SOED-GE.2325: The Learning of Culture
Fall 2013
Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. – 12:40 p.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment

This course examines the meaning and study of culture through a sociological lens. 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 primarily to some of the classic – and some more contemporary – theorists in the field of sociology. The second question we examine in the 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. The third question of the course is: in what ways has schooling become the site for cultural politics and identity-building? The final 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
- Weekly Reading Questions or Responses: 15% of grade
- Midterm paper: 25% of grade (due on Friday, October 25th at 4:00 p.m.)
- Final paper: 45% of grade (due on Wednesday, December 11th at 4:00 p.m.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

1. Office Hours: I am happy to meet and am available by appointment. I also am regularly accessible by e-mail and by phone. I will make every effort to respond as promptly as possible to all e-mails. E-mail is always the best way to reach me.

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 class discussion. I also expect that this participation will be based on an informed familiarity and thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading.
3. **Weekly Reading Questions or Responses:** Students have weekly reading questions or responses due every Wednesday by 9:00 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 NYU Courses site. You will not get credit for late submissions. To sign onto NYU Courses, sign onto your NYU e-mail account, go to the tab marked “Academics.” Under the “Course Sites” heading should be the “NYU Classes” tab. Click on our class tab in the “My Workspace” section on the top. Then, go to the “Forums” section (tabs on the left-hand side), then click on the week’s class date. Then click “Post New Thread” to add and submit your posting. 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.

4. **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 25th 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) Choose a concept from the theory readings from the first half of the course that still confuses you. Write about it in a way that helps you understand it better. The topic for the final paper (due on Wednesday, December 11th at 4:00 p.m.) is: Apply the theoretical frameworks from the first half of the course to some issue of schooling addressed in the second half of the course. How do these theoretical understandings of culture help illuminate some aspect of schooling as a cultural institution or as a site for cultural contestation? In writing this final paper, you may also choose to substitute schooling for another cultural institution (like an aspect of media) that interests you. The goal for this paper is to help students integrate the various strands of the course, to encourage students to reflect on how social theory can shed light (or not) on issues of schooling that interest them.

5. **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.
6. **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.).

7. **Academic Integrity:** All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity. A copy is available at [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity).

8. **Students with Disabilities:** Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. Please see: [http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html](http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html).

**REQUIRED READINGS**

There are 10 required books for this course. Additional articles and chapters below will be made available over the course of the semester. The books are available at the campus bookstore. All books also are available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books (in the order in which we will read them) are:


COURSE OUTLINE

September 4: Course Introduction

September 11: The Sociological Tradition and the Question of Culture, Part I


September 18: 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 25: What is Culture and How Do We Study It? The Psychoanalytic Tradition


October 2: What is Culture and How Do We Study it? Sociological Approaches


October 9: Culture and Power: A Marxian Theoretical Framework


October 16: Culture and Power: Foucault I


October 23: Culture and Power: Foucault II


October 30: Culture and Schooling: Current Debates on “Oppositional Identity,” Race, and Academic Achievement


November 6: Culture and Schooling: Race, Class, Schools, and Parenting


November 13: Culture and Schooling: Power, Privilege, and Elite Schooling


November 20: Culture and Schooling: Schools, Gender, and Sexuality

November 27: NO CLASS

December 4: Culture and Schooling: Politics, Political Identity, and Higher Education