MUS 407 / 507: Hip Hop Studies

Professor Loren Kajikawa

Class Location / Time: 207 Music Building
Tuesdays, 1:00pm – 3:50pm

Office Hours: 205 Collier House
Wednesdays, 1:00pm – 3:00pm

kajikawa@uoregon.edu

Course Description

How have hip hop and rap music been written about by scholars? What issues and methodologies have been important and why? What particular challenges confront those researching and writing about the music? What contributions can future scholars make to hip hop culture and history?

In this seminar, we address these and other questions through readings, discussions, and writing assignments that explore the growing body of research on hip hop and rap music. In addition, students will undertake original research projects on hip hop-related topics.

Course Themes

Research and writing about hip hop music is diverse and has evolved considerably in the past thirty years. Scholars have approached the music from a variety of...
disciplinary backgrounds and with different questions in mind. Some themes that have been important include:

1. Hip hop music as culture
   - What pre-existing cultural influences led to the development of hip hop music? How do Afro-Diasporic approaches to music making help to explain its workings? Can hip hop itself be described as a coherent culture with its own values and ways of looking at the world?

2. Hip hop music as history
   - Why did hip hop music develop in the particular time and place that it did? How can we understand hip hop music’s relationship to changing historical contexts? How does hip hop engage with its own history?

3. Hip hop music and politics
   - What political issues have been central to the hip hop generation? In what ways are hip hop music and politics co-dependent and co-productive? How has hip hop music itself become a political topic?

4. Hip hop music and identity
   - How does hip hop music contribute to new understandings of identity (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.)? Does hip hop reinforce or resist normative constructions of identity?

5. Hip hop music as music
   - Hip hop was initially dismissed by some as “not really music.” Why does hip hop’s status as music matter? What does it mean to take hip hop seriously as music? Do new methods need to be developed to study it?

Accessible Education/Students with Disabilities: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability related barriers to your participation, please notify us as soon as possible. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu or http://aec.uoregon.edu/

Prohibited Discrimination and Sexual Harassment: The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex based bullying and stalking. Any UO employee who becomes aware that such behavior is occurring has a duty to report that information to their supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity.
The University Health Center and University Counseling and Testing Center can provide assistance and have a greater ability to work confidentially with students. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options as confidential counselors are not deemed mandatory reporters. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

**E-mail Etiquette:** As a rule, you should understand your relationships to professors as professional relationships. When corresponding by e-mail, always include a salutation (“Dear Prof. Kajikawa”) and a closing that identifies who you are (“Sincerely, Sean Carter”). Please also note that I might not check my e-mail more than once per day, or at all on weekends or in the evening, and I might not have time to reply immediately. Please have patience and do not hesitate to follow up with a second e-mail or in person during office hours or before, during, or after class if I have not replied to e-mail.

**Electronic Devices:** Cell phones must be turned off prior to class and put away. **PLEASE DO NOT TEXT IN CLASS.**

**Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:** All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. Please review the University’s policies at: http://uodos.uoregon.edu/

**Student Conduct and Climate:** The topics covered in this course are often emotionally charged and are not always easy to discuss openly. You are expected to engage the issues in a reflective and respectful manner, and to show respect for other students and the professor at all times. We are all accountable to create a climate of mutual respect in the classroom. While differences of opinion are vital and will be encouraged, common courtesy as well as University policy prohibits personal attacks and discriminatory conduct.

**If You Are Having Difficulty in the Class:** If you find yourself struggling in the class, it is best to take immediate steps to address the situation; your grade cannot be adjusted at the end of the term because of extenuating circumstances. Consider instead:

A. Coming to the office hours of the professor with questions or issues to discuss
B. Meeting with classmates in a regular study group to review readings or prepare for assignments and exams
C. Taking advantage of the many on-campus resources intended to support students: Student Support Services, the Teaching and Learning Center, the
Writing Lab, etc. accessed through the Teaching and Learning Center at 68 PLC.

Required Materials


- This book should be purchased immediately at the UO Duck Store.

Other readings will be available as PDF files and posted to Blackboard. Students are responsible for printing out assigned readings and bringing them to class. A set of readings will also be left on reserve at Copy Shop (539 E 13th Ave). You can print out copies and even have them bound into an easy to carry reader for a reasonable price.

About MUS 407/507 Hip Hop Studies

MUS 407/507 is a seminar. Prof. Kajikawa will NOT be lecturing. Instead, students will help generate knowledge through their engagement with course materials. The success of this seminar depends on students coming to class well prepared. This means completing all assigned readings and other assignments on time.

This course is a mixed undergraduate and graduate level seminar. The UO Committee on Courses requires that blended courses specify distinct requirements for these different populations of students. Although the majority of course readings and assignments will be similar, the major differences are as follows:

- Graduate students will regularly lead discussions of reading assignments
- Graduate students will have extra reading assignments
- Graduate students will write longer research papers
- Undergraduate students will take a midterm exam (take-home format)
- Undergraduate students will sometimes have separate assignments

Undergraduate Student Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper (Description/Draft/Final)</td>
<td>20% (1% + 4% + 15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduate Student Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Leading</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper (Description/Draft/Final)</td>
<td>20% (1% + 4% + 15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

This class meets only once each week for three hours. Attendance is **essential and mandatory**. Missed classes will negatively impact your grade. One unexcused absence will lower your final grade by 5%. A second unexcused absence will result in a **failing grade** for the course.

Earning credit for participation will require **active engagement** in discussion activities. Merely showing up for every meeting will not earn you full credit. In addition to preparing for discussions, each student should **keep notes on all the readings, and on the discussions**. These will come in handy when it is time for the oral exam at the end of the course; you are welcome to consult the instructors about how best to take notes. If you are a “listener” and not a “talker,” please see Prof. Kajikawa early in the term to arrange other ways in which you can demonstrate active participation.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

For **each reading assignment** (book chapter, article, etc.) students will write a **short summary** (less than one double-spaced page in length). Summarizing a book chapter or article in less than a single page requires laser-like focus and can be harder than you might imagine. Start by stating the author's main purpose for writing the article; continue by giving an example of how the author goes about proving his or her argument (or sharing his or her research); conclude by tying up any loose ends, revealing other layers of complexity, and/or by making a quick connection to the other readings.

Writing assignments are **due BEFORE the beginning of class** and should be uploaded to Blackboard (see the “Assignments” link). Late assignments will be **lose a letter grade** for each day late.
EXAMS:

Undergraduate students will be given a take-home midterm exam, which will include a series of short essay questions. The exam will be distributed in class on Tuesday, May 12 and will be due via online submission to Blackboard on Saturday, May 16 (11:59pm).

RESEARCH PAPER & PRESENTATION:

For the final assignment, students will write research papers in which they analyze a song of their choosing. However, rather than focus exclusively on just one song, the goal of the assignment will be to situate the chosen recording in a historical, political, cultural, and musical context. The chapters in Sounding Race provide one model, but students will be encouraged to develop approaches that best suit their projects.

In addition, each student will create and share a Prezi presentation about their song (using free software available at prezi.com). The presentations will provide an overview of the research project and explain the chosen song's significance with respect to course themes. Presentations will take place during Weeks 9 and 10.

A description of your project is due online Friday, May 8 at 11:59pm (Week 6). An annotated bibliography is due online Friday, May 22 at 11:59pm (Week 8). A first draft of the paper is due online Friday, May 29 at 11:59pm (Week 9). The revised final draft is due no later than Tuesday, June 9 at 11:59pm (Finals).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Tuesday, March 31

Course Introduction: Hip Hop Studies

Reading:
  • MUS 407/507 Syllabus
  • “Introduction,” Sounding Race in Rap Songs

Assignments:
  • Get copy of Sounding Race in Rap Songs and other course readings
Week 2: Tuesday, April 7

Classic Material: Hip Hop Studies in the 1990s

Reading:
- Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*
- Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics"
- Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*

- Robert Walser, “Rhythm, Rhyme, Rhetoric” (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Write summaries for each chapter and article assigned
- EXTRA CREDIT: two-page summary of Edwin Hill’s public lecture

Event:
- Edwin Hill, “Cypher v. State,” Monday, 4/6 @ 4pm (Browsing Room)

Week 3: Tuesday, April 14

Hip Hop Journalism (Guest: Brian Coleman)

Reading:
- Brian Coleman, *Check The Technique Volume 2* (excerpts)
- Loren Kajikawa, *Sounding Race* (Introduction)

- Oliver Wang, “Trapped In Between The Lines” (grad students only)
- Raquel Cepeda (editor), *And It Don’t Stop* (3-11; 83-85; 121-146)

Assignments:
- **Listen** to albums discussed in Coleman reading
- **Write** 2 pages about your experience reading *Check the Technique* and listening to the albums.
- **Summarize** (1-page) the introduction to *Sounding Race* (and “Trapped In Between the Lines” for graduate students only)
- **Extra Credit**: two-page summary of Boots Riley & Brian Coleman event

Event:
- “Taking Over: The Life and Times of Boots Riley of The Coup”
  Boots Riley in conversation with Brian Coleman
  Wednesday, April, 15 @ 7pm (163 Music Building)
Week 4: Tuesday, April 21

Early Hip Hop and the Birth of Rap Music

Reading:
- Chapter 1: “Rapper's Delight,” *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*
- Joseph Schloss, *Foundation*
- Dan Charnas, “Uptown/Downtown,” *The Big Payback*
- Mark Katz, “Mix and Scratch” (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Write summaries for each chapter assigned

Week 5: Tuesday, April 28

Sample-Based Hip Hop

Reading:
- Chapter 2: “Rebel Without a Pause,” *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*
- Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats*
- Oliver Wang, “Beat Making”
- Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Write summaries for each chapter and article assigned

Week 6: Tuesday, May 5

Gangsta Rap

Reading:
- Chapter 3: "Let Me Ride," *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*
- Selected articles about and reviews of N.W.A. and Dr. Dre’s music
- Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin’ But a G Thang*
- Justin Williams, *Rhymin’ and Stealin’* (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Write summaries for each chapter assigned
- Project description due online **Friday, May 8** at 11:59pm.
Week 7: Tuesday, May 12

Racial Authenticity

Reading:
- Chapter 4: "My Name Is," *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*
- Selected articles about and reviews of Eminem’s music
- Oliver Wang, “Rapping and Repping Asian”
- Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground* (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Midterm exam due online **Saturday, May 16** at 11:59pm.
- Write summaries for each chapter and article assigned

Week 8: Tuesday, May 19

Convention and Counter-convention (Guest: Susan McClary)

Reading:
- “Conclusion,” *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*
- Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*
- Susan McClary, “Introduction,” *Conventional Wisdom* (grad students only)

Assignments:
- Write summaries for each chapter and article assigned
- Annotated bibliography due online **Friday, May 22** at 11:59pm.

Week 9: Tuesday, May 26

Presentations Part I

Reading: None

Assignments:
- Listening Examples for presentations (TBA)
- First draft of paper due online **Friday, May 29** at 11:59pm.
Week 10: Tuesday, June 2

Presentations Part II

Reading: None
Assignments:
  • Listening Examples for presentations (TBA)

Finals Week

Final Papers Due online **Tuesday, June 9** at 11:59pm.