

## Communication and Popular Music COMM 4221

Instructor: Mark Pedelty  
Contact information

This seminar meets twice weekly for 75 minutes. 3 credit hours.  
Course website: Moodle. To access the site, log in through myu.umn.edu

### Course Description

*Communication and Popular Music* examines the social production, distribution, and consumption of popular music. What are the cultural, political, and even ecological meanings of popular music? How have musical genres formed and functioned historically? Does the music industry empower or restrict musical creativity? In order to answer these and other musical questions, students will read the work of influential authors in popular music studies, while conducting ethnographic field research in a musical community of their own choosing. *Communication and Popular Music* is a collaborative learning experience, meaning that student discovery, effort, and input will play an essential role in the course.

### Learning Objectives

Music is fundamental to human existence. Therefore, the exploration of music can teach us a great deal about who we are as a species, as individuals, and as communities. The main objective of COMM 4221 is to investigate what popular music means, discover how music functions as a means of communication, and explore music's potential for individual expression and community building. Students enroll in music and popular culture courses for many different reasons. Some students are interested in performing careers, while others would like to produce or market music. A business major might be interested in music as a marketing tool. An education minor might want to explore music's pedagogical potential. However, most students have no plans to apply what they learn in the course; they are simply interested in learning more about popular music. In other words, there are as many learning goals and interests as there are students. Because of that wide diversity in student interests, orientations, and goals, COMM 4221 explores popular music as social communication, broadly conceived, rather than focusing on a single application or learning outcome. Assignments are designed to assist students in individual and collective exploration of popular music, while challenging them to link course learning to their specific, personal interests. It is hoped that COMM 4221 students will use their new knowledge about popular music toward positive ends in their lives and the lives of others.

## Reading

### Books:

- Klosterman, Chuck. 2002 (or any edition). *Fargo Rock City*. New York: Simon and Schuster. (Available at the University Bookstore)
- Petchauer, E. 2012. *Hip-hop Culture in College Students' Lives: Elements, Embodiment, and Higher Edutainment*. New York: Routledge. (Available at the University Bookstore)

### Articles:

The following articles are available on Moodle, unless the URL is provided below.

- Cárdenas, Micha. 2012. Blah, Blah, Blah: Ke\$ha Feminism? *Popular Music Studies* 24(2):176-195
- Drewett, Michael. 2007. The Eyes of the World are Watching Now: The Political Effectiveness of 'Biko' by Peter Gabriel. *Popular Music & Society* 30(1): 39-51
- Grigoriadas, Vanessa. 2010. Growing Up Gaga. *New York Magazine* March 28, <http://nymag.com/arts/popmusic/features/65127/>
- Hess, Mickey. 2005. Metal Faces, Rap Masks: Identity and Resistance in Hip Hop's Persona Artist. *Popular Music and Society* 28(3): 297-311
- Ingram, David. 2008. 'My Dirty Stream': Pete Seeger, American Folk Music, and Environmental Protest. *Popular Music & Society* 31(1): 21-36
- Levande, Meredith. 2008. Women, Pop Music, and Pornography. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8(1): 293-321
- Ortiz-Torres, Ruben. 2012. Mexipunx. In *Punkademics: The Basement Show in the Ivory Tower*, Zack Furness, Ed., <http://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/punkademics-web.pdf>. pp.187-201
- Palmer, C. T. (2005). Mummies and Moshers: Two Rituals of Trust in Changing Social Environments. *Ethnology* 44(2): 147-166
- Phillips-Silver, Jessica, C. Athena Aktipis, and Gregory A. Bryant. 2010. The Ecology of Entrainment: Foundations of Coordinated Rhythmic Movement. *Music Perception* 28(1)(9): 3-14
- Rosenthal, Debra. 2006. 'Hoods and the Woods: Rap Music as Environmental Literature. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39(4): 661-676
- Samson, Jim. 2012. Genre. *Grove Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>
- Tagg, Philip. 1994. Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music. <http://www.tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/virrat.pdf>
- Weintraub, Andrew N. 2008. 'Dance Drills, Faith Spills': Islam, Body Politics, and Popular Music in post-Suharto Indonesia. *Popular Music* 27(3): 367-392
- Weissmann, Gerald. 2007. Trashing "America the Beautiful": From She to Shining She. *FASEB Journal* 21(13): 3399-3403

## Assignments

Musical Ethnography Report	30 points	30% of final grade
Weekly Quizzes	30 points	30% of final grade
My Song, My Genre Presentation	20 points	20% of final grade
Participation Portfolio	20 points	20% of final grade

## Musical Ethnography Report

After reading *Hip-hop culture in college students' lives*, you will complete a similar study on campus, focusing on a musical genre and group of your choosing. The professor will provide feedback on a first draft, which is due midnight Tuesday, November 20, via Moodle. The final report, due no later than 6:00 PM on Tuesday, December 18, will constitute your Final Exam. See the *Musical Ethnography Report* research and writing guide on Moodle.

## Song and Genre Presentation

This project starts with one of your favorite songs or musical works. You will play a recording of the song or project a music video. Next, you will present a five-minute explanation of what the song means to you and analyze it as a cultural artifact. Discuss an aspect of the song that illustrates or sheds light on a larger social reality, group, institution, and/or ritual. The song does not need to contain all of the answers; music can serve as an “interlocutor,” an expressive gateway to cultural, social, political, philosophical, and/or economic themes. For example, a techno track could lead to discussion of rave ritual, Peter Gabriel’s Biko might lead to discussion of the anti-apartheid movement (see Drewett article), and so on. This is the place for you to learn more about a song or genre you love and teach others about it as well.

## Weekly Quizzes

The weekly quizzes will help you keep up with the reading and test your knowledge of basic course concepts. Some of the questions involve key themes and theses from the reading, while others deal with key course concepts. These concepts are presented in the reading, lecture, and discussion. Each quiz will be taken online, involves ten multiple-choice questions, and is available for four days (Thursday 4:00 PM to Monday 4:00 PM). The quizzes will be graded on a straight percentage; see the Letter Grades and Percentages chart on the following page.

## Participation Portfolio

The course requires active participation to fulfill its potential as a learning experience and exchange of ideas. However, not all people participate in the same way. Some people are active listeners, but are less inclined to speak in class. All types of earnest participation are valued in this course. The most fundamental form of participation is to be present. At the end of the semester, you will fill out a self-assessment and a peer assessment form, evaluating other students' contributions to the class, including small group discussions, mini-projects, and presentations. The instructor will take all self and peer assessments into consideration when determining participation grades. However, not all forms of participation and class accomplishment are visible to your peers, so the instructor will not rely solely on peer assessments when determining your participation grades.

## Letter Grades and Percentages

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
≥ 93%	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	0-59

## Late Papers and Make-Up Assignments

If you are not present for your scheduled *song and genre* presentation, present during the following class session. If you miss your presentation for an excused absence, no points will be deducted. See the U of M policy on "legitimate absences": [policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html#750](http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html#750). Because you have a week in which to submit *quizzes*, late quizzes will not receive credit and cannot be made-up. However, your three lowest scores will be dropped. This is a reasonable, flexible, and generous make-up system. Please do not ask for any exceptions, for any reason. Because it constitutes the Final Exam, your *ethnographic research report* cannot be late. Please turn it in at least a day early to avoid technical difficulties, last minute emergencies, etc. If you qualify for an Incomplete and have a passing grade going in the class, talk to me about it before missing a major assignment.

## Reading Schedule

Note: a few key concepts may be added to this list as the course progresses. These additional concepts will be clearly denoted and explained in brief, introductory concept lectures.

<i>Week</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>
September 4 & 6	✦ Foreword and Chapters 1-3 of <i>Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives</i>	cultural capital, emic/etic, ethnography, heuristics
September 11 & 13	✦ Chapters 4-7 of <i>Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives</i>	edutainment, ethics, kinetic consumption, meta-narrative
<b>Popular Music as Political Communication</b>		
September 18 & 20	✦ <i>The Eyes of the World are Watching Now</i>	collective identity formation, hegemony, signifying units, soundscape
September 25 & 27	✦ 'Dance drills, faith spills': Islam body politics, and popular music in post-Suharto Indonesia ✦ <i>Trashing "America the Beautiful"</i>	body politic, mediatization (mediatisation, nationalism, sexuality)
<b>Communicating Identities: Genre, Subculture</b>		
October 2 & 4	✦ Oct. 2 Guest: Justin Schell, Director of "We Rock Long Distance." ✦ <i>Metal Faces, Rap Masks: Identity and Resistance in Hip Hop's Persona Artist</i>	persona race
October 9 & 11	✦ <i>Blah, Blah, Blah: Ke\$ha Feminism?</i> ✦ <i>Women, Pop Music, and Pornography</i>	gender interpellation subculture taste culture
October 16 & 18	✦ <i>Mexipunx</i> ✦ <i>Genre</i>	genre syncretism transnationalism
<b>Popular Music as Environmental Communication</b>		
October 23 & 25	✦ <i>'Hoods and the Woods</i>	ecomusicology narrative analysis semiotics
October 30 November 1	✦ Green space, soundscape and urban sustainability	soundscape
November 6 & 8	✦ 'My dirty stream': Pete Seeger, American folk music, and environmental protest ✦ <i>Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music</i>	simulacrum subjectivity
<b>Popular Music as Ritual Communication</b>		
November 13 & 15	✦ <i>Mummers and Moshers: Two Rituals of Trust in Changing Social Environments</i>	liminality ritual
November 20	✦ <i>The ecology of entrainment</i>	entrainment
<b>Music Journalism: Popular Music as Popular Communication</b>		
November 27 & 29	✦ <i>Fargo Rock City</i> , pp. 1-132	music journalism
December 4 & 6	✦ <i>Fargo Rock City</i> , pp. 133-273	memoir
December 11	✦ <i>Growing Up Gaga</i>	synthesis

## **Disabilities**

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Further information is available from Disability Services (180 McNamara Alumni Center). Note: Students with special needs may receive this syllabus and other course materials in alternative formats upon request. Contact the SJMC Student Services Center for more information, 612-625-0120.

## **Grading Scale**

A - Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

B - Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

C - Achievement that meets course requirements in every respect.

D - Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.

F - Represents failure and signifies that the work was either completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or was not completed.

I (Incomplete) - assigned at the discretion of the instructor. An incomplete grade will be considered only when documented, extraordinary circumstances beyond control, or ability to anticipate, prohibit timely completion of the course requirements. Incomplete grades are rare and require a written agreement between instructor and student.

## **Scholastic Misconduct – Definition**

Scholastic misconduct is broadly defined as “*any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work or that involves misrepresentation of your own work. Scholastic dishonesty includes, (but is not necessarily limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student’s work.*” **Proven scholastic misconduct will result in a course grade of F.**

## **Sexual Harassment**

University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the 12/11/98 policy statement. Copies of the 12/11/98 policy statement on sexual harassment are available at 419 Morrill Hall or [online](#). Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University Office of Equal Opportunity at 419 Morrill Hall.

## **Student Mental Health and Stress Management**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/>.

## **Course Grade Changes**

Questions about course grade changes should be directed to your instructor; or you may contact the Student Conflict Resolution Center at 612-624-7272 for assistance. *Grade changes will be made only when there is evidence of an error in grading and/or recording of a grade.*

### **Workload Policy**

For undergraduate courses, one credit is defined as equivalent to an average of three hours of learning effort per week (over a full semester) necessary for an average student to achieve an average grade in the course. For example, a student taking a three credit course that meets for three hours a week should expect to spend an additional six hours a week on coursework outside the classroom.

### **Excused Absences**

Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include illness of the student or his or her dependent, participation in intercollegiate athletic events (see the Administrative Policy: *Intercollegiate Athletic Events during Study Day and Finals Weeks: Twin Cities*, which prohibits intercollegiate athletic competition during study day and finals week except under certain circumstances), subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances. Such circumstances also include activities sponsored by the University if identified by the senior academic officer for the campus or his or her designee as the basis for excused absences. The instructor has the right to request verification for absences. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections.

### **General Expectations and Extra Credit**

Students are responsible for all information disseminated in class and all course requirements, including deadlines and examinations. The instructor will specify whether class attendance is required or counted in the grade for a class. A student is not permitted to submit extra work in an attempt to raise his or her grade unless the instructor has specified at the outset of the class such opportunities will be afforded to all students.

### **Sale of Notes**

Lectures given in this class are the property of the instructor. They may not be recorded without prior permission from the instructor. They may not be used for any commercial purpose. This includes the sale of notes to a retail distributor who reproduces them for resale to other students. Students found to be in violation of this policy may be subject to discipline under University policies.