Culture I

SOC6516H Graduate Seminar, Fall 2022

Department of Sociology, University of Toronto,

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Class: Thursday, 1 – 3, Room 240
Office hours: after class or by appointment

This seminar introduces the principal approaches to the sociological study of culture. The course is designed to equip students with an overview of how sociologists conceptualize culture, the methodological approaches they use to study it, the major debates within the field, and an appreciation for how the field has evolved over the past few decades. We will consider culture in material, embodied, processual and conceptual forms and examine how it operates at the micro, meso and macro levels of society. Emphasis is on understanding how culture influences action, the relationship between culture, hierarchy and social inequality, how culture is produced and consumed, and how to operationalize and measure cultural meaning. Along the way, students will learn what the sociology of culture offers for studying cultural objects, such as food, music, art, and fashion, and social phenomena, like poverty, educational success, and gender segregated occupations.
**Course Schedule:**

**Session One, September 15: Introduction and Overview**


**Session Two, September 22: Culture in Interaction**


**Session Three, September 29: Culture as Symbols and Ideas**


**Session Four, October 6: Conceptualizations of Culture**


**Session Five, October 13: Culture as Capital**


**Session Six, October 20: Culture as Boundaries**


**Session Seven, October 27: Culture and Classification**

**Guest Speaker: Professor Timothy Dowd, Emory University**


Dowd, Timothy J. “The Dynamics of Musicking: Classifications, Careers, and Connection.”

Session Eight, November 3: Culture and Cognition

Guest Speaker: Gordon Brett


Session Nine, November 10: Reception of Culture


Session Ten, November 17: Culture in Organizational Context


**Session Eleven, November 24: Production of Culture**


**Session Twelve, December 1: Worth and Valuation**


Course Requirements:

Slip-Box

Build a slip-box (following techniques developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann). Your slip-box will contain three components:

1. Bibliographic notes: for each reading, answer the following five questions in your own words (bullet format is fine):
   - What is the central research question or purpose of the study?
   - What is the main argument?
   - What are the key concepts and how are they defined?
   - What are the weaknesses? (If you think the work is perfect or nearly so, then write about what should be the next step in extending the study.)
   - What is the main contribution as you see it? (This may differ from what the author presents as the main contribution.)

2. Idea notes (zettels): after completing the reading for the week, write two to three idea notes (in complete sentences) for each reading. Each note contains only one idea and allows you to collect insights and develop emerging analyses in a lightweight way through the course of the semester. You might begin by asking yourself what new ideas you are most excited about, what are the most interesting things about each study, what pressing questions do the readings raise, what has most inspired or troubled you about the work. (For further details, see the Quercus handout on “Slip-box entries.”)

3. Register: Create a register for the idea notes you have written.

Entries are due by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday before each session via Quercus. No credit will be given for late entries. Entries will be marked as check (82%), check – (77%), and check+ (87%).

Discussion Questions

Before each class, students will compose a minimum of three discussion questions for that week’s readings. Your questions help prepare you for class, give me a sense of how you are engaging with the course readings and help focus our discussions. Think carefully about what you want to ask. Good questions focus on core and critical issues or make connections between different readings. Avoid questions that focus on a small detail or tangential point, questions that can easily be answered in a sentence or two, that address only one reading, and
Yes/no questions. Feel free to draw on your idea notes in developing your discussion questions. Discussion questions are due by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday before each session via e-mail to me and the presenter for that week. Students must submit questions on ten sessions to receive full credit. Questions will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis (calculated as 85%/75%).

Presentations & Leading Discussion

Each student will prepare a short (10 – 15 minutes), in-class presentation to guide our discussions, based on the readings for the session. You may begin by briefly reviewing the main points of the reading before turning to a critical, substantive presentation. This is an opportunity to share your critical assessments, emerging analyses and insights, and reflections on what you find particularly noteworthy, compelling, or troubling about the readings. The goal of the presentation is to motivate class discussion and provide a starting framework for the conversation to follow. Presenters will also prepare a handout (maximum 2 pages) covering the main points of the presentation as well as the discussion questions (organized thematically or by readings and based on questions submitted by students) and will then lead class discussion (with my assistance). Presentations will be marked for sociological imagination, organization, clarity, comprehension of materials, and presentation style.

Class Participation

Students are expected to do the reading thoroughly before each class meeting and to come to class prepared to actively discuss the readings. This means taking the time to reflect on what you’ve read before class. Working through the following questions for each reading will help prepare you:

- What is the central research question(s) the author is trying to answer?
- What is the author’s main argument?
- How does the author define (implicitly or explicitly) culture? What are the other key concepts and how are they defined and measured?
- What kind of evidence does the author offer?
- How convincingly does the evidence support the conclusions?
- What are the main contributions and strengths of the work?
- What are the weaknesses, gaps or misconceptions?
- What is most surprising or puzzling to you about the reading?
- What questions are left unanswered by the reading?
- How does the work compare to other readings or streams of research?
- How do you find the author’s work useful for your own scholarship?
Your class participation will be evaluated on the basis of your contribution to class discussion, the level of comprehension of the readings reflected in your contributions, and your ability to actively listen and engage with other members of the class.

If you must miss a class, please inform me beforehand. Unexcused absences or lateness will negatively impact your participation grade.

**Final Essay**

The final paper for this course gives you an opportunity to step back and consider the course as a whole and develop analyses and ideas that have been emerging in your slip-box. There are two options for this paper: a) motivated by the readings in this course, write a research proposal that presents your take on one of the most pressing and promising areas for future research in the sociology of culture; b) write an essay that in some way synthesizes and takes stock of what you’ve learned about the sociology of culture subfield in this class. Further direction will be provided. I am also open to other proposals for papers. Due Friday, December 9th, 5 p.m. via e-mail. 10-12 pages, double-spaced, plus bibliography. Late papers will not be accepted without legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student’s control.

**Evaluation**

- **Slip-Box** 40% (bibliographic notes, 20%; idea notes & index 20%)
- **Discussion Questions** 10% (pass/fail)
- **Class Presentation** 15%
- **Class Participation** 10%
- **Final Essay** 25%
Policies and Procedures

Academic Integrity
Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean’s office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See this link for tips for how to use sources well: (http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize).

According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence “to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.”

By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university’s rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019) and Code of Student Conduct (http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

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It is the University of Toronto's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council “Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities” at http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppnov012004.pdf.

Equity and Diversity
The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is
inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at http://equity.hrandeduincequity.utoronto.ca.

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