

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 2017 (650)
Reading Popular Culture
Fall/Winter 2025-26

Instructor: Dr. Nigel Joseph
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Office hours: Wednesday 1.30 – 3.30 on
Zoom (or another day, by arrangement)

Course Description

In this course, we pay attention to the way pop culture can address our deepest desires as well as trigger our deepest fears: often both at once. We explore conservative condemnations of the “trashiness” of pop culture as well as analyses that emphasize its democratic potential and capacity to defuse conflict, and we examine the way pop culture alienates us as well as draws us into new communities. The course encourages us to look at representations (films, books, advertisements) as well as practices (shopping, modifying our appearance). We look at the contemporary obsession with an ideal bodily type characterized by slimness, at arguments that lay the blame for this obsession with advertising, and others that claim that the causes lie much deeper. We look at some influential theorists’ arguments about how we watch films and why we get the kinds of pleasure we do from watching them. We explore the new kinds of connectivity as well as the new forms of alienation and separation made available through the new social media.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify and paraphrase arguments made by notable defenders and critics of popular culture
- Offer a range of explanations for the growth and development of popular culture
- Analyze and identify the different ideologies that permeate the productions of popular culture

Course Materials

Course Readings are accessible on Brightspace, and Voicethread lectures will be uploaded once every two weeks. Check Brightspace announcements page for updates.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

In-person final exam	40%
Assignment	10%
Test 1	10%
Test 2	10%
Test 3	10%
Discussion forums	20%

Office hours will be conducted via Zoom. I will be available on Wednesdays, between 1.30 and 3.30. If you want to meet at some other time, you will have to arrange a time to meet me beforehand (email njoseph3@uwo.ca).

Voicethread lectures will be posted on Brightspace approximately every two weeks, usually on a Monday. There are 13 lectures listed, but we might have one more (14 altogether), depending on time and interest.

Final exam, tests, assignment and forums:

The final exam will be a three-hour in-person exam. The venue and the specific date and time will be announced later.

The three tests will each be for one hour (test periods will be spread through the course, and the dates indicated in the outline). Tests will be available within a 48-hour window.

The assignment must be submitted by the specified date. Topics will be announced later.

The forum comments can be made in the forum section, under topic headings that will be announced. **You have to participate in at least four forums to get your maximum grade of 20%.** If you contribute to more than four forums, I will choose your four best grades. **50% of each forum grade will come from responding to another student** (so only 50% if you make a comment but do not interact with another student). You may make multiple responses to another student/students (a "conversation" of up to four or five responses on a single topic is fine). The forums will close by a specified date, so **you must make your comments before the due dates.**

Test grades, assignment grades and forum grades should be visible on Gradebook within a week of submission.

Late Penalties: The assignment should be submitted via OWLBrightspace by the due dates listed above (and on the course Timetable). The assignment may be submitted up to one week (7 days) after the due date, at a penalty of 1% per business day.

Statements

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the assignment must be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Intellectual Property/Copyright:

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:
<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

This is strictly prohibited.

Academic Integrity Tutorial

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Sep 4	First lecture (Introduction) posted and forum open (two weeks)
Sep 19-20	Test 1 (1 hour)
Sep 22	2 nd lecture (Adorno and Horkheimer) and forum
Oct 6	3 rd lecture (Benjamin) and forum
Oct 20	4 th lecture (Ideology and the action film; the Western)
	Reading week Nov 3-9
Nov 10	5 th lecture (Laura Mulvey and the male gaze)
Nov 24	6 th lecture (Barbara Creed and horror films)
Nov 28-29	Test 2 (1 hour)
Dec 1	7 th lecture (Advertising and women's bodies; Jean Kilbourne (at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxYcaFzVX08))
	Winter break
Jan 5	8 th lecture (Susan Bordo and the philosophical roots of anorexia)
Jan 19	9 th lecture (Shopping-malls and planned seduction: Douglas Rushkoff)
Feb 2	10 th lecture (Sherry Turkle and connectivity)
Feb 6-7	Test 3 (1 hour)
	Reading week Feb 14-22
Feb 23	11 th lecture (Hubert Dreyfus and distance education)
March 9	12 th lecture (Reading in the Internet era: Carr and Healy)
March 23	13 th lecture (Evolving brains and multitasking: Small and Vorgan) Assignment due March 28
	Classes end April 9
	In-person final examination (3 hours): date TBA