SC 573: Sociology of Culture  
Boston College  
Fall 2011  
Wednesdays, 12-2:30pm (Higgins 275)

Instructor: Danielle Hedegard  
Email: hedegard@u.arizona.edu (will be updated to BC address later!)  
Office: McGuinn Hall, Rm 409  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11am – 12:30pm, or set up by email (*see note below)  
Course Website: on Blackboard  

Description  
This is a mixed graduate/undergraduate level course on the sociology of culture. By the sociology of culture, I refer to three intellectual orientations: 1) to understand what constitutes culture, how it is constructed, what forms it takes, 2) to examine how culture – in its many forms – influences, or even co-constitutes, social processes and structures, and 3) to examine culture as a tool actors use in social action. We will discuss several active debates in the literature on culture: structure vs. agency, form vs. content, and coherence vs. incoherence. Culture touches many sub disciplines in sociology (race, gender, social movements, politics, nationalism, etc.), but we will not have time to discuss all of these areas. The theoretical works we will read are broadly oriented towards many areas of social like. The empirical readings emphasize inequality, race, class, gender, and work.

*Office Hours: I will post a signup sheet outside of my office. If you want to meet, please sign up in one (or two) of the 15 minute time slots listed. If these times do not fit your schedule, please email me to set up an alternative time.

Texts  
Significant sections from the following books will be assigned. I will post these chapters on blackboard, but I suggest you (especially graduate students) buy at least some of the books for your personal collection. (I did not order these through the bookstore. Please purchase online.) Other readings will also be posted online.


Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish.

Assignments and Assessment

Class attendance and participation (15%)
Students are expected to attend each meeting, do the reading thoroughly, and participate actively in class. Emphasis is on mastering the material and responding to it constructively and creatively, with an eye toward your own research interests. **Students who miss classes or do not contribute to class discussions on a regular basis will receive no higher than a B in the course.**

Weekly memos on required readings: (15%)
Students will write analytical memos on the readings each week. **Students should submit at least 10 memos.** These memos should have, at a minimum, a basic argument regarding the readings supported with evidence. Below are some examples to organize your memos, but you are not required to answer these specific questions. Memos should be between 300-500 words (1-2 pages). Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

- State what (and why) you agree or disagree with in the readings,
- Critically relate readings to one another
- Relate the readings to the themes of past readings
- Discuss how and why you might apply ideas from the readings to your own research.

Lead Discussant (25%)
Each student will act as lead discussant for one week’s readings. This should be a synthesis and analysis of them in relation to each other, as well as in relation to topics from past weeks. You can also suggest future avenues for research, or discuss the readings in relation to your own work. Finally, you should have at least 3 well-crafted discussion questions for the class. If you are assigned to a week that includes optional or graduate student readings, you must include at least one of those readings in your discussion.

Research Paper (Graduate Students) (45%)
Each student will write a research paper of roughly 20 pages. The term paper may be: (1) a literature review of a specific topic within the sociology of culture; (2) a proposal for a future research; or (3) a small-scale analysis. Students should turn in a short description of their proposed papers in Week 4 (due by Friday, September 30th, 10% of grade). The final paper is due by Friday, December 16th (40% of grade).
Final Exam (Undergraduates) (45%)
Undergraduate students will take an in-class final exam. This will be a blue-book style essay exam, covering the entire semester.

Weekly Schedule

Within each week, I organized readings to move from theoretical to empirical. I suggest you read them in the order listed. Some of the scanned readings are marked with notes and highlights. This was unavoidable. Do not use them as references for your own focus when reading. **I reserve the right to make minor changes to the reading list as needed throughout the semester**

**Week 1 (9/7): Introduction**

**Required:**

Levi Martin, John. 2009. “Life’s a beach but you’re an ant, and other unwelcome news for the sociology of culture” *Poetics*.

**Week 2 (9/14): Categories and Classification**

**Required:**


**Graduate students choose at least one:**


**Week 3 (9/21): Semiotics**

**Required:**


Tavory and Swidler. 2009. “Condom Semiotics: Meaning and Condom Use in Rural Malawi" *ASR.*


**Graduate students choose at least one:**


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**Week 4 (9/28): Ritual**

**Required:**


Week 5 (10/5): Measuring culture, units of analysis

Required:


Graduate students choose one:


Week 6 (10/12): Power and Hegemony

Required:
Williams, Raymond. “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”


Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish. Selections.


Graduate students:
**Week 7 (10/19): Ideology and Change**

**Required:**


Inglehart and Baker. 2000. “Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values.” *ASR.*

**Week 8 (10/26): Discourse and Language**

**Required:**
Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality.* Selections.


**Graduate students choose at least one:**


**Week 9 (11/2): Practice**

**Required:**


**Graduate students:**

**Optional:**

**Week 10 (11/9): Interaction, Performance, Context**

**Required:**


**Graduate students choose one:**

Week 11 (11/16): Tastes and Cultural Capital

Required:


Graduate students choose at least one:


Optional:


**Week 12 (11/23): Tastes and Cultural Capital (Con’t)**

**Week 13 (11/30): Production**

**Required:**


**Graduate students choose at least one:**


**Week 14 (12/7): Reception**

**You final paper is due by Sunday, December 11th.**

**Required:**


**Graduate students choose one:**


**THE END**