Sociology 420: Cultural Sociology and the Sociology of Culture  
Winter quarter 2016 Syllabus  
Thursdays 9:00 – 11:50 in 1812 Chicago Ave. seminar room

Professor: Wendy Griswold; 1810 Chicago Ave, 2nd floor; w-griswold@northwestern.edu  
Office hours: Please email me to set up an appointment

This course introduces graduate students to the sociology of culture (understanding social influence on cultural formations) and cultural sociology (understanding cultural influences on social processes). Although the course has no prerequisites, some acquaintance with Weber, Durkheim, and Marx will be helpful. Classes will be roughly half discussion, half lecture. Students must come to class prepared to discuss the readings and their applications, and teams of students will lead each discussion.

Course requirements are:
1. Active and prepared participation in class discussions, including leadership (30%)
2. A report on one of the recommended readings (a book or pair of articles) (30%)
3. A term paper, including a short oral report (40%)

The term paper may be either: (1) a critical review of the literature on some problem or issue in cultural sociology; (2) a small-scale study, which might turn out to be a pilot study for later research, or (3) a research design (proposal) for a future empirical study, e.g. second-year paper, article, dissertation (this third option is appropriate only if the student has already done preliminary research and knows the literature on the topic). Students need to decide which type of paper they are writing; they will turn in a short description of their proposed papers in Week III.

Each class begins with a lecture, followed by a student-led discussion on the readings and topics for the week follows; the class ends with one or more book reviews. I expect all seminar members to prepare and participate actively in the discussions. The tradition is that the student team leading the day’s discussion brings snacks.

Note that this course has an unusual time structure: all work will be done and term papers written by the 10th week class. This means you will not have the reading period or exam week to finish your papers. The good part of this is, you’ll have one course out of the way early; the bad part is you’ll have to work like crazy for the ten weeks. Smart strategies for keeping your head above water include (1) getting ahead on the readings, (2) forming small groups to discuss readings, (3) acquiring and reading your book for review well in advance of the actual report so you have time to think about it in relation to the course concepts, and (4) getting papers underway right from the start.

The required and recommended readings—some more theoretical, others more empirical—represent each thematic area. Five books are available at Norris; these are also on reserve in the library. (No readings from Cultures and Societies in a Changing World have been assigned, but the course lectures roughly follow the chapter structure of this book.) You will have to find the articles and recommended books on your own; they are readily
available, but you’ll need to plan ahead. Also note that the required readings for each week follow a logical order, so you should try to read them in the order listed; this is not the case for the recommended readings. In addition to offering book review choices, the recommended readings will, for many of you, be the basis for Special Fields papers and Qualifying Exams.

At Norris and on reserve:

*** Students will prepare all readings before class (including the Williams and Sapolsky for the first week).

Week 1: What is culture? (January 7)

Come to class with an example of the word “culture” taken from the newspaper or magazine; be prepared to discuss the definition of culture implicit in your example, with reference to the Williams and Sapolsky readings.


Week 2: Culture, cultural objects, and the cultural diamond (January 14)
Leaders:


**Week 3: Culture and meaning (January 21)**

A one-page description of the paper you are going to write for this course is due in class this week

**Leaders:**

Geertz, Clifford, “Thick Description” in Spillman.
Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2004. “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy.” *Sociological Theory* 22: 527-573. (This is the same as Chapter 1 in *Social Performance*, so you can read that if you have the book.)


**Week 4: Collective Production (January 28)**

**Leaders:**


**Classics**: Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.
Becker, Howard S. 1982. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. (Becker is a bit recent to be a “classic” but should be read by anyone with serious interest in sociology of culture; I’m also including him on Recommended list.)

**Week 5: Cultural Reception, Tastes and Symbolic Boundaries (February 4)**

**Leaders:**


Georg Simmel, “The Stranger.”

Veblen, Thorsten. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

**Week 6: Identities, Problems, Movements (February 11)**

**Leaders:**


**Week 7: Organizations in a Multicultural World (February 18)**

**Leaders:**


**Week 8: Culture and Connection (February 25)**

**Leaders:**


Classics: Emile Durkheim. *Suicide*.

Week 9: Culture and power (March 3)
Leaders:


Two articles on social memory:


Week 10: Oral presentation of term papers; no additional reading. Term papers are due in class that day. (March 10)