Introduction

In a society as obsessed with celebrity as ours is today, what does the urge to gossip about famous folk tell us about where we live and who we are—as a nation, as a community, and as people? In this ENGL 114 course, we’ll ask ourselves why certain names, faces, and bodies are elevated above others, and how we ourselves participate in the consumption and performance of celebrity. We’ll think about gossip and scandal: not just as a means of policing human behavior, but as two different strategies for the production and dissemination of information. And we’ll consider whether or not social media has definitively altered our conception and consumption of fame. In other words, this is a class which celebrates and scrutinizes Instagram, web apps, and all things Kardashian, which will allow us to touch on topics as diverse as anthropology, sociology, art history and media studies. Along the way, we’ll tackle the following questions: What is celebrity? Can it be disentangled from other features of our consumer economy—and where do we go from here?

Course Objectives

In the process of exploring the weird and wacky world of modern celebrity, you will write three major papers and a less formal “op-ed” piece, the purpose of which is to prepare for the kinds of sophisticated thinking and writing you will be asked to do here at Yale and beyond. As in all sections of ENGL 114, we will focus on the four elements of a compelling, cohesive argument: identifying a problem, making a defendable claim, supporting claims with evidence, and providing a motive for writing. With these skills in mind, you will learn to read your own work—and that of your classmates—with a critical eye, with the ultimate aim of transforming these texts into sophisticated, refined, and persuasive final products.

Required Texts


Course readings will be made available to you through the Canvas @ Yale portal, as well as a printed course packet available for purchase at TYCO Printing on 262 Elm Street. *You are required to bring a hard copy of each day’s assigned reading to class.*
SEMINARY CALENDAR AND DRAFT DUE DATES (subject to change):

How to Read this Schedule:

Week #
Date       Topics, readings, assignments and activities addressed in class
           • Readings, writing exercises, and other assignments to be completed in preparation for and in advance of this class
           • Date due of written assignments

UNIT ONE: DEFINING CELEBRITY

Week 1
Monday, July 3  Course Introduction/go over syllabus
                Introduction to key rhetorical terms (handout)
                Essay 1 assigned
                Maureen O’Connor, “A Celebrity Divorce-Expert Tells All”

Wednesday, July 5  Introduction and claim
               • Thomas J. Boorstin, “From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event”
               • *Craft of Research* Chapter 7—Making Good Arguments
               • *Craft of Research* Chapter 9—Making Claims
               • Due: Preliminary claim for Essay 1

Friday, July 7  Essay 1 writing workshop
                Focus: Introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions
                • *Craft of Research* Chapter 9—Assembling Reasons and Evidence
                • *Craft of Research* Chapter 16—Introduction and Conclusions
                • Due: Rough draft of Essay 1. Please bring two printed copies of your essay to class.

UNIT TWO: SURVEILLING CELEBRITY

Week 2
Monday, July 10  Essay 2 assigned
                Placing sources in conversation
                • Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal”
                • Joshua Gamson, “The Unwatched Is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture”
                • Watch Kanye West’s music video, “Famous,” available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7FCgw_GlWc

Wednesday, July 12  Warrants, Evidence and Analysis
                • Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
• Nicholas Schmidle, “The Digital Dirt: How TMZ gets the videos and photos that celebrities want to hide”
• Craft of Research Chapter 10—Acknowledgements and Responses
• Due: Final draft of Essay 1

Friday, July 14
Essay 2 writing workshop
Focus: integrating secondary sources
• Due: Rough draft of Essay 2. Please bring two printed copies of your essay to class.

UNIT THREE: CELEBRITY AS CULTURAL ARGUMENT

Week 3

Monday, July 17
Essay 3 assigned
Brainstorming paper topics
• Richard Dyer, “Monroe and Sexuality”
• Sarah Marshall, “How Anna Nicole Smith Became America’s Punchline”

Wednesday, July 19
LIBRARY VISIT details TBD
• Due: Final draft of Essay 2

Friday, July 21
Essay 3 writing workshop
Focus: moving from research to outlining and writing
• Anne Helen Petersen. “How Jennifer Garner Went Full ‘Minivan Majority’”
• Anne Helen Petersen, “The Unbearable Sadness of Ben Affleck”
• Craft of Research Chapter 12—Planning
• Due: Research Proposal and Working Bibliography. Please bring two printed copies of these documents to class.

Week 4

Monday, July 24
Essay 3 writing workshop
Focus: moving from partial to complete drafts
• Anne Anlin Cheng, “Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern”
• Craft of Research Chapter 13—Drafting Your Report
• Due: Partial draft of Essay 2 (introduction with claim, at least three body paragraphs, and detailed outline with quotes). Please bring two copies of your essay to class.

Wednesday, July 26
Celebrity and New/Old Media
• Natalie Jarvey, “Instagram’s CEO is Counting on Selena Gomez, Kevin Hart and 500 Million More to Win Digital Media’s New Game: Video”
• Stephen Burt, “Kim, Caitlyn, and the People We Want to See”
• Claudia Rosenbaum, “The Once Mighty Celebrity Tabloids Face An Uncertain Future”

Friday, July 28
In-class peer review of Essay 3 Draft 1
• Due: complete draft of essay 3. Please bring two copies of your essay to class.

Week 5
Monday, July 31
Celebrity and Politics
Presentations assigned
In-class work on preparing for and delivering a presentation
• Anne Helen Petersen, “Ivanka Trump and the Aesthetics of Denial”
• Olivia Nuzzi, “Kellyanne Conway is a Star”

Wednesday, August 2
Presentation on Research Topics—Panels 1 and 2
• Due: Essay 3 Final Draft
• Due: Presentation Script (panels 1 and 2)

Friday, August 4
Presentation on Research Topics—Panels 3 and 4
Class Conclusion
• Due: Presentation scripts (panels 3 and 4)

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Grades

Paper 1: Close Reading of an Argument (3-4 pages) 15%
Paper 2: Controlled research Essay (4-5 pages) 20%
Paper 3: Research-Based Essay (8-10 pages) 30%
Research proposal and preliminary bibliography for Essay 3 5%
Presentation and script 15%
Participation 15%

Due Date of Papers

First Draft Paper 1: Friday, July 7
Final Draft Paper 1: Wednesday, July 12
Participation

Come to class with something to write with and something to write on. It’s not a bad idea to purchase a notebook solely devoted to ENGL 114 notes and assignments. You will occasionally be asked to hand in your in-class writing; for that reason, make sure your handwriting is legible, and that you can tear pages neatly from said notebook.

Please note that I do not allow laptops, tablets, or cellphones in class. (Unless they pertain to our in class discussion.)

In-Class Discussion

To make discussion as effective as possible, you will be expected to come to class having done all the assigned readings and assignments. Most importantly, however, you are expected to treat your fellow classmates (and myself) with courtesy and respect. Discussion, debate, and even disagreement are strongly encouraged, but it is vital that our seminar room constitute a space where everyone’s opinion is respected and heard.

Attendance

Unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance, rough drafts and final essays will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade for each day (class day or otherwise) that they are late. Extensions must be requested at least 48 hours in advance of the assignment due date. Please also keep in mind that assignments are due on time via Canvas even if you are not present in class. If you miss a class, you are expected to find out the homework for the following class from a classmate.

Tardiness

Class begins promptly at 9:00 am—be there! You may be late for class two times without penalty, but every third late arrival will count as a day of absence. (See the policy above.)

Seeking Help Outside of Class

I’m here to help, and love to work with students on their writing. That said, you are encouraged to talk to me for any reason outside of class: just stop by during office hours or email to make an appointment. I also encourage you to make use of Yale’s residential college writing tutors and the tutors in the Writing Center. More information about both can be found at http://www.yale.edu/writing/.

Emailing Etiquette

Please don’t email me as if you were sending a tweet or posting on Instagram! Start your
messages with “Dear…” and remember to sign-off with your name. Treat emails like short letters, and our exchanges will run smoothly.

**Assignments**

**Websites**
Canvas @ Yale will be used for signing up for office hours, retrieving homework assignments and course readings, and viewing grades.

**Drafts**
We will write several drafts along the way to each final paper. These will progress from a proposal or a guided exploration, to the “final draft,” which will be handed in for a grade. All drafts will be given deadlines on your syllabus, most will be discussed in class, and completed first drafts will receive instructor comments (but no grade). The better quality your drafts, the better my feedback can be, so your writing should be as strong as possible, and absolutely polished. Late papers—either first drafts or revised essays—will receive few or no comments.

**Workshops**
Most drafts and many exercises will be discussed in class. This means that select essays may be discussed by the class as a whole, or individual essays may be considered by small groups of 2 to 3 students. Workshops will provide you with valuable feedback from your peers and instructor as to how you can revise your essay drafts.

**Final Essays**
Imagine an audience of astute, interested, and intelligent readers who may or may not share your precise opinions, experiences, or beliefs—that’s the audience you should be writing for. Papers will be evaluated in terms of the quality of their ideas and arguments, their engagement with the readers, their form and style, and their grammar and mechanics.

**Essay Format and Submission**
Final essays and drafts should be submitted to me on or before the day they are due via the Canvas @ Yale portal. Please make sure that all essays follow these specifications:

- Typed, generic size 12, Times New Roman font
- Double-spaced
- One-inch margins (top, bottom, and sides)
- Numbered pages
- Stapled (if submitted in hard copy)
- Word-count, given at the end of the essay
- Citations in MLA or Chicago format

**Academic Honesty**
Academic honesty is the basis on which this class and our university functions: we share and discuss our research with each other in the understanding that we will give credit where credit is due and present as our own only our own ideas. I expect you to show integrity and care as participants in our academic community. One of the central goals of this course is to teach
students how to use published research to support their own thinking, both in speaking and in writing. Any instance of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty may result in a failure on the particular assignment involved or of the course. I urge you to consult Yale’s policies on this matter, which can be found at http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/undergraduate-regulations, or to talk to me if you have any questions.