

English 258.001: Popular American Culture
“Sights, Signs & Cyborgs: Into What Wild Do We Go?”—Fall 2008
TR 4:00-5:15 OGH 102

Dr. Lisa Wellinghoff
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Required Texts:

Signs of Life in the U.S.A. Eds. Sonia Maasik & Jack Solomon. 5th Ed. Bedford/St. Martin's: Boston, 2006.
Critical articles, you tube videos, song lyrics, art, weblinks posted on Ecampus and/or given as handouts.

Course Description:

We will consider our dependence on technology—how free or restricted does it make us. We will consider the future of technology and our relationship with it. In the medical profession more and more people have cybernetic parts, cochlear implants, prosthetic limbs, that function as well as and better than natural human parts. We can buy our Genetic codes and know our most likely medical fates as we get older. How do these options free us, restrain us, impact our humanness? How does our literature and film reflect our dependence on technology or contemplate our future choices? We will discuss questions along with past, current, and future trends that seem to reflect our answers to these questions. Our texts will include films, songs, literature, comics, television shows, and radio. Our genres will include fiction, poetry, lyric, and science fiction. We will discuss what popular culture tells us about ourselves.

Policies and Procedures:

This class will discuss a variety of opinions and ideas that you may or may not agree with or find interesting. Regardless, I expect all students to respect their peers, as well as me, and keep in mind that without diversity, without contraries, we would have no progression. As future scholars, we strive for the enlightenment, not narrow mindedness. Respect each other and come to class curious, not hostile or indifferent. Turn all cell phones to silent mode. Come to class prepared. Check your tentative calendar often. Check Ecampus often, at least once a day. Changes will be posted.

Late Work:

Late work will result in an F for that grade. Beware: any work left in my mailbox may not be picked up on time and will be considered late. Work is due at the beginning of each class period on the day it is due. Do not email papers or work to me unless I ask you to do so.

Attendance:

If you miss 3 or more days of class, your final grade will go down one letter. Missing 5 or more constitutes grounds for failure. If you need to miss class, it is your responsibility to check with a classmate to discover what you missed and to inform me at least 2 class periods ahead of the date of your intended absence. Attendance is not just showing up for class. It includes *participation* in class discussions and on Ecampus, reading all assigned reading material, and coming to class on time. Much of class time will consist of discussions of material read; student input is necessary. Attendance is a part of your participation grade. Chronic lateness or tardiness will affect your grade. Each day late is a .5 days absent. If there is a reason you will be late to class, let me know the first day of class. Come to class prepared, read assigned materials for class, come ready to discuss the readings, take responsibility for your work and your level of motivation in this class.

Grading and Course Assignments:

We will write three essay tests and write essay questions/reading responses on Ecampus in this class. Our class discussions, journals, posts, blogs, essays and tests will allow us to display our knowledge of what popular culture means and how it reflects us. We will write journals and blogs based on our goals in this class that will teach us to read and write critically about American popular culture. The reading responses/questions on

Ecampus are designed to help you engage with the texts and learn how to write about and analyze texts of all kinds. We will expand the definition of texts in this class to include mediums like video, audio, film etc.

The response questions will also help you review for your tests and be discussed in class. Almost every week you will respond to the reading assignments, blog, and journal on Ecampus for an accumulative grade. You should journal at least 3 times and blog at least 6 times.

Test 1	10%	Reading Responses	30%
Test 2	20%	Blogs, Journals	10%
Test 3	20%	Participation	10%

Reading Responses:

Almost each week, I will give you topics to write about that are due on Ecampus by Friday at noon. They will be posted on Ecampus in the assignments section. They are due Friday so that you have a chance to practice critically analyzing American popular culture. These topics will ask you to support your critique with evidence from the text and use the key terms of Cultural Studies we discuss the first weeks of class. These are sample essay questions and informal writing assignments, essay length (2-4 pages). They are designed to prepare you for the tests and papers and to expand and/or to reveal the major themes or questions we ask, ponder, and discover this semester. My comments on your work are more important than your actual grades in the sense that they will reveal the strengths and weakness of your analysis. From them, you will learn how to improve your arguments in the future. They will each be graded based on how well you answer the questions and how well you use the text and terms to support your critique and persuade your audience of its validity. You will write 7 of them and the lowest grade will be dropped. An average of those grades will become the reading response grade (30%) of your final grade.

Blogs/Posts and Journals:

On Ecampus you will journal and blog. Journals are read only by me. They can be a response or question to a reading or assignment. You must do this 3 times. If you do, you get an A, if you do not you get an F. Blogs will be read by the whole class. They should be reactions, interesting ideas etc. about the texts or the discussions in class. You may also respond to another person's blog post. You must do 6 of them to get an A. If you do not, then you get an F. I will add up the number of blogs and journals that you do and that number will determine your final grade for this activity which is 10% of your final grade. You will have until 11/21 to do this. (9 posts and journals equal an A+, 8=A, 7=A-, 6=B, 5=C, 4=C-, 3=D+, 2=D, 1=D, 0=F)

Participation:

Participation is worth 10% of your grade. If you come to class and miss less than 3 excused absences, if you read the required material, if you take or make up all of your tests, if you contribute to our online community, you will receive an A for participation. See the grade descriptions for A, B, C, D, and F participation criteria. If you miss 4 classes, you slip to B level participation. If you miss 5, you slip to C. If you miss 6, you slip to D. Any more is an F.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism means representing someone else's work as you own. It includes recycled papers, stolen papers, internet papers, bought papers, roommate/friend written papers, etc. It will result in a failing grade for the course. I report all incidents of plagiarism.

Special Needs:

If you have special educational or physical needs which require accommodation please see me if I can help you in any way.

Tentative Calendar

Week 1

- 8/19 Syllabus & Introduction to Cultural Studies and 20th Century America Lecture
8/21 Key Terms Lecture: "Introduction" & "Portfolio" in *Signs of Life (SOL)* pages 1-40
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Week 2

- 8/26 Key Terms Lecture Con't & Nuclear Imagination: *Nuke Pop* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/>
8/28 *SOL*: Gary Engle 744-752 & Mr. Clean 768

***Due 8/29 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 1: Homework Questions, revised, *SOL* page 29 ***

Week 3

- 9/2 The Existential Questions Lecture: *Twilight Zone*: Season 2, Episode 59 "100 Yards Over the Rim"
http://www.cbs.com/classics/the_twilight_zone
SOL: Anna Quindlen 397-399 & Laurence Shames 76-82
- 9/4 To Boldly Go: Consumption and Myth Lecture: *SOL*: Charles Ealy 326-330 & Linda Seger 317-325 & 41-62
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Week 4

- 9/9 Super Men & Women of Rock 'n Roll Lecture: Elvis, The King: YouTube: "Elvis In the Ghetto: singing in 1970"
Johnny Cash: YouTube: "Johnny Cash - San Quentin" & *SOL*: Paul Taylor 578-590 & Angeline Price 591-596
- 9/11 Bob Dylan: YouTube: "Subterranean Homesick Blues;" Joan Baez: YouTube: "We Shall Overcome";
Jimi Hendrix: You Tube: "All Along the Watchtower;" & *SOL*: Thomas Frank 136-139

Due 9/12 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 2

Week 5

- 9/16 Michael Jackson: YouTube: "Beat It"; Madonna: YouTube: "Material Girl"; Joan Jett: YouTube: "Bad Reputation" *SOL*: Leon Wynter 561-566 & Aaron Devor 458-463 & Deborah Tannen 499-504
- 9/18 Ramones: YouTube: "I Don't Wanna Grow;" Nirvana: YouTube: "Smells Like Teen Spirit;" Public Enemy
YouTube: "Fight the Power" (uncensored and long version); *SOL*: Susan Willis 650-662 & Benjamine DeMott
567-577 & Gwendolyn Pough 275-283
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Week 6

- 9/23 Review For Test 1
9/25 Test 1
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Week 7

- 9/30 The Outsider Lecture & Film: *Edward Scissorhands*
10/2 Finish *Edward Scissorhands* & *SOL*: Robert B. Ray 308-316 & *SOL*: David Denby 343-348

Due 10/3 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 3

Week 8

- 10/7 Making Fun of Ourselves: Turning into Dolls Lecture; *Simpsons*: "Lisa and the Barbie Doll" Episode Number: 95
Season 5 & *SOL*: Emily Prager 769-772, Gary Cross: 772-778, Bell Hooks 610-612, page 90
- 10/9 *Simpsons*: "Behind the Laughter" Episode Number: 248 Season 11 & *SOL*: Carl Matheson 250-262

Due 10/10 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 4

Week 9

- 10/14 Consuming Reality: Reality TV, Oprah & Zombies Lecture; *SOL*: Steven D. Stark 263-270, Francine Prose 222-
228, & Rick Pioto and Kelly Otter 232-240
- 10/16 Gangsta/Mob Lecture: *The Sopranos*: Episode 30 Season 3 "Employee of the Month;" *SOL*: James Harold 241-
249 & Vivian C. Sobchack 372-377 & 378-379

Week 10

10/21 Review For Test 2

10/23 Test 2

Week 11

10/28 Lecture: Countercultural Heroes; *SOL*: David Brooks 388-396

10/30 Film: *Into the Wild*

Due 10/31 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 5

Week 12

11/4 No Class

11/6 Film: *Into the Wild*

Due 11/7 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 6

Week 13

11/11 Film: *Into the Wild* OR TBA Guest Lecture

11/13 Film: *Into the Wild* OR TBA Guest Lecture

Due 11/14 on Ecampus by noon: Reading Response 7

Week 14

11/18 Advertising Lecture; *SOL*: James Twitchell 203-207 & Advertisement Portfolio that precedes his article
Lecture: Cyborgs; Critical Article on Ecampus by Donna Harroway: "Cyborg Manifesto"

11/20 *Battlestar Galactica*: "33" Episode 1 Season 1

Week 15 Thanksgiving Break

Week 16

12/2 Review for Test 3

12/4 Test 3 Due in Class

Test 3 Pickup: Exam Week (details TBA)
