SOCI 150: The Sociology of Popular Music

Basic Information:

Instructor: Ryan Ceresola
Office Location: Golisano 338
Student Support Hours: via appointment
Class Location: TBD
Class Hours: TBD

Course Description:
This course explores the social interplay between popular music and American society, emphasizing how musical trends reflect and influence broader social shifts. From the rise of jazz and rock to the cultural impact of hip-hop and electronic music, students will examine how music shapes and is shaped by issues of class, race, gender, and identity. Topics include the commodification of music, the evolution of music marketing, and the political and cultural movements intertwined with musical expression. Practically, students will study music's production, consumption, and societal role through listening sessions, song discussions, and by completing our own mini-research project.

In satisfaction of GEOs 2 & 5, the course will also address how data has been processed, analyzed, and distributed in the past and present. We will examine contemporary transformations in music brought about by artificial intelligence and big data. Students will learn how these technologies are reshaping how music is created, distributed, and experienced, and consider their implications for the future of both music and society.

General Education Outcomes:

- GEO 2: Understand visual, performative, and digital media forms.
- GEO 5: Apply data and an understanding of big data analytics to decisions and actions.

Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze the sociological relationship between music and key social structures and identities (race, class, gender, etc.).
- Identify the cultural, political, and technological transformations in popular music over time.
- Evaluate the effects of commodification and industry shifts on musical expression.
- Conduct a sociologically informed analysis of musical content or trends.
- Understand how data and AI are used in the music industry, and assess the consequences of these tools.

Required Readings:

- Joseph A. Kotarba (Ed.) (2017). *Understanding Society through Popular Music*, 3rd Edition. ISBN-13: 978-1138806528.

- Liz Pelly (2025). *Mood Machine: The Rise of Spotify and the Costs of the Perfect Playlist*. (Hardcover – January 7, 2025).

- Extra readings as uploaded to D2L.

Required Software: Microsoft Office (.doc/.pdf formats), internet browser for YouTube and streaming content, D2L access.

Grading Breakdown:

- Weekly Quizzes (based on readings and lectures): 25%
- Video Logs & Listening Responses: 20%
- Song Analysis Mini-Essay (3 pages): 15%
- Music Data + AI Analysis (group infographic project): 20%
- Final Project (Mini Research Project on Music and Society): 20%

Your letter grade for the course will be derived from the percentage of points you earn on each assignment as detailed in the course breakdown below. The percentage you earn on total assignments gives letter grades by this breakdown.

>= 93 = A	80 – 82.9 = B-	67 – 69.9 = D+
90 – 92.9 = A-	77 – 79.9 = C+	63 – 66.9 = D
87 – 89.9 = B+	73 – 76.9 = C	60 – 62.9 = D-
83 – 86.9 = B	70 – 72.9 = C-	<59.99 = F

Course Policies:

- **E-mail:** Email me if you have any questions about the course, or to set up an appointment in my office. I only communicate with you through your Hartwick email address.

- **Office Hours:** My office hours will be in-person, or virtual – whatever works best for you. See my time listed above, or email me and we can work something out.

- **Late Work Policy**: Every 24 hours an assignment is late, I'll take off 10%. You can always submit things early!

- **Attendance Policy:** It is my expectation that you will attend each class session, that you will arrive to class on time, and that you will stay for the entire session. If you miss **more than TWO** classes for any reason, you will have been unable to participate in the course at the minimum level I expect, and **each additional missed class after that will reduce your overall grade by three percentage points**. It is your responsibility to consult a classmate to find out about any course material (including announcements) you miss during your absence before you return to class.
However, in the course of an academic career, there are times when you may be called to participate in school-sponsored events including conferences, field trips, or athletic games. These will be considered official absences and will not factor in the absence policy. Students will provide each instructor (i.e., me) with an agreement letter prior to the end of the first week of the semester (or by the second day of January term) notifying the instructor that they may occasionally have to miss class for an event or competition and will work with the faculty member to complete any missed assignments. In the event that an activity is not known prior to the drop/add period the student will notify the instructor as soon as they are aware of the conflict.

  In all cases and for all activities, students will present the faculty member with a hard copy of a letter detailing the activity, dates of the activity and acknowledgement of the class assignments that will be missed and date for submission of any course work. Students are expected to notify their instructors in whose courses they will be missing academic work -- preferably two weeks before each absence from class -- due to extra-curricular or co-curricular participation. When applicable, the letter also will be signed by appropriate college personnel coordinating the event and will include anticipated departure times. For athletic competitions, students will be excused from class an hour before the scheduled departure time when traveling to away games and an hour before the start of a home competition. In cases in which a student will miss more class sessions than what is outlined in the class syllabus (i.e., the 3 absences that are allowed), the student will not be disadvantaged by having the final grade reduced due to representing the College as long as all missed work is completed.

  Tardiness: If you are over ten minutes late to class, you will be marked absent.

- **D2L:** This will be the place to upload your in-class assignments, other homework, and all of the small deadlines that come with your research paper, as well as this being the best place to check up on your grades, as I will have the most updated grades posted there. I

also will link pertinent information here including YouTube clips and other documents to help your success. Ensure that you familiarize yourself with the interface of this site, located at: https://d2l.hartwick.edu/.

- Electronics Policy: **All electronics should only be used in-class for classroom purposes (e.g., taking notes, watching videos, linking to articles, or completing activities).** If it becomes clear that you aren't using technology for that purpose, I will ask you to put your device away. If you continue to use your device in a way that is distracting, I will ask you to leave the class. I will start relatively promptly at the allotted time.

- Inclement Weather Policy: In most cases, if there is inclement weather that leads to a change in class structure, the class will be conducted via asynchronous activity and video lecture. Stay tuned to instructor emails for more information in this case.

- Counseling: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning. These might include strained relationships, anxiety, 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. Heart, 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 a Heart Peer Counselor, email heart@hartwick.edu.

- Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications: **Hartwick College is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students, and welcomes students with disabilities into all the College's educational programs.** The AccessAbility Services Office is responsible for the determination of appropriate modifications for students who encounter barriers due to a disability. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic accommodations, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services and Academic Inclusivity, at sanfordl@hartwick.edu or AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. To serve you best, requests should be made as early as possible. Please let me know if you have questions or need assistance. I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am happy to consider creative solutions if they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity.

- Academic Integrity: I will be following the Academic Integrity Policy described in the Hartwick guidelines and will enforce this policy to the full extent. These policies are available here: https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/. Students, or student groups, must do their own work— they will write their own papers and exams, prepare their own presentations, and cite the original sources of any material they draw on for their papers. Any deviations from these

principles (including plagiarism, intended or not) will result in severe penalties, including a failing grade on the assignment and/or the course.

- Tutoring Services For Tutoring Services, visit their webpage at: https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/center-for-student-success/css-services/tutoring-services/

- Title IX: Sex Discrimination, Harassment, and Misconduct: Hartwick College is committed to equal opportunity and providing a campus community free from all forms of discrimination and discriminatory harassment, including sex, gender, or sex-based discrimination.

  To make a report to the College or if you have any questions about Hartwick's Discrimination and Harassment Policy and related procedural resolutions, please contact Geoffrey Gabriel, Title IX Coordinator at gabrileg@hartwick.edu, or at (607) 431-4293. Additional information can be found on our website: https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/

  To speak with a confidential resource, please contact the Perrella Wellness Center at (607) 431-4120, the Counseling Center at (607) 431-4420, or the Opportunities for Otsego's Violence Intervention Program at (607) 432-4855.

  All Hartwick College employees, including faculty, who are not deemed confidential must report all incidents or perceived incidents of discrimination and harassment to the Title IX Coordinator so that resources, support, and options can be provided to all who are adversely affected by discrimination and harassment.

- The Writing Center: The Charlotte Orr Hotaling Writing Center (Clark 230) offers free one-on-one writing support for any stage of writing, including brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising. The Writing Center offers personalized feedback on short assignments, essays, senior theses, resumes, graduate school applications, scholarship applications, and other documents. Students can request in-person or online video support by scheduling 30-minute or one-hour appointments through Navigate. Asynchronous email support is also available by emailing your assignment prompt, assignment, and any questions to WritingCenter@Hartwick.edu. The Writing Center is open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm. Drop-in visits are welcome. The website is https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/.

Assignments

More information will be provided about the major projects in separate hand-outs.

Quizzes (25%)
Short quizzes on weekly readings and lectures. Focus will be on sociological concepts and contemporary examples.

Video Logs & Listening Responses (20%)
Weekly guided sheets for selected music videos, documentaries, or listening tracks.

Song Analysis Mini-Essay (15%)
Pick a song and write a 3-page sociological analysis. Include themes of identity, culture, and context.

Music Data + AI Infographic (20%)
In small groups, create an infographic that presents a recent trend in music shaped by AI or big data. Include data interpretation and sociological implications.

Final Project (20%)
A 5-page research paper on a topic of your choice relating music and society (e.g., genre politics, subcultures, protest music, commercialization).

Course Calendar:

Module 1: Introduction to the Sociology of Music

- Textbook: Introduction, Chapter 1: Social Interaction, Chapter 2: The Family; Chapter 3: The Self, Identity, and the Life Course
- Extra Readings: Frith, "Music and Identity"; Becker, "Art Worlds" (selections)
- Quizzes
- Video Logs: "The Social Power of Music" (PBS short)
- Listening Log: Jazz and Civil Rights

Module 2: Race, Class, and Gender in Music

- Textbook: Chapter 4: Youth, Deviance, and Subcultures; Chapter 5: Religion, Politics, and Popular Music; Chapter 6: Class and Gender
- *Mood Machine* – first third.
- Readings: Rose, "Black Noise" (excerpts); Negus, "Popular Music in Theory"
- Quiz 2
- Video Log 2: Hip-Hop Evolution (Netflix episode)
- Assignment Due: Song Analysis Essay

Module 3: Protest, and Politics, in Music

- Textbook: Chapter 7: Hip-Hop Culture and Social Change; Chapter 10: The Globalization of Popular Music
- *Mood Machine* – middle third
- Readings: Eyerman & Jamison, "Music and Social Movements"; Selected articles on AI in composition
- Quiz 4
- Video Log 4: "This is America" and "Fight the Power" analyses
- Group Work: Infographic Project on AI/Data in Music

Module 4: Music Industry, Commodification, and Data

- Textbook: Chapter 8: Music and Social Media; Chapter 9: Business in the Music Community
- Readings: Hesmondhalgh, "The Cultural Industries"; Tufekci on streaming platforms
- *Mood Machine* – last third
- Quiz 3
- Video Log 3: "How Spotify Changed Music" (YouTube)
- Final Project Due