

	<p><b>Sociology of Culture: Producing and Consuming Cultural Symbols and Objects</b></p> <p>Sociology 410/510</p> <p>M/W 2-3:20, 175 Lillis</p> <p>Fall 2021</p> <p><b>Ryan Light</b></p> <p>Office Hours: Thursday, 2:00-4:00, Zoom via Calendly (<a href="https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min">https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min</a>) or schedule alternative arrangement, including in-person, via email.</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:light@uoregon.edu">light@uoregon.edu</a></p>
---	---

## Course Description

Culture, from a sociological perspective, consists of those symbols central to our individual and collective efforts to make sense of the world. Debate follows culture in an everyday sense as we engage in conversation with each other about the value of a particular cultural object – “That movie is so good!” – but also in a sociological sense as the discussion and interpretation of cultural objects are rarely as simple as they seem and can often benefit from the kind of thoughtful, scholarly work that universities are built to accomplish. This class will emphasize this latter sense teasing apart different sociological approaches to thinking about culture from approaches focused on the symbolic systems that help structure our social world to approaches focused on how culture is produced and consumed sociologically. Of course, these approaches often intersect. In attending to theoretical motivations, we will also think through how a sociological understanding of culture contributes to a more complete understanding of other core sociological topics, such as power, inequality, race, and so forth. We will develop our analytic tools through conversation – the class leans heavily on in-class discussion – and through writing. The course culminates with a research project where you are tasked with performing an act of cultural sociology.

## Expected Learning Outcomes

- \*You will be able to describe sociological approaches to understanding the production and consumption of culture. You will gain first-hand experience comparing key approaches to cultural sociology.
- \*You will be able to identify and evaluate sociologically how culture intersects with individual, group, and organizational behavior to produce social systems.
- \*You will learn how to undertake a rigorous, intellectual discussion of complex theoretical work in cultural sociology. You will practice your public-speaking and writing skills.
- \*You will put your knowledge to work by writing an empirical research paper on a relevant topic in cultural sociology that synthesizes their knowledge of course content.

## Estimated Student Workload

This course will require approximately 12 hours of work per week with most of that work (about 9 hours) occurring outside of class. A typical week will include 6 hours of reading and 3 hours of in-class time. The two response essays will take approximately 3 hours of dedicated time to complete (e.g. if you complete without “multitasking”). The final project will take a substantial amount of time that will likely vary substantially, but will not take any longer than one would take to prepare for a difficult exam (and hopefully will be more enjoyable and useful!).

Graduate students should expect to work about 1/3 more on this class than the above description.

## **Course Modality**

This is a **an in-person class**: We will meet masked up, attempt to provide as much space as possible, but also engage in the community-building efforts of in-person classes. 400-level courses are considered large seminars with lively discussion and we will do our best to replicate that experience.

## **Course Policies**

### **Communicating with Me: How and Why**

Our class will communicate through our Canvas website. Announcements and emails are available there and are archived. They are automatically forwarded to your UO email and can be sent to you via text if you prefer (adjust this setting under account/notifications). I respond to emails in 48 hours or fewer, usually excluding the weekends. If I do not respond in two days, please send a follow-up email as the original likely got “lost in the shuffle.”

### *Office Hours and Questions*

I will host office hours via Zoom on Thursdays from 2-4pm. To book a meeting, please use this link: <https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min>. If you need more time than 15 minutes, feel free to book two slots in a row. If you cannot meet during this time, please contact me via email to set up a meeting at an alternative, agreed-upon time. We will also have a running discussion called “General Course Questions” that I will monitor and that the class is free to use to ask/answer questions.

### *Why Office Hours?*

When I was an undergraduate, I remember feeling intimidated by my instructors and confused about how to best use office hours. I didn’t want to waste anyone’s time or risk looking like I was behind other students. As a faculty member, I find office hours to be one of the best, in underused, aspects of my job and I’ve never felt that my time was wasted or that attending office hours conveyed anything negative about a student. Students have attended office hours for many reasons from clarification on assignments, to working through difficult course material, to discussions about career goals, to fill me in on something interesting they read, listened to, or saw. Any of these reasons or more are good reasons to come to office hours in my courses. If you think that you may want a recommendation from me later – even years later – you could come to office hours at least once during the course as it is far easier for me to remember students who I know personally via these meetings.

## **How Grades Will Be Determined**

*Participation and In-class Quizzes:* In-class participation is essential for this course. By this time in your academic career, you have the skills and knowledge to contribute and should be confident in this fact. Any PowerPoint slides or notes will be made available after class. My hope is that this will facilitate more thoughtful note-taking and more creative engagement in the course. Attendance is required and you should be prepared in at least two ways: **Please read the course materials prior to the class and have the necessary course materials for each class.** Participation will include a self-evaluation component that will be offered during Week 5 and Week 10.

We will work through 10 exercises in small groups or alone during class – you can also complete outside of class - and will grade them for completion. Complete 8 of the 10 exercises and you will have a perfect score for this section.

*Reader Response Essays:* Reader response essays are short (500-1,000 words, single-spaced) opportunities to put cultural sociology to work. For each essay you have two options: 1. You can use an assigned piece of creative non-fiction as data for exploring a course concept (i.e. the essays by Morris, Smith or Abdurraqhib or the This American Life podcast). These essays are explicitly not sociological research, but certainly have sociological implications. Your task will be to build an argument illustrating the value (or not) of a specific concept (or two) from the course. Each response should pertain to a different essay and concept, but you may mention concepts multiple times. 2. You can write a response on the topic of your choosing engaging a course concept. More information on the responses will be available at least a week prior to the first response due date.

*Final Project:* There are two options.

1. The **final research project** is an original research project that consists of two parts: A proposal and the final paper. The final project may be on a topic of your choice related to cultural sociology. Three data options available: 1.) you can conduct at least 2 1-hour long interviews of individuals associated with your topic, 2.) you can critically analyze at least 3 films that pertain to your topic. I will provide more detail about the final project by Week 5.

*Final Proposal:* The proposal (250 to 500 words, single-spaced) will help lay the foundation for your final project. It should include an overview of your project and a discussion of your data.

*Final Paper:* The final paper (3,000-3,500 words, double-spaced) will represent the culmination of your original research. It will be formatted as a “standard” sociological article with a theory section, data section, results section and so forth. As is the standard with most scholarly writing, it should err on the side of formality and should represent your best work!

2. The **mega response** a longer version of the three responses that you will have written for the class. You are tasked with writing an essay on a single topic that uses three course concepts or tools to better understand that topic. The **proposal** is two-three sentences long and should include a description of the concepts/tools that you are likely to use for the essay. You may use two

concepts that you have already used in responses, but the topic of the essay must differ from the responses that you already have written.

The **mega response** has the same structure but is longer and asks that you select the most successful concept for understanding your topic in conclusion.

It is likely to require 2,000-2,500 or more words.

Note: If you are a graduate student, you will likely want to develop an alternative assignment that corresponds with your graduate work. I am amenable to and encouraging of this. Graduate students will also be required to write a more substantial final project (about 5,000 words), present an 8 minute overview of your project. Graduate students will also read four additional readings that correspond with your interests and we will meet to discuss those readings twice in my office at a mutually agreed upon time.

### **Late work and Attendance Policies**

Assignments are due on Canvas on their assigned dates/times. Late assignments **may** receive a 5% deduction for every day that they are late excluding weekends up to a 20% deduction. Attendance is not required but is highly correlated with success in this class. In the past most students who have received As had nearly perfect attendance. If circumstances may affect your participation, attendance, or your ability to turn work in on time, please contact me as soon as those circumstances arise. I will work with students in these situations and do not need to know any details about your situation. In accordance with UO policy, you are not required to provide documentation of these circumstances.

### **Grade Summary**

\*\*\*Every Assignment is Turned in on Canvas\*\*\*

20% In-Class Quizzes and Brief Exercises

30% 3 Reader Response Essays (500-1,000 words, single-spaced)

10% Proposal (250-500 words, single-spaced)

40% Final Paper (3,000-3,500 words, single-spaced)

Read more about the grading standards for this course under “Grade Culture” below.

### **Grade ranges:**

A	93+	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	<60

An A+ will only be offered for coursework that significantly exceeds A-level performance, which generally applied to work that, earns above 100% for the course.

## **Course Schedule (Subject to change with appropriate notice via Canvas announcement):**

Note that reading assignments listed as CV will be available through Canvas and see the reference list below for exact page numbers for each reading assignment.

INTRODUCING THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE – How does a sociological perspective contribute to our understanding of culture?

September 27, 2021

Introduction(s)

September 29, 2021

CV: (Griswold, 2012: Chapter 1)

CULTURE AS MEANING – How do symbols shape our social worlds?

October 4, 2021

CV: (Geertz, 1973)

October 6, 2021

CV: (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991) – Basic Argument

CV: (Norton, 2011) – Basic Argument

October 11, 2021

CV: (Morris, 2020)

CULTURE AS TOOLKITS – How does cultural understanding and practices shape opportunities?

October 13, 2021

CV: (Swidler, 1986)

**RECORDED LECTURE (NO IN-PERSON CLASS)**

October 18, 2021

CV: (Rosen, 2017) – Basic Argument

October 20, 2021

CV: (Joffe-Walt, 2020)

**READER RESPONSE 1**

PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF CULTURE – What organizations shape how culture is made? How does social structure shape what culture we consume?

October 25, 2021

CV: (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1977)

October 27, 2021

CV: (Grazian, 2012)

CV: (Rivera, 2012) – Basic Argument

CONSUMPTION OF CULTURE

November 1, 2021

CV: (Bourdieu, 1998)

CULTURE, COMMUNITY, AND CONNECTION – How does cultural sociology help us to understand community and place?

November 3, 2021

CV: (Simmel, 1903)

**READER RESPONSE 2**

November 8, 2021

CV: (Harrison, 2017)  
CV: (Jerolmack, 2007)

## VALUES AND BOUNDARIES

November 10, 2021

CV: (Kahneman, 2012)  
CV: (Luft, 2020)

November 15, 2021

CV: (Carter, 2006)  
CV: (Vasquez & Wetzel, 2009)

## DIGITAL CULTURE

November 17, 2021

CV: (Striphas, 2015) – Basic Argument  
CV: (Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2019)

## PROPOSAL

November 22, 2021

CV: (Smith, 2010)

(SUB)CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND POWER – How does culture and identity intersect to create the potential for social change?

November 24, 2021

## READER RESPONSE 3

No Class Thanksgiving

November 29, 2021

CV: (Foucault, 1980)

December 1, 2021

CV: (Abdurraqib, 2020)

**FINAL PAPER DUE 5pm, December 6th on Canvas**

## Additional University and Course Policies<sup>1</sup>

**Encouraging Inclusive Learning Environments:** The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

---

<sup>1</sup> From Professor Light and/or the Teaching Engagement Program ([tep.uoregon.edu](http://tep.uoregon.edu))

**Academic Misconduct:** The University Student Conduct Code (available at [conduct.uoregon.edu](http://conduct.uoregon.edu)) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at [www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students](http://www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students).

**Being A Good Academic Citizen:** What it means to be a good academic citizen is changing at a rapid pace. Classroom norms differ between departments and professors. Technology and our relationship to it have much to do with these ambiguities. So, being a good academic citizen means following traditional norms of good academic behavior: don't plagiarize, including non-appropriated paraphrasing and quotation (see full statement below), be respectful of others ideas, and so forth. But, it is also worth considering newer norms. For my class your phones should be put away. It is distracting to others to have people fidgeting with their text messages. You *can* use a laptop, but you should stay on task and respectful of others around you. If someone is being distracting, please contact me or a GTF. Last, you may NOT sell material for this class (notes, study guides, etc.). Any student who needs help with note-taking should talk to me.

*Remote Learning:*

Note that the same ethics and responsibilities of the face-to-face classroom apply to remote learning and our Zoom meetings. Please be respectful of one another and courteous to one another both in our large meetings and in breakout rooms.

**Your Well-being:**

Life at college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own--there's help and support on campus.

As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about.

[University Health Services](#) help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates.

University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at [counseling.uoregon.edu](http://counseling.uoregon.edu) or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

*Basic Needs*

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support.

[The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide](#) includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support.

## Grade Culture

A+ Quality of student's performance significantly exceeds all requirements and expectations required for an A grade. Very few, if any, students receive this grade in a given course.

A: Quality of performance is outstanding relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at the highest level.

B: Quality of performance is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at a high level.

C: Quality of performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content.

D: Quality of performance is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course, but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F: Quality of performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.

## References

Abdurraqib, H. (2020). *The Vanishing Monuments of Columbus, Ohio*. The New Yorker.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-vanishing-monuments-of-columbus-ohio#>

Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (1977). The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J. Wollacott (Eds.), *Mass Communication and Society* (pp. 349–383). Edward Arnold.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical Reason*. Stanford University Press.

Carter, P. L. (2006). Straddling boundaries: Identity, culture, and school. *Sociology of Education*, 79(4), 304–328.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 3–33). Basic Books.

Grazian, D. (2012). Where the Wild Things Aren't. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 53(4), 546–565.



- Griswold, W. (2012). *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. SAGE.
- Harrison, J. A. (2017). Rust Belt Boomerang: The Pull of Place in Moving Back to a Legacy City. *City & Community*, 16(3), 263–283. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12245>
- Jerolmack, C. (2007). Animal Practices, Ethnicity, and Community: The Turkish Pigeon Handlers of Berlin. *American Sociological Review*, 72(6), 874–894.
- Joffe-Walt, C. (2020, July 31). *Nice White Parents* (No. 712). <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/712/transcript>
- Kahneman, D. (2012). *Of 2 Minds: How Fast and Slow Thinking Shape Perception and Choice [Excerpt]*. Scientific American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/kahneman-excerpt-thinking-fast-and-slow/>
- Luft, A. (2020). Theorizing Moral Cognition: Culture in Action, Situations, and Relationships. *Socius*, 6, 2378023120916125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120916125>
- Morris, W. (2020, October 25). *My Mustache, My Self*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/14/magazine/quarantine-mustache.html>
- Norton, M. (2011). A structural hermeneutics of The O'Reilly Factor. *Theory and Society*, 40(3), 315.
- Pascoe, C. J., & Diefendorf, S. (2019). No homo: Gendered dimensions of homophobic epithets online. *Sex Roles*, 80(3–4), 123–136.
- Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 999–1022.
- Rosen, E. (2017). Horizontal Immobility: How Narratives of Neighborhood Violence Shape Housing Decisions. *American Sociological Review*, 82(2), 270–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417695841>
- Simmel, G. (1903). *The metropolis and mental life*. na.
- Smith, Z. (2010). *Generation Why?* <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2010/11/25/generation-why/>
- Striphas, T. (2015). Algorithmic culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(4–5), 395–412.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51(2), 273–286.
- Vasquez, J. M., & Wetzel, C. (2009). Tradition and the invention of racial selves: Symbolic boundaries, collective authenticity, and contemporary struggles for racial equality<sup>1</sup>. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32(9), 1557–1575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802684232>
- Villarrubia-Mendoza, J., & Vélez-Vélez, R. (2017). Iconoclastic Dreams: Interpreting Art in the DREAMers Movement. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 58(3), 350–372.

Wagner-Pacifici, R., & Schwartz, B. (1991). The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(2), 376–420. <https://doi.org/10.1086/229783>

Willis, P. (2003). Foot soldiers of modernity: The dialectics of cultural consumption and the 21st-century school. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(3), 390–415.