At the root of this class is an exploration of the idea that culture is shaped through social interactions and relationships with others; and that the opposite is also true. Networks coalesce, are transformed, and dissolve because of cultural change – and indeed, there are good reasons to think of networks as a form of culture as well. This is a graduate course that has a dual focus on subfields of the sociology of culture and social networks; and as such, there is a tradeoff here. I make a choice for breadth across these fields rather than the requisite depth that either one deserves (indeed, entire careers have been devoted to each one). Still, the course is based on the conviction that using a lens of the study of culture can be a useful entry point into the study of social networks, and vice versa.

The format of the course is partially discussion-based, and partially practical application.

a) Discussion: I will spend time each week giving key background and context to how the work articulates with the development of the field, and each week one (or two) of you will lead a discussion introducing the material (no more than 15 minutes), and we'll spend the remainder of the time engaging with the questions raised by the discussants. This discussion will touch on conceptual/methodological contributions of the studies, how they articulate with prior approaches, and any challenging questions they raise.

b) The practical application part of the course will involve you identifying and working with a model dataset (provided to you by me) that has both relationship and culture information, and then doing three workshop assignments.

Your goals in this course to take the topical knowledge and skills you learn during the term to develop a research paper to inform a comps, dissertation chapter, or independent manuscript. Any of these final products will be evaluated by me, but part of your course grade will come from thoughtful peer reviews of your classmates’ presentations to help them advance their thinking should they decide to develop it further into a publication, thesis, or dissertation. Starting in Week 2, if you have not signed up as one of the week’s two discussants, you will be required to write and submit a 1-page memo (single-spaced, 12pt font) on an aspect(s) of the reading(s) that you found interesting (or provocative, or problematic) to Moodle by Wednesday @ 12n. The list of weekly supplemental readings is intended to provide extra detail for those that wish it; these are not required.

Grading: 30% class participation and engagement (including serving as discussant and your reflection papers); 30% workshop assignments; 40% final paper.

Required text: McLean, Paul. 2016. Culture in networks. John Wiley & Sons. If you have not had formal exposure to social network methods, you may wish to familiarize yourself with key concepts in one of the following texts:

Week 1: Network origins of culture (w/o January 21)
McLean, Paul. 2016. Culture in Networks. Chapters 1-3 (pp.1-64), Chapter 5

Also recommended:

Week 2: Cultural origins of networks (w/o January 28)
McLean, Paul. 2016. Culture in Networks. Chapter 6 “Networks from culture”.

Also recommended:

Week 3: Towards synthetic perspectives (w/o February 4)

Also recommended:

Week 4: Measurement of meaning structures (w/o February 11)

*** Workshop Homework 1 due ***
Week 5: Culture & cognition (w/o February 18)

Also recommended:

Week 6: Culture, networks, & social class (w/o February 25)

Also recommended: TBD

Week 7: Meaning-making processes & network mechanisms (w/o March 4)

Also recommended: TBD

*** Workshop Homework 2 due March 8***

************** No class Week 8 : March 11-18 – Spring Break **************
Week 9: Research ethics with relational data (w/o March 18)


TBD: (likely a Human Subjects Application that we'll study and pick apart)

Week 10: Social movements & networks (w/o March 25)


Also recommended:


*** Workshop Homework 3 due ***

Week 11: Cultural production and networks (w/o April 1)


Also recommended:


Week 12: Cultural preferences, attitudes, & tastes (w/o April 8)

Also recommended:

Week 13: What’s next: the future of the analysis of culture and networks (w/o April 15)
Readings TBD

Also recommended:

Week 14: Final project presentations and group feedback, Part 1 (w/o April 22)
In this class session, your goal is to publicly summarize (in 10 minutes) your final project, lessons learned, and next steps. This will serve as a workshop of sorts, and allow you to integrate feedback from your peers in time for the final paper submission.

Week 15: Final project presentations and group feedback, Part 2 (w/o April 29)
In this class session, your goal is to publicly summarize (in 10 minutes) your final project, lessons learned, and next steps. This will serve as a workshop of sorts, and allow you to integrate feedback from your peers in time for the final paper submission.

********* Final papers due May 9 **********

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