Culture I

SOC6516H Graduate Seminar

Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, Winter 2018

"Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”
Raymond Williams, 1976

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Course location: Room 41, 725 Spadina Ave.
Course time: Thursdays, 10 – 12

This seminar provides an introduction to some of the principal approaches to the sociological study of culture. The course is designed to equip students with an overview of how sociologists conceive of culture, the methodological approaches they use to study it, the major debates within the field, and an appreciation for how the field has evolved in the past few decades. Emphasis is on understanding how culture influences action, the relationship between culture and social inequality, how culture is produced and consumed, and how to measure meaning. Along the way, students will learn what the sociology of culture offers for studying a range of cultural objects, such as food, music, books, art, film and fashion.

Course Requirements:

Analytical Essays

Submit six 3 – 4 page, double spaced, analytical essays (1000 words maximum) on the course readings.

Guidelines for essays:

- The purpose of the essays is to help you to deepen your engagement with the course readings and provide you an opportunity to develop and present your emerging analyses and critical reflections. They also allow me to provide guidance and feedback throughout the semester. In writing the essays, focus on what you find particularly interesting, important or problematic about the readings. A good place to start is by going through the questions recommended below for preparation for class participation.


• What to avoid:
  o Avoid summarizing the readings. You may refer to specific points in the readings or include brief quotations or paraphrases but no broad or extensive summaries.
  o Avoid personal reflection and the use of anecdotal evidence.
  o Avoid focusing on only one reading. In general, try to address or build an argument across some or all of the assigned readings for that session.
• Essays are due by noon on the Wednesday before each session via e-mail. No credit will be given for late essays. List the word count for each essay and do not go above the word limit. Proofread carefully as essays will be marked down for typos, spelling and grammatical errors
• Essays will be marked as check (82%), check – (77%), and check+ (87%).

The following website includes some helpful guidelines for developing critical analysis in your essays: http://leeclarke.com/docs/writingcritically.html

Discussion Questions

Before each session, students will compose a minimum of three discussion questions for that session’s readings. Your discussion questions help prepare you for class, give me a sense of how you are engaging with the course readings and help focus our discussions. Think carefully about what you want to ask. Good questions focus on core and critical issues or make connections between different readings. Avoid questions that focus on a small detail or tangential point, questions that can easily be answered in a sentence or two, questions that address only one reading, and yes/no questions.

Discussion questions are due by noon on the Wednesday before each session via e-mail (to me and the presenter for that week). Students must submit questions on ten sessions to receive full credit. Questions will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis (calculated as 85%/75%).

Class Presentations

Each student will prepare short (10 – 15 minutes), in-class presentations to guide our discussions, based on the readings for the session. The number of presentations will depend on course enrollment. Presenters may begin by briefly reviewing the main points of the reading before turning to a critical, substantive discussion. This is an opportunity to share your critical assessments, emerging questions, ideas and analyses, and reflections on what you find particularly noteworthy, compelling, or troubling about the readings. The goal of the presentation is to motivate class discussion and provide a starting framework for the conversation to follow. Presenters will also prepare a handout including brief summaries of each reading and 3 – 5 written discussion questions to begin the class meeting (based in part on questions submitted by students) and will then lead class discussion (with my assistance). Presentations will be marked for organization, clarity, comprehension of materials, and presentation style.
Class Participation

Students are expected to do the reading thoroughly before each class meeting and to come to class prepared to actively discuss the readings. This means taking the time to reflect on what you’ve read before class. Working through the following twelve questions for each reading will help prepare you:

- What is the research question(s) the author is trying to answer?
- How does the author define "culture" (or the aspect of culture on which she or he focuses)?
- What are the other key concepts and how are they defined?
- What is the research design and the data or empirical evidence? Is the research design effective for the questions the author(s) is posing?
- What are the main conclusions of the research? How convincingly does the evidence support the conclusions?
- How does the work relate to other readings or streams of research? Does it build and extend earlier work? Challenge or contradict other studies?
- What do you see as the weaknesses or flaws in the research?
- Are there any ideas or assertions in the reading that you disagree with?
- What do you find innovative, if anything, about the work?
- What is most surprising or puzzling to you about the reading?
- What puzzles or questions are left unanswered by the reading?
- What is the main contribution of the reading?

Your class participation will be evaluated on the basis of your contribution to class discussion, the level of comprehension of the readings reflected in your contributions, and your ability to actively listen and engage with other members of the class.

If you must miss a class, please inform me beforehand. Unexcused absences or lateness will negatively impact your participation grade.

Final Essay

The final paper for this course gives you an opportunity to step back and consider the course as a whole. There are two options for this paper: a) motivated by the readings in this course, write a research proposal that presents your take on one of the most pressing and promising areas for future research in the sociology of culture; b) write an essay that in some way synthesizes and takes stock of what you’ve learned about the sociology of culture subfield in this class. Further direction will be provided. I am also open to other proposals for papers. Due Friday, April 5th, 5 p.m. via e-mail. 10-12 pages, double-spaced.

Marking Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Essays</td>
<td>60% (each essay is 10% of the final mark)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>10% (pass/fail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Course Schedule:

Session One, January 11: Introduction and Overview


Session Two, January 18: Conceptualizations of Culture


Supplementary:


Session Three, January 25: Meaning and Measurement


Supplementary:


**Session Four, February 1:  Culture as Capital**


*Supplementary:


**Session Five, February 8: Cultural Capital and School Success**


*Supplementary:

Session Six, February 15: Culture in Action


Supplementary:


Session Seven, February 22: Culture as Boundaries


Supplementary:


Session Eight, March 1: Production of Culture


Supplementary:


Session Nine, March 8: Reception of Culture, I


Supplementary:
Session Eleven, March 22: Classification


(Conclusion).

**Supplementary:**


**Session Twelve, March 29: Culture and Materiality**


**Supplementary:**


