

Sociology of Horror (SOCI-250)

Hartwick College, Sociology Department

3 Credit Hours

Professor: Michael Branch

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Student Support Hours: By appointment via Google Meets

Course Description

This course covers how horror is constructed, how we respond to it, and how it shapes our experiences of daily social life. Involving more than just feeling afraid, horror is an opportunity to learn more about who we are through investigating the feelings of revulsion and repulsion it generates. Throughout the course, we will draw on sociological and cultural theory to reflect on how horror emerges as the "collective nightmares" of a given culture and unpack its social, cultural, and political dimensions. We will explore how horror functions and changes across various mediums (fiction, graphic novels, film, video games, podcasts, etc.) and throughout different parts of the world. We will also draw on feminist and queer theory to examine horror and its role in (re)producing social differences and inequality. Students enrolling in the course should be aware that given the focus on horror, the content we will cover may be upsetting, offensive, grotesque, or challenging. However, the goal of the course is to use a sociological perspective and develop a critical gaze to explore horror as a mirror that reflects back to us our fears, anxieties, and tensions at any given moment.

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General Course Information

Course Objectives

Throughout this course, students will explore one of the most popular and viscerally affecting genres of media: horror. This course focuses on the things that we find scary, shocking and monstrous to investigate the cultural and political dimensions of horror. Particular emphasis will be placed on: (A) Learning how to carefully read and engage with interdisciplinary texts and media and (B) learning how to articulate your thoughts on complex cultural and social issues, and apply them to contemporary forms of horror. Throughout this course, students will also (C) develop an understanding of some of the basic topics in sociology, cultural theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and media studies, list in the course description. At the end of the course, students should be able to (D) explain the enduring popularity of the horror genre, (E) describe how and why what we considered to be horrifying has been used as forms of social control, and (F) discuss why horror provides insight into a broad range of cultural and political perspectives.

Required Materials

There is no textbook for this class. All of the readings will be uploaded to D2L and must be completed in *Perusall*.

- Since this is a condensed class, we will be moving through readings and topics fairly quickly. In general, there will be at least one reading for each “class” or topic. Readings will typically be between 10-15 pages. Each week of the course will have approximately 50-75 pages of reading so please be sure to plan accordingly.

Throughout the class, we will be watching multiple horror movies and playing a couple of short horror video games. Each “class” or topic will have one piece of horror media assigned for it. You will be responsible for finding a way to access these movies and games.

- For each movie, game, or other form of media assigned, there will be a link to a streaming platform or service where it is available.

Asynchronous discussion will take place on a dedicated Discord server for our class. If you do not already have a Discord account, you can register for one by downloading the program for free on your [desktop computer](#), or through the [Google Play store](#) or [Apple App Store](#) on mobile devices and tablets.

- Additional support for downloading and getting started with Discord is [available here](#).
- Details on how to join the class server will be available on D2L.

Technology

Microsoft Office: All assignments for this course must be uploaded in .doc or .pdf format. Any other format will not be accepted. This means if you use Apple’s Pages, Google Docs, or Open Office’s word processor, you must be sure to save your file in either .doc or .pdf format. If you are unsure about how to save your files in this format, I would recommend downloading and using Microsoft Office, which comes with your enrollment as a Hartwick student. To install Office on personally owned equipment, please go to <https://portal.office.com> and log in using your Hartwick College network credentials. The TRC recommends using the “Download and

install” button in the upper right to install the full version of Microsoft Office 2016. Contact the Technology Resource Center if you have any questions.

Google Shared Drive: The final project for this class (creating your own horror media) will be uploaded to a shared Google Drive folder ([available here](#)). The purpose of using the shared folder is so that you can share your work with fellow students and simulate the in-class experience of sharing your work in a class.

Resources

Email: Please be sure to email me if you have any questions about the course, or to set up a virtual office hours meeting. Keep in mind that I will only communicate with you through your Hartwick email address. See the email policy section for more details on email communication.

Student Hours: My student support hours will be held virtually via Google Meets. All you need to do is email me to let me know what you would like to meet about and a time when you’re interested in meeting.

D2L: You’ll be uploading your written assignments to Hartwick’s D2L. This will also be the best place to check up on your grades. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with the interface of the site, located at <https://d2l.hartwick.edu>.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

In this course, you must engage with course materials and actively participate in class discussion and individual coursework. I expect that you will complete any assigned readings by the due date and will raise thoughtful points and/or ask questions during the discussions of these readings.

Evaluation

This course will use an alternative grading system called “specifications grading” – sometimes referred to as “standards based grading”. This grading system is an effort to avoid the problem associated with more conventional grading systems and to provide you with more agency in choosing how you want to engage with the class. Please be sure to reach out to me if you have any questions about how this grading system will work.

Your final grade will be determined by the minimum number of standards met throughout the semester. Assignments will not be graded in the typical “point” fashion. Instead, all assignments are graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory where the requirements for Satisfactory are set at approximately B-level or higher. Grading is not Pass/Fail. In order to earn credit, work must be of satisfactory quality and meet all outlined specifications. The purpose of this approach is to increase transparency in grading and promote student agency and decision making. In this course, you can pick whichever grade bundle meets your educational needs and will have the ability to revise work to demonstrate mastery of course materials and concepts.

In general, Satisfactory should not be viewed as “minimally competent,” but rather as a mark of having achieved the assignment’s learning goals and specifications The final letter grade is not an assessment of your intelligence, your abilities, or your value as a person. Rather, the grade reflects what you demonstrated that you learned in the course: no more, no less.

Built into this system is a good deal of choice as to how much you wish to learn and how hard you want to work to demonstrate and apply that learning. You might choose that passing the course with a C is sufficient for your goals—it is perfectly appropriate and worthy of respect for you to make that choice, especially if it allows you to proactively allocate your time to other endeavors. If you strive to get an A in the course and maximize your learning, you should know that you are taking on that work and challenge yourself, and should make sure you are in a personal and academic situation to achieve that level of engagement.

Mitchell, Jason. 2016. “Rethinking Grading: An In-Progress Experiment.”

Assignments in this course are bundled together and tied to specific benchmarks for final grade outcomes. The only letter grade you will receive in this course will be your final grade, and it will be indicative of the assignments you choose to pursue. The bundles and their grading outcomes are listed below.

Each bundle includes the requirements of any lower grades (i.e., to get a B, you must meet all of the benchmarks for a C). Students will default to the highest available grade in each bracket (A, B+, C+), and may receive a lower grade if they are short of the number of Satisfactory assignments required.

Grade Bundles

Grade	Learning Outcome	Requirements / Benchmarks
C	Students will critically engage with the course content and readings	Receive a Satisfactory on at least 17 out of 20 <u>Perusall Reading Reports</u>
		Receive a Satisfactory on at least 17 out of 20 <u>Media Journals</u>
B	Students will contribute to class discussion and constructively engage with their peers	Receive a Satisfactory on at least 6 out of 8 <u>asynchronous Discord discussions</u>
A	Students will demonstrate understanding and application of key concepts from the course	Receive a Satisfactory for a <u>final research/creative project</u>

Assignments Overview

Please see below for a breakdown of each of the assignments for the course. Studies of college student learning have demonstrated that both grades and learning are higher when there is peer interaction in a class. With that in mind, you will occasionally be working in small groups to collaborate and build discussions.

Media Journals

Throughout the course, we will be engaging with a variety of horror media. These may include movies, short stories, literature, excerpts from graphic novels, YouTube clips, short video games, and more. Each topic will have one media assigned for it that is meant to connect to and expand on the that topic. For each topic, you will be responsible for submitting a media journal. This is a short written assignment that asks you to respond to the film. A template will be available on D2L. Fill out that template and upload it via the appropriate assignment on D2L.

Course Readings and Perusall – Engagement and Annotations

Alongside the various media we'll be engaging with, there will also be a reading assigned for each topic. You should expect approximately 10-15 pages of reading per topic. This means that you will be completing between 50-75 pages of reading a week.

To facilitate grater engagement with the readings (and to help give more of a traditional 'classroom' feel), we will be using *Perusall*. *Perusall* is a "social reading" platform, treating each reading as a shared document to discuss together.

All readings are available on *Perusall*, which can be accessed directly from the course's D2L page. Using *Perusall*, you will collaboratively highlight and annotate the readings with other students, asking questions and sparking discussions in the margins. You should use these as a launching pad for synchronous and asynchronous discussion.

You will earn points by posting comments or questions (called annotations) that reflect thoughtful reading. These may include answers to your classmates' questions, notes about where to find answers to questions on assignments, or just general thoughts, responses and questions about the material. **You should plan to make at least 3 substantive interactions per reading, including comments, questions, or replies.**

Asynchronous Discussions: Discord

To facilitate more robust conversations about the course, asynchronous discussion will be held on a dedicated Discord server. While *Perusall* offers the opportunity to work together in small groups, our Discord server will allow us to contribute to discussions as a class. Multiple sub-channels will be available, including weekly discussion threads, technical assistance, and off-topic discussion. During the first week of our class, you should register for a Discord account and join the course channel. Once there, please post a short introduction of yourself in the "Introductions" text channel.

Credit for asynchronous discussions will be based on participation. **You should plan to post at least two times per week and follow ongoing discussions on Discord.**

Final Research/Creative Project

Students wishing to engage in an original work of scholarship will do so through the final research/creative project. This project will task you with creating and pitching your own horror media on a topic of your choice. The final project can be submitted as a written paper, between 8 to 10 double-spaced pages in length, or as a video essay, 10 to 15 minutes in length. With my approval, you may also pursue other forms (such as a graphic novel, creating a website, hosting a podcast, etc.). To successfully complete the final project, you will need to engage with the readings in the class and cite them appropriately to support your project. You may also need to conduct additional research.

For the final project, you will need to turn in an overview of the horror media you are creating, an outline for at least 4 scenes, a description of main characters, and a final reflection. Final projects are due on the last day of the class, July 21st. More detailed instructions will be provided on D2L.

Late Policy

All assignments must be submitted by the established due date and time. The dates for all assignments are firm and late work is generally not accepted in the class.

Lack of access to the internet or a wireless connection are not legitimate reasons to submit late work or be unable to complete readings or assignments. It is your responsibility to be prepared for the assignments in the class. Emailing me several hours before an assignment due date (e.g., at 10 or 11pm) and then not submitting work because you have not heard from me is not an acceptable reason for work to be submitted late. Academic adjustments and/or modifications will be made only when alternative arrangements have been made in advance of the assignment's date.

Submission Policy

All assignments for this course must be submitted as either a Word document or a PDF file. Any assignment that is submitted as a Google Doc and Pages file will receive a 0 and will be subject to late penalties. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate format.

Course Policies

Screening Content

Horror can be a difficult genre. I have made every effort to avoid unnecessarily distressing or potentially traumatizing material this semester, but I cannot predict how everyone might react. Students enrolling in the course should be aware that given the focus on horror, the content we will cover may be upsetting, offensive, grotesque, or challenging. However, the goal of the course is to use a sociological perspective and develop a critical gaze to explore horror as a mirror that reflects back to us our fears, anxieties, and tensions at any given moment. If you are at all concerned about a reading or assigned media, please contact me to discuss alternative options.

Email Policy

Please always include the course title (SOCI 250) along with a keyword regarding the nature of your inquiry in the subject line. For example, your subject line might look like this: “SOCI 250: Journal Question”. Your email should use professional language, tone, and style. Please take the time to proofread your email. Keep in mind that email is not the same as texting. Do not write your entire message in the subject line.

Before emailing me, reading through the syllabus again might provide an answer to your inquiry. Looking through our course page on D2L may also resolve your question. For example, if you are unsure of where to find a reading, be sure to look through our course content first. In other words, you should make at least an initial effort to address your question.

Questions about grades, substantive feedback, and comments on assignments will be answered via virtual meetings rather than email. You are more than welcome to ask those questions via email, but I will likely respond by asking you to set up a meeting to talk through them either in-person or virtually. Allow for at least 24 hours for me to respond to your message during the workweek. Please do not expect immediate responses after 5pm, during holidays, and on the weekends. If the email does not adhere to these standards, I reserve the right to not respond.

Conduct Rules

Assignments and discussions in this class will be based on many topics that can be considered controversial. It is not expected for everyone to agree; however, it is expected that each of us be respectful and appropriate. You should be prepared and are encouraged to listen to different perspectives. As we will cover in this course, horror and what we considered to be scary, graphic and shocking can have disparate impacts and can produce serious harms and trauma, which means that our discussions may touch on issues that could potentially make one uncomfortable. Discomfort can be a sign of growth. However, gross discomfort due to bullying or bigotry of any kind will not be tolerated. If you encounter such a situation in class by another student or myself, please let me know as soon as possible so that we may find a solution.

Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications

Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the semester in order to be eligible for academic adjustments. Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services, at sanfordl@hartwick.edu or AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. AccessAbility Services is located on the 5th floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

Academic Dishonesty

Throughout the course, students are expected to be honest and ethical at all times and will be held accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to understand both course-specific and college-wide academic integrity expectations. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, fabricating or falsifying information or sources, improper collaboration, submitting the same paper for different classes without permission, and plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when writers deliberately or unintentionally use another person's language, ideas, or materials and present them as their own without properly acknowledging and citing the source. This includes but is not limited to the use of direct quotations without the use of quotation marks and referencing of the source of the quotation, turning in all or part of an essay written by someone other than yourself (a friend, an internet source, purchased online, etc.) and claiming it as your own, and including information or ideas from research material without citing the source. Additionally, students are not to seek out assignments, exams, etc. from prior semesters for this course and/or instructor from online sources or from others who have previously taken this course. While students are encouraged to talk to one another about class material, sharing of assignments will also be considered plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be tolerated in this course. Students must be honest and responsible in their academic studies and are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and/or cheating in this course results in one or more of the following consequences: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, and/or disciplinary action taken by the College. If you are unsure of something and are worried that you may be plagiarizing, please come see me or visit the Writing Center. In order to best avoid plagiarism, be sure to cite all your sources carefully and completely; when in doubt, cite. For further information, see the Academic Integrity Policy in the Hartwick guidelines: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>

Title IX

Hartwick College is committed to equal opportunity and providing a safe community free from all forms of sexual misconduct including sexual/gender-based harassment, discrimination, dating or domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and sexual assault. If you wish to make an

official report to the College or have questions about the College's policy and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Michael Arno, at arnom@hartwick.edu or (607) 431-4293. Online reporting and policy information is available at <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>.

If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact one of the following resources: Perrella Wellness Center, Health - (607) 431-4120, or Counseling – (607) 431-4120; or Opportunities for Otsego's Violence Intervention Program – (607) 432-4855.

All other employees, including faculty, are responsible employees at Hartwick College and are required to report any incident of sexual misconduct that is personally reported to them to the Title IX Coordinator so that support and resources can be provided for all parties.

Tutoring and Writing Center

Writing assistance is available through the Writing Center. The services offered are an excellent resource for anyone who is interested in improving and growing as a writer. Consultants are able to offer individual assistance and support for any stage of the writing process – from brainstorming to outlining to editing and revisions to more. This assistance is free and available to all students! The Writing Center currently offers Zoom, in-person, and email consultations. For more information and guidelines for signing up for a consultation, please refer to the Writing Center site (<https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/>). Please try to avoid making an appointment immediately on or before the due date for assignments. Even if you are waiting for feedback from the Writing Center, it is your responsibility to submit your assignments on time.

Campus Mental Health Support Services

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning. These might include strained relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, or loss of motivation. The Counseling Center is available to help with these issues and may be reached by calling (607) 431-4420 or emailing counselingcenter@hartwick.edu. Counseling services are free of charge and confidential. Fifty-Fifty, a peer counseling service, is also available if you are more comfortable talking with a fellow student who has been trained to offer information and support in a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere. To reach Fifty-Fifty, call (607) 431-5050 or email fiftyfifty@hartwick.edu.

Potential Changes to Syllabus

As the instructor, I reserve the right to make necessary changes to the syllabus, including assignments, readings, due dates, and policies, to best meet the learning needs of the class. If changes are made, I will post an announcement on D2L and send an email outlining the revisions.

Course Schedule

The best way to read this schedule is by starting in the upper left-hand corner, going down the column, and then moving to the next column. You should plan to complete each column before moving on to the next one. I recommend completing the reading before engaging with the assigned media for that topic. If deemed necessary, changes may be made to the course schedule.

Module 1: Introducing and Defining Horror					
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
Sub-Topic	What is Horror? Why Horror?	A Brief History of Horror	Horror, Cultural Discourse, and Ideology	Politics of Horror	Boundaries of Horror and Children’s Horror
Reading Due	Andrew Tudor, “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre”	Mathias Clasen, “Monsters Everywhere: A Very Brief Overview of American Horror”	Paul Santilli “Culture, Evil, and Horror”	Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture”	Catherine Lester, “The Children’s Horror Film: Characterizing an ‘Impossible’ Subgenre”
Media Due	Jennifer Kent, <i>The Babadook</i> (2014)	Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (YouTube) AND Mary Shelly, “Frankenstein” (YouTube)	Alfred Hitchcock, <i>Psycho</i> (1960)	George Romero, <i>Dawn of the Dead</i> (1978)	Henry Selick, <i>Coraline</i> (2009) OR Adrian Molina and Lee Unkrich, <i>Coco</i> (2017)
Assignments	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report
Due date for all content of Module 1 (5 media journals, 5 reading reports, 2 Discord discussions): Saturday, July 1					

Module 2: Monstrous Identities and Horrifying Bodies					
	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
Sub-Topic	Horror and the Monster	Gender and Horror	Racial Horror	Horror and Disability	Queer Horror
Reading Due	Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"	Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection"	Xavier Burgin, <i>Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror</i> (2019)	Angela M. Smith, "Introduction: Disability, Eugenics, and Classic Horror Cinema"	Lisa Cunningham, "Queerness and the Undead Female Monster"
Media Due	Christopher Landon, <i>Happy Death Day</i> (2017)	David Robert Mitchell, <i>It Follows</i> (2014)	Jordan Peele, <i>Get Out</i> (2017)	Tod Browning, <i>Freaks</i> (1932)	Brad Michael Elmore, <i>Bit</i> (2019)
Assignments	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report
Due date for all content of Module 2 (5 media journals, 5 reading reports, 2 Discord discussions): Saturday, July 8					

Module 3: Capitalism, Politics, and Nature in Horror					
	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5
Sub-Topic	Capitalism and Horror	Environment, Landscapes, and Horror	Rural Horror	International Horror	Horror and Death
Reading Due	A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "All Against All: Dystopia, Dark Forces and Hobbesian Anarchy in the <i>Purge</i> Films"	Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, "Introduction: Film, Environment, Horror"	Kathleen P. Hunt, "Bring Him the Blood of the Outlanders!": <i>Children of the Corn</i> as Farm Crisis Horror"	Darren Kerr, "Interstitial scares: transnational gothic-horror performance"	Christine S. Davis and Jonathan L. Crane, "A Dialogue with (Un)Death: Horror Films as a Discursive Attempt to Construct a Relationship with the Dead"
Media Due	Gerard McMurray, <i>The First Purge</i> (2018)	Bong Joon-Ho, <i>The Host</i> (2006)	Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, <i>The Blair Witch Project</i> (1999) <u>OR</u> Michael Dougherty, <i>Trick 'r Treat</i> (2009)	Junji Ito, <i>Uzumaki</i>	Ian Dallas, <i>What Remains of Edith Finch</i> (2017)
Assignments	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report
Due date for all content of Module 3 (5 media journals, 5 reading reports, 2 Discord discussions): Saturday, July 15					

Module 4: Social Nightmares and the Future of Horror					
	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5
Sub-Topic	The Comedic Side of Horror	Horror Post 9/11	Horror and the Internet	Horror and Video Games	Horror and Everyday Life; The Future of Horror
Reading Due	Erika Tiburcio Moreno, "Classism and Horror in the 1970s: The Rural Dweller as a Monster"	Angela Ndalians, "Genre, culture and the semiosphere: New Horror cinema and post-9/11"	Tina Boyer, "The Anatomy of a Monster: The Case of Slenderman"	Kevin Steinmetz, "Carceral horror: Punishment and control in <i>Silent Hill</i> "	Pete Falconer, "Being in a Horror Movie"
Media Due	Eli Craig, <i>Tucker and Dale vs. Evil</i> (2010)	James Wan, <i>Saw</i> (2004) OR Eli Roth, <i>Hostel</i> (2005)	Levan Gabriadze, <i>Unfriended</i> (2015) OR Zachary Donohue, <i>The Den</i> (2013)	Scott Cawthon, <i>Five Nights at Freddy's</i> (2014)	Ari Aster, <i>Hereditary</i> (2018)
Assignments	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report	1 Media Journal 1 Reading Report
Due date for all content of Module 4 (5 media journals, 5 reading reports, 2 Discord discussions, 1 final project): Friday, July 21 st at midnight					