Course Description and Objectives

Okay, so here’s a list of stuff from recent years in American popular culture that’s made it into our everyday lives. Whether we’re aware of it or not, this “stuff” makes meaning for/about us and teaches us what it means (or not) to be white, black, Asian, Latina/Latino, Native American, gay, straight, bi, trans, (un)cool, politically (un)saavy, and many other subject positions. This class is about writing, reading, and researching about popular culture and the way the “popular” creates rhetorical situations and spaces (you know ... rhetoric? We’ll spend an entire semester talking about how all of the stuff is rhetoric).

In this course, we will develop our critical writing, reading, and researching skills, while focusing on American popular culture from the late 1980s (around the time you were born) to today, paying careful attention to gender, sexuality, race, class, ideology (fancy word for a system of beliefs), and epistemology (fancy word for the study of the way meaning is made). Through our writing, reading, and research in this course, we’ll locate, (possibly) re-locate, and understand ourselves in the context of alphabetic and digital popular cultural texts that surround us. Together, we’ll weave narratives, both personal and collective, about the rhetorical influence(s) of popular culture. We’ll use these narratives to write, to read, to analyze, to think critically, and to research.
What I want us to keep in mind is that our own perspectives based on gender, sex, race, class, and sexuality are all important lenses through which we will interpret, analyze, and negotiate the popular cultural world. As an instructor, I will contribute my own perspectives and approaches (influenced by gender, sexuality, race, and class), and I will expect you to do the same, in the most respectful and constructive ways.

**Major Questions We’ll Tackle This Semester**
- What is popular culture, and who decides what popular culture is?
- How do we compose popular culture?
- How is popular culture composed through rhetoric and writing?
- What are intersections between rhetoric, writing, research, and popular culture?
- How have writing and rhetoric shaped, deconstructed and/or challenged your ideas about popular culture?
- How does popular culture make meaning for us in American culture?
- How is popular culture related to institutional power and access?
- How/what does popular culture teach us about gender, sexuality, history, race, class, institutions, and ideologies?

**Tier I Writing Goals**
As part of the general education requirement, Tier I Writing contributes to the mission of Michigan State University by focusing on inquiry-based teaching and learning that encourages students to begin to understand themselves as:

- contributing members of MSU’s community of scholars
- committed to asking important questions and to seeking rich responses to those questions
- developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to improve the quality of life for themselves and others through their scholarly, social, and professional activities.

* We’ll talk about the chart of specific Tier I writing goals early in the semester.

**Course Materials**
**Texts**

You can find these books online or at the bookstores. If you have difficulty finding these books, let me know. Also, if you have trouble finding the store locations, let me know; I’ll get you pointed in the right direction. I’d actually suggest that you find these books online, though, to save you from paying too much.
Other Suggested Materials
   - Digital Back-Up Device (Flash-drive, etc.)

Technology
In this section of WRA 150, we will be mostly paperless, since you will turn in your work via email and will compose the majority of your writing in blogs and in digital spaces. I advise to back up your work on the storage device you choose to use. I can’t stress enough the importance of having a memory device; these devices will be valuable to you in this class, in your other classes, and throughout your college career.

For this class, you should check your MSU email account often, as I will notify you of any important class changes through your MSU account.

Because of the weather constraints of the spring semester, we will occasionally hold class online through ANGEL chat. I will do my best to notify you as soon as possible if class is scheduled online, so it’s important that you keep up with your email.

You are welcome to bring your own laptop to class, as the room is MSU wireless equipped. You are required by the university to own your own computer, and you will be expected to have access to a computer in order to complete class assignments.

Teacher/Student Communication
I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours anytime you need me. Please try to first set up a time within the office hours in person before or after class or via email, so you’re not left waiting to see me. You can also email me anytime, but be aware that if you email me between Friday at 5:00 p.m. and Monday at 9:10 a.m., you may not hear from me until after Monday’s class. Also, late night emails the night before you need a question answered are not guaranteed an answer; you are responsible for getting questions to me early enough to get the answers you need.

Course Requirements
(*you must complete all projects to pass the course)
(** I’ll post specific project requirements to our course weblog throughout the semester)

WRA 150 Projects
- Project I: Personal Literacy & Popular Culture (3-5 pages)
- Project II: Cultural Artifacts, Gender Performance, & Popular Culture (3-5 pages)
- Project III: Writing, Rhetoric, & Research in Popular Culture (4-6 pages)
- Project IV: Mapping Popular Culture Literacies
- Project V: Revising Popular Culture Literacies (4-6 pages)

** For each project, I will upload a project description to our course blog that we will go over in class.
**Blogging**

Once per week (on weeks with no major project due), we will use a free, online blogging program to respond to course texts. These blogging responses will require you to engage in various writing, reading, and researching skills, such as summarizing, responding, critiquing, and synthesizing. Reading responses may take the form of a mini-essay that connects the reading to a theme or issue and will be about 300—500 words (about 1 to 2 pages). I will participate in these blogging responses as well.

Throughout the semester, I’ll monitor your blogging without advanced notice. *All* of the writing we do throughout the semester will help us with our writing process and our projects, so it’s important that you take the blogging/informal writing assignments seriously.

**Grading Scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>GPA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000-900 points (4.0)</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>899-850 points (3.5)</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>849-800 points (3.0)</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>799-750 points (2.5)</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>749-700 points (2.0)</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>699-650 points (1.5)</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>649-600 points (1.0)</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>599-550 points (.5)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>.5</td>
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<td>549-below</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>0</td>
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For each project, we’ll compose a grading rubric together as a class to help me assess your projects. If at any time you have a question about your grade, please talk me about it.

**The Drafting Process in Our Class**

In our class, we’ll emphasize the process of writing, not the product or the “final draft.”

*The Peer Draft*

The first element of our process is the **Peer Draft**. The peer response process involves exchanging writing projects and responding critically to each other’s writing (with an “end-letter” response). On the day of peer response, you’ll also bring 2 guiding questions for your peers along with your draft. If you miss class the day peer response is scheduled, you’ll still have to take part in the process; **I will not accept any project that has not been through two peer readings.** **We’ll discuss this process in more detail later in the semester.**
The Instructor’s Draft
The second element is the Instructor’s Draft which is a revised draft based on the comments offered by peers. This draft will be handed in electronically with a writer’s memo and will be returned to you with a grade and with suggestions for revision.

The Revised Draft
The Revised Draft is an optional draft based on my feedback. You have the option of revising your Instructor’s Draft if you feel you would like to revise for more feedback or for a grade change. You have one full week after receiving your Instructor’s Draft to hand in a Revised Draft.

** Remember: The revision process entails meeting with me during office hours to discuss the revision process and then “re-seeing” the essay. Keep in mind that “re-seeing” the essay does not simply mean “correcting” surface-level errors and “changing” a few words; the actual revision process leads you to see the draft in a different way with a new approach. As I read your revisions, I’ll re-assess the revised essay. In this process, I urge you to step out of your comfort zones and try something new with your draft. Don’t worry: your grade will not be lowered; the highest grade you receive (whether on the original or revised version) will stand.

Participation, Preparation, & Civility
Participation includes, but is not limited to, attendance, being prepared for class, discussing materials in small and large groups, in-class writing/blogging, and good citizenship. In terms of participation and preparation, I expect you to have completed all previous homework assignments by class time.

At all times, I expect us to treat each other with respect and civility. In class, we’ll talk about controversial topics that we might disagree upon. This is not a bad thing. In fact, disagreement is welcomed as long as listening is involved; however, it’s important to remember that we’re all part of a community, where will treat each other with respect, in light of our differing positionalities.

Since this classroom will be conducted as a community of writers, I expect you to treat each member of our community with the dignity and respect she/he/hir deserves. No discriminatory behavior directed toward a person’s race, creed, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability will be allowed in our class space. Also, of course, no disparaging emails, postings to threaded discussions, or the like.

The classroom is a place for exploring issues, obtaining and sharing knowledge, and engaging in critical thinking. Teachers and students meet to foster a learning environment. In a class such as ours, this goal must be met by many personalities working together, and everyone is responsible for creating a good climate. However, individual students may feel anonymous and angry about their responsibilities, and this confusion sometimes results in destructive conduct. In face-to-face classroom meeting times, such unacceptable behaviors include:
• Coming late
• Leaving early
• Reading outside material
• Surfing the web (when not part of in-class activities)
• Text messaging
• Chatting with friends
• Making rude comments
• Interrupting lecture and/or others
• Refusing to engage in learning activities

At times, I may publicly ask you to cease unacceptable behaviors, at other times I may tell you after class or via email in order to avoid interrupting class or embarrassing you. Don’t assume, though, that because I haven’t “caught you during class,” I haven’t noticed unacceptable behavior. If engaged consistently in unacceptable behavior, you may be counted absent for the day’s class.

In our online spaces, unacceptable behaviors include:

• Nonparticipation
• Flaming (engaging in posting destructive, personal, and intentionally demeaning statements or responses on discussion threads)
• Spamming (being inconsiderate about the content and amount of emails or posts sent to fellow students and the instructor)

If you choose to act in any of these ways, you will be asked to leave the classroom or to cease participation, and it will reflect negatively on your grade.

Sometimes, teachers and students fail to meet each other’s expectations. If you are having a problem with the class, whether it be class time or assignments, it is your responsibility to make this known, in a mature way, to me. You may, for example, ask a question after class if you feel you’ve missed the point. Or you may write an email to me expressing your concerns, but this should be done in a mature and respectful manner. It takes courage to do this, but I will respect you for your honesty more than if you are sullen and covertly disrespectful. If sincere and respectful, your comments can lead to an even better class.

Attendance & Tardies
I expect you to be in class. The class discussions and your work toward each project are contingent on your attendance. You need to be present for group discussions, pre-writing, informal writing, revising, and peer-workshopping; all of these course elements will assist you in your growth as a writer. But life happens. However, if you miss more than one week of class (4 days), your final grade for the course will be lowered .15 for each additional absence. Please see your student handbook or the university Ombudsman’s web page http://www.msu.edu/~ombud/ for procedures for obtaining an excused absence at MSU.
If you miss more than a week of class, please see me and we’ll discuss the situation and possible solutions. **Remember:** If you miss class, you are responsible for getting caught up.

It is your responsibility to be on time to class every day. Being more than ten minutes late to class is equal to a tardy. Three tardies are equal to a course absence, so make sure to set your alarm and to manage your time in the mornings wisely.

**Missed Peer Workshops/Late Projects**
Because peer response is an important part of the course and contributes to your development as a writer, your grade will be impacted if you are absent for the in-class peer evaluation or if you do not complete other peer evaluation activities (e.g., online sessions). Late papers will be dropped one full letter grade for each day that they are late. In other words, participating in peer response activities and handing your papers in on time are vital to your success in this class.

I understand that certain exceptional circumstances may require individual re-negotiations of these policies; please do feel free to talk with me if such circumstances arise for you during the semester. I look forward to our time together, and set these ground rules to create as much space and time as possible to concentrate on your needs as readers, writers, and researchers.

**Submitting Work Online**
All work must be turned in to my gmail account: websteta@gmail.com. I will not accept paper copies of any project. All work must adhere to MLA standards (we’ll discuss these early in the semester). MLA standards include 1” margins, Times New Roman font, a full single-spaced heading, a title, and proper pagination.

**Academic Honesty**
Plagiarism is using the ideas and/or words of someone else as your own without providing credit to the author. Plagiarism is not tolerated in this class. When it comes down to it, I’m very interested in what you have to say as a writer and a thinker, not what others have said. Here is a further statement from MSU about this situation.

“Michigan State University has adopted the following statement about academic policy:

**GENERAL STUDENT REGULATIONS**

- **1.00 PROTECTION OF SCHOLARSHIP AND GRADES**
  - The principles of truth and honesty are fundamental to the educational process and the academic integrity of the University; therefore, no student shall:
  - **1.01** claim or submit the academic work of another as one’s own.
  - **1.02** procure, provide, accept or use any materials containing questions or answers to any examination or assignment without proper authorization.
  - **1.03** complete or attempt to complete any assignment or examination for another individual without proper authorization.
1.04 allow any examination or assignment to be completed for oneself, in part or in total, by another without proper authorization.

1.05 alter, tamper with, appropriate, destroy or otherwise interfere with the research, resources, or other academic work of another person.

1.06 fabricate or falsify data or results.”

Procedures for responding to cases of academic honesty and possible repercussions are outlined in Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide. They can also be found on the web at: http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/honestylinks.html.

Plagiarism can be a wide range of things, some that you may know about and others that may surprise you. Buying papers online or other places, cutting and pasting from the internet, and using another writer’s ideas without giving proper credit (citing) all constitute plagiarism. Any time you quote someone, you need to cite them. Even paraphrasing should include a citation. Plagiarism also includes having someone else write a paper for you. Any form of plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will result in a failing grade on the assignment. A second offense will result in failure of the course.

**Resources For You**

- **Me:** You can always find me during my office hours. I’m also around my office quite a bit, so if my door is open, feel free to come by. If the door is not open, knock; I might be around. Email is a sure way to get in contact with me, since I check my email at least three times a day.

- **Your classmates:** While you can always come to me for questions, also remember to rely on each other. Together, you represent a vast body of knowledge and experience.

- **Disability Services:** If you have a documented or undocumented learning disability, or any other disability, please speak to me about it as soon as possible. If you feel you need additional support or adaptations during the semester, do not hesitate to discuss this with me. For more information, visit the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/, or call 517-884-7273.

- **MSU Writing Center** provides an amazing resource for you as a writer. Writing tutors and graduate students are available to discuss your writing with you, one-on-one. For more information, call 517-432-3610, or visit the website: http://writing.msu.edu/.

- **Counseling services** provide a wide range of services to students including counseling, workshops, drug and alcohol screening, career prospect exploration, and national testing. For more information, call 517-355-8270, or visit the website at http://www.couns.msu.edu/

- **Olin Health Center** provides comprehensive out-patient care to all eligible students. For more information, visit http://olin.msu.edu/, or call 517-885-6546.

*This syllabus is subject to change throughout the semester based on the needs of the class. Please feel free to talk to me about any questions or concerns you may have over the course of the semester.*