

AMST 401T
Fall 2008

The Corporation in American Culture

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane
Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-1:00pm; Thurs. 12:00-2:00pm
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Course Description: Corporations serve an undeniably central role in contemporary American culture, yet the nature and structure of the corporation—and how it came to be that way—rarely makes its way into discussions of American culture. This interdisciplinary seminar will thus explore the role of the corporation in American culture, focusing specifically on the three following subjects: how corporations first developed in the U.S.; changing representations of the corporation in U.S. popular culture from the 19th to 21st centuries; and the structure and nature of working life within the contemporary American corporation. To that end, students will read a variety of texts including: studies of the origins of the corporation and corporate management philosophies; ethnographies of corporate culture; and popular representations of the corporation in literature (novels and comics), film, television, and the Internet.

Learning Goals: This course has multiple learning goals, all of which aim to prepare you to design, conduct, analyze, and present (in written and oral form) original research. Specifically, this course will help you:

- probe the concept of culture and the interdisciplinary study thereof;
- understand the history of the corporation in America;
- design and undertake original research (historical, ethnographic, and/or popular culture analysis)
- sharpen your oral and written communication skills;
- and help you to understand American history and culture more broadly through the lens of the corporate form, corporate culture, and the corporation's shifting representations and roles in American life.

Required Texts:

- Joshua Ferris, *Then We Came to the End*
- Arlie Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*
- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*
- Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office*

For the best prices on these books I recommend <http://www.half.com> and <http://www.powells.com>. **FYI:** You'll be reading excerpts (though lengthy ones—at least 100 pages) from Hochschild, Kanter, and Kwolek-Folland. If you'd rather Xerox the required pages than buy the book you can certainly do that. In addition to these books, you have a **required reading packet**, which you can purchase at CopyCo (2438 E. Chapman).

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: This is an upper-level seminar with a limited enrollment. Most class meetings will be devoted to discussions of the assigned reading, and all class members are expected to actively take part in these discussions. **You are required to attend every class having completed the week's readings;** you are allowed one absence over the semester; any additional absences will result in a reduction of your final course grade by one half letter grade for each absence. Your **class participation grade** will depend not only on attendance and frequency of participation, but also on the substance of your participation, and how your contributions contributed to the creation of an engaging and intellectually rigorous seminar. If you cannot or choose not to participate verbally, it is your responsibility to meet with me to determine an alternative method of participation.

Presentation on Readings: Each student will select one week in which to make a short presentation on the week's readings. These presentations are **not** summaries of the readings. Instead, each presenter will point out the work's central themes and situate them within broader analyses of the U.S. corporation. He or she will then offer a few thought-provoking questions to kick off class discussion. When two or more students share responsibility for the presentation, the responsibility for both preparing **and** presenting will be shared equally.

Film Review: For this assignment you'll select a feature film or documentary that features a corporations or corporate employment or culture more generally. The film can concern any era, but must focus on the United States. Your review will be approximately three pages long, and should tell me about the movie, your response to it, and what you think it tells the viewer, intentionally or not, about the corporation and American culture. Be sure to draw on course materials and discussions to frame and bolster your discussion of the film.

Research Papers: There are no exams for this course, but over the course of the semester you will complete multiple written assignments and undertake an independent research project on an aspect of the corporation in American culture. After submitting your research proposal, **each student is required meet with me to discuss their topic and plan of research and writing.** All research projects must have my approval. Students will make an in-class presentation on their research paper during the last two weeks of class. Assignments related to the research project—**project proposal, progress reports, and oral presentation**—will be due over the course of the semester, culminating in a **final paper of roughly 15-20 pages** (20-25 pages for graduate students).

In evaluating your research papers I will consider whether you have designed and conducted original research, presented and substantiated a coherent thesis, and offered an insightful and well-articulated analysis of your findings. In particular, your research paper should be conceptualized clearly and completely. It should provide a developed and critical analysis of primary sources and should address and incorporate secondary research in a synthetic and thoughtful manner.

Graduate Students: The requirements for graduate students differ from those of undergraduate students. In addition to a longer final research paper (20-25 pages), graduate students will be expected to demonstrate a higher level of written and oral communication in this class, and I expect that their research papers will include more extensive research and greater analytical depth than that expected of undergraduates. I will meet with graduate students over the semester to determine any additional requirements. *Note to graduate students: While I enthusiastically*

welcome graduate student participation in this course, this is at core an undergraduate course. I believe that everyone benefits immensely from classroom exchanges with students at different levels of their scholarly careers, but I also expect that you will be considerate of your classmates' different levels of classroom and research experience.

Calendar of Assignments: All assignments are to be submitted by the beginning of class on the due date unless otherwise specified.

<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
Sept. 18	Project Proposal
Oct. 16	Project Update I (3 pages)
Nov. 6	Project Update II (3 pages)
Nov. 20	Movie Review (3 pages)
Dec. 2, 4, 9 & 11	Oral Presentations
Dec. 18	Final Research Paper

Grading Procedures and Standards:

Class Participation	20% (attendance, participation, in-class assignments)
Reading Presentation	10%
Research Proposal	5%
Project Update I	5%
Project Update II	5%
Film Review	5%
Oral Presentation	10%
Final Project	40%

Extensions should be requested well in advance of the assignment deadline. There is no make up work in this class without a written documented excuse.

A 93-100%	B- 80-82	D+ 68-69%
A- 90-92%	C+ 78-79%	D 63-67%
B+ 88-89%	C 73-77%	D- 60-62%
B 83-87%	C- 70-72	F 59% or lower

The +/- grading system will be used; no extra credit will be offered. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. I reserve the right to add or modify assignments over the course of the semester.

Academic dishonesty includes such things as cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism, and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. When you use information from sources external to yourself, you must reference the source appropriately. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated** and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment, as well as possible removal from the course or suspension from the university.

Students with special needs: Please inform the instructor during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs that you may have that may require specific arrangements related to attending class sessions, carrying out class assignments, or writing papers or examinations. According to California State University policy, students with disabilities must document their disabilities at the Disabled Student Services Office in order to be accommodated in their courses.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week One: Introduction

August 26: No reading.

August 28: “What is a Corporation?” [handout]
Kalle Lasn, “The Unofficial History of America” (1999) [handout]
James Livingston, “Corporations and Cultural Studies” (1995) [handout]

**Sign up to lead one class discussion*

Week Two: The Corporation from a 21st-Century Vantage Point

September 2: No reading (but finish Ferris by Thursday!)
DUE: *Bring an image of the corporation from popular culture*

September 4: Joshua Ferris, *Then We Came to the End: A Novel* (2007)

Week Three: The Shift to a Corporate Culture

September 9: FILM: *The Crowd* (1928) [104 min, excerpts]

September 11: Clark Davis, “The Corporate Reconstruction of Middle-Class Manhood” (2001)

Week Four: Gender and the Early Corporation

September 16: Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, Intro., Ch. 1-2, & 4 (feel free to just skim Ch. 2)

September 18: No reading--Describe your project in class
DUE: *Project Proposal (3 pages)*

Week Five: The Organization Man in Postwar Pop Culture

September 23: FILM: *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) [153 min, excerpts]

September 25: William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956), Parts I, IV, and Appendix

Week Six: The Organization Man in Postwar Pop Culture, cont.

September 30: Continue discussion of *Org. Man*

October 2: Project Roundtable: Bring a Question, Bring a Suggestion

Week Seven: Race and Diversity in the Modern Corporation

- October 7: Juliet Walker, "White Corporate America: The New Arbiter of Race?" (2004)
DUE: bring in representation of race and the corporation
- October 9: No reading: continued discussion of race and diversity

Week Eight: The Office Wife: Secretaries and Organizational Structure

- October 14: Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Ch. 1-5
TV: *3's A Crowd* (1979)
- October 16: FILM: *9 to 5* (1980) [110 min, excerpts]
DUE: Project Update I (3 pages)

Week Nine: The Family-Friendly Corporation

- October 21: Arlie Hochschild, *The Time Bind* (1997), Parts I and III
- October 23: Discussion of Project Progress: No reading

Week Ten: White-Collar Layoffs

- October 28: Katherine Newman, "Rejected Managers and the Culture of Meritocracy" (1988)
Brenda Choresi Carter, "Going Postal" (2008)
- October 30: FILM: *Falling Down* (1993) [113 min]

Week Eleven: The Future of Work

- November 4: Andrew Ross, Chapters 1 and 2 in *No-Collar* (2003)
Malcolm Gladwell, "Designs for Working" (2000)
Rodney Rothman, "My Fake Job" (2000)
**Optional supplement: watch docs e-Dreams or Startup.com*
- November 6: *DUE: Project Update II (3 pages)*

Week Twelve: The Corporation in Moral Crisis

- November 11: FILM: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005) [110 min]
- November 13: Jim Lobe, "Americans Uneasy over Corporate Influence" (2000)
Claudia Deutsch, "U.S. Poll Shows Americans Distrust Corporations" (2005)

Week Thirteen: The Office: Comedy or Tragedy?

November 18: TV: “The Office” (U.S. version)

November 20: *DUE: Film Review (3 pgs)*

Week Fourteen: Oral Presentations

December 2: Oral Presentations

December 4: Oral Presentations

Week Fifteen: Oral Presentations

December 9: Oral Presentations

December 11: Oral Presentations

FINAL PAPER DUE: Thursday, December 18