Understanding Media Fandom

**Course code:** FMS 478/578

**Term and year:** Fall 2025

**Day and time:** Mondays, 11:15-14:00

**Instructor:** Ted Turnau, Ph.D.

**Instructor contact:** [ted.turnau@aauni.edu](mailto:ted.turnau@aauni.edu); +420 774-3535-91

**Consultation hours:** Tuesdays 14:15-14:45, or by appointment, in room 4.02 (just off the stairs leading to the 4th floor).

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| **Credits US/ECTS** | 3/6 | **Level** | Advanced |
| **Length** | 15 weeks | **Pre-requisite** | FMS 152, “Introduction to Media Studies (Theory)” or FMS 370, “Popular Culture and Media Theory,” or instructor’s permission. |
| **Contact hours** | 42 hours | **Grading** | Letter grade |

# Course Description

This course explores fandom, particularly media fandom. In a world suffused in popular culture, fans are those who have invested themselves most heavily in enjoying and making meaning from popular culture. Why do they? Are they just weird, just different than us? Or is it simply a more intense expression of how we all make meaning from culture? Drawing on some of the seminal theorists of fan studies (including Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bourdieu, Camille Bacon-Smith, John Fiske, Henry Jenkins, Matt Hills, and D. W. Winnicott), this course seeks to understand fans as meaning-makers as they watch, play, write, create, blog, form communities and hierarchies, even quasi-religions, to understand the object of their fan-desire.

# Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

* demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures,
* articulate his or her own ideas about what drives fandom,
* demonstrate an ability to reflect on his or her own fandom.

# Reading Material

## Required Materials (available on NEO)

* Bacon-Smith, Camille. “Training New Members” and “Homoerotic Romance.” Chaps. in *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “Worldcon: Mobile Geography in Real Time.” Chap. in *Science Fiction Culture.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
* Bennett, Tony. “Popular Culture and the ‘Turn to Gramsci.” In Tony Bennett, Collin, Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds. *Popular Culture and Social Relations.* Milton Keynes, England: Open University Press, 1986. xi-xix.
* Bourdieu, Pierre. “Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture.” Excerpt from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Transl. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
* Burton, Tara Isabella. “Harry Potter and the Birth of Remix Culture.” Chap. in *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World.* New York: Public Affairs, 2020.
* de Certeau, Michel. “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” and “Reading as Poaching”. Chaps. in *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Berkeley, CA/London: University of California Press, 1984.
* Fiske, John. “Madonna.” Chap. in *Reading the Popular.* Boston/London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
* Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise Bielby. “Entering the Wild Zone.” Chap. in *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.
* Hills, Matt. “Fan Cultures between Knowledge and Justification.” Chap. in *Fan Cultures.* London/New York: Routledge, 2002.
* Jenkins, Henry. “‘Layers of Meaning’: Fan Music Video and the Poetics of Poaching,” Chap. in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* New York/London: Routledge, 1992.
* Jenson, Joli. “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization.” In Lisa Lewis, ed. *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. New York: Routledge. 1992. 9-29.
* Radway, Janice. “The Readers and Their Romances.” Chap. in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 1991.
* Reinhard, Carrielynn D. “Communication, Power, and Fractured Fandoms.” Chap. in *Fractured Fandoms: Contentious Communication in Fan Communities.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Book, 2018.
* Renae. “Hurt/Comfort: A Confession and a Celebration.” [Blogpost]. *The Fanfic Symposium.* June 5th, 2000. <https://trickster.org/symposium/symp55.html>.
* Scodari, Christine, and Jenna L. Felder. “Creating a Pocket Universe: ‘Shippers,’ Fan Fiction, and *The X-Files* Online.” *Communication Studies* 51, no. 3 (2000): 238-257.
* Thornton, Sarah. Excerpts from *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital.* Cambridge/Oxford: Polity Press, 1995.
* Vermorel, Fran, and Judy Vermorel. “A Glimpse at the Fan Factory.” In Lisa Lewis, ed. *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. New York: Routledge. 1992. 191-207.
* Williams, Rebecca. “‘It’s About Power: Spoilers and Fan Hierarchy in On-Line *Buffy* Fandom.” *Slayage* 11-12 [3.3-4] (April 2004). <https://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/williams_slayage_3.3-4.pdf>
* Winnicott, D. W. Excerpt from *Playing and Reality.* New York/London: Routledge, 1971.

## Recommended Materials (either on NEO or you can borrow from me)

* Bourdieu, Pierre. “Classes and Classifications.” From *Distinction.*
* n.a., “Fan Fiction Timeleines.” From *TVwiki.tv,* no longer available online.
* n.a., Fanlore.org. “Race and Fandom.” <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Race_and_Fandom>.
* Gilsdorf, Ethan. “You Have to Become the Con.” Chap. in *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks.* Guilford, CN: Lyons Press, 2009.
* Ingersoll, Julie J. “The Thin Line between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: Meaning and Community among Jimmy Buffet’s Parrotheads.” In Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, eds. *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture.* London/New York: Routledge, 2001.
* Jenkins, Henry. Excerpt from “Matt Hills Interviews Henry Jenkins.” In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture.* New York/London: New York University Press, 2006.
* Jindra, Michael. “It’s about Faith in Our Future: *Star Trek* Fandom as Cultural Religion.” In Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America.* Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 2000.
* Sandvoss, Cornell. “A Text Called Home.” Chap. in *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption.* Malden, MA/Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005.
* Young, Cathy. “The Fan Fiction Phenomena.” *Reason,* February, 2007. <https://reason.com/2007/01/30/the-fan-fiction-phenomena/>.

# Teaching methodology

The teaching methodology of this course is a combination of lecture, in-class discussion, and student-led seminars.

# Course Schedule

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Class Agenda** |
| **Session 1**  Sept. 1st | **Topic:** An Orientation to Fandom  **Description:** Going over syllabus, an introduction to the subject matter.  **Reading:** None.  **Assignments/deadlines:** None. |
| **Session 2**  Sept. 8th | **Topic:** The Popular Perception of Fans  **Description:** An overview of the social context within which fan studies emerged (especially seeing fans as pathological).  **Reading:**   * Fran and Judy Vermorel, “A Glimpse at the Fan Factory,” * Joli Jensen, “Fandom as Pathology.   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| **Session 3**  Sept. 15th | **Topic:** Understanding Hegemony, Reception, and Imagination  **Description:** An overview of the theoretical context from which fan studies emerged (specifically, hegemony, reception theory, and imagination).  **Reading:**   * Tony Bennett, “Popular Culture and ‘The Turn to Gramsci,’” * Janice Radway, “Readings and their Romances.”   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| **Session 4**  Sept. 22nd | **Topic:** “First-Wave” Fan Theory: Fan as Trickster Hero  **Description:** An overview of the theories involved in early fan theory in which fans were conceived as the underground resistance to the hierarchies and conforming forces of consumer culture.  **Reading:**   * Michel de Certeau, “’Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” and ”Reading as Poaching.” * John Fiske, “Madonna.” * Henry Jenkins, “’Layers of Meaning’: Fan Music Video and the Poetics of Poaching.”   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| **Session 5**  Sept. 29th | **Topic:** “First-Wave” continued…  **Description:** See above.  **Reading:**  **Assignments/deadlines: Vocab test 1 is today!** |
| **Session 6**  Oct. 6th | **Topic:** Fan Communities  **Description:** An exploration of the emergence of the fan convention.  **Reading:** **Required:**   * Camille Bacon-Smith, “Training New Members,” ch. 4 from *Enterprising Women,* and “Worldcon: Mobile Geography in Real Time," from *Science Fiction Culture.*   **Optional:**   * Ethan Gilsdorf, “You Have to Become the Con,” from *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks* * “Race and Fandom,” from fanlore.org   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| **Session 7**  Oct. 13th | **Topic:** Fan Productivity  **Description:** An exploration of creative ways fans express themselves, e.g. filking, fanfic, etc.  **Reading:**  **Required:**   * Camille Bacon-Smith, “Training New Members,” (cont., on Mary Sue and Lay stories), and “Homoerotic Romance,” from *Enterprising Women* * Christine Scodari and Jenna L. Felder, “Creating a Pocket Universe: ‘Shippers,’ Fan Fiction, and the *X-Files* Online” * Reneae, “Hurt/Comfort: A Confession and a Celebration.”   **Optional:**   * Henry Jenkins et. al., “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking” * Cathy Young, “The Fan Fiction Phenomena” * “Fan Fiction Timelines,” from tvwiki.tv.   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| **Session 8**  Oct. 20th | **Topic:** “Second-Wave” Fan Theory: The Fan as (Sub)Culture Capitalist  **Description:** An exploration of later developments within fan theory, particularly the idea that far from resisting consumer culture and social hierarchies, fan culture replicates them.  **Reading:**  **Required:**   * Pierre Bourdieu, “Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture,” excerpt from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* * Sarah Thornton, excerpt from *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* * Rebecca Williams, “’It’s About Power’: Spoilers and Fan Hierarchy in On-Line *Buffy* Fandom.”   **Optional:**   * Bourdieu, “Classes and Classifications,” conclusion from *Distinction.*   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. |
| Oct. 27th | **Midterm break!** Rest well, be safe. |
| **Session 9**  Nov. 3rd | **Topic:** “Second Wave” continued…  **Description:** see above.  **Reading:**  **Assignments/deadlines: Vocab test 2 is today!** |
| **Session 10**  Nov. 10th | **Topic:** “Third Wave” Fan Theory: The Return of the Individual Fan, Desire, and Identity  **Description:** An examination of the latest theories emerging from fan studies, especially those having to do with fan identity and desire.  **Reading:**   * D. W. Winnicott, excerpt from *Playing and Reality* * C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby, “Entering the Wild Zone,” excerpt from *Soap Fans.* * Matt Hills “Fan Cultures between Knowledge and Justification.”   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. Also, begin work on your fan self-ethnography. |
| Nov. 17th | **NO CLASS – Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day** |
| **Session 11**  Nov. 24th | **Topic:** “Third-Wave,” continued/Discussion of Toxic Fandom (“fantagonism”).  **Description:** We conclude our exploration of fan psychology (role of pleasure, etc.) with an exploration of toxic fandom.  **Reading:** Carrielynn Reinhard, “Communication, Power, and Fractured Fandoms.”  **Assignments/deadlines:** |
| **Session 12**  Dec. 1st | **Topic:** Fandom as Religion?  **Description:** An exploration of the continuities and discontinuities between fandom and religion.  **Reading:**   * Tara Isabella Burton, “Harry Potter and the Birth of Remix Culture.”   **Optional Readings (debate over fandom as religion):**   * Cornel Sandvoss, excerpt from chapter 3, “A Text Called Home,” from *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* * Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills, excerpt from “Interview” * Michael Jindra, “It’s About Faith in Our Future: *Star Trek* Fandom as Cultural Religion” * Julie J. Ingersoll, “The Thin Line between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: Meaning and Community among Jimmy Buffet’s Parrotheads.”   **Assignments/deadlines:** Reading questionnaire, due by class time. **Final vocab test is today!** |
| **Session 13**  Dec. 8th | **Topic:** Student fandom projects.  **Description:** Student groups A will present their multimedia presentations.  **Reading:** None.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Students from group A need to be ready to present. |
| **Session 14**  Dec. 15th | **Topic:** Student fandom projects.  **Description:** Student groups B will present their multimedia presentations.  **Reading:** None.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Fandom self-ethnography paper due. |

# Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **Workload (hours)** | **Weight in Final Grade** | **Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes** | **Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes\*** |
| Class Participation | 42 | 0% | Ask questions, give insights, show that you’re engaging with the material. Presence for and participation with student fandom presentations is expected. | 2, 3 |
| Reading questionnaires | 35 | 10% | Student will:   * demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures. | 1,2 |
| Three vocabulary tests | 33 | 30% (10% each) | Student will:   * demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures. |  |
| Fandom presentation. | 20 | 30% | Student will:   * demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures, * articulate his or her own ideas about what drives fandom, * demonstrate an ability to reflect on his or her own fandom. | 1,2 |
| Fandom self-ethnography (6-8 pages, double-spaced, typed) | 20 (10 for M.A.) | 30% (15% for M.A.) | Student will:   * demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures, * articulate his or her own ideas about what drives fandom, * demonstrate an ability to reflect on his or her own fandom. | 1,2,3 |
| Theoretical appendix to Fandom self-ethnography (M.A. students only). | 10 | 15% | Student will:   * demonstrate a good grasp of theoretical concepts associated with the study of media fan subcultures * articulate his or her own ideas about what drives fandom * demonstrate an ability to reflect on his or her own fandom. | 1,2,3 |
| **TOTAL** | **150** | **100%** |  |  |

\*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

# Detailed description of the assignments

## Assignment 1: Reading Questionnaires

Must be completed by class for in-class discussion. I only grade on completion, not correctness. In other words, your answers are the *beginning* of our discussion. “Completeness” means writing at least several sentences per question.

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Completeness and done on-time. | 100% |

## Assignment 2: Fandom Research Presentation

Design your own research project on a fandom of personal interest to you and give a multi-media presentation on it to class (undergrads will be able to work in teams if they wish). I will be looking for evidence of a grasp of the theoretical concepts we have been discussing in class, as well as your own appropriation of them. You must use seven of these terms in your presentation. For more details, see the grading rubric I will post on NEO (folder 1).

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Research and content (choice of topic, details presented, illustrations/examples, conclusions). | 45% |
| Application of theory (how the theory we learned in class informed the presentation). | 30% |
| Presentation style (visuals, vocal delivery). | 25% |
| Question and answer period. | 20% |

## Assignment 3: Fandom Self-ethnography Paper

Mine your own fan history. What were you a fan of and when. And most importantly, *why.* For detailed guidance, see Matt Hills, “Fan Cultures between Knowledge and Justification.” I will be looking for how well you are able to explore your own fan history, and what drives your own fandom. Besides aiding self-understanding, it is a way of developing empathy with other fans.

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Depth of content (how deep can you dig – see Matt Hills article). | 40% |
| Interaction with content of class (applying what you learned in class give clarity or insight to your understanding of self-as-fan). | 40% |
| Clarity and creativity of the writing. | 20% |

## Assignment 4 (M.A. only): Theoretical Appendix to Fandom Self-ethnography

Write an additional 4-5 pages where you reflect on the theories of fandom presented in class vis-a-vis your own experience of fandom. You may also do some independent research into *other* fan theorists that you believe clarify your own fan experience better than those explored in class.

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Depth of content (how deep can you dig – see Matt Hills article). | 40% |
| Interaction with content of class (applying what you learned in class give clarity or insight to your understanding of self-as-fan). | 40% |
| Clarity and creativity of the writing. | 20% |

# General Requirements and School Policies

## General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar

with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the

highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU

intranet for a [summary of key policies](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xoNETY9yqNMwNP-06wDzM2VmgMIOire-) regarding coursework.

## Course specific requirements

## Attendance

## I expect my students to attend every class. You put yourself at a disadvantage if you miss the interaction in class. I know that life sometimes gives us unexpected circumstances, so you may miss one class without too much consequence (I still encourage you to get notes from a classmate). Miss two classes, however, and I will require you to either get notes or watch the class video (if available) and post 3 questions or comments on NEO Forums that show you engaged with the material. The same if you miss a third class. If you miss four, you are done – I will fail you. Please do not miss classes. Note: Coming more than 15 minutes late to class will count as one-half of an absence. If you are more than 30 minutes late, I will mark you as absent. Missing classes may adversely affect your grade, so please come to class, and come on time.

* ***Make-up options for quizzes/presentations***

If for some life-or-health-threatening reason you know that you will miss a quiz or a presentation, you MUST inform me at least 24-hours in advance to arrange for an alternate time to take the quiz or give the presentation. If you do not give me advance notice, I may deduct points for lateness.

## Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

## Electronic devices

## I do not permit the use of electronic devices in the classroom. They are simply too distracting, and there is good evidence that they actually hinder learning. So, at the beginning of class and upon return from break, I will ask that students put their electronic devices away. I will provide printed outlines to take notes on.

## Eating is not allowed during classes.

## Cheating and disruptive behavior

## If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will be dealt with and may include a failing grade for that assignment.

## Plagiarism and Academic Tutoring Center

Plagiarism is “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Random House, New York, 1993). For more detail, see my “Plagiarism Policy” document in the first folder of NEO classes.

At minimum, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the Dean. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Allegations of bought papers and intentional or consistent plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

If unsure about technical aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>. You can also talk to me. I truly want to help you avoid plagiarism.

* ***A Word about AI-Generated Text***

*Don’t.* That’s the word. Do. Not. (That’s two words). Steer clear of any AI-text generation websites or apps, and that includes Grammarly’s “paraphrase” function. Passing AI-generated text off as your own is plagiarism (large language models train on other people’s writing – it’s just using other writer’s work, uncited, as your own).

* ***Concerning Citations***

If you produce a presentation or a paper without *any* citations, I get very suspicious. Here is the rule: any writing that you do that is not a) your own ideas or b) common knowledge *must have a citation!* And by “citation,” I mean either a footnote or an in-text citation that links a specific sentence in your work to a specific page in a book or essay, or a specific webpage. For this class, you may use either Chicago author-date in-text citation or MLA in-text citation. Both require author’s name, date, and a specific page number, as well as a bibliography with more information about the specific publication. I prefer Chicago (for guidance, see this link: <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/citing-information/chicago-author-in-text>), but you may use MLA if you wish. APA (which does not require page numbers) is forbidden.

## Course accessibility and inclusion

If you have learning accommodations, please speak to me as soon as possible. I will do what I can to help (within reason).

**Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter Grade** | **Percentage\*** | **Description** |
| A | 95–100 | **Excellent performance**. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject. |
| A– | 90–94 |
| B+ | 87–89 | **Good performance**. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort. |
| B | 83–86 |
| B– | 80–82 |
| C+ | 77–79 | **Fair performance**. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work. |
| C | 73–76 |
| C– | 70–72 |
| D+ | 65–69 | **Poor**. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student’s work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives. |
| D | 60–64 |
| F | 0–59 | **Fail**. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course. |

\* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.