for you to bring an example of something to class), which will be worth the same as quizzes. Quizzes and

assignments account for 150 total course points.

4. **Workshops** (5% of final grade, total): There will be three in-class workshops geared toward your final paper. In all, they are worth 50 points toward your final grade.
5. **Final Paper** (40% of final grade, total): The final paper is your opportunity to explore an issue raised by the materials in this course in a more in-depth manner. In order to encourage that this become a process and not an event (the night before it is due), I will collect a **3-4 page prospectus** (proposal; 10%) from you that maps the general argument and ideas you plan to discuss. Your proposal should include a five source (minimum) bibliography and address the following questions:
  - What is the popular cultural artifact you intend to engage critically?
  - Why is this artifact significant?
  - How do you situate it historically/contextually?
  - What is your preliminary thesis?
  - What sorts of theoretical materials can you bring to bear on your analysis? There might be essays that we have read in class that will be relevant to your analysis; however, you must to go beyond our class readings to more fully engage your artifact.
  - HOW (paper, visual project, etc.) will you prepare your final project?

Building upon your proposal, the **10-12 page final paper** (30%) should represent the culmination of your engagement with your chosen popular cultural artifact. Your aim should be a critique of the cultural artifact approved by me through the completion of your prospectus. What “critique” means and what this paper should look like are things we will discuss in class. I will also be providing you with more detailed information about the assignment as the semester moves along. As a default, this should be a polished paper that benefits from your multiple engagements with your peers and professor. The final paper should include a bibliography of at least 10 appropriate scholarly and primary sources, **at least 8 of which should not be on the syllabus**.

Both the prospectus and the final paper should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman, with one-inch margins, **single-sided**, and stapled. Please never use booklets/covers/folders. Bibliographies, title pages, and appendixes do not count toward page limits. Please follow the APA style manual and observe common rules of grammar, spelling, and argumentation. If I can't read it, I can't grade it ... please remember that. The two elements of the final paper (proposal and paper) account for 400 points total.

6. **Final Paper Presentation** (5% of final grade): You are expected to prepare a 4-5 minute presentation on your final paper, which you will present in the final weeks of the semester.

**Grading:** I assume that students in a 4000-level course have the ability to read, analyze, synthesize, engage in critical thinking, write cogently using correct style/grammar/etc., and participate intelligently in class discussion. Students are expected to produce written work that conforms to the “Writing Guidelines” for student papers in the “undergraduate program” section of the department website.

You can find that information and more at <http://www.comm.unt.edu/docs/WRITING%20GUIDE.docx>. If you feel that you need assistance with your writing, contact the UNT Writing Lab in Aud 105 or checking out their website at <http://www.unt.edu/writinglab/>.

The graded assignments are designed to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency in these areas. The following scale will be used:

A	90-100	Clearly Outstanding and exceptional work
B	80-89	Above Average Work
C	70-79	Average Work; Meets all the criteria for an assignment
D	60-69	Below Average Work
F	Below 60	Fails to Meet Minimal Expectations

**Grade Appeals:** I am more than happy to discuss grades with you, but those discussions must be calm and rational. If you believe a grade should be *reconsidered*, take time to review my comments and follow these instructions:

1. Wait at least 24 hours after receiving the grade but no more than 1 week to talk to me.
2. Your reasons for receiving another grade (which you must specify) must be written in a memo to me (2 page max).
3. The original evaluation & all assignment materials must be included with your memo.  
*There is no guarantee that a reconsideration of your work will yield a higher grade; but I am willing to consider your reasons and, at the very least, help you troubleshoot deficiencies for subsequent assignments. I will not discuss grades over email -- period.*

**Submitting Assignments:** All written assignments should be submitted in class (hard copy) and via email as a Word (doc or docx) file attachment.

**Extra Credit:** Extra credit opportunities, to the extent that they are offered, will generally be associated with faculty and graduate student research projects. Should such opportunities become available, they will be announced in class. Students should not ask to resubmit assignments for a better grade.

**Late Work Policy:** Assignments are due by dates and times specified in the course schedule and must be submitted as directed. Late work will not be accepted.

**Tardiness:** If you arrive after attendance has been taken, it is your responsibility to inform the professor by the end of the class period in which you are tardy; otherwise, the absence will not be removed. Furthermore, if you arrive 10 or more minutes late for any class period, it

constitutes an absence.

**Attendance Policy:** The attendance policy is multifaceted and none of its elements are negotiable; all elements will be applied uniformly to all students. In accordance with departmental policy, students who do not attend the first day of class in courses that are full will be dropped to permit students who do attend to add the class.

Your success in this course depends on active participation in the daily activities of the class. You must attend to attain the full benefits of the experience. Thus, if you accumulate more than three (3) absences over the course of the semester, your grade will be affected adversely. Beginning with your fourth absence (and continuing with each subsequent one), I will lower your final grade by 10% (the equivalent of one letter grade). The term “absence” as we use it in this policy does not apply to University Authorized Absences. However, University Authorized absences that are not cleared within two weeks of the date(s) of the absence(s) will remain on the roll as unauthorized absences. Furthermore, you can still be docked for unexcused absences regardless of whether they occur before or after “excused” absences. For example, if you skip two classes and have two excused absences (for a total of four), your grade will still be docked one letter grade at the end of the semester. If you have four excused absences and zero unexcused absences, however, your final grade will not be docked. That said, you should seriously consider taking this class a different semester if you have university-authorized activities that will interfere regularly with your attendance.

You should assume responsibility for keeping track of the number of absences you have accumulated. The professor will not provide warnings about how absences are affecting grades. Help me maintain a good working relationship by contacting me in advance when you are going to be absent, even if you must call or email just prior to the beginning of class.

**Policy Regarding Communication Devices:** It’s pretty simple ... turn off your cell phones, pagers, etc. during class. You should be devoting your attention to the class, not to your friends outside of class; so please, don’t be texting, IMing, Facebooking, or anything of the sort during class. If your phone goes off in class or you’re caught texting/IMing/Facebooking, you’ll probably be mocked the first time. If it happens again or, worse yet, you don’t stop when asked, you’ll be asked to leave the class. If it happens during an exam, your test will be confiscated and you’ll receive a grade of zero. If there are extenuating circumstances, you must inform the professor before class (not after you’re caught).

**Access Policy:** “The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 -- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.”

I cooperate fully with the University’s Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to provide reasonable accommodation to students who wish to avail themselves of ODA services. Students who wish to self-identify should register with the ODA no later than the second day of class.

**Plagiarism & Cheating:** All persons shall adhere to the Student Standards of Academic Integrity regarding academic dishonesty, including acts of cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage.

Policies and procedures regarding adjudication of acts of academic dishonesty are available in the UNT Policy Manual at <http://vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm>. You can also read more here: <http://www.unt.edu/csrr/development/integrity.html>. If you have ANY question whatsoever about what might constitute academic dishonesty, ask. Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse. Plus, you all should know this stuff from COMM 3010.

**Acceptable Student Behavior:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr).

**Incomplete Policy:** In keeping with UNT policy, I cannot award incompletes simply because a student does not complete coursework in a timely manner. An incomplete may be awarded only in cases where students meet the following conditions: (a) the student has completed at least three-quarters of the work for the semester, and (b) the grade is warranted by a medical or military excuse. Even in such instances, it is the student's responsibility to request a grade of incomplete, which will not be awarded without explicit agreement by the professor.

**Technology Issues:** Each student is **required** to obtain the rudimentary skills necessary to maintain a university **e-mail account** and use **Blackboard Vista**. Check your e-mail and Blackboard regularly so you receive class-related messages in a timely fashion.

We all depend upon machines to get our work done. We all know that machines break down. When they do, it does not constitute an "excuse" or an "emergency." It is expected that you will prepare your assignments *far enough in advance* so that *when* (not *if*) your computer malfunctions you will still have time to rectify the problem and turn in the assignment on time. Also: **ALWAYS KEEP GOOD BACKUPS!!!**

**Crisis Contingency:** In the event of the university closing for weather-related reasons or illness outbreak, e.g. flu, please visit the course website on Blackboard where you will find instructions.

**COMM Library Copier Use Policy:** Students conducting research in the Communication Studies Library associated with departmental coursework have access to a printer/photocopier located in the office adjacent to the library. We encourage students to make use of this resource to print research accessed online in the library or to copy essays from any of the department's holdings. Students may not use this resource for other purposes, such as printing courses assignments, class notes, scripts, etc. Students who use the copier for uses other than those outlined above will lose copying privileges.

**SETE/Course Evaluations:** The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you 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 SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class. SETE administration for Spring 2011 will be available between April 19 (Tuesday) and May 13 (Friday).

**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.

## Course Reading/Assignment Schedule

It is expected that you will read the text(s) **BEFORE** coming to class for the day they're assigned and that you will *bring the readings with you to class* so we can discuss them fully. We may alter some of the readings as the semester progresses depending on the needs of the class. Assignment due dates are marked with an asterisk (\*).

**IMPORTANT:** Bring your readings to class daily (the ones relevant for that day). You must have your readings with you in order to get the most out of the classroom discussions and lectures. I will periodically check that you've brought them with. Failure to do so will result in point deductions from your participation grade.

### Week 1: It Begins....

1/19: Intros/Overview

### Week 2: Communication, Culture, and Signs

1/24: James Carey, selection from *Communication as Culture*

1/26: Roland Barthes, selection from *Mythologies*

### Week 3: Ideology, Hegemony, and Articulation

1/31: Dick Hebdige, selection from *Subculture*

2/2: Kevin DeLuca, "Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice"

### Week 4: Rhetorical Critique of Popular Culture

2/7: Lawrence Grossberg, selection from *We Gotta Get Out of this Place*

2/9: Bonnie Dow, "Introduction: The Rhetoric of Television, Criticism, and Theory"

### Week 5: Criticism Redux

2/14: William Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary Copeland, "Invention in Media and Rhetorical Criticism: A General Orientation"

\* 2/16: **TOPICS DUE**; Proposals Assignment; Exam Review

### Week 6: Exam and Putting It All Together

\* 2/21: **EXAM #1**

2/23: Greg Dickinson and Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Fallen: OJ Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the Re-Centering of White Patriarchy"

### Week 7: Finishing the Puzzle and Preparing Your Proposal

2/28: Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix, "Seeing 'Straight' through Queer Eye: Exposing the Strategic Rhetoric of Heteronormativity in a Mediated Ritual of Gay Rebellion"

\* 3/2: **WORKSHOP #1**: Bring 4 copies of your 3-page proposal to class to workshop with peers.

### Week 8: Propose It ... Then Laugh About It

\* 3/7: **PROPOSALS DUE**—Prepare to speak on your topic for 2 minutes.

3/9: Don J. Waisanen, "A Citizen's Guides to Democracy Inaction: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's Comic Rhetorical Criticism"

### **Week 9: Spring Break, 3/14-3/18—NO CLASS!!!!**

### **Week 10: Racial Neoliberalism On TV and in the News**

3/21: Amy Adele Hasinoff, "Fashioning Race for the Free Market on *America's Next Top Model*"

3/23: Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Barack Obama, the Tea Party, and the Threat of Race: On Racial Neoliberalism and Born Again Racism"

### **Week 11: Get Your Affect On**

3/28: Brian L. Ott, "The Visceral Politics of *V for Vendetta*: On Political Affect in Cinema"

- \* 3/30: **WORKSHOP #2**: Bring research materials, your graded proposal, and notes. You will work on thesis statements, intros, and conclusions.

### **Week 12: The American Dream**

4/4: Ron Von Burg and Paul E Johnson, "Yearning for a Past That Never Was: Baseball, Steroids, and the Anxiety of the American Dream"

4/6: Luke Winslow, "Comforting the Comfortable: *Extreme Makeover Home Edition's* Ideological Conquest"

### **Week 13: Whiteness & Eminem**

4/11: Eric King Watts, "Border Patrolling and 'Passing' in Eminem's *8 Mile*"

- \* 4/13: **WORKSHOP #3**: Bring 4 copies of a well-developed final paper outline for peer review

### **Week 14: Latina/o Popular Cultures**

4/18: Helene A. Shugart, "Crossing Over: Hybridity and Hegemony in the Popular Media"

4/20: María Elena Cepeda, "Singing the 'Star-SpanGLISH Banner': The Politics and Pathologization of Bilingualism in U.S. Popular Media"

### **Week 15: Final Paper Presentations**

- \* 4/25: **PRESENTATIONS**

- \* 4/27: **PRESENTATIONS**

### **Week 16: Finishing Up**

5/2: Final Exam Review

- \* 5/4: **FINAL EXAM**

### **Finals Week**

- \* 12/14: **FINAL PAPER DUE** in my office (GAB 320A) and via email (as a .doc or .docx attachment) between 10:30-12:30

## References

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