Emory University

SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

Soc 560; Fall 2015

Fridays 1:00-4:00; 206 Tarbutton Hall

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course (1) provides students with grounding in cultural sociology and (2) prepares students for doing their own cultural research. To facilitate the first objective, we survey major themes and issues in the sociology of culture. We begin this survey by considering the sociological approach to culture, which entails answering the following questions: “What is culture and what does it do?” and “How are we to study culture?” We get at these broad questions via the case of music. We next turn to issues that Marx, Weber, and Durkheim respectively raised. In particular, we inspect how current scholars (from a variety of theoretical perspectives) approach these seminal issues. Examples of issues that spring from the work of classical sociologists include the following: “Do media messages shape our view of reality? If so, how?” and “How do class and lifestyle intertwine to reproduce inequality?” Finally, we turn to substantive questions that have come to the fore in recent decades, including “How is market activity undergirded by cultural assumptions?” and “How does social context shape the production and consumption of expressive goods?” To facilitate the second objective (i.e., doing research), we give special attention to methods and designs employed in current research, and we heed how theoretical ideas are translated into empirical projects. Thus, by the end of the semester, each student will have a grasp of the field and an understanding of how to do cultural sociology.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is organized as a seminar, which entails the combination of a fair amount of reading, class discussion, and an empirical paper. Given this organization, you are expected to attend each class and to participate.

A) Attendance

If you must miss a class, please inform me ahead of time so that we can make arrangements. Note that unexcused absences will negatively affect your final grade.
B) Class Participation and Discussion

Active participation requires adequate preparation. You therefore must read the assigned material before class and develop your own assessment of this material. Such careful preparation will improve the quality of class discussion. Of course, class discussion should be both informed and respectful; moreover, it should be a forum wherein all can raise questions, explore ideas, and express misgivings. Most of all, this discussion should be fun. Class participation comprises 20% of your final grade.

C) Weekly Memos

You will prepare a 3-page memo for each week's readings (typed and double-spaced). You should regard these memos as ideas in progress rather than as finished products. Use them to digest each week's readings and to respond with questions, criticisms, and new ideas. Please bring your memo to class and submit it at the end of class. The weekly memos comprise 30% of your final grade.

D) Final Paper

You will complete a theoretically informed paper with an empirical component. This paper will be at least 15-pages in length (typed and double-spaced), and it will represent the first step in your efforts to submit a work for a thesis, for a conference presentation and/or for journal review. While the paper topic is left to your discretion (subject to my approval), the default paper will consist of survey analysis—most likely involving one of the surveys located at the National Archive of Data on Arts & Culture (see http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NADAC/). Of course, you have the option of proposing an alternative to this default of survey-analysis.

I ask that you discuss your topic with me by September 25 and submit an outline by October 23. The final paper is due on December 11 and comprises 50% of your final grade.

COURSE RESOURCES

As the semester progresses, class materials will be posted on the Blackboard site for SOC 560 (see http://classes.emory.edu/). Each week, for example, I will post a “Questions to Ponder” document that addresses the current readings. These questions should give you a starting point for approaching the reading materials and subsequent class discussion.

The assigned readings are drawn from many sources, so there is no textbook. Instead, the required readings are available at our Blackboard site and at Woodruff electronic reserves (see https://ereserves.library.emory.edu/index.php).

The particular reading that provides the foundation for each week is marked by a star (*).
Note that the readings for this class augment—do not duplicate—those found in the Sociology of the Arts (SOC 561) and Sociology of Mass Media (SOC 562) graduate seminars.

As a result, you may wish to peruse the SOC 561 and SOC 562 syllabi for additional culture readings on my faculty webpage (see http://sociology.emory.edu/home/people/faculty/dowd-tim.html).

If you have any special needs, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and we will discuss the necessary arrangements (for additional information, visit the Emory Office of Access Disability Services, and Resources website; see http://www.ods.emory.edu/).

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to Revision)

August 28: Introductions

September 4: Sociology and the Study of Culture: The Case of Music


September 11: Class, Ideology, and Resistance: The Cultural Turn


September 18:  From Media Domination to Media Framing


September 25:  Status Groups: The Construction of Identity and Exclusion


DUE DATE FOR FINAL PAPER TOPICS

October 2: Class, Status, and Cultural Capital: Reproduction Revisited


October 9: Distinction: The Intertwining of Social Position and Tastes


October 16:  The Rationalization of Life, Work and the Economy


October 23:  Solidarity and Individualism in Contemporary Times


DUE DATE FOR FINAL PAPER OUTLINES

October 30:  Classification, Boundaries and Commemoration


**November 6: Construction of Markets and Industries**


**November 13: The Social Context of Creativity**


November 20: The Content of Expressive Goods: Stability and Change


November 27: THANKSGIVING BREAK (No Class)

December 4: The Reception and Consumption of Expressive Goods


December 11: FINAL PAPER DUE