Course Framework

This course is designed as a broad, but in-depth introduction to American society and culture. We will examine aspects of American culture and institutions that shape modern human experience and the ways in which they are changing. We will be paying particular attention to relations of power and conflict. In doing this, I predict we will tune-in to some of the most pressing questions and problems facing our minds and the world. What is “normal”? Who (or what) decides normality? Why has inequality persisted so much in the U.S. (and world) over the last 2 decades? How does economic power get converted to political power, and why? How and why does racial/ethnic segregation and inequality persist? How have modern institutions -- such as family, media and education -- shaped our understandings of ourselves, our goals, our loyalties, our gender identities and sexuality? What is culture and how is "it" related to social power? Who controls the mass media and does it matter in the “making of meaning”? Where is our society and world headed, and what are the possibilities? How do social movements play a part in shaping history and the allocation of power? How do you feel while the world teeters on an edge of social and ecological crisis? Why do you feel that way? By no means shall this be an uncomplicated journey. To really engage these and other questions, you can expect to read a lot (about 100 pages per week, or about 2 hours of reading for every hour of class time), think a lot, and write some… but not a lot. It will be impossible for you to take this journey unless you link heart, mind and body into the learning process, or in other words have a passion to learn and the discipline to read.

Readings
Available at the U of O Bookstore.

4) ONLINE COURSE READINGS: SEE BLACKBOARD. These readings are indicated with an asterisk (*) in the outline below.

Course Boundaries
My intention is to help create an environment where each of us can share our views and expand our perceptions of ourselves and the world that we are creating. Maintaining a common ground in the course readings will help us toward that end. I encourage you to complete the readings as they are listed on Blackboard. Please do your best to complete the assigned section before the respective lecture times, as there will be close links between the lectures, discussion and readings. Finally, since we meet under compressed circumstances, with this much reading, it would be a benefit to all if we raise questions and comments in class.
Below you will find my proposal for evaluating how each of you engage the course material. My intention with this proposal is to provide a framework from which I can assess how much and to what depth each of you pursue the course material.

**PROPOSAL:** 4 graded activities. First, 20% of your total grade is determined by your attendance and participation in class. Each day accounts for 1.2% of your grade, so be sure to attend and sign the role sheet. Everyone will receive two free (unmarked) absences. I’ve adopted this policy to eliminate the negotiations, explanations, and justifications for absences. No need to report your absences to me unless significant life changes impact your ability to participate in your school activities. Use the absences wisely. Secondly, three quizzes will be distributed throughout the term (see course outline below for the dates). Each of these is worth 15% of your grade, totaling 45%. The third component of this proposal is that you respond to a take-home essay question in about 3 pages, worth 15% of your total grade. This is due on **December 7**, during the final exam. You will receive instructions for this in class. Fourth, there will be an in-class final exam scheduled for **Thursday Dec. 7** at **8:00am**. This component of the final is worth 20% of your total grade.

**SOC 399 Credit** – pursue an alternative method of evaluation. If you find that the proposal above does not meet your needs for learning in this class, or if you would like to supplement this plan, you may pursue an alternative method of evaluation by enrolling in a 1 credit experimental class. My hope is to create a small classroom learning environment within this larger course. There, up to 15 of you may participate in more advanced discussions and develop projects that cover the material presented in American Society. The project you develop in that course will determine your grade for this course. It is my guess that those of you who wish to learn with more depth, creativity, and with more opportunities for participation will find this option enriching. Soc 399 (17218) meets Thursday from 9-9:50 in ESL 112.

**Course Outline**

All readings refer to online readings in the Blackboard folder for “Course Documents” or to one of the three books assigned for the class. Readings from the books are indicated with the authors name(s) in **bold**.

**I) Introduction: Weeks 1-2**

A) Sociology – Knowledge and Being in the Modern World

B) The Expansion of Capitalism
   - Max Weber, Selection from “Politics as a Vocation”
   - Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Bourgeois and Proletarians” from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (up to page 22).

C) Social Identity, the Self, and the Power of the Social:
   - Berger & Luckmann, “Society as a Human Product”
   - Mead, GH. “The Social Self” and “Social Attitudes and the Physical World”
   - Milgram, “The Perils of Obedience”

**Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial**, Intro and Chapter 1
II) Authoritarianism: Denial and American History

What is meant by Authoritarianism?

A) Gender Socialization, Family Abuse, and Violence: Weeks 2-3
   - See Web Readings on Blackboard
   Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Chaps 2-4
   
   Film – Tough Guise

QUIZ #1 – October 17

B) Politics of Social Control: Week 4

Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 5
   - Rosenhan, “On Being Sane in Insane Places”
   - Schwartz, NYT on Iraq and Prison Experiments
   - “The American Prison Crisis”

C) Race, Colonization and American Holocaust
   
   - Early European colonization and empires
   - Race, Racism: Conquest and Slavery (Smedley/Smedley “Race as Biology is Fiction”)
   Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 7

FILM

D) Poverty, Wealth and Power

QUIZ #2 – October 26

III) The Consequences of Denial, Illusions of Empire

A) October 31: Militarism and the Discourse of Punishment and Retribution
   
   Johnson, Chalmers. The Sorrows of Empire. Chaps 1-2
   Milburn and Conrad, Politics of Denial, Ch. 6 & 8
   
   Film: Why We Fight

B) November 9: Media and Memory
**Johnson, Chalmers.** *The Sorrows of Empire*. Chaps 3-6
**Skolnit, R.** *Hope in the Dark*. Read it all by end of Week 10.

Film: The Ad and the Ego

Quiz #3 – November 21

C) November 21: Ecology and Global Environmental Crisis

**Milburn and Conrad**, *Politics of Denial*, Ch. 9 & Conclusion
**Skolnit, R.** *Hope in the Dark*. Read it all by end of Week 10.

D) November 28: Getting out of Denial

**Johnson, Chalmers.** *The Sorrows of Empire*. Finish the book.
**Skolnit, R.** *Hope in the Dark*. Read it all by end of Week 10.

FINAL EXAM: December 7th, Thursday, 8:00am