Sociology 923
The Sociology of Culture
Tuesdays 3:00-5:40 (online) Spring 2021
email: jajordan@uwm.edu

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Jordan
Office Hours: by appointment on Teams

What is culture? How do sociologists define it, and study it? How does culture shape action? How does culture (in its various forms) contribute to or combat inequality? Why do certain foods taste good, why are certain paintings beautiful, why is some music just noise?

This course will introduce students to a range of approaches to the sociology of culture. Culture as high art, culture as unspoken practice, popular culture, symbolic violence, culture as a toolkit or interpretive framework—each approach will offer a window into the centrality of culture for broader sociological questions, and the methodological approaches with which to pose such questions. We will address a range of issues, including theories of culture, culture and inequality, culture in the city, popular culture, art, music, and food. We will read classical approaches, as well as a range of contemporary approaches. Students will develop sound foundations in the key areas of the sociology of culture, combining theoretical and empirical analysis and developing the tools necessary to integrate cultural questions into their own research agendas.

In addition to developing a deeper knowledge of the content of this course, students will also strengthen their understanding of how sociologists go about doing their research, respond to ongoing conversations in the literature, and draw (and write up) conclusions in order to join that conversation. In addition, this course will allow students to investigate their own particular research interests in the realm of culture.

**READINGS:**

**Books:**


Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) [Please note that this book is OPTIONAL, although portions of it are required and will be available on the Canvas site]
The required articles and book chapters available online (through library databases or the Canvas site) are listed below in their relevant weeks. PLEASE NOTE: Some of the Canvas scans have my margin notes or others’ margin notes in them. Please feel free to check out the original book, order it from interlibrary loan, etc. if that is distracting.

Pandemic note: As you well know, we are still in the middle of a pandemic. This circumstance places unique and uneven burdens on all of us. If you need an extension on any assignment, please email me to request it, and I will most likely grant it. Note that assignments are cumulative, so if you find yourself falling behind, let’s have a meeting and strategize. Keep the lines of communication open with me—if pandemic challenges are getting in the way for you, please ask for my assistance.

ASSIGNMENTS:

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<th>Assignment</th>
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<td>Attendance and participation</td>
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<td>Discussion questions/central argument</td>
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<td>Discussion leader</td>
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<td>AGSL and Library workshop assignments</td>
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<td>Paper topic</td>
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Attendance and Participation:
It is a requirement of this course that you participate actively in each class meeting, whether synchronous or asynchronous, and that you are prepared to discuss that week’s readings in a thoughtful manner.

Arguments/Discussion Questions:
Each week you will need to summarize the key arguments of the readings, and develop questions for discussion. Please post set of arguments and questions for EIGHT of our class meetings. These should be posted on Canvas by 5 pm on Mondays, so that people can look through each other’s before class on Tuesdays. Please post in TWO places: in our weekly discussion, AND in the assignment section. Include at least one summary of the central argument per reading in a week where we are reading several articles, or a more in-depth explanation of the key arguments if we are reading a book. In addition, include at least two questions for discussion—really think about questions that will help to generate further discussion, AND/OR that will help to clarify things that you found unclear in the readings.

Discussion Leader:
Choose THREE articles from the syllabus on which you want to lead the class discussion, and I will assign one or two of them to you—this gives me some flexibility in case there is overlap, and I say one or two because we may have to adjust the
readings a bit as the semester progresses. Please email your preferences to me by Friday, January 29 at 5 pm.

**AGSL and Library Assignments:**
We have two “field trips” this semester. Both are asynchronous, and both involve building your research skills. There will be assignments associated with both. One is to “meet” with Kristin Woodward to hone your literature review skills, and the other is to “meet” with Georgia Lee Brown in the American Geographic Society Library, to learn about UWM’s (amazing) collection of maps, cartographic data, etc. With this module you will also become (more?) familiar with a really beautiful digital presentation tool, StoryMaps.

**Paper Topic:**
Relatively early in the semester, you will need to submit a one-page discussion of your final paper topic. You should include a tentative title, guiding questions for the paper, and a preliminary bibliography. In other words, you will need to do some thinking and some research and reading before completing this assignment. Use this opportunity to begin narrowing down your final paper topic early in the semester so that you are not left with LOTS to do at the end of the semester. NOTE that the final paper format is a literature review, NOT a conventional research paper.

**Paper Proposal:**
Building on the Paper Topic assignment, and incorporating my feedback and additional preliminary research, you will need to write a proposal for your final paper. I will offer more detailed guidelines in the first few weeks of the semester. The proposal will include an in-depth abstract, outline, and preliminary bibliography.

**Final Presentation:**
On the last day of class, all students will offer a presentation of their final paper. I realize that your paper may not be complete at this point, but I will assume you will have completed all of the necessary reading for it, and that you will have some sense of your argument. More details will follow later in the semester.

**Final Paper:**
This will be the most significant portion of your grade, and will give you the opportunity to write a literature review, demonstrating your engagement with one of the areas of the sociology of culture. It is essential to develop these skills, and I will work closely with you to do so. This paper must also be as well-written as possible. Good writing allows your ideas and conclusions to shine through, and everything from spelling to overall organization can help you achieve this goal. I will provide more detailed instructions for the final paper later in the semester as well.
SCHEDULE:

Please note that this schedule is subject to change! I would very strongly discourage you from printing readings more than a couple of weeks ahead, as I will very likely adjust the readings a bit as we go along.

Week 1: January 26
Introduction (no reading)


Week 2: February 2
3. Acknowledgements and Introduction, Measuring Culture

ALSO: For our Feb. 9 class, find 5 Sociology of Culture syllabi and/or prelim lists. Write a paragraph or so reflecting on what you found—what overlap and variation do you see? What might be some of the silences and omissions? How does this field constitute itself? Post this paragraph and links to the syllabi/prelim lists you found in the appropriate Week 3 Discussion location on Canvas.

Week 3: February 9
3. Measuring culture, chapter 1

Week 4: February 16
3. Measuring Culture, Chapter 2
**Week 5: February 23**
2. Measuring culture, chapter 3

**Week 6: March 2 [PAPER TOPIC DUE by 4 pm on March 1]**
3. Measuring Culture, Chapter 4

**Week 7: March 9**
1. Becker, Howard. *Art Worlds* (Focus on ix-xxv and Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, and 11).
2. Measuring Culture, Conclusion

**Week 8: March 16**

**Library Research Seminar (Asynchronous)**

Please note that this seminar is mandatory. Even if you have had a library orientation before, you must attend this session. This session will be asynchronous, but please definitely take advantage of the Canvas discussions to ask Kristin (and me) plenty of questions! Please spend some time on this website http://guides.library.uwm.edu/infolit in order to familiarize yourself with some of the fundamentals—some of this may already be very familiar, but some of it may be quite new.

**MARCH 23: SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9: March 30**

**Week 10: April 6 [PAPER PROPOSAL DUE]**
**Week 11: April 13**

**Week 12: April 20**

**Objects and Places**

**Week 13: April 27**
   [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.04.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.04.003)

**Week 14: May 4**
Visit to the AGSL, AGSL assignment due on Canvas Friday, May 7, 5 pm.

**Week 15: May 11**
Final Presentations

FINAL PAPER DUE ON CANVAS, MAY 18 at 5:00 PM

**WORKLOAD STATEMENT**

The university has asked departments to break down for students how much time they will spend working on various aspects of their classes.

As the UW System assumes “that study leading to one semester credit represents an investment of time by the average student of not fewer than 48 hours” (UWS ACPS 4), a 3-credit course such as this one will require a minimum of 144 (3 x 48) hours of your time. You may find it necessary to spend additional time on a course; the numbers below only indicate that the course will not require any less of your time.

For this course, over the semester you will spend a minimum of
• 37.5 hours in the virtual classroom (both in synchronous and asynchronous work)
• 75 hours preparing for class, which may include reading, note taking, completing minor exercises and assignments
• 31.5 hours preparing for and writing major papers