

ANTHROPOLOGY 319.01
 Special Topics in Anthropology
 Popular Culture and Identity
 SPRING 2025
 TR 9:25-10:40 ECTR 111

Dr. Hector Qirko
 Office hours: M 10:00-12:00,
 W 11:00-1:00, TR 1:45-2:45.

88 Wentworth, room 105
 (843) 953-5738 (dept.)
qirkoh@cofc.edu

Course description: “What kind of music do you like?” is a common question, and we ask it because answers tell us a great deal more about people than just what pleases their ear. Similarly, other aspects of popular culture (movies, television, fashion, food, etc.) provide information about who people are and with whom they identify, and our own preferences in these areas reflect in part what we want to communicate about ourselves to others as individuals and members of groups. This course explores anthropological approaches to understanding the role of popular culture in shaping identity and the means through which individuals and groups accept, reject, transform, and manipulate aspects of popular culture to achieve social, economic, and political goals.

Course objectives and student learning outcomes: Students will be able to:

- describe several different scholarly approaches to the study of popular culture;
- describe several different scholarly approaches to the study of individual and group identity;
- use anthropological theory and methods to study many domains of popular culture (music, film, humor, body art, etc.) as related to individual and group identity;
- explain cycles of production and consumption of popular culture products in different social group contexts;
- conduct internet- and ethnography-based research on selected domains of popular culture as related to individual and group identity; and
- improve their active and critical reading, research, analytical, writing, and oral discussion skills.

Course structure: Class periods will consist of lectures, videos, music, discussion of topics and readings, and student presentations.

Graded work:

Exam I	20% of course grade
Exam II	25%
Media-based analysis	25%
Ethnographic analysis	25%
Class participation	5%

Grade scale:

A 92-100%; A- 90-91; B+ 88-89; B 82-87; B- 80-81; C+ 78-79; C 72-77; C- 70-71; D+ 68-69; D 62-67; D- 60-61; F 59 or below.

Course materials:

All required readings and materials will be available either electronically at the course OAKS site or via internet links listed in the course schedule below. Please contact me with any access issues as soon as possible. Announcements regarding reading updates, revisions, and other relevant topics will be made in class and via email.

Exams (on 2/20, 4/29):

There will be two in-class, long identification/short essay exams designed to ensure course engagement and understanding of materials covered in the lectures, readings, videos, links, and class discussion. In addition to fundamental terms, concepts and illustrations, you will be expected to identify specific research and researchers as highlighted in lectures. Exams are not cumulative, and study guides will be provided prior to each. Exams missed due to excused and documented absences can be made up at the end of the semester, dates and location TBA. You must contact me as soon as you missed an exam if you plan on making it up.

Projects:

I. *Media-based analysis*. For this project, you will explore a current trend in popular culture through the collection of mass media-based data in order to assess how it relates to identity issues. A project proposal will be due on 2/11; a data-set rough draft on 3/11; and you will briefly present the project in class on 3/20 or 3/25. The final project paper itself will be due on 3/25.

II. *Ethnographic analysis*. For this project, you will conduct ethnographic research on an aspect of popular culture and identity by means of participant-observation and interviews. This project proposal will be due on 3/18; the data-set rough draft on 4/8; and you will present on 4/17 or 4/22. The final project paper will be due on 4/22.

Your grades for both projects will be based on all of the work products associated with them as listed above. More details and guidelines will be provided in class and on our OAKS site.

Class participation:

Class attendance, engagement, and participation are essential for success in this course, as much of the material on exams will stem directly from lectures and class discussion. Participation involves more than just speaking out in class – full participation requires coming to class on time having read the material assigned for the day and being prepared to both ask questions and contribute your views. If you must miss a class, obtain notes from classmates and feel free to meet with me during office hours to discuss them prior to the relevant exam. I will not provide lecture notes, although I will make study guides, assignment guidelines, power points, and other materials available as applicable.

You are responsible for reporting absences that require documentation (exam and assignment due dates, as well as extended absences related to health, personal or emergency situations) directly to me. Also remember that [Student Health Services](#) are always available as needed.

Special needs

If you have (or think you might have) a documented disability that may impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, contact an administrator at the [Center of Disability Services](#) (email: snap@cofc.edu; phone: 843-953-1431; location: Lightsey Center 104). Accommodations will require a Professor Notification letter (PNL) from you and will be approved early in the semester and not during or after exam periods or assignment due dates. Please feel free to discuss related issues with me at any time during office hours or by appointment. Additionally, whether or not you have a documented disability, let me know about anything that can make navigating and learning course materials easier for you.

Self-care and finding a healthy life-college balance

Keeping life, school, and often work in balance can be difficult. This [site](#) provides resources to help with some of the many issues that can come up. Also always feel free to discuss with me if you want additional input.

Honor code

Violations of the honor code will be taken seriously. If you need reminding, you can find the complete code and all related processes in the [Student Handbook](#). Obviously, lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Any acts of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students and addressed through the conduct process.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools may be used for brainstorming, outlining, and generating ideas about a topic. However, they may not be used as a cited source or as a substitute for your own writing in your submitted work. Because plagiarism is sometimes an unintentional infraction, I recommend that you refer to this Elsevier [fact sheet](#) to make sure you know what errors to avoid. And because the use of AI tools is further complicating this issue, use the content of this [video](#) by Brian Doak as a guide for what I expect from you regarding these tools in this course. Don't hesitate to contact me with any doubts or questions you may have.

Inclement Weather or other substantial interruptions

If in-person classes are suspended, I will let you know as soon as possible my plan to keep the class going. Whatever that entails, you will need a computer equipped with internet access.

Additional resources

Any problems with any aspect of the course, don't hesitate to meet with me. Also, there are many good online articles on critical skills that can help you navigate this course and others. For example:

[Critical/objective thinking](#)

[Active reading](#)

[Critical reading](#)

[Effective writing](#)

And don't forget the Writing Lab in the [Center for Student Learning](#) (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more information, call 843.953.5635.

As members of the College of Charleston community, we affirm, embrace and hold ourselves accountable to the core values of integrity, academic excellence, liberal arts education, respect for the individual student, diversity, equity and inclusion, student centeredness, innovation and public mission.

Course Schedule:

NOTE: Subject to revision. Readings are listed by pdf file names on OAKS. Link numbers correspond to full links available below the schedule.

PART 1

1/9

Introduction to course

Sullivan 96

1/14	Culture and popular culture	LINK 1, Kidd 14:1
1/16	anthropological methods 1	Geertz/Goodman 07, LINK 2
1/21	anthropological methods 2	LINK 3, Roscoe 08
1/23	Popular culture	Fedorak 09:1
1/28	PC methods 1	Fedorak 09:2, Mintz 83
1/30	PC methods 2	Fiske 89:2, Levine 92, LINK 4
2/4	Identity basics	LINK 5, Sokefeld 99
2/6	Identity and groups	Nagel 94, Eckert 07, Treuer 11
2/11	Identity & popular culture	Condry 01, Kidd 14:4, LINK 6 [project I proposal due]
2/13	Identity and the internet 1	Turkle 95: 7, 10
2/18	Identity and the internet 2	Fedorak 09:5, LINK 7, Zidani 21
2/20	Exam I	
PART 2		
2/25	Film/Video/TV 1	Belton 96, Schiappa 08, LINK 8
2/27	Film/Video/TV 2	Fedorak 09:3, LINK 9, Mishan 22
3/4-6	Spring break	
3/11	Music 1	Fedorak 09:4, “Accordion Kings” (in class) [project I draft due]
3/13	Music 2	Horton 57, Qirko 14
3/18	Books and language	Alvermann & Hagood 00, Pennycook 10, LINK 10 [project II proposal due]
3/20	Project I presentations	
3/25	Project I presentations	[project I paper due]
3/27	Humor	Urish 16, Mintz 85
4/1	Food	Fox 03, Fedorak 09:8
4/3	Sports	Hornby 92, Fedorak 09:9, Carter 02

4/8	Clothing and fashion	Locke 11, Fiske 89:1, Nannini 20 [project II draft due]
4/10	Body art	Fedorak 09:7, LINK 11, “Tattoo Odyssey” (in class)
4/15	Celebrations and “reversals”	Cowley 85, Daun e Lorena19
4/17	Project II presentations	
4/22	Project II presentations	[project II paper due]
4/29	Exam II* (8:00-10:00 am)	

* Final exam day/time may not be changed unless you have too many exams scheduled on the same day (as defined by the College).

LINKS (corresponding to numbers in outline above)

PART 1

1. **Delaney 07- Pop culture: An overview**
https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview
2. **HRAF n.d.- The Return of the Comparative Method in Anthropology**
<https://hraf.yale.edu/the-return-of-the-comparative-method-in-anthropology/>
3. **Research design review 15- 10 Distinctive qualities of qualitative research**
<https://researchdesignreview.com/2013/07/31/10-distinctive-qualities-of-qualitative-research/>
4. **Taylor 09- We are what we consume: Is popular culture really popular?**
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/200912/popular-culture-we-are-what-we-consume>
5. **Stokes Rice 21- Social construction of cultural identity**
https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Intercultural_Communication/Communications_256%3A_Intercultural_Communication/01%3A_Chapters/1.03%3A_Social_Construction_of_Cultural_Identity
6. **Vanden Berghe 16- How popular culture defines identity**
<https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/defines-identity>
7. **Insights 21: Brand me: Digital selves and the transformation of identity**
<https://atelier.net/insights/digital-selves-identity-digital-anthropology>

PART 2

8. Elbaba 19- Why on-screen representation matters, according to these teens (short video and text) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/why-on-screen-representation-matters-according-to-these-teens>

9. Top Ten Films 19- Real-life cases of cultural appropriation on TV
<https://www.top10films.co.uk/55840-real-life-cases-of-cultural-appropriation-on-tv/>

10. Unlabel 19- That's what she said: the impact of pop culture on language
<https://unbabel.com/thats-what-she-said-the-impact-of-pop-culture-on-language/>

11. Funhouse Tattoo SD 24- The influence of pop culture on tattoo trends
<https://funhousetattoosd.com/2024/06/26/the-influence-of-pop-culture-on-tattoo-trends/>