Soc 508: Sociology of Culture

Fall 2004, Tues/Thurs 12:30pm–1:45pm.
Social Sciences 415.
Kieran Healy.

Email: kjhealy@arizona.edu.
Homepage: http://www.u.arizona.edu/~kjhealy.
Office: 404 Social Sciences Building.
Phone: 621-3480

Course Description and Objectives

This is a survey course in the sociology of culture. It will introduce you to the major themes of a field that has grown rapidly in the U.S. over the past 25 years. It overlaps significantly (though not entirely) with the Culture Reading List for Prelim Exams.

The sociology of culture is a difficult topic to organize into a manageable course for several reasons. Unlike the family, religion or politics, it is not a distinct institution or social process that can be treated more or less separately from others. Unlike networks, stratification or micro-interaction, it does not have as well-developed a set of methods that can provide an initial focus for study. The bias of this course is towards empirical studies of the production of culture, particularly in its more organizationally and institutionally durable forms. But this is still a very wide net, and we will read micro-level studies of small groups to comparative macro-sociologies of cultural change across nations. The classical roots of the subject are explored in the first few weeks. We return to broad questions about where the field should be going in the last week or two.

I have tried to ensure that the readings overlap as little as possible with material from other courses offered by the department — notably Social Movements & Collective Action, Religion, Gender, and Race & Ethnicity.
Requirements

The course is a seminar. It should go without saying that students are expected to attend each meeting, do the reading thoroughly and in advance, and participate actively in class and online discussions. The emphasis is on mastering the material and responding to it constructively and creatively, with an eye toward your own research interests.

In addition to attendance, reading and participation, two other kinds of work are required:

a) For each week after the first, two students will prepare brief, informal presentations. One student will prepare a “lead memo” (of about 1,000 words), to be posted to the class weblog by lunchtime on Monday afternoon, responding to the week's readings. Participants are expected to read the memo and contribute their own thoughts, questions and comments about it. A second student will prepare a “research memo” (of about 1,000 words), by lunchtime Wednesday. This might be a brief account of an outstanding problem from the readings and a preliminary design of a study to solve it; or a memo introducing and describing an existing data set relevant to the week's readings and suggesting some possible uses. Participants should be prepared to discuss these memos as well, both online and in class.

b) Each student will prepare memoranda of 1,000 to 1,500 words on the readings prior to at least four of the weekly meetings. Hand them in to me in class or post them on the class weblog. These memos should be regarded as writing and thinking exercises, not as finished products. Use them to engage each week’s materials and respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas that they suggest. Memos should be used to develop ideas informally over time and to put into words impressions that seem worth developing. Because I will read them each week, they also provide an opportunity for you to receive individualized feedback.

No final paper is required.

The course is open to any graduate student in Sociology. Students from other departments should meet with me before enrolling.
Readings

All other required readings will either be available for copying in the graduate student sociology library, on electronic reserve at the main library, or available via J-STOR or other online source. This syllabus is available online via the POLIS page for the course and by following the “Teaching” link on my homepage. The links in the online version will take you to the J-STOR (or equivalent) copies of the readings, wherever available. Let me know if you're not familiar with J-STOR or PDF files, and we’ll set about welcoming you to the 1990s.

Course Schedule

The following two anthologies are available from the bookstore and will be useful to you, but are not required:


Preliminaries: Housekeeping and Orientation

**Week 1: Aug 24/26**


Part I: Lineages of Classical Theory

Week 2: Culture and Social Structure. Aug 31/Sep 2


Week 3: Culture and Class. Sep 7/9


Week 4: Culture as Signification. Sep 14/16


Week 5: Culture Enacted. Sep 21/23


Part II: The Production of Culture

Week 6: Theories of Practice. Sep 28/30


Week 7: Organizations. Oct 5/7


Week 8: Institutional Fields. Oct 12/14


**Part III: Current Topics and Debates**

**Week 9: Comparative Macro-Sociology. Oct 19/21**


Week 10: Cultural Consumption and Reception. Oct 26/28


Week 11: Boundaries and Identities. Nov 2/4


Week 12: Markets and Culture Nov 9/11


**Thursday 11th: Veterans’ Day. No class.**

**Part IV: Programmatic and Prescriptive Statements**

**Week 13: Nov 16/18**


**Week 14: Nov 23/25**

Thanksgiving. No class.

**Week 15: Nov 30/Dec 2**
References


Alexander, Jeffrey and Seidman, Steven, editors, Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates (Cambridge University Press, 1991).


___ How Institutions Think (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).


Durkheim, Emile and Mauss, Marcel, Primitive Classification (University of Chicago Press, 1960).


Williams, Raymond, Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society Expanded edition. (London: Fontana, 1988).


