

DRESS, IDENTITY, & SOCIETY
MALS 620A
MONDAYS 6-8:50
SPRING 2006

PROFESSOR: Dr. Nancy Nelson Hodges

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies
213 Stone Building
336-256-0291
njnelson@uncg.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Dress is an intensely personal phenomenon, in that it helps us to express our innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires. At the same time, dress is completely socially situated as it functions to make such thoughts, feelings, and desires public. In this course, dress, in the form of modifications made to the body and supplements placed on the body, is the starting point for an exploration of the self in society. We will examine the ways by which the dressed body communicates our personal and social identities through its intersections with such factors as gender, age, social roles, ethnicity, and culture. Our study of dress will be contextualized through an interdisciplinary examination of how time and space are critical to understanding the meanings that are both embedded within and expressed through the dressed body.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- Calefato, Patrizia. (2004). *The Clothed Body*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Damhorst, Mary Lynn, Miller-Spillman, Kimberly, and Michelman, Susan. (2005). *The Meanings of Dress* (2nd edition). New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc.
- Other readings assigned weekly and accessed via Blackboard e-reserves

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Define the theoretical foundations of dress and identity.
- Identify and explain the factors influencing the use and interpretation of dress as a form of non-verbal communication.
- Evaluate and discuss approaches to understanding dress, the body, society, and identity.
- Assess the importance of contextual factors operating to define dress and identity in social terms.
- Apply knowledge of dress and identity to understanding and exploring issues and problems specific to the dressed body in society.

EVALUATION:

The course is conducted in a seminar format, with several content related readings assigned for discussion each week. Attendance is expected. If for some reason you have to be absent, notify me prior to the class by email. Because attendance is factored into the participation portion of the grade, it would be a good idea to connect with another student who was there to update you on what happened in class. Each student is expected to participate in the discussion of all readings, but will also be assigned discussion leadership for several readings on a rotating basis.

You will be asked to locate a minimum of 8 newspaper articles (can also be television or internet based) on current event topics related to dress in contemporary US society. A typed journal of your reactions to these articles and the relationship of article content to topics discussed in class will be turned in at the end of the semester. You will also be expected to share what you find with regard to these articles with the class throughout the semester.

A final research paper that addresses an aspect of dress, identity, and society of interest to you is required. This research paper will be evaluated based on depth of perspective and insight into the topic as well as integration of concepts covered during the course. A succinct presentation of the topic during class time is also required. You will work with me to determine an appropriate topic for the paper. The presentation of findings will occur during the final two class meetings.

The breakdown for evaluation is as follows:

- Discussion participation: 20%
- Discussion leadership: 15%
- Dress in society journal: 15%
- Research paper and presentation: 50%
- Grades will be assigned on a scale of A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, and F.

The UNCG Academic Honor Code and Integrity Policy will be followed. Students are expected to be informed of the guidelines of the *UNCG Academic Integrity Policy* and will be required to sign their names indicating their adherence to the stated guidelines on all major work submitted.

TENTATIVE TOPICAL COURSE OUTLINE:

WEEKS 1-2:

- Definition and functions of dress
- Theoretical foundations of dress as non-verbal communication
- Appearance and the self
- Contextual factors and the interpretation of meaning:
 - Place
 - Time period

WEEKS 3-6:

- Fundamental concepts in the study of dress and identity:
 - Gender

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Religion
- Culture

WEEKS 7-10

- Beauty ideals
- Dress and the body

WEEKS 11-13:

- Style/Fashion
- Subcultures and dress
- Popular culture and dress: Movies, music, and the media
- The future of dress, identity, and society

WEEKS 14- 15:

- Research Paper Presentations
- Wrap-up