

# Theory and Practice of Cultural Studies

Theory and Practice of Cultural Studies

HON 100 – 3 credit hours

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Endicott College

Endicott Scholars Honors Program

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**Course Description:** A foundational seminar for twenty first-year honors students, this course examines the concept of “culture” from a range of perspectives drawn from the field of cultural studies. Students read and interpret a variety of academic and popular texts - written, visual, and oral - to recognize the role culture plays in how a text is produced and understood; explore the role ideology plays in cultural texts; apply various theoretical positions to cultural texts; explore how different ways of reading a single text produce different meanings; conduct library and field research; and engage successfully in the writing process.

## Texts:

- Althen, G., Doran, A. & Szmania, S.J. (2002). *American ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. Chapters 1, 2 and 3, pp 3-66.
- Barthes, Roland. “The Great Family of Man.” *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001. pp. 100-102.
- Berger, A. (2005). *Making sense of media: Key texts in media and cultural studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 8-22.
- Brummett, B. (2006). *Rhetoric in popular culture*, second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 34-38.
- Gmelch, G. (2003). Baseball magic. In Harper D.& Lawson, H.M. (Eds.), *The Cultural study of work*. (pp.181-191). Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Lindlof, T. (ND). *Qualitative communication research methods*. “Cultural studies.”
- Lindlof, T. & Taylor, B. (2002). Chapter 5 – Observing, learning and reporting. *Qualitative communication research methods*. Second edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage. pp. 132-169.
- Miller, S. & Downes, B. (1998). Chapter 3 - Ideology. *Media studies*. London: NTC: Contemporary Publishing. pp 22-36.
- Owen, B. (1998). *In the mix: Struggle and survival in a women’s prison*. New York: State University of New York Press. Introduction and Chapter 5.
- Rollins, J. (1985). Introduction and chapter 6. *Between women: Domesticity and their employers*. Philadelphia: Temple UP. pp 5-17 and 207-232.
- Sanders, C.R. (2003). Annoying Owners: Routine Interactions with Problematic Clients in a General Veterinary Practice. In Harper D.& Lawson, H.M. (Eds.), *The Cultural study of work*. pp.335-346.
- Sardar, Z. & Van Loon, B. (1999). *Introducing cultural studies*. Cambridge, UK: Icon Books. pp. 9-13 and 15-23.
- Sherman, R. (2007). *Class acts: Service and inequality in luxury hotels*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sumser, J. (2001). Chapter 6 – Fieldwork: Looking at people in actual environments. *A guide to empirical research in communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 101-123.
- Tompkins, J. (1985). Sensational Designs. Introduction. *The Cultural Work of American Fiction*. NY: Oxford UP. pp. xi-xix.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). Chapter 1 – Fieldwork, culture and ethnography. *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pps 1-12.
- Vida, V. (1999). *Girls on the verge*. New York: St. Martins. Chapter 6, Love Recipe: Young Brides.
- Willis, P. (1981). Preface to the Morningside edition, Introduction. *Learning to labor*. New York: Columbia U. Press. pp. ix-xiii.

## Syllabus

Date	Topic
Week 1	<p>What is a text? How do you read a text?</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Brummett, B. (2006). <i>Rhetoric in popular culture</i>, second ed. pp. 34-38 (on reserve) and Vida, <i>Love Recipe: Young Brides</i></p>
Week 2	<p>Defining "culture" and cultural studies</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Lindlof, Cultural studies</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Paper #1 due: Greeting Card Paper 10%</p> <p>Using the terms "respond," "link," and "interpret," write a 2-page analysis paper on a greeting card of your choice. Drawing from specific components of the card, assess how your interpretation emerges from the ways you respond to and link the card's contents to your own experience. First-person voice is permitted, but this should be written as a formal rather than a reflective paper. Include a copy of the card with your paper.</p>
Week 3	<p>Semiotics and textual analysis: Sign, signifier, signified; Denotation &amp; Connotation</p> <p>In-class discussion of Givhan, R. (2005). Condoleezza Rice's commanding clothes. <i>The Washington Post</i>, February 25. (essay to be handed out in class)</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Berger, Chapter 1 and 2; Barthes, <i>The great family of man</i></p>
Week 4	<p>Writing Workshop &amp; Introduction to Ideology</p> <p>Organizing your ideas: The example of James Bond</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Paper #2 due: Textual Analysis Paper 15%</p> <p>In this assignment you will be a detective in search of meanings in a cultural text of your choosing. Your first task is to select a cultural text from the list provided. Next, you will begin to interpret the text, describing specific ways in which the text influences people's beliefs. In doing so, you will need to discuss ways in which the text is a site of struggle for competing meanings. What are those meanings? What elements in the text record their presence? Which meaning is dominant? How does that dominance reflect cultural beliefs, including tensions, in society more generally? Throughout this paper, you must use the language of semiotics and ideology as discussed and applied in class.</p>
Week 5	<p>Ideology and hegemony</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Downes and Miller, <i>Media Studies</i>, chapter 3; Althen, <i>American Assumptions and Values</i></p> <p><b>Assignment</b> (for discussion in class): Write a 3-4 paragraph summary of an instance where an aspect of American ideology as discussed by Althen is seen in a television program or recent film. In this three-paragraph summary, outline the basic summary of the television program or film and identify how one aspect of American ideology is seen in the television program or film, using tangible examples to support your point of view.</p>
Week 6	<p>Capitalist and Feminist Ideologies</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Hanslinger and Tuana, <i>Introduction to feminism, topics: What is feminism?</i></p>
Week 7	<p>Application of Theory: The Game of Life</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Paper #3 due: Shopping paper</p> <p>This assignment invites you to explore the "culture" of three different stores: Old Navy, The Gap, and The Banana Republic. In a 5-7 page paper compare and contrast the cultures of each store, drawing upon your experiences and observations of each store to support your main points. Use outside research to contextualize your findings and summary descriptions. Consider how each store's culture can be interpreted using the concepts discussed in class and in the readings. Please also complete some research on these places of business -- look at their websites and conduct a library search to see what has been written about them in professional and academic publications. Throughout this paper, you must use the language of semiotics and ideology as discussed and applied in class.</p>
Week 8	<p>Ethnography: field research, observations, interviewing</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Van Maanen, Chapter 1; Sumser, Chapter 6; Lindlof &amp; Taylor, Chapter 5; Sherman: Introduction, Appendix A Methods; Rollins, Introduction &amp; Chapter 6; Sherman, Chapter 1, 3 and 6, either chapter 4 or 5, and Conclusion; Owen, Introductory Note and Chapter 5</p>

Week 9	Integrating Library and field research
Week 10	Discussion of ethnographies, process of research, troubleshooting and outlining your paper. Spotlight on how capitalist and feminist ideologies can be located in ethnographic texts <b>Readings:</b> Gmelch, G. (2003). Baseball magic; Sanders, C.R. (2003). Annoying Owners: Routine Interactions with Problematic Clients in a General Veterinary Practice
Week 11	Discussion of the ethnography experience Last minute details: writing workshop <b>Assignment:</b> Ethnography Paper: 25% Please complete an ethnographic, cultural observation and write up an 8-10 page analysis of the observation using critical discourse and tying in course content and a brief (3 pages) personal reflection about how this course has influenced the way you now view the cultural event. A cultural observation should be made of some common occurrence in our society (examples: a visit to McDonalds, observation of the prom dress department at a department store, observation of how listening stations are used at a music store, a visit to an arcade, club, movie theater, book group, etc.) You may use direct observation (observing and taking notes without any interaction) or participant observation (observing and taking notes while you participate in the event or activity). Both observation methods will be reviewed in class. You should also complete at least one in-depth interview with a participant who frequents your location. Interviewing methodology will be reviewed in class. <b>**You must have your site approved by us.</b>
Week 12	Cultural Imperialism: Application and Analysis <b>Reading:</b> Bohannon, L. (1971). Shakespeare in the Bush.
Week 13	Bringing it all together: The case of LL Bean.
Week 14	<b>Assignment:</b> Final group presentations.15% Each group of students will pull a "text" out of a hat. Please prepare a 10-15 minute presentation that examines this text from at least 4 vantage points. Your presentation should critically examine your text using the cultural studies approach(es) we've been discussing in class. You should also explore how your chosen text functions and is situated in the broader culture. All presentations must include a summary of research on the text from at least 4 vantage points. These presentations should explore the complexities inherent in the chosen text and include outside research on the text at hand.  The goal of this presentation is to engage you in using a variety of the tools and theories we've been studying all semester to examine a text in our culture. Noting the contradictions and complexities of any given text sets the foundation for a strong analysis
Week 15	Final Exam

**Grading:**

Grades will be based on the assignments listed in the syllabus and on student participation in on-line discussions using the College's web platform, GullNet (15%).

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