COMM 322: Communication & Popular Culture

Fall 2026

Course Information

Instructor Information
Courtney Dreyer, Ph.D.
Communication Studies
courtney.dreyer@bsu.edu

Catalog Description
Examines popular culture and teaches communication perspectives to evaluate the influential appeal of a variety of texts; focuses on the power, potential, and problems of popular culture; stresses the importance of using communication theory to understand messages in media.

COMM 322 and the University Core Curriculum
COMM 322 is part of the University Core Curriculum. As such, COMM 322 contributes to your overall experience at BSU by enabling you to:

- Realize your intellectual potential.
- Add breadth and depth to your educational experience
- Develop skills that promote lifelong success through critical analysis and meaningful application.
- Apply principles of communication to accomplish your goals, be they personal, professional, and/or civic.

COMM 322 contributes to the Beneficence Theme of Being Human because the creation and consumption of media is uniquely human. Media texts illustrate elements of culture and spotlight values that can connect and divide us in this rapidly changing world.

COMM 322 contributes to the Beneficence Theme of Global Connections because the creation and consumption of media allows us to recognize and appreciate the varied cultural voices that shape our world. Messages in the media can illustrate how our experiences are both similar and unique when compared to other cultural groups.

Course Structure & Rationale
This course is designed to help you develop critical thinking, media literacy, and persuasive communication skills through the rhetorical analysis of popular culture. Throughout the semester, we will examine a variety of popular culture texts and explore how they communicate ideas about identity and society. You will practice using concepts, frameworks, and methods from communication, rhetorical, media, and cultural studies to develop evidence-based arguments and communicate your interpretations clearly and persuasively.

Because these skills develop through practice, much of the learning in this course will take place during class meetings. Rather than simply learning about theories of popular culture and media analysis, you will regularly practice using these concepts to interpret popular culture texts, consider multiple perspectives, and develop your own arguments. Regular attendance and engagement are therefore important components of your success in this course.

Course Objectives Aligned with ICC Student Learning Objectives:
At the end of this course, students should be able to:

ICC: Humanistic and Artistic	**Course Learning Objective**	**NACE Competencies**
6.2 Apply disciplinary methodologies, epistemologies, and traditions of the humanities and the arts, including the ability to distinguish primary and secondary sources	Distinguish between primary and secondary sources when determining how disciplinary perspectives and theories contribute to or detract from learning about media and culture.	Communication Critical Thinking
6.3 Analyze and evaluate texts, objects, events, or ideas in their cultural, intellectual, or historical contexts.	Identify, analyze, compare, and evaluate various mediated texts/sources paying particular attention to the influence of contexts and how the texts shape and influence society.	Critical Thinking
6.5 Create, interpret, or reinterpret artistic and/or humanistic works through performance or criticism.	Interpret or reinterpret mediated texts/works through performance or criticism lens.	Critical Thinking
6.6 Develop arguments about forms of human agency or expression grounded in rational analysis and in an understanding of and respect for spatial, temporal, and cultural contexts.	Develop arguments grounded in analysis about the scope and power of popular culture to shape societal issues and cultural contexts (including but not limited to race, gender, class, and politics).	Critical Thinking Equity & Inclusion

Additional Course Objectives
At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify, explain and apply key terms, perspectives, and theories of popular culture, media, and communication (NACE: Communication and Critical Thinking)

- Assess how social, cultural, and historical contexts affect media development and shape messages in the media (NACE: Critical Thinking)
- Develop skills in technology (including social media) and research to determine what choices are most effective for constructing impactful messages (NACE: Technology and Critical Thinking)

Required Materials

- Soukup, C. & Foust, C. R. (2024) *Popular culture in everyday life: a critical introduction* (1st ed., online) Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
    - This textbook is available for free online through Ball State's library. You can access it through the "Reading List" tab on our Canvas page.
- Additional readings and course materials will be posted on Canvas throughout the semester.
- A writing utensil (pen or pencil) is required for each class meeting

Recommended Materials

- A dedicated composition notebook for taking and organizing course notes.

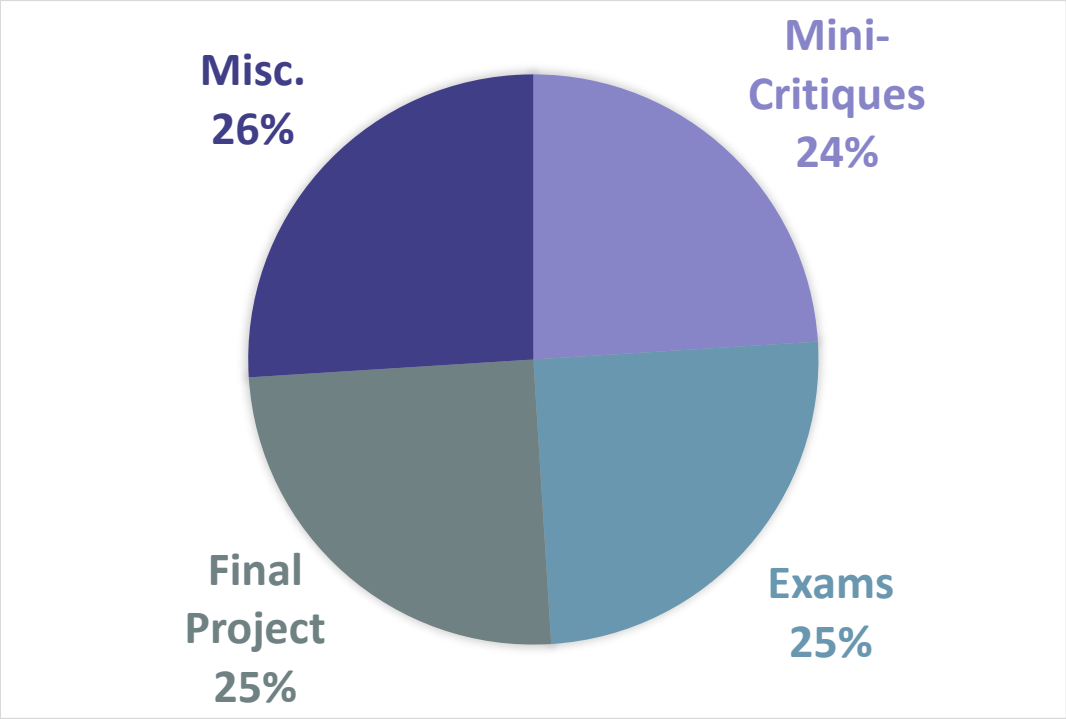
Course Assignments

Assignment details, including instructions, relevant readings, due dates, and grading criteria/rubrics will be posted and updated on Canvas.

Assignment	**Total Points Possible**
My Pop Culture Story Presentation*	25
Mini-Critiques (8 assigned x 20 pts each, two lowest scores dropped)	120
Unit 1 Exam	50
Unit 2 Exam	75
Final Project (proposal, outline, presentation, Q&A, and partner evaluation)	125
Semester Reflection*	30
Participation Activities* (15 required at 5pts each, at least 20 opportunities available)	75
Total:	**500**

*These assignments are included in the "Misc." category in the point distribution chart below.

Points Distribution



Grading Scale

All final grades are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Letter grades are based on the following scale:

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	100- 94%
A-	93- 90%
B+	89- 87%
B	86- 84%
B-	83- 80%
C+	79- 77%
C	76- 74%
C-	73- 70%
D+	69- 67%
D	67- 64%
D-	63- 60%
F	< 60%

Course & University Policies

Continued enrollment in this course indicates your agreement to the policies listed within this syllabus. If you have concerns or needs that I do not preemptively address, please reach out by e-mail or stop by my office hours so we can discuss solutions together. This is an option for you at any point during the semester.

Classroom Expectations
Students are expected to come to class prepared to learn. Please bring a pen or pencil each day, as many in-class activities will involve written responses completed on paper. I also strongly recommend using a dedicated composition notebook for this course to organize your notes.

Your midterm and final exam will be open-note, provided your notes are in hard copy. A dedicated notebook makes it easy to keep your notes organized and bring them to class on exam days. You are welcome to take notes digitally throughout the semester, but any notes you wish to use during the exams must be printed in advance.

All electronic devices (phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) should be silenced and used in ways that support your learning without distracting those around you.

I recognize that no one is at their best every day, and I do not expect perfection. I do expect that you make a genuine effort to engage with the course and contribute to our learning community. Participation looks different for different people. While speaking during discussions is encouraged, thoughtful listening, active engagement with class activities, and meaningful contributions in other ways are also valuable forms of participation.

University Statement
We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse.

Disability Statement
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

Freedom of Expression
In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions.

Please review Ball State University's Statement on Freedom of Expression, the resources on Ball State's Freedom of Expression webpage, and Ball State's Beneficence Pledge.

Communication
Students are expected to check Canvas regularly, including announcements and course messages. Important course information, reminders, and updates will be communicated through Canvas.

If you have questions outside of class, please email me from your BSU email account**.** My email address is listed on the first page of this syllabus. When emailing, please address me as Dr. Dreyer or Professor.

I typically respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends and during breaks. If you have not received a response after 48 hours, please send a follow-up message.

Attendance Policy
Attendance is recorded each class meeting in accordance with university policy. Although attendance itself is not a graded component of this course, students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and come prepared to participate.

Because much of our work is collaborative, discussion-based, or completed during class, many learning experiences cannot be recreated outside the classroom. Regular attendance is essential for keeping up with course content and participating fully in class activities.

Students are responsible for obtaining any notes, announcements, or course materials they miss during an absence. Lesson slide decks will be posted to Canvas by the start of each class meeting and should be reviewed if you miss class.

Missed In-Class Graded Work
Many graded components of this course—including participation activities, Friday mini-critiques, exams, presentations, and other in-class assignments—must be completed during the scheduled class meeting. Unless otherwise stated, missed in-class graded work cannot be made up.

Exceptions are made only for approved university-sponsored absences (such as official athletic or university organization travel) or documented extenuating circumstances. When possible, students should notify me in advance of a university-sponsored absence.

In-Class Activities & Participation
Throughout the semester, we will complete a variety of in-class activities designed to help you apply course concepts, engage with your classmates, and practice the skills we discuss in class. While these assignments typically cannot be made-up, there is built-in flexibility for Friday Mini-Critiques and participation activities. Built-in flexibility recognizes that students may

occasionally miss class or have an off day while still encouraging consistent engagement throughout the semester. See the specific policies below:

> **Friday Mini-Critiques.** There will be 8 Friday mini-critiques during the semester. At the end of the semester, your 2 lowest mini-critique scores will automatically be dropped.
>
> **Participation Activities.** Participation activities will occur at least once each week and often twice. These activities may include discussions, written reflections, group work, polls, or other short exercises. Participation activities are intentionally unannounced to encourage consistent attendance and engagement throughout the semester.
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> Each participation activity is worth 5 points. There will be at least 20 participation activities throughout the semester, and you must complete 15 to earn full credit (75 points) for the participation portion of your grade. Any additional participation activities you complete beyond the required 15 will count as extra credit.

Canvas Assignments

A small number of course assignments are submitted through Canvas rather than completed during class. Unless otherwise noted, these assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. on the scheduled due date.

All Canvas-submitted assignments include a 12-hour grace period. Assignments submitted during the grace period will not receive a late penalty. Once the grace period has ended, the late work policy below applies.

Students are responsible for submitting the correct file and verifying that their upload was successful. Uploading the wrong file, a blank file, or a corrupted file may be treated as a non-submission until the correct file is received.

Extension Policy (The "Life Happens" Pass)

I recognize that managing multiple courses and life commitments can sometimes be overwhelming. To encourage proactive communication, you may request a one-time, 48-hour extension on a Canvas-submitted assignment this semester, provided you meet the following conditions:

1. Advance Notice: You must email your request at least 48 hours before the deadline.
2. Frequency: This proactive pass can only be used once per semester (unless documented extenuating circumstances apply).
3. Action Plan: Your email must include your current progress and a realistic plan for completing the work by the revised deadline.

Note: Requests made less than 48 hours before the deadline will fall under the standard late policy unless accompanied by official documentation of an emergency.

Late Work
Unless otherwise noted, Canvas-submitted assignments may be submitted up to one week after the original due date. All late submissions receive an automatic 10% deduction per day late.

Assignments submitted more than one week late will not be accepted.

Because the Partner Evaluation and Semester Reflection are due on the final day of the semester, they are not eligible for the one-week late submission period. These assignments may only be submitted during the standard 12-hour grace period.

Generative AI Policy
In this course, I value your authentic voice and the development of your critical skills. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT or Grammarly may be used to support your learning—but with clear limits.

Permitted Uses:

- Brainstorming topic ideas
- Practicing delivery with AI speech coaches (e.g., Microsoft Presenter Coach, Ovation VR)
- Clarifying grammar or checking for typos.

Prohibited Uses:

- Submitting coursework written entirely or mostly by AI.
- Using AI to generate citations, personal stories, or persuasive appeals you present as your own
- Uploading course materials or other students' work to public AI tools

Any use of generative AI outside the above permissions constitutes a violation of Ball State University's Student Academic Ethics Policy. When in doubt, please ask me before using GenAI.

You, the student, are always responsible for the content you submit, publish, share, or act upon, regardless of whether GenAI tools assisted in the process. For data security reasons, please use BSU-approved GenAI tools (e.g., BSU Gemini, NotebookLM), which support single sign-on (SSO) with BSU ID and password. Commonly used public GenAI tools carry a higher risk of data being shared externally. In contrast, when using BSU-approved GenAI tools, any data you input is protected within the BSU system. Instructors do not have access to BSU IT Center logs of AI tool usage, so student data shared through BSU-approved GenAI tools remain private.

Student Academic Ethics Policy
Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's academic integrity

website (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University Student Academic Ethics Policy.

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).
- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

Assignment Grade Appeals
Grades are not given; they are earned. Though I thoughtfully assign grades, I'm also human and may make mistakes. All grade appeals must follow these guidelines:

- **24 Hour Rule.** Receiving grades can be upsetting. To make sure our conversation is productive, please wait at least 24 hours before notifying me of your wish to appeal a grade.
- **One Week Timeline.** All grade appeals must be made within one week of receiving your initial grade on an assignment.
- **Written.** All grade appeals must be first put in writing and sent in an email.
- **Evidence-Based.** Grade appeals must be evidence-based arguments as to where more points were earned on an assignment than were assessed. This is not a "re-do" or a chance to provide correct answers. It also isn't enough to ask "for more points" because you're close to a certain letter grade. Rather, this is your opportunity to articulate specific places where I was mistaken, where your work met and exceeded the

expectations of the rubric (when applicable), the assignment description, spirit of the assignment, and procedures of the course.

If you have any questions or concerns about your grade (on a specific assignment or in general), please make an appointment.

University Grade Appeal Policy
If you believe you received a final course grade that does not reflect your performance due to fairness or a procedural issue, you have the right to file an appeal within 5 school days after final grades are posted by the Office of the Registrar. Review the University Grade Appeal Policy and Process.

Class Cancelations
Please see the course schedule for specific dates that our class will not be meeting. If class must be canceled due to university closure, instructor illness, or another extenuating circumstance, I will post an announcement to Canvas as soon as possible. Thus, it is important to regularly check our course Canvas page. I recommend allowing notifications on the Canvas app or setting up Canvas announcements so they are sent to your email.

Title IX
Ball State University is committed to maintaining an educational environment free from sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, and stalking. Students who experience or witness conduct that may violate University policy are encouraged to seek support and assistance. The Title IX Office can provide information about reporting options, supportive measures, and available resources. Contact the Title IX Office at 765-285-1545 or titleix@bsu.edu.

Please Note: As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter. If you disclose information to me about conduct that may constitute sex discrimination or sexual misconduct, I am required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Office will reach out to discuss available resources, supportive measures, and reporting options. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, you may contact the Counseling Center or the Center for Survivor Support.

Course Copyright
No electronic recording or broadcast of any portion of this class is permitted without permission; posting audio or video recordings of any portion of this class online is not permitted without permission.

Course & Instructor Evaluation
Students will have an opportunity to participate in formal assessment of this course and the instructor's teaching performance at the end of the semester through the university's online evaluation process.

Subject to Change Statement

The syllabus and course schedule may be adjusted because of scheduling difficulties or instructional need. You are responsible for all materials and instructions given in class and on Canvas.