What is “popular culture”? Nobody agrees about an answer to this question, though there are many answers. Much of the problem is that neither the term “popular” nor the term “culture” is unambiguous -- both terms could mean at least more than one thing. For example, “popular” might be used pejoratively to mean mainstream, low-brow or kitsch. “Popular” might also be used literally to mean simply the culture or cultures constituted and engaged with by some group. Other meanings might be discerned, too.

Rather than trying to explicate “popular culture,” this course examines the ways in which the notion of “culture” is controversial. It situates the controversy in debates about different and contested conceptions of human agency and flourishing. By exploring the reciprocal relations between so-called “mass media” and culture, the course emphasises how economics and political economy shape communication, and in turn, how modes of communication shape conceptions of individual identity and community belonging.

**Evaluation**

First Paper (2-3 pages) 20%
Second Paper (4-5 pages) 20%
Third Paper (4-5 pages) 20%
Final Exam 30%
Participation 10%

**Class Policies**

The policies for the class are outlined in the document available at: www.chass.utoronto.ca/~jfoster/CMST_Policy.pdf. By registering in the course students covenant to abide by the class policies as well as those in the University code of conduct.
Tentative Reading List

All course readings are available via the course webpage, indicated above. The instructor reserves the right to adjust the reading list as the course develops. All changes will be announced in class and via the course webpage.

Topic 1 -- Beyond Britney and Beyoncé

John Storey, “What is Popular Culture?” from Cultural Theory and Popular Culture


Topic 2 -- Who’s Afraid of Popular Culture?

Roger Scruton, “The Great Swindle” from Aeon.
Jim Ferreira, “Cultural Conservatism and Mass Culture: The Case Against Democracy”

John Storey, “The Social Life of Opera”
John Seabrook, “Nobrow Culture” in The New Yorker (September 1999).

Essay 1 Assigned: What is cultural conservatism? What problems does it face?

Topic 3 -- It’s No Big Deal: Liberalism and Neo-Liberalism

Video: Dire Straits, Money for Nothing (1985)
Video: Katy Perry, This is How We Do (2013)

Journalism Pieces:
Youtube: “Three Minute Theory: What is Neo-Liberalism?”
Scott Sumner, “The Unacknowledged Success of Neo-Liberalism”
Paul Krugman, “The Conscience of a Liberal”
David Sloan Wilson, “A Good Social Darwinism” in Aeon.
**Topic 4 -- It's A Big Deal: Marxism**

Video: Gil Scott Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970)
John Storey, “Marxisms” from *Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*.
Movie: *In Time* (2011)

**Essay 2 Assigned: What is the Marxist critique of liberalism? What does the critique imply about popular culture?**

**Topic 5 -- Is American Pop Culture Hegemonic?**

Byungju Shin and Gon Namkung, “Films and Cultural Hegemony: American Hegemony “Outside” and “Inside” the “007” Movie Series”
Marnie Carroll, “American Television in Europe: Problematizing the Notion of Pop Cultural Hegemony”
Edward Rothstein, “Damning (Yet Desiring) Mickey and the Big Mac” from the *New York Times Magazine*.
Robert Genter, “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics”

**Topic 6 -- “Media Determines Our Situation”**

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Preface and Introduction
Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, ch.6-7.

**Topic 8 -- Mass Media and Mass Capital**

Topic 9 -- Getting the Message


Diane Zimmerman Umble, “Sinful Network or Divine Service” from *New Media*

*Essay 3 Assigned*

Topic 10 -- Two Cheers for Materialism! Postmodernism and Consumerism

John Storey, “Postmodernism” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*.

Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, ch. 3 and 5.

Topic 11 -- The Media Panopticon: From Consumer to Shadow Worker

Clay Shirky, “Gin, Television and Social Surplus” in *The Social Media Reader*, ch.16

David Brade, “Are We All Online Content Creators Now? Web 2.0 and Digital Divides”
Emily Nussbaum, “Say Everything” from *New York Magazine* (February 2007)