

Culture and Public Discourse (CMST 3270)
Thursdays 5:30pm-8pm, Old Main 203

Instructor: Dr. Jason Gilmore

Email: jason.gilmore@usu.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2:50 – 4:50pm or by appointment (Lundberg 206)

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) Culture in Public Discourse Example. For one class you will work with a fellow student and be in charge of finding an example of a culture reflected in media in the United States or around the world. It should be something that you share at the beginning of class; so short videos are ideal (5 minutes max). For the day of class, please come prepared to share why you found the example compelling and to lead a brief discussion with students to analyze the media artifact. To turn in: Please print out a list of 10 questions related to course content to ask your fellow students about the example you share. You need to submit the artifact to me for review a full 24 hours before the class, no exceptions.
- 3) Reflection Papers. You are required to complete six one-page, single-spaced, and typed reflection papers. In these papers you will synthesize the readings for the day by discussing how they relate one another and to concepts and theories discussed in class. You are required to use concepts and theories from class to help explain your evaluations and analyses. You may relate the readings and class concepts back to events and happenings you are exposed to in the real world, to personal experiences, or to information you have learned in other classes. Reflection papers must be turned in only on the days when we have discussants. Look for the *s on the schedule for when these are due. Please note that reflection papers need to be printed and turned in in person at the end of class on the scheduled days.
 - a. NOTE: All students are required to write the first reflection paper. See schedule below for due date.
- 4) Reading Discussant. You will be required to serve as a reading discussant for the weekly readings for one class this semester. The reading discussants will write a “discussant paper” (similar to a reflection paper) but with the added responsibility of serving as one of three or four student discussion leaders for that day’s discussion. This means that you will hand in a discussant paper with a second FULL page—single-spaced—of discussion ideas and questions that will help you lead the discussion for the day. You will also need to create a discussion activity to do with your group and provide a full description on the second page you turn in. Please note that the paper you write for this day does not count as your regular reflection papers. Note that a discussant does not dominate the conversation, but guides students to new perspectives and distinct ways of thinking about the subject matter.
- 5) Examinations. There are two examinations this semester. Both exams will cover lecture material only. 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 80 points (20%)

Presentation #2 80 points (20%)

Public Discourse Example:

10 points (2.5%)

Reading Discussant

Discussant Paper and Discussion Leadership 30 points (7.5%)

Reflection papers: 6 @ 15 points each

90 points (22.5%)

Examinations:

Exam 1 60 points (15%)

Exam 2 50 points (12.5%)

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/studentcode/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.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week #	Date	Tentative Class Topics	Readings	Assignments (* = day w/ discussants)
1	8/30	Intro to the course	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	Readings DUE – Come ready to discuss
2	9/6	Public Sphere, Public Discourse, and Uses and Gratifications	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	Readings DUE – Come ready to discuss
3	9/13	Social Constructionism, Culture, and Public Discourse	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper REQUIRED
4	9/20	Framing	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
5	9/27	Cultural Studies and Cross Cultural Comparisons	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
6	10/4	Critical Perspectives and Public Discourse	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
7	10/11	EXAM #1 Student Presentation Chat	No readings for this week	
8	10/18	Student Presentations	No readings for this week	
9	10/25	Introduction to the Effects of Media and Public Discourse	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
10	11/1	Stereotypes, Violence, and Effects	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
11	11/8	Public Discourse, Politics, and Effects	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
12	11/15	New Media and Effects	See CANVAS for online reading(s)	*Reflection paper
13	11/22	No Class - Thanksgiving Break		
14	11/29	EXAM #2 Student Presentation Chat	No readings for this week	
15	12/6	Student Presentations	No readings for this week	