

LDSP 301 Critical Thinking
TR 3:45-5:00

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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*

Frank & Weiland, eds., *Commodify Your Dissent*

Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Williams & Colomb, *The Craft of Argument: Concise Edition* (recommended)

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 an analytic paper of 5-8 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 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 125 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, 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 21

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW: FEBRUARY 25

FINAL PAPER: MONDAY, APRIL 25

Calendar: LDSP 301

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

Week 1

1/11 **T** Introduction; Edmundson, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education" (**e-reserve**), Shorris, "As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor" (optional)

1/13 **R** Browne & Keeley (B&K), chs. 1-3; McMillan & Cheney, "The Student as Consumer" (**)

Week 2

1/18 **T** Lunsford, "On Reading & Thinking Critically," Press, "The Kept University" (**)

1/20 **R** B&K, ch. 4; Williams, from *Keywords* (xerox); Glickman, from *Consumer Society in American History* (**)

Week 3

1/25 **T** Adorno & Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry" (**); ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE

1/27 **R** B&K, chs. 5- 6; Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, chs. 1-2

Week 4

2/1 **T** B&K, ch. 7; Veblen, chs. 3-4

2/3 **R** B&K, ch. 8; Baudrillard, "The System of Objects" or "Consumer Society" (**)

Week 5

2/8 **T** B&K, ch. 9; Hine, "What's in a Package," Kron, "The Semiotics of Home Decor" (**); ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE

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

Week 6

2/15 **T** DeLillo, *White Noise* (parts I & II, p. 163)

2/17 **R** DeLillo, *White Noise* (chs. 22-26, p. 203)

Week 7

2/22 **T** DeLillo, *White Noise* (finish); ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE

2/24 **R** Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity & Its Secret" (**)

Week 8

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

3/3 **R** Brooks, chs. 2-3

SPRING BREAK— NO CLASS 3/8 & 3/10

Week 9

3/15 **T** Brooks (finish)

3/17 **R** B&K, chs. 11-12; Veblen, ch. 7

Week 10

3/22 **T** Halter, *Shopping for Identity*, chs. 2-3 (**); ASSIGNMENT DUE

3/24 **R** Gladwell, "Listening to Khakis," Davis, "Blue Jeans" (**)

Week 11

3/29 **T** Bernstein, "Goin' Gangsta, Choosin' Cholita" (**); ASSIGNMENT DUE

3/31 **R** B&K, ch. 13; DuCille, "Toy Theory," Prager, "Our Barbies, Ourselves" (**)

Week 12

4/5 **T** Fiske, "Shopping for Pleasure" (**); ASSIGNMENT DUE

4/7 **R** B&K, ch. 14; Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism" (**)

Week 13

4/12 **T** Frank & Weiland, *Commodify Your Dissent*, "Opening Salvo," 31-45, and 57-78;
PROPOSAL DUE

4/14 **R** *CYD*, 121-26, 143-63, 194-202

Week 14

4/19 **T** *CYD*, 216-22 and "Closing Salvo"; ASSIGNMENT 8 DUE

4/21 **R** Brooks, "Organization Kid," Schor, "Towards a New Politics of Consumption" (**)

LDSP 301 Short Writing Assignments:

Over the course of the semester, you will complete the following assignments. Each should be no longer than two single-spaced pages in length and must be submitted in hard copy. For *most* of them, the choice of text is up to you (for instance, for #1 you can use any of the articles assigned for January). You may complete assignments 4-7 in whatever order suits you. Please identify the assignments you submit by number and make clear to what text you are responding.

1. **1/25** What puzzles or interests you in your chosen text? Pose three specific, debatable, and significant questions about any aspect of the text. These should be *real* questions—that is, ones you don't yet have answers to but believe are important to pursue. For each question, write a paragraph explaining why the question is worth asking and suggesting possible ways to begin answering it (with support from the text).
2. **2/8** Periodical review: details TBA.
3. **2/22** Choose a specific and significant moment in *White Noise*. First, quote the line or passage; then, write a 1-2 page close reading of it. What does it literally say? What does it mean? Why is it significant? Talk about the passage's relation to its immediate context as well as its importance for the text as a whole: what issue(s) does it bring up? How/why is this issue important to the work and your reading of it?
4. Write a response to one of the selected readings, adopting the following strategy: *affirm & defend* the argument (do not merely agree with the analysis presented, but instead try to imagine what kind of objections someone might have and address them). Be sure to provide textual evidence from the essay to support your position.

5. Write a response to one of the selected readings, adopting the following strategy: *extend & complicate* the discussion (i.e., elaborate upon and strengthen the argument). Be sure to provide textual evidence from the essay to support your position.

6. Write a response to one of the selected readings, adopting the following strategy: *challenge & refute* the analysis (i.e., identify flaws in the argument and suggest your own corrective interpretation). Be sure to provide textual evidence from the essay to support your position.

7. Choose a specific and significant passage one of our texts. First, quote the line or passage; then, write a 1-2 page response to it. What is it saying? Does it suggest any other meaning between the lines? Why did it strike you—or why do you think it's significant? Does the passage illuminate something about the text as a whole?

8. **4/19** An introduction to an academic argument sets a context, identifies a problem or question, establishes what's at stake in addressing it, and then goes on to make a claim that solves or answers it. Choose a text or issue to discuss and write a well-developed introduction for a paper you could imagine turning in for a 300-level course; please also provide a one-paragraph rationale for this paper topic.