

Culture and Public Discourse (CMST 3270)
MWF 12:30pm-1:20pm, Old Main 126
Fall Semester 2017

Instructor: Dr. Jason Gilmore

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:20 – 2:20 or by appointment (Main 002F)

Course Description

Scholars have long debated the nature and extent of the impacts that public discourse can have on culture and on the ways that people in society understand themselves in relation to the world. This class finds its theoretical foundations in the notion that “reality” is but a collection of constructs that we negotiate together through our collective discourses. Furthermore, the class functions from a fundamental understanding that these constructions of reality are negotiated on a number of different levels from interpersonal communications (in person or mediated) to mass communicated levels such as discourse in popular media and news. Many, however, forget to account for the fact that discourse is itself a product of culture and that we can understand the characteristics of discourse through the culture that produces it. In this class, therefore, we will focus on analyzing and examining cultures from around the world through the discourse they produce. For example, what differences are there in the ways that people discuss and define concepts such as “community,” “human rights” or even “democracy” in Mexico versus Kuwait and what cultural factors help explain these differences? These cultural differences, however, do not always happen at the national and international levels. In fact, there are a number of cultural “discourses” alive within a given country. For example, we might be interested in how the distinct cultures of the Democrat and Republican parties impact the predominant discourses that they generate within the United States? Understanding the characteristics and impacts of these sub-cultural, national, and even global “public spheres,” therefore, is the primary focus of this course. This class, therefore, will critically examine both the impacts that culture can have on the many discourses alive in the public sphere and the impacts that public discourse then has on culture.

Course Objectives

1. Learn the fundamental perspectives, theories and principles of the impacts of culture on communication and public discourse.
2. Strengthen students’ ability to organize and present your thoughts, perspectives, and arguments in written format.
3. Obtain a robust understanding and appreciation of different cultural perspectives, approaches, and worldviews.
4. Further improve students’ ability to think critically about and evaluate different points of view and arguments.
5. Further develop students’ ability to maturely engage in intellectual conversations through extensive in-class discussions.
6. Strengthen students’ ability to analyze complex subject matter and make sound arguments in order to present them in both oral and written formats.

Overall expectation

The fact that we don’t always agree on matters is a strength, rather than a weakness, of modern society. Students are asked to come to class with attitudes of respect and openness to learning about themselves and others in relationship to culture and public discourse.

Required Texts

1. All course readings can be found on the class CANVAS site.

Course Requirements

- 1) Presentations. There will be two (2) graded in-class group presentations due this semester. A description of the assignments will be handed out in class at a later date.
 - a. **Assignment #1:** Analysis of the impacts of culture on public discourse.
 - b. **Assignment #2:** Analysis of the impacts of public discourse on culture.
- 2) Reading Discussant. You will be required to serve as a reading discussant for the readings for one class this semester. This assignment has two central parts:
 - a. You will be required to write one 500+ word blog post this semester. Each student will be assigned to a discussion groups in the class. You must post on your assigned weeks. All posts will be made on CANVAS.
 - b. Students will be expected to lead an in-class discussion group on the material that they covered in the blog posts. Also, please note that a discussant does not dominate the conversation, but guides students to new perspectives and distinct ways of thinking about the subject matter.
 - i. You will need to turn in a 1 page plan for your discussion group leadership. See assignment instructions for full details on this.
 - ii. NOTE: There will be no make ups on reading discussants.
- 3) Blog Responses. You will be expected to post a thoughtful comment (at least 250 words) in response to your assigned group's blog post before the start of the class when discussion groups are held (See schedule for *s which indicate that discussion groups are being held that day). Blog responses must engage in the readings just as much as the blog posts themselves. You will be required to post 6 responses throughout the semester.
 - i. Note: You are required to be in class and participate in your group's class discussion to receive points for your blog response.
 - ii. NOTE: There will be no make ups on blog responses.
- 4) Class participation. Because this is a 3000-level class a high level of individual participation is expected of each student. As you cannot participate if you are not in class, regular attendance is therefore vital to your overall success in this course. Please arrive *on time* having already completed the assigned reading, ready to engage in the discussion material.
 - a. The participation grade will be broken into two parts:
 - i. 50% - Your overall presence and participation in class discussions and in-class activities.
 - ii. 50% - Your active involvement in student lead reading discussion groups.
- 5) Examinations. There are two examinations this semester. Both exams will cover assigned readings and lectures. Early exams or make-up exams rarely will be given, and only to students who have unavoidable conflicts—that can be documented—with the exam time. The exams will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

Evaluation

Presentations:

Presentation #1	60 points (15%)
Presentation #2	60 points (15%)

Reading Discussant

Blog Post and Discussion Leadership	50 points (12.5%)
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Blog Responses:

6 blog responses @ 5 points each	30 points (7.5%)
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In-Class Participation

	40 points (10%)
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Examinations:

Exam 1	80 points (20%)
Exam 2	80 points (20%)

Total:

400 points (100%)

Course policies

Missed Assignments. If you miss **any assignment** due date because of a documented illness or emergency situation, you **MUST** provide me with an official note (doctor, police, etc.) justifying why you were not able to make the due date. All notes must be accompanied by a contact number, as this number will be called to verify your illness or emergency.

Policy on Academic Honesty. I am counting on your integrity. It is expected that all work turned in will be your own. Any ideas or content that come from another source must be properly cited. This includes any content taken from the Internet. Any acts of plagiarism will be penalized according to the Student Code of Conduct (Article VI) in place by Utah State University. Please check the university's information online regarding their policies on academic honesty:

http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=96#Academic_Honesty
<http://www.usu.edu/student-services/student-code/article6.cfm>

Disabilities

Disability Resource Center at Utah State University will work with students needing additional accommodations to academically succeed in this class. Students with ADA-documented physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435)797-2444 voice, (435)797-0740 TTY, (435)797-2444 VP, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible.

Expectations of students

Students are asked to come to class with attitudes of respect and openness to learning about themselves and others in relationship to culture. This is a broad field that addresses essential learning about human communication. We cannot come to understand the world in one semester, or even a lifetime. We will cover the core theoretical models in class that will help students form a basic understanding of the patterns of culture that will go a long way in helping each participant function more effectively in intercultural interactions.

Class conduct

No student is permitted to create a threatening, intimidating, or harassing environment in this course. Classroom civility is a part of the Student Code, and infractions will be pursued through the Student Conduct Coordinator. This course will be conducted in a safe and tolerant environment, and any person who detracts from that environment will be first given a verbal warning about the behavior. If said behavior persists, the student will be asked to leave the class and will not be able to return until the case is settled to the satisfaction of the professor by the Student Conduct Coordinator.