

University of Manitoba  
Department of Sociology

**SOC 7160 To1**  
**Selected Topics in Sociology: Media and Consumer Culture**

Wednesdays 1.00-3.55 pm  
335 Isbister Building  
Winter 2011, 3 Credit Hours

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-2, Thursdays 10-11

**Course Objectives**

This course provides an advanced introduction to the socio-cultural analysis of what has been called a 'consumer culture', marked by an increasing emphasis on the stylization of consumption, and intricately interlinked with the expansion of media such as brands. It begins with a consideration of classical to more recent accounts of the social and cultural significance of commodities and consumption. We then turn to an analysis of the stylization, or aestheticization of consumption, exploring and evaluating alternative explanations of the emergence and shape of contemporary consumer culture (e.g. production-led and consumption-led explanations). We address the complex relationship between the increasing emphasis on commodity aesthetics and the rise, growth and shifts in media forms such as advertising and branding. Related to this theme, we will explore the role of 'cultural intermediaries' in processes of aestheticization and configurations of contemporary consumers. We will then consider alternative accounts of consumption practices in consumer culture (e.g. lifestylization, social distinction). Finally, we will assess the implications of cultural consumption for social life, focusing on issues of self-identity and belonging, social division and inequality, and the cultural politics of consumption.

**Required Readings**

Required readings will be on reserve in the Dafoe library. Selections of assigned readings will be made available in the photocopier room.

**Assessment**

Participation

- The course will follow a seminar format, involving student presentations and discussion of assigned readings. Each week a pair of students will be responsible for jointly presenting the readings to the class (summarizing the readings in approximately 15 minutes), raising questions, and facilitating discussion. Presentations should be structured around a guiding theme.
- All students are expected to complete the required readings prior to the class, and actively participate in class discussions.

### Critical reviews (**due in class**)

- Students are required to write two short papers (4-5 pages), each of which will provide a critical review of all the readings for one week. Students will likely (but not necessarily) want to submit papers for the set of readings they are covering in their presentations. Critical reviews papers are due at the end of the class in which the articles reviewed are presented.

### Essay (**due April 7**)

- Students will be required to write an essay of 5000 words. The essay topic will be chosen by the student, and must fit within the broad themes of the course, drawing on the theories and concepts we have considered. Topics must be approved by the instructor. Papers will be presented to the class near the end of the course, as a work in progress.

**Note:** Students are instructed to *always keep a personal copy of any submitted work* in the case that they are required to submit another copy.

### Grade Weights

1. Participation 30%
  - Seminar presentations 10%
  - Class participation when not presenting 20%
2. Critical Reviews 30% (15% each)
3. Essay 40%
  - Paper 35%
  - Presentation 5%

### Grade Distribution

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>GPA</i>	<i>Description</i>
A+	91-100%	4.5	Exceptional
A	80-90%	4.0	Excellent
B+	75-79%	3.5	Very Good
B	70-74%	3.0	Good
C+	65-69%	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60-64%	2.0	Adequate
D	50-59%	1.0	Marginal
F	49% or less	0	Failure

## **Late Submissions, Missed Tests, and Missed Participation Exercises**

- Students who are absent on their assigned date of presentations will receive a grade of 0. Medical documentation will normally be required to waive this penalty.
- Missed classes, failure to read assigned texts, and disruptive or negative classroom behaviour will result in lower participation marks.
- Late papers will be penalized 3% per day late (including weekends) unless an extension has been obtained from the professor PRIOR to the deadline. Medical documentation will normally be required to waive this penalty.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (Section 7.1) and 'Examinations: Personations' (Section 4.2.8) found in the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar. *Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and range from failing the course to expulsion from the University.* Guidelines for properly referencing your papers will be distributed in class.

**Note:** The Faculty of Arts reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

## **Religious Holidays**

The University of Manitoba acknowledges the right of all students to observe recognized holy days of their faith. You will need to inform the instructor in writing of your intended absence(s) at least three weeks in advance, particularly if such absence(s) coincide with the set mid-term test date.

## **Voluntary Withdrawal**

Last day for voluntary withdrawal from the course without academic penalty is **March 18, 2011.**

**Lecture Topics and Readings**  
*Handed out on the first day of term*