**PROPOSED SYLLABUS -- DRAFT**

**SOCIOLOGY 220: SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE**

**Rutgers University**

What does it mean to give a “cultural” explanation for a social event or pattern? What does it mean to say there is a cultural difference between people? Is pop culture the same as culture? What social forces create the cultural objects we regularly encounter and consume? We use the term culture in many contexts to describe and explain many different types of things. Most of us have some idea what we think it is, but often struggle to come up with a precise definition. This class provides a framework for thinking about what culture is from a sociological standpoint and why it matters.

This class is organized into three sections. We will explore:

1) Cultural explanations for behavior,

2) The production of culture as objects, and

3) Cultural perspectives on social life.

**Readings**

Readings are from *Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader* by Matt Wray

The reader will be supplemented by articles, book selections, and films.

**Structure of the Course**

All readings are REQUIRED and should be completed before class. Class sessions will be interactive lectures and class activities, so come to class ready to talk about the material.

**Requirements and Grading:**

**Attendance (10% of grade).** We will cover lots of material in lectures so attendance is mandatory.

**Reading Quizzes (40% of grade).** We will have a series of brief in-class quizzes on the course readings.

**Short Papers (50% of grade).** At the end of each of the 3 sections of the class, you’ll write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) paper responding to a prompt regarding the main themes for the section.

**Summary of Grading:**

Attendance and Participation 10%

Reading Quizzes 40%

Short Paper 1 (Cultural Explanations) 10%

Short Paper 2 (Making Cultural Objects) 20%

Short Paper 3 (Culture and Social Life) 20%

---------------------------------------------------------------

TOTAL 100%

**SECTION ONE: CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS FOR BEHAVIOR**

**Week 1: Cultural Explanations for Behavior:** Culture vs. what? // What do most people think culture is? Lay Theories of Culture

Economics: “[When ‘Culture’ Is the Best Explanation](http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2013/04/when-culture-is-the-best-explanation.html)”

Biology: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/runners/> Radio Lab: Cut and Run

Personality: Implicit theories of personality

**Week 2: Cultural Explanations for Behavior:** Culture as meaning // Culture and interaction

Gary Alan Fine, “Group Culture”

Raymond Williams, “The Meanings of ‘Culture’”

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description”

**Week 3: Cultural Explanations for Behavior:** Toolkit // Social Construction

Ann Swidler, “Culture as a Toolkit”

Selection from Zerubavel, *The Fine Line*

Selection from Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*

*First Short Paper Due*

**SECTION TWO: MAKING CULTURAL OBJECTS**

**Week 4: Making cultural objects: TV**

Michael Schudson “Media Effects”

William Bielby and Denise Bielby, “Making Hits”

Cerulo, Karen A. 1984. “Television, Magazine Covers, and the Shared Symbolic Environment: 1948-1970.” *American Sociological Review* 49: 4: 566-570.

**Week 5: Making cultural objects: Art**

Howard Becker, “Art Worlds”

Selection from *Sociology of Art: A Reader*, Ed. Tanner

**Week 6: Making cultural objects: Music**

Jennifer Lena and Richard Peterson, “Changing Musical Styles”

Lopes, Paul. 1992. “Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry.” American Sociological Review. 73:697-718.

*Film:* “Twenty Feet from Stardom”

**Week 7: Making cultural objects: Fashion**

Ashley Mears on Fashion

Simmel, Georg. “Fashion”, In Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms. Ed. Levine, Chicago.

**Week 8: Making cultural objects: Production of Culture // Culture and Innovation**

Richard Peterson on Production of Culture

Groce, 1989. “Occupational Rhetoric and Ideology: A Comparison of Copy and Original Music Performers.”

Selections from *Why Smart People Fall for Fads* by Joel Best

*Second Short Paper Due*

**SECTION THREE: CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL LIFE**

**Week 9: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Inequality—Gender and race**

John Skrentny, “Culture and Racial and Ethnic Groups”

Jay Macleod, “Culture, Class, and Race” OR Michele Lamont

Zimmerman and West, “Doing Gender”

Martin, Karin. 1998. “Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools,” American Sociological Review. 63:494-511.

**Week 10: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Inequality—Class**

Pierre Bourdieu, “Naming as Power”

Paul DiMaggio, “Highbrow and Lowbrow Culture”

Bethany Bryson, “Music and Symbolic Exclusion”

Paul Willis, “Culture, Capitalism, and the Working Class”

**Week 11: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Health**

Peter Hall and Michele Lamont, “Culture and Health”

Matthew Kreuter and Stephanie McClure, “The Role of Culture in Health Communication,” *Annual Review of Public Health*

**Week 12: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Politics**

Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, “Enduring Structure of Civil Discourse”

Polletta on frames in social movements

Andrew Perrin, “Political Microcultures”

**Week 13: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Family**

Annette Lareau, “Families, Institutions, and Inequalities”

Milkie, Melissa A. and Kathleen E. Denny. 2014. "Changes in the Cultural Model of Father Involvement: Descriptions of Benefits to Fathers, Children, and Mothers in Parents’ Magazine, 1926-2006" *Journal of Family Issues*.

**Week 14: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Economics**

Viviana Zelizer, “Pricing the Priceless Child”

Kieran Healy, selection from *Last Best Gifts*

Viviana Zelizer, selection from *The Purchase of Intimacy*

**Week ‘15’: Cultural Perspectives on Social Life: Culture and Law**

David Garland, “Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning”

Austin Sarat, “Narratives of Violence in Capital Trials”

Jonathan Simon, selections from *Governing Through Crime*

*Third Short Paper Due*