Student Cultures in the University Environment

EDL 666 Syllabus

Faculty Contact Information

Peter Magolda
300H McGuffey Hall
(513) 529-4950 (W)
email: magoldpm@miamioh.edu
website: www.muohio.edu/sahe

Seminar Description

This seminar sits at the crossroads of higher education, anthropology, and cultural studies. Seminar participants will use the disciplines of anthropology and cultural studies to examine collegians and their universities. This multidisciplinary theoretical lens allows seminar participants to view higher education as well as student culture and subcultures in new and important ways. The elusive nature of culture and subculture requires that we explore the many different ways we use this term and its influences on higher education.

Seminar Objectives

The driving question for this course is: What is student culture and how do we come to know it? Although we are unable to fully address, much less definitively answer, this question, this will not deter us from embarking on our exploration or formulating initial thoughts. To explore this question we will focus on three objectives:

• Become knowledgeable about culture by becoming familiar with conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of anthropology (e.g., ritual) and cultural studies (e.g., subculture) as interpretive lenses for understanding college students and their universities.

• Appreciate the breadth and depth of anthropological and cultural studies research and apply it to the student affairs and higher education contexts.

• Learn how to conduct a participant-observation research study by designing and conducting a semester-long fieldwork study of a collegiate subculture.

Seminar Expectations

Out-of-class Preparation

The seminar works if students carefully read, evaluate, and assimilate all reading and multimedia materials before each weekly seminar. While reading, summarize authors’ arguments, compile questions, identify points of disagreement, and document issues worthy of discussion.

In-class Participation

Optimal learning takes place when seminar participants respectfully share their perspectives and listen to colleagues (and disagree if occasions arise). It is essential for students to share their honest thoughts and listen carefully to others’ perspectives. The success of our seminar requires all participants to engage in genuine and civil dialogue. Active participation includes:

• Demonstrating that you have completed the readings by integrating aspects of the readings in our class conversations and in a meaningful way in written assignments.
• Contributing thoughtful comments about and examples of concepts being discussed; this includes comments about ideas you’re still trying to understand
• Raising thoughtful questions, including asking for clarification when you don’t understand a concept (again, class conversation is about learning, not already having all of the answers)
• Listening carefully to your classmates’ contributions and respectfully responding to others’ comments

Attendance
Attending every class and actively participating in class discussions is essential. Out of respect to seminar participants, please arrive for class on time. Students missing three classes will be dropped one full letter grade at the end of the semester (e.g., if a student earned an "A" and missed three classes, the student’s final grade would be a "B"). Students missing four classes will automatically be dropped from the course.

Meeting Deadlines
There are no optional written assignments. This syllabus includes all due dates. Students submitting a late assignment must also include a written explanation for the delay that minimally includes: The due date of the assignment, the date the student submitted the assignment, a rationale for the delay, and a proposed penalty (if any) for the delay. If students fail to submit a written assignment, they may be dropped from the seminar.

Accommodations
If you have a disability that will affect your ability to participate fully in the course or if you require accommodations, please contact either the Rinella Learning Center or the Office of Disability Resources so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is central to our community. The university policy regarding academic misconduct is stated in Section 5 of the Graduate School Handbook. Please review this document and adhere to the University’s integrity policies.

Grading
Your assignments should be clear, precise, and concise. The paper format (e.g., font, headers, spacing) should follow APA style guidelines. Below are metrics I use when assigning grades.

• **A**: The work is excellent quality that demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of course material. The writing includes thoughtful and meaningful analysis. The writing style is clear, concise, and error-free. The work incorporates scholarly material well (as appropriate to assignment). Students earn an “A” if they convey that they understand the material AND the content educates someone unfamiliar with it.

• **B**: The work is high quality that demonstrates a complex understanding of the course material. The essay also include evidence of analysis, where appropriate, but the quality of the analysis could be better. The style of writing is generally good but includes some mistakes and/or some places where the prose could be sharper, scholarly material is incorporated but could be better integrated. Students earn a “B” if they convey that they understand the material, but the content does not educate individuals unfamiliar with it.
C: The work is adequate. Analysis is the exception, rather than the rule. The flawed style of writing (e.g., grammatical errors, bloated sentences, jargon) detracts readers’ attention away from ideas. Scholarly material is not well incorporated into the prose. Students earn a “C” if they don’t convey they understand the material, and don’t educate someone unfamiliar with the material (i.e., they will not learn much from reading this essay).

D: The work is below average quality for graduate students. The student conveys minimal understanding of the course material and analysis is absent. The style of writing and errors are a major distraction to readers and scholarly resources (if needed for the assignment) are sparse or non-existent.

F: The student does not complete the assignment or the completion of the assignment does not rise to any of the levels of performance described above.

Assignments

Class Facilitation/Syllabus Assignment [15%]
Each week, one or two students will assume responsibility for facilitating the final 75-minutes of our seminar meeting (i.e., after the break). The Friday (at 5:00 p.m.) before the facilitation, the facilitator[s] will post a facilitation guide on the Niihka site that minimally includes:

- Learning outcomes and goals
- An agenda
- Two discussion questions for each reading
- Two annotated bibliographic citations of readings that augment the seminar required readings (these suggestions should be sufficiently high quality to assign as EDL 666 required readings in the future)
- Two annotated YouTube/Internet links that illuminate the readings and/or the discussion topics

One week after the class, the facilitators will submit a 1-2 page evaluation of the session (e.g., how well seminar participants met your learning goals, how well you facilitated the session).

Student Subculture Fieldwork Project [35%]
This team project (involving 3-4 students) involves studying a collegiate subculture and then applying theoretical concepts from the course to interpret the subculture. Each team member must log 12 hours of fieldwork (i.e., observations, interviews, document analysis) and use these data as a foundation for the final report, which includes four parts:

- A 3-page project proposal, Human Subjects form, and Information Sheet. Visit the Niihka site to access sample forms and proposals, which is due February 11, 2014.
- A 20-page cultural description (i.e., narrative) of the student subculture, which is due March 6, 2014.
- A 15-page theoretical interpretation of your fieldwork narrative that uses the course readings as a foundation for the analysis, which is due April 15, 2014.
- A 5-page methodological summary that includes a description of the study’s research methods. This assignment is due April 29, 2014.
The final team report, which includes: the revised description, interpretation, methodology, and proposal (included in the appendix), is due May 6, 2014.

Auto-ethnographic Essay [10%]
Each student will submit a 5-page auto-ethnographic essay regarding the participant-observation experience. Introduce one methodological issue (e.g., gaining access) with which you grappled during your fieldwork and make explicit the tension. Discuss how you resolved the issue and how it connects to the scholarly literature about qualitative inquiry. Discuss insights or new thinking based on the experience and this post-fieldwork assignment. Discuss how the insights gained from this reflection/analysis paper may better inform your work as a student affairs practitioner. This assignment is due May 6, 2014.

Midterm and Final Examinations [40%—20% for midterm and 20% for final]
These exams are major undertakings, which require students to synthesize and integrate the readings and connect theory to practice. These take-home examinations will each include 2-3 questions. Students will receive the midterm three weeks before the assignment is due, which is March 18, 2014. The take-home final exam is due May 13, 2014.

Required Texts


Required Readings


**Weekly Study Guide**

**Session 1—January 28, 2014**

**Topic: Seminar Introduction**

**Learning Goals**

There are four learning goals for this introductory meeting of Student Cultures in the University Environment. The first goal is to get acquainted. A second goal is to discuss seminar goals, outcomes, and community norms. A third aim is to explore the ways the academic disciplines of anthropology and cultural studies enrich understanding about higher education and collegians. The final goal is to begin to generate multiple conceptualizations of culture.

**Required Readings**


Miner presents examples of behaviors that, if viewed as rituals, provide the reader with a deeper understanding of this culture’s values, norms, and beliefs. This reading illustrates that no matter how exotic a culture may seem, it is one’s own language and cultural blinders that define what is exotic and what is ordinary or normal.


Magolda uses his fieldwork research to illustrate some common frustrations that Student Affairs professionals encounter when they use a cultural perspective (as well as other qualitative methodologies) to enhance their professional practice. This manuscript reveals how participant observation and interviewing can lead to significant insights. These insights can then be further deepened through affirming what we already know (i.e., making the obvious obvious), questioning what we think we already know (i.e., making the obvious dubious), and surfacing new insights (i.e., making the hidden obvious).

**Session 2—February 4, 2014**

**Topic: Experiencing Culture**

**Learning Goals**

For this second seminar meeting, the first learning goal is to clarify questions about the course expectations, the syllabus, and learning community goals. A second goal is to examine ways the disciplines of educational anthropology and cultural studies might guide student affairs practice by examining Jenny Stuber’s *Inside the College Gates.*

**Required Readings**


This chapter introduces readers to ethnographic (i.e., participant observation/fieldwork) research. Madden defines key anthropological concepts and theoretical perspectives, which is the foundation for analyses of Stuber’s *Inside the College Gates.*


Stuber examines the co-curriculum in higher education and reveals the ways in which social class inequalities originate and reproduce outside the classroom. Stuber reveals how social
class backgrounds impact how collegians experience campus life—revealing how class inequities influence the acquisition of cultural and social capital.

**Session 3—February 11, 2014**

**Topic: Experiencing Culture**

**Learning Goals**

This third session explores the ways the academic disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies can enrich seminar participants’ understanding about higher education and its collegian cultures using Stuber and Charon texts as springboards for discussion.

**Required Readings**


Charon clarifies the concept of social structure and individuals’ relationships to social structures. He discusses “roles” and “positions” and their relationship to an individual’s identity. Charon also highlights the nuances and contradictions embedded in social structures by posing questions such as: “What is the meaning of social structure?” and “Does equality ever exist in social structure?”


Charon defines culture and its relationship to social structure and poses the question “Why is culture important?” Charon explores this question by analyzing the American value system and the complexity and contradictory nature of this value system.


Stuber examines the co-curriculum in higher education and reveals the ways in which social class inequalities originate and become reproduced outside the classroom. Stuber reveals how social class backgrounds impact how collegians experience campus life—revealing how class inequities influence the acquisition of cultural and social capital.

**Session 4—February 18, 2014**

**Topic: Studying Culture**

**Learning Goals**

During this class meeting, a primary goal is to learn the art and craft of fieldwork. The texts explore a variety of theoretical and applied perspectives centering on how to study culture, with the hope that each seminar participant will eventually devise her/his own views about and approaches to conducting fieldwork.

**Required Readings**


This text targets readers unfamiliar with the various ways ethnographers conduct fieldwork and then re-presents their data in writing. The book is a guide for students writing their narratives and auto-ethnographic essays.

This essay uses a Christian organization to examine the role of student subcultures in higher education. The paper examines the origins of student subcultures, explores how groups form and sustain subcultures, and examines what counts as “normal.” This manuscript includes examples of narratives and theoretical interpretations—which should be helpful to research teams as they complete their EDL 666 fieldwork project.

Session 5—February 25, 2014

Topic: Subcultures: The Meaning of Style—Part I

Learning Goals
This session focuses on the subcultures—in particular how and why they form—by examining cultural study theories. After becoming familiar with the concepts such as bricolage, style, hegemony and homology, Hebdige explores the interrelationship of power, privilege, and culture. Thus, the final goal for this session is to apply subculture theory to the Schone and Boyer case studies.

Required Readings

Hebdige uses music to explore how individuals and society mutually construct and control culture. *Subculture* provides a thick description of subcultures and the ways in which members of subcultures have experiences, turn those experiences into expression, and finally make significance from the initial experiences. The notions of hegemony, bricolage, and homology clarify the meaning of subculture. The distinction between simple authority over another subculture and the hegemonic definition of control is that hegemony works to shape the subculture in such a way that it seems natural for the controlling group to come into this position.


This chapter provides an overview of Hebdige’s unique conceptualization of subculture. It offers an abbreviated overview of his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* book.


Schone describes an incident of racism that occurred at Miami University in 1998. The story illuminates the concepts of subculture, style, homology, and hegemony.


This essay chronicles an alleged sexual assault involving Duke University lacrosse players. The essay reveals the diverse campus subcultures as well as the strategies one university employed to try to alter student culture.

Session 6—March 4, 2014

Topic: Subcultures: The Meaning of Style—Part II

Learning Goals
This session builds upon Hebdige’s conceptualization of culture by introducing participants to British cultural studies and elaborates on Hebdige’s conceptualization of subculture. The goal is to continue connecting your own unique definitions of culture and subculture to other scholars’ conceptualizations.
**Required Readings**

[Chapter 4: “Distinctive Individuality and Subcultural Affiliation,” (pp. 55-80) and Chapter 7 “Resistance, Incorporation, and Authenticity,” (pp. 131-155)]

These two chapters build on the work of Hebdige by elaborating on key concepts such as subculture affiliation, distinctive individuality, countercultures, defusion and diffusion, media influence on society, and politics.


This essay, published in *Rolling Stone*, offers an in-depth description of fraternity hazing at Dartmouth University. This disturbing essay is an excellent case study to apply the ideas advanced by cultural studies theorists.


**Session 7—March 11, 2014**

**Topic: Collegiate Subcultures—Applications**

**Learning Goals**

The goal of this session is to continue to apply ideas introduced in the first half of the seminar to reading centering on music and identity centers on college campuses.

**Required Readings**


Petchauer argues that higher education scholars, too often, misunderstand hip-hop culture and underestimate its influence on collegians. The book explores the origins of hip-hop culture and uses this “unusual” collegiate subculture to reveal the cultural logic and world views that influence collegians. We will use this text to apply the ideas discussed in the first half of this seminar.


The author in this essay responds to the question—”Do identity centers (e.g., women’s centers, ethnic centers, LGBT centers) divide rather than unite higher education faculty, students, and administrators? If so, why are they so prevalent on college campuses?”


The author of this essay, Lori Patton, responds to Kris Renn’s essay and offers additional insights centering on the value of identity centers on college campuses.
Session 8—March 18, 2014

Topic: Theoretical Synthesis

Learning Goals

A goal for this week is to revisit readings from the first half of the semester that warrant a closer or more in-depth analysis. During March 11th class meeting we will select readings from the first half of the semester to revisit.

Session 9—April 1, 2014

Topic: Collegiate Subcultures—Applying Cultural Studies to Contemporary College Students

Required Readings


This “Crippled by Culture” chapter reveals the influence of culture on Americans’ conceptualizations of disability. Molsberry argues a person with a disability is subject to relativist cultural interpretations.


This chapter, written by a gay man at Princeton University, describes his experiences “in the closet” as well as his coming out rite of passage.


This chapter entitled, “Students Navigating the College Culture,” provides a summary of issues that Latino students encounter when trying to manage home and school responsibilities.


This chapter, based on ethnographic research, reports on the ways first-generation college students undertake library research and utilize library staff in their research undertakings.

Session 10—April 8, 2014

Topic: Interpretation of Culture—Part 1

Learning Goals

This session focuses on the application of anthropology and cultural studies to ordinary and innocuous collegiate “fun” activities, to reveal how theory can inform practice and how making the familiar strange is important in higher education contexts.

Required Readings


In this book, the author—a linguist and anthropologist—uses house signs posted on off-campus students’ residences in Oxford, Ohio as a way to explore campus culture—in particular issues such as fun, gender, sexuality, race, and faith. Based on the researcher’s analysis of house signs and interviews with residents, he models ways to undertake in-depth and important cultural analysis of “benign” artifacts such as house signs.
**Session 11—April 15, 2014**  
**Topic: Interpretations of Culture—Part II**

**Learning Goals**
This session continues to focus on the application of anthropology and cultural studies to ordinary and innocuous collegiate “fun” activities, to reveal how theory can inform practice and how making the familiar strange is important in higher education contexts.

**Required Readings**

**Session 12—April 22, 2014**  
**Topic: Ritual—Part I**

**Learning Goals**
A goal of this week’s seminar is to gain clarity about an important anthropological concept—ritual. Seminar participants should explore the various theoretical perspectives about ritual and begin to develop their own working definition. A second goal is to examine our own campus rituals to ascertain the messages embedded in these rituals. We will apply the theoretical concepts introduced in the weekly readings to higher education contexts.

**Required Readings**

Magolda introduces several key concepts of rituals through an examination of the campus tour at Miami University. Most notably, he defines rituals as “formalized, symbolic performances” (p. 33). These performances (campus tours, fraternity rituals, etc.) “communicate expectations and norms for behavior and performance (that is, transmit culture)” (p. 33).


Quantz and Magolda advocate that the everyday interactions occurring in classrooms as well as the sharing of some common experiences are more important rituals in forming community than the formal rituals performed in schools. Quantz and Magolda define ritual as more an aspect of action rather than the type of action performed. This notion of ritual is played out through the story told about the first day of a lab class in a physical science course. Magolda entered the classroom as an observer as well as a participant. Through his descriptions of the everyday interactions among the students, we can see the importance of understanding these interactions as a key ingredient in understanding our schools.
**Session 13—April 29, 2014**

**Topic: Ritual—Part II**

**Learning Goals**

A goal of this week's seminar is to continue to gain clarity about an important anthropological concept—ritual. A second goal is to examine our own campus rituals to ascertain the messages embedded in these rituals. We will apply the theoretical concepts introduced in the weekly readings to higher education contexts.

**Required Readings**


Sweet offers an intimate look at fraternity norms as he delves into hazing rituals, using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical lens.


Quantz begins by defining ritual as a formalized, symbolic performance. He elaborates on the meaning of ritual by providing two frameworks from two different anthropologists: Durkheim and Turner. Durkheim advocates that ritual is a tool of solidarity due to the bonds formed through practicing rituals, and can be used to maintain the status quo. Turner describes ritual as having an emotional and spiritual energy that can lead to transformation rather than always maintaining the status quo. Quantz uses both of these concepts of ritual to further expand upon his meaning of ritual. What is more important, he describes ritual not as ceremoniously performed activities that have grand meaning, but as those that are a part of our everyday lives.

**Session 14—May 6, 2014**

**Topic: Ritual—Part III**

**Learning Goals**

A goal of this week's seminar is to continue to gain clarity about an important anthropological concept—ritual. A second goal is to examine and apply the theoretical concepts (i.e., root paradigm, resistance) introduced in the weekly readings to higher education contexts.

**Required Readings**


McLaren introduces the concept of root paradigms, citing Turner (1979), as “certain consciously recognized cultural models for behavior that exist in the heads of the main actors in a social drama” (p. 64). This social drama is a culture, and root paradigms are the rituals, symbols, and beliefs that shape the culture’s behavior. He plays this concept out through an examination of Catholic schooling. This examination reveals two major root paradigms: “becoming a worker” and “becoming a Catholic” (p. 64). Students are cultivated to become workers not only through the assignments and projects themselves, but also through the determination and hard work required to complete the tasks well. Religious symbols throughout the school building constantly reminded students of what it means to be Catholic. While these two root paradigms are presented separately at first, McLaren shows their interconnectedness toward the end of the manuscript.

As the title suggests, this article examines the ritual dimensions of resistance by focusing on the ritualized behavior of the class clown. The notion of resistance as a rite of transgression is explored. The author invites scholars to re-conceptualize resistance and to take a second look at behaviors of oppositional subcultures.


This manuscript focuses on ritual, using the context of an Indonesian school. The essay reveals how rituals have the power to promote the interests of the dominant culture as well as serve as a vehicle for those less powerful to gain power and promote their agendas.