

Course Syllabus – Fall 2025



Course AMS 2300.001
Course Title American Popular Culture
Professor Dr. Kyle A. Hammonds

Office Hours Tues, Wed, & Thurs, 1:00 – 2:15pm, & by appointment;
HH 2.812

Professor's Contact Information

Office Phone 214-240-5778

Office Location HH 2.812

Email Address kyle.hammonds@utdallas.edu

Class Meeting Info Tues & Thurs, 2:30 – 3:45pm, ML2 1.214

Course Description

This course introduces students to the academic study of American popular culture. Through the analysis of forms such as, but not limited to, TV, music, radio, and film, we will critically analyze the role of popular culture in contemporary America, as well as relationships between pop culture and American values, beliefs, priorities, and identities. Furthermore, the course features exploration of the intersections between pop culture and economic, social, and political circumstances. Through the course, students will examine the power dynamics at play in the production and consumption of pop culture.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Students will gain an understanding of central themes in American cultural history.
- 2) Students will develop working definitions for key terms in the study of popular culture, as well as an understanding of academic and critical disputes over the nature of popular culture and its place in American society.
- 3) Students will critically analyze the relationships between elements of American popular culture and other facets of American life, including technological developments, political changes and transitions, and economic circumstances.

Required Texts & Materials:

- Brandt & Clare (2018), *An Introduction to Popular Culture in the US: People, Politics, and Power*. New York: Bloomsbury. [Book]
- *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975). [Film]
- *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999). [Film]
- *The Incredibles* (Bird, 2004). [Film]
- Pokémon Go (Niantic, 2016). [Game]

Required technology: Computer with internet access (music videos, podcasts, sound streaming) and PDF reader (digital articles, newspaper clips, comics); Cell phone with internet access (gaming)

Disclaimer: Films, music, podcasts, short stories, or other pop culture texts may also be assigned during the semester. Note: some texts may involve *mature content*, especially in regard to violence, racism, sexism, and scary images. These texts were chosen for their literary value and potential for prompting discussion regarding course topics. The inclusion of these works does not necessarily indicate the professor's approval of the speech or practices contained therein. Please consult with the instructor if you have any concerns.

Access and Reproduction: Additional materials will be posted to eLearning. All assigned texts are required unless otherwise designated.

Materials posted to eLearning will be available to all registered students, as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. These materials may be downloaded, but should not be reproduced or shared with those not enrolled in the course, or uploaded to any other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these university requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Course Policies

Communication:

The primary methods of communication this semester will be UT Dallas email and eLearning announcements. Generally, student messages will be answered within 48 working hours. If your question has not been addressed within this time frame, feel free to follow up with the instructor.

Class attendance:

At UT Dallas, course attendance policies are set by individual faculty members. Regular and punctual attendance is expected regardless of instruction modality. Students who fail to attend class regularly are at greater risk of academic difficulty.

Try as best you can to attend all class meetings. This, of course, does not mean that you need to attend class when you are ill or facing a crisis. Use your best judgement and try to find a balance between academic responsibilities and self-care.

Class attendance is mandatory and will be recorded. This is a discussion-based course, so please note that your participation directly affects the learning of your peers. For their sake and your own, please come to class prepared, engaged, and ready to discuss the readings.

Attendance will be factored into grades, and **all** unexcused absences will result in **grade point deductions** (-50 points per absence). Students may request to **make-up up to three (3) absences** with essay-writing assignments corresponding to the content covered in the missed session[s]. It is the student's responsibility to track their own absences. Make-up essays will **not be accepted during the last week of classes**.

Deadlines & late work: Deadlines are designed both to motivate student progress through materials as well as to ensure grading may be completed in a timely manner. While the instructor reserves the right to refuse to accept late work submitted without prior consent, as well as the right to penalize late submissions, there is also space for helping students who demonstrate the need for

extensions. Students should clearly communicate requests for extensions and do so well in advance of the need, when possible.

Server unavailability / other technical difficulties:

The university is committed to providing a reliable learning management system to all users. However, in the event of an unexpected server outage or unusual technical difficulty that prevents students from completing a time-sensitive assignment or activity, the instructor will provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and also contact the online eLearning Helpdesk. The instructor and the Helpdesk will work with the student to resolve the issues as quickly as possible.

Class recordings:

The basic rule is that meetings of this course will not be recorded. Students are expected to follow university policies regarding access to recorded materials, and are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved a request to record.

Recordings provided by the instructor may not be published, reproduced, or shared, and may not be uploaded to any online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these requirements is a violation of the student code of conduct.

If the instructor or a UTD school, department, or office plans to make use of recordings outside of the instructional setting, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is permitted by law. Failure to comply with these requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Standards for written work:

All work will be submitted electronically, generally through eLearning submission boxes. Submission of files in DOC format is recommended. Some students have encountered problems when submitting from Google Docs or Box; the most frequently-occurring issue is that the document appears both to you and the instructor as a blank page. If this occurs, you may of course send your non-blank document to the instructor via email, but avoiding these file formats may help to minimize anxiety. **Chrome is the preferred browser for eLearning**; attempted submissions from other browsers have historically been plagued by an array of glitches.

Written work should be APA, 12 point font, double-spaced, and free from pervasive spelling, mechanical, and grammatical errors. Make reasonable choices about margins, font, and the like. Essay submissions to be thoroughly edited and proofread.

Technology Policies

Classroom Citizenship – Computers and Phones:

Students should not use cell phones, tablets, computers, or other portable electronic devices in class unless they have received express permission from the instructor. Course notes, in the form of presentation slides, will always be posted to eLearning for review after each individual class meeting. Students are welcome to take written notes on class discussions, but will not need technology to follow along with the formal course notes on class content.

AI Guidelines:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs, such as ChatGPT and Bard, can be valuable resources for education when used in appropriate ways, but can also stifle creative process and circumvent instructor's intention that students convey their own knowledge (records of thought processes) rather than showcasing skills (utilizing virtual tools).

The UTD Office of Community Conduct and Standards (OCCS) **requires** that instructors report student work that is flagged as generated by AI at 20% of the content or more.

The use of generative AI is not permitted for this class, including the use of spelling & grammar checkers (like Grammarly) that draw on generative AI to make recommends and edit student language. It is recommended that students make use of other university resources, such as the [writing center](#), if they would like assistance in developing their writing.

Please remember that individual instructors do not have the time and resources to investigate every specific case of suspected AI, and documents in question will be forwarded to- and handled by- the OCCS as the official office designated to address these matters.

Additional Resources & Policies

Academic support resources: The Academic Support Resources webpage lists resources that provide assistance and support to the UTD campus community. (See <https://provost.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies/#academic-support-resources>).

UTD syllabus policies & procedures: The university policies and procedures provided at the UT Dallas Syllabus Policies page constitutes an addendum to this syllabus.

Comet Creed: This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Assignments & Academic Calendar – Class meets twice a week on Tues / Thurs

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
1	8/26 – 28	<p>Introduction to Course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims & Objectives • Overview of Assignments and Policies 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Syllabus/Schedule <p>Day 2 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boss, <i>Taking Pop Culture Seriously</i> • Yardley, <i>Pop Culture: The Academic Undiscipline</i> <p>[Check eLearning and/or end of syllabus for reading links]</p>
2	9/2 – 4	<p>Conceptualizing [Popular] Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locating Pop Culture in the Academic Landscape (Cultural Studies) <p>Culture and Consciousness</p>	<p>Day 1 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brandt & Clare, <i>An Introduction to Popular Culture in the US</i> (IPCUS), Ch. 1, p. 7 – 19 • “The Shot” (ESPN Throwback) <p>Day 2 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</i> (Seuss, 1957) <p>[Practice Annotation in Class]</p>
3	9/9 – 11	<p>History of Pop Culture ... Printing Press & Mass Media, Film, Radio, News, Musical Concerts</p> <p>Cultural Myths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning-Making • Connotation & Denotation 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hammonds’ audio/visual lecture on <i>History of Mass Media</i> • READ: IPCUS, Ch. 2 (Cultural Myths), p. 29 – 35 <p>Day 2 – [NO IN-CLASS MEETING] Campus Scavenger Hunt</p>

			Textual Annotation DUE
4	9/16 – 18	<p>Genre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss “Close Reading” Assignment 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>IPCUS Ch. 3 (Genre), p. 52 – 68</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SlasherCom</i> (Studio C) • <i>Video Killed the Radio Star</i> (The Buggles) <p>QUIZ 1</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thriller</i> (Michael Jackson) <p>[Practice Historical Reading in Class: What was happening in the 1980s in general? In music? How might original “readers” have explain the text...?]</p>
		Switch Groups!!!	
5	9/23 – 25	<p>Culture Industries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romantic <i>and</i> Critical theories of understanding texts 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>IPCUS Ch. 4 (The Culture Industries), p. 77 – 92</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <p>Case Studies in Art Criticism</p> <p>Close Reading Assignment DUE</p>

6	9/30 – 10/2	<p>Material Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products as creations, consumables • Television, Interior Design, Food, and Fashion 	<p>Day 1 – IPCUS Ch. 8, p. 167 – 171 (Intro + Material Culture), & p. 183 – 186 (Shelter: Tiny Houses, Fixer Uppers, and Design Stars)</p> <p>Day 2 – [NO IN-CLASS MEETING: Instead, meet in the Union outside of the campus Starbucks]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walters, <i>How Does Starbucks Coffee Rate?</i> • Coffee School, <i>How Can You Tell Good Coffee?</i> <p>Extra Credit: Write a half page to page (.5 – 1 page) summary of IPUS Ch. 4, p. 93 – 100</p>
7	10/7 – 9	<p>Visual Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comics • Visual Continuity (Editing) • Semiotics • Psychology of Shapes 	<p>Day 1 – <i>Amazing Spider-Man #3</i> (Lee & Ditko, 1964)</p> <p>Day 2 – “Who’s That Girl?!” [Movie Clip] (<i>The Artist</i>, 2011, Dir. Hazanavicius)</p>
8	10/14 – 16	<p>Practice and Review</p>	<p>Day 1 – Music Video Appreciation Assignment DUE IN CLASS</p> <p>Day 2 – [None]</p> <p>Review Game: Teams will be generated; Do not sit with people from your regular table/group; 10-minute prep time to get to know new team members</p>

9	10/21 – 23	<p>Written Communication & Adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral v. Visual Culture • [Re]Production • Representation • Narratization 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>Brothers Grimm, <i>The Children of Hamelin</i> (or, <i>The Pied Piper</i>)</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <p>“A Stranger Among Us,” <i>Lore</i> [Podcast] (Mahnke, 2015)</p> <p>QUIZ 2</p> <p>Historical Reading Paper DUE</p>
		SWITCH GROUPS!!	
10	10/28 – 30	<p>Constructions of Identity and Reality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity & Community • Identification • Pre-reflection • Psychoanalysis • Technology and Self • Trans-, Post-, Humanism • Modernity and Postmodernity 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>IPCUS Ch. 6 (Theories of Identity)</p> <p>“Everybody Who Bet on the Cowboys Yesterday” [TikTok] (brbetting_, 2023)</p> <p>“I’m Tired” [TikTok] (CBSsports)</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <p>The Matrix (Wachowskis, 1999)</p> <p>QUIZ 3</p> <p>[<i>Extra Credit</i>: Create a short outline of IPCUS Ch. 7 (Social Constructions of Identity), with a half page summary of what this chapter means to <i>you</i>]</p>
11	11/4 – 6	<p>Auditory Communication: Music & Celebrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence • Identification and Persuasion • Influence and Consumerism 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>IPCUS Ch. 5 (Heroes & Celebrities), p. 103 – 110</p> <p>Day 2 –</p>

			<p>IPCUS Ch. 5, p. 110 – 122</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hammonds’ audio/visual lecture on <i>Taylor Swift</i> • “Love Story,” <i>Fearless</i> (Taylor Swift, 2008) • “Look What You Made Me Do,” <i>reputation</i> (Swift, 2017) • “Anti-Hero,” <i>Midnights</i> (Swift, 2022)
12	11/11 – 13	<p>Integral Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual <i>and</i> Oral Culture • Mediation <i>and</i> Live Experience • Proceduralism <p>Community & Civilization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociality and Communication • Neoliberalism & Consumption 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p><i>Pokémon Go</i> (Niantic, 2016)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach Level 5 and complete a “Raid” with at least one other person • [Submit screenshot of your avatar in a gym/raid lobby and a screenshot in your raid battle; Be prepared to describe and/or write about your raiding experience in class] <p>Quiz 4</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPCUS Ch. 9 (Community), p. 195 – 204; 215 – 220
13	11/18 – 20	<p>Fandom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dimensions of Fandom • Fan-based Community • Dark and Toxic Fandom • Hierarchy and Strata 	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>Hammonds’ audio/visual lecture on Fan-based citizenship & toxic modes of fan consciousness</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <p><i>The Incredibles</i> (Bird, 2004)</p>

X	11/25 – 27	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK	
		Switch Groups!!	
14	12/2 – 4	<p>Philosophy of Fandom (Neoliberalism)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism case study • Consumerism as the driver of US pop culture <p>Concept Review Game</p>	<p>Day 1 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lewis, <i>Fandom Analytics</i> (ch. 1) • <i>Jaws</i> (Spielberg, 1975) <p>QUIZ 5</p> <p>Day 2 –</p> <p>Review Game: Teams will be generated; Do not sit with people from your regular table/group; 10-minute prep time to get to know new team members</p>
15	12/9	Reflections and Conclusions	<p>Day 1 –</p> <p>Media Journal (in-class activity):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm the new media you’ve consumed over the last 3 months – be as inclusive of all different kinds of pop culture as possible • What media, themes, styles, genres, etc. form patterns in your life? • What do you think your media consumption says about you? <p>Last day to turn in Make-Up Assignments</p> <p>Day 2 – NO CLASS</p>

16	12/12	Finals Week – NO CLASS	Critical Reading Assignment DUE at 11:59pm
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UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures	<p><i>The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.</i></p> <p><i>Please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies for these policies.</i></p>
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The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Virtual Assignment (Readings and Videos) Links:

Taking Pop Culture Seriously (Boss) –
<https://www.csmonitor.com/1999/1221/p15s1.html>

Pop Culture: The Academic Undiscipline (Yardley) -
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1988/06/13/pop-culture-the-academic-undiscipline/801a828e-8675-4578-a458-f55aa440be3b/>

The Shot: Michael Jordan's Iconic Dagger Over Craig Ehlo Eliminates Cavs (ESPN Throwback) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1ChoqrQCrE>

How the Grinch Stole Christmas (Seuss) – <https://archive.org/details/how-the-grinch-stole-christmas>

Video Killed the Radio Star (The Buggles) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8r-tXRLazs>

SlasherCom (Studio C) - <https://youtu.be/-IAhvyuoQko?si=4tEtUZ2m8rhyGIEo>

Thriller (Michael Jackson) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA>

How Can You Tell Good Coffee? (Coffee School) –
<https://www.coffeeschool.com.au/news/how-can-you-tell-good-coffee>

How Does Starbucks Rate? (Walters) –
<https://www.coffeereview.com/starbucks-coffees-rate/>

The Children of Hamelin / The Pied Piper (Brothers Grimm)
<https://www.hameln.de/en/the-pied-piper/the-pied-piper/brothers-grimm-pied-piper>

Lore (Mahnke, 2015)
[Listen to episode 24, “A Stranger Among Us” on the streaming option of your choosing]
<https://www.lorepodcast.com/episodes/24>

Everybody Who Bet on the Cowboys Yesterday [TikTok] (brbetting_, 2023)
https://www.tiktok.com/@brbetting_/video/7282877993045757226?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7379694301129491998

I'm Tired [TikTok] (CBSsports)
https://www.tiktok.com/@cbssports/video/7324434497699695914?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7379694301129491998

“Who’s That Girl?!” *The Artist* (Hazanavicius) –
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_WoelQbZyM&list=PLZbXA4lyCtqrDc_bjUHuvTMVkh6XqhrOX

Assignment Descriptions

Participation & Attendance [100 points]

Complete in-class discussions, activities, debates, worksheets, etc. [*This score is calculated independently of any absence deductions: see Course Policies > Class Attendance*]

Reading Quizzes [100 points]

Scheduled class quizzes designed to check student understanding of homework content (e.g., watching movies, reading articles, listening to music, and playing games). There will be five (5) quizzes at forty (20) points each, resulting in the overall 100-point value.

Textual Annotation [100 points]

Students must turn in a set of *handwritten* notes (2 – 4 pages) that have been taken while engaging with a popular culture text or event. The notes should demonstrate an inductive thought process while encountering texts. Each sheet of paper must include **three (3) columns**: 1) description / observations, 2) interpretation [decoded arguments or meaning], and 3) application [how the text might be useful in teaching or learning about some aspect of American culture].

Music Video Speech (Visual/Semiotic Reading) [100 points]

This is a *speech* assignment: Students will demonstrate their ability to conduct visual analysis by bringing *1 – 3 large screenshot photos* from a favorite music video to class on a *posterboard*, and explaining the meaning to their peers.

The presentation should minimally include: 1) background on the student’s interest in the music video, 2) overview of key visual elements in the selected image[s], and 3) reference of at least one [1] concept from semiotics, continuity, or shape psychology. This speech should last precisely between **2min and 4min**. Students should be prepared to answer peer questions for about 1 minute after their speech.

Essay 1: Close Reading (General) [200 points]

Practice the basic building block of cultural studies research, “close reading.” Write an essay of approximately four (4) pages addressing Brummett’s conception of *close reading*: re-reading, investigation of **context**, and critique/evaluation.

- Ultimately, you should make an argument about what you think your selected pop culture text **means** (i.e., What core idea, whether intended or unintended by the author, that it shares with the audience) and provide multiple examples of how the text points toward that message.
- Give a brief explanation of the history/background/context of your selected object and elaborate on how the context may support your understanding of its meaning.
- Two (2) outside sources should be included in the paper.

Essay 2: Historical (Contextual) Reading [200 points]

Students will choose three (3) mass media artifacts that they feel characterize a theme of American culture *in a particular decade*. This paper will: 1) describe American social values represented in the pop culture items, 2) explain the relationship[s] (themes) between the selected texts, and 3) connect the themes to American social life in the chosen decade. The paper should 3.5 – 4 pages in length. Two (2) references are required.

Essay 3: Critical Reading (Advocacy Paper) [200 points]

Part I.

Choose any popular culture text or event that is meaningful *to you*. Explain how the text meaningfully engages with an observed challenge or problem (broadly construed) that exists in American society. You may choose film, TV, podcasts, comics, music, food, gaming, fashion, or whatever pop culture text makes sense to you for the assignment.

Part II.

Answer these prompts:

- 1) Identify the major social challenge exemplified or identified in the text, providing patterns of evidence from close reading.
- 2) Pick a concept, theory, or framework from class (either readings or lectures) that may be used to dissect the problem from the text
- 3) Explain how major characters, personae, or figures navigate the identified challenge (*Remember that personae can be implied, such as a “customer” or “consumer” in a food, fashion, or tourism experience; or a “listener” in music. These figures exist even if there are not formal characters in a story.*)
- 4) Articulate the main argument of the text (what ideas or actions are advocated?) and what that argument suggests for how consumers/audiences should engage with similar issues beyond the text

Papers should be four to five (4 – 5) pages in length (excluding any potential visual references) and requires at least three (3) *peer-reviewed* sources.