This course examines the meaning and study of culture from a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. The course is structured around three primary questions. The first of these questions is: what does culture mean and how has it been studied? To examine this question, we look to sociology, anthropology, and psychoanalytic theory. We also look at how culture has been reframed by the Birmingham School over the past few decades. The second question asked by this course is: what is the relationship between culture and power? To explore this question, we examine a Marxian approach to power, then we investigate the work of Michel Foucault and the ways in which he reconceptualized power. We also read a current book by an
NYU law professor, who broadly examines the way in which power works through culture and cultural work. The third question of the course is: in what ways has schooling become the site for cultural politics and identity-building? The final short unit of the course approaches this question through a number of qualitative studies of schooling. The first goal of this course is to provide a solid, introductory grounding in the many ways in which the term *culture* has been used in the study of societies. The second goal is to raise questions about the relationship between culture and structures and to provide analytical tools to understand institutions (like schools) as sites of culture-building and cultural struggle.

**GRADED REQUIREMENTS**

- **Class Participation:** 15% of grade (including a required self-assessment, due by the beginning of class on Tuesday, October 13th, and an optional second self-assessment, due by the beginning of class on Tuesday, December 1st)
- **Weekly Reading Questions or Responses:** 15% of grade
- **Midterm paper:** 25% of grade (due on Friday, October 30th at 4:00 p.m)
- **Final paper:** 45% of grade (due on Monday, December 14th at 4:00 p.m.)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES**

1. **Office Hours:** I have regularly scheduled office hours and am available by appointment. I am also regularly accessible by e-mail and by phone. I will make every effort to respond as promptly as possible to all e-mails.

2. **Class Attendance and Participation:** Class attendance is required for this course. If you must miss or arrive late to a class for any reason, please let me know in advance. I expect that everyone will participate in seminar discussion. I also expect that this participation will be based on an informed familiarity and thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading.

3. **Class Participation Self-Assessment:** Twice over the course of the semester (Tuesday, October 13th and Tuesday, December 1st, at the beginning of class) you will be asked to turn in short self-assessments of your class participation, which I will take into account when I assign your grade for class participation at the end of the semester. The first self-assessment is required and the second is optional. This assignment also will provide the opportunity for you to convey any concerns you have about your participation and the dynamic of the class and any goals you would like to set for yourself regarding your participation. It also will allow me to provide written feedback to you on your participation.

4. **Weekly Reading Questions or Responses:** Students have weekly reading questions or responses due every Tuesday by 10:00 a.m., beginning on week two of the semester. You will have one week during the course of the semester – which you can choose – during which you do not need to submit a post. Please post approximately five questions or a 1-2 paragraph response to the week’s readings to the course Blackboard site. You will not get credit for late submissions. To sign onto Blackboard, sign onto your NYU e-mail account, go to the tab
marked “Academics.” Under the “Courses” heading of the Blackboard section, our class should be listed under the “Current” tab. Click on our class listing to take you to the Blackboard site. Then, go to the “Discussion Board” section, then click on “September 15” (for example). Then click “Thread” to add and submit your posting. You will also see directions for how to read and respond to the postings of others in the class. I encourage you to read the questions/responses of others before you post your own – so that you can also include responses and/or follow-up questions. You are not responsible for responding to others, although you are encouraged to do so. Hopefully, having the questions/responses of others accessible to you on the website will be useful to your own thinking. The main goal of this assignment is for you to engage critically with the material and to come to class with a set of questions and responses guiding your exploration of the texts in the course. Response paragraphs can be engagements with any aspects of the reading. If you choose to submit reading questions: This kind of question asking is the goal of much academic work, and coming up with good questions that guide and shape your research is often the most difficult part of academic projects (like dissertations). I regard this as a substantive exercise. I am asking you to engage with the work and to really ask questions that provide purpose, that you leave the text with, and that you would like to discuss further.

5. **Papers**: Students have two papers due during the semester: a shorter midterm paper and a longer final paper. The short paper will be 5-7 pages (double-spaced, in 12-point font) and the longer essay will be 10-15 pages (double-spaced, in 12-point font). These are analytical essays that respond to the reading and the issues raised by the course. The topic for the midterm essay (due on Friday, October 30th at 4:00 p.m.) is: either (a) Choose two authors whose work we have read in the first part of the course. Critically compare and contrast their understanding of culture (some aspect of its definition, its role, its relationship to structure, etc.); or (b) In a critical engagement with the readings from the first part of this course, develop a focused response to the question: what is culture? The topic for the final paper (due on Monday, December 14th at 4:00 p.m.) is: Apply the theoretical frameworks from the first parts of the course to some issue of schooling addressed in the last unit of the course or an issue of schooling that particularly interests you. How do these theoretical understandings of culture help illuminate some aspect of schooling as a cultural institution or as a site for cultural politics? In writing this final paper, you may also choose to substitute schooling for another cultural institution (like an aspect of media) that interests you.

6. **Paper Substitute Question**: For the final paper, feel free to substitute the following topic: Explain the cartoon above. Sufficiently answering this question will require additional, outside research into the field/discipline of Cultural Studies.

7. **Proofreading, etc.**: All assignments should be thoroughly spellchecked and proofread before they are submitted to me. Please allow time to do this before assignments are due. I reserve the right to lower grades on assignments that are turned in with excessive spelling, formatting, and other proofreading errors.

8. **Deadlines**: All paper deadlines are firm. *I will not grant extensions*, except in the case of absolute emergency. For each day that a paper is late, the final grade will be lowered by one-third of a grade (e.g., an A- becomes a B+ if a paper is one day late). *Papers are also*
considered late if they do not meet the time deadline (e.g., a paper due at 4 p.m. is due promptly by 4 p.m.).

9. *Special Accommodations:* Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 719 Broadway, 2nd floor; (212) 998-4980 (telephone and TTY); [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).
REQUIRED READINGS

There are 8 required books and a required coursepack for this course. The books and coursepack are available at the campus bookstore. The coursepack is a selection of readings, and readings found in this coursepack are marked “(CP)” below. All books and the coursepack also are available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books are:


COURSE OUTLINE

September 8: Course Introduction

September 15: The Sociological Tradition and the Question of Culture, Part I


September 22: The Sociological Tradition and the Question of Culture, Part II

Emile Durkheim. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. New York: The Free Press, 1915. Introduction; Book 1, Chapter 1; Book 2, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 7; Conclusion

September 29: What is Culture and How Do We Study It? The Psychoanalytic Tradition


October 6: What is Culture and How Do We Study it? Sociological Approaches


October 13: What is Culture and How Do We Study It? The Birmingham Tradition


October 20: Culture and Power: A Marxian Theoretical Framework


October 27: Culture and Power, Foucault I


November 3: Culture and Power: Foucault II


November 10: Culture and Power: “Covering”


November 17: Culture and Schooling: Current Debates on “Oppositional Identity,” Race, and Academic Achievement


November 24: Culture and Schooling: Race and Racial Identity in School


December 1: Culture and Schooling: Schools, Gender, and Sexuality


December 8: Course Wrap-Up