

**LDST 250 Critical Thinking**  
TR 11:15-12:30 & 12:45-2:00

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The aims of this course are practical ones: to prepare you for your academic future, as well as to contribute something to the way you think about and engage with the world around you. In other words, this is a skills-based, rather than a content-oriented, course: the vocabulary you develop, the habits of mind you cultivate can and should be portable. We will focus on problems of knowledge and interpretation, on the potential and pitfalls of language and argumentation; the course will be as much about reading and writing as it is about thinking. We will learn from social theorists and novelists, scholars and public intellectuals. Because it will help us to have a common framework for substantive discussion, we will supplement our critical thinking guide with readings on the wide-ranging theme of consumer culture. But since nobody said we can't have fun while in pursuit of these worthy ends, we'll try our best to do that, too.

**Texts:**

\*\* selected essays on electronic reserve \*\*

Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*

Browne & Keeley, *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*

DeLillo, *White Noise*

Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

**Recommended:**

Williams & Colomb, *The Craft of Argument* (concise edition) or

Booth, Colomb, & Williams, *The Craft of Research* (2nd edition)

Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (6th edition)

**REQUIREMENTS:**

1. *Class contribution* (15%): You are required to keep up with the substantial reading assignments and participate in class discussion in an active and informed manner. You may occasionally be asked to help *lead* class discussion; you will always be expected to help *shape* it. This will not be a lecture course.

2. *Short Assignments* (30%): You will be responsible for completing a variety of short assignments aimed at cultivating your critical reading and writing skills. You can turn in one late assignment without penalty. See separate sheet for details.

3. *Paper* (30%): You will write a research paper of 6-8 pages at the end of the class. Guidelines and suggested topics will be provided as the deadline approaches.

4. *Quizzes* (25%): Instead of a cumulative final exam, there will be weekly reading

quizzes (generally on Thursdays), beginning in the second week of class. I will drop the lowest quiz grade before calculating your average.

### **RULES & REGS:**

Failure to meet the short assignment deadlines will affect your grade. Papers must be handed in to my box in Jepson 126 before 5 p.m. on the due date. Extensions will be accepted *only if you speak to me before the paper is due*. If you submit a late paper without getting advanced (more than 24 hours) approval, your paper grade will be reduced by an **entire letter grade** (i.e., a paper grade of B-plus becomes a C-plus).

Since class participation is an essential part of this course, I will allow only two unexcused absences without penalty (an excused absence is one about which I have been notified beforehand—for example, a serious illness, athletic event, religious observance, or family emergency). More than two unexcused absences will result in the reduction of your final grade by **two-thirds of a letter grade for each missed class** (i.e., a final grade of a B-plus becomes a B-minus).

### **KEY DATES:**

LAST DAY TO DROP/ADD: JANUARY 25

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW: FEBRUARY 29

FILM SCREENING: TBA

FINAL PAPER: MONDAY, APRIL 28

## Calendar: LDST 250

(Note: readings should be completed by the day for which they are assigned)

### Week 1: Getting Started

1/15 **T** Edmundson, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education" (\*\*e-reserve\*\*), Shorris, "As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor" (optional)

1/17 **R** Browne & Keeley (B&K), chs. 1-3; McMillan & Cheney, "The Student as Consumer" (\*\*)

### Week 2: Backgrounds

1/22 **T** Press & Washburn, "The Kept University," Williams & Colomb, "Argument & Rationality," (\*\*)

1/24 **R** B&K, ch. 4; Williams, from *Keywords* (xerox); Glickman, from *Consumer Society in American History* (\*\*)

### Week 3: Classic Texts

1/29 **T** Adorno & Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry" (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE

1/31 **R** B&K, chs. 5-6; Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, chs. 1-2

### Week 4: Classic Texts, cont'd

2/5 **T** B&K, ch. 7; Veblen, chs. 3-4

2/7 **R** B&K, ch. 8; Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity & Its Secret" (\*\*)

### Week 5: Contemporary Contexts

2/12 **T** B&K, ch. 9; Hine, "What's in a Package," Kron, "The Semiotics of Home Decor" (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE

2/14 **R** B&K, ch. 10; Marchand, "The Parable of the Democracy of Goods," Solomon, "Masters of Desire" (\*\*)

### Week 6: This American Life

2/19 **T** DeLillo, *White Noise* (parts I & II, p. 163)

2/21 **R** DeLillo, *White Noise* (chs. 22-26, p. 203)

Week 7: This American Life, cont'd

2/26 T DeLillo, *White Noise* (finish); ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE

2/28 R Baudrillard, "Consumer Society" (\*\*)

Week 8: The Educated Elite

3/4 T Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, Introduction and ch. 1; ASSIGNMENT DUE

3/6 R Brooks, chs. 2-3

SPRING BREAK— NO CLASS 3/11 & 3/13

Week 9: The Educated Elite, cont'd

3/18 T Brooks (finish)

3/20 R B&K, chs. 11-12; Veblen, ch. 7

Week 10: Shopping & Identity

3/25 T Halter, *Shopping for Identity*, chs. 2-3 (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT DUE

3/27 R Gladwell, "Listening to Khakis," Davis, "Blue Jeans" (\*\*)

Week 11: Shopping & Identity, cont'd

4/1 T Bernstein, "Goin' Gangsta, Choosin' Cholita" (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT DUE

4/3 R B&K, ch. 13; DuCille, "Toy Theory," Prager, "Our Barbies, Ourselves" (\*\*)

Week 12: Subversive Shopping?

4/8 T Fiske, "Shopping for Pleasure" (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT DUE

4/10 R Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism" (\*\*)

Week 13: The Rebel Consumer

4/15 T B&K, ch. 14 & "Final Word"; Frank, "Why Johnny Can't Dissent" (\*\*); PROPOSAL DUE

4/17 R Frank, "Alternative to What?" and Klein, "Alt.Everything" (\*\*)

Week 14: Here & Now

4/22 **T** Heath & Potter, from *The Rebel Sell* (\*\*); ASSIGNMENT 8 DUE

4/24 **R** Brooks, "Organization Kid," Schor, "Towards a New Politics of Consumption" (\*\*)