Course Description:
This course aims to unravel elements of contemporary popular culture through the analysis of Young Adult Fantasy texts, ranging from the literary works of C.S. Lewis to the global television phenomenon Pokemon. The longevity, continuing influence and popularity of such texts will be probed beyond the aesthetic, transforming these popular works into cultural insight. By putting these concerns in tension with the texts, this multimedia course will develop close reading skills of visual, cinematic, literary and audio material. The course will look critically at the construction of the popular and at the easy definition of terms such as “Fantasy” and “Young Adult,” as well as shed light on contemporary American concerns such as identity, race, religion and globalization.

Required Texts:
C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (book)
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (film)
Looney Tunes (television)
J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (book)
Pokemon Season One: Indigo League (television)
Stephnie Meyer, Twilight (book)
New Moon (film)
Avatar: The Last Airbender Season Two: Earth (television)
Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games (book)
Phillip Pullman, The Golden Compass (book)
Additional materials on Collab

Course requirements:
Participation and Attendance: 30%
Because much of the critical work for this class will be generated via discussion, it is crucial that students attend class and participate actively. The course encourages lively discussion about the texts and their accompanying cultural norms, social assumptions or moral controversies. However, it is also vitally important that all students remain respectful of other perspectives and open to the process of reconsidering their own worldviews.

Blog Posts: 30%
In order to jump-start classroom discussion, students will be required to write eight blog posts throughout the semester responding to the reading material. These blog posts will bring class concerns to the fore before our scheduled meeting times, and will provide direction for our in-class conversations. Posts can be close reading analyses, cultural critiques or personal reflections, and should be no longer than 300 words. Blog posts will be submitted via Collab, and are due by 10am on Monday. More details to come.

Short Response Paper: 10%
Students will write one short response paper of 1-2 pages. The paper should include a critical close-reading of one of the class texts. Due date: March 1, 11:59pm, via email.

Final Project: 30%
In lieu of a final exam, students will complete a final project that encapsulates the themes of the course and demonstrates engagement with the texts. Students have several options for the final project, including, but not limited to: a critical essay, creative writing, or a presentation of original research. More details will be provided later in the semester.

Class Schedule
Readings should be completed before the day assigned. Schedule may be revised as the course progresses. All additional material is available on Collab.
Week One (January 18-20)

→ Introduction: Fantasy, Young Adult, Popular Culture

Week Two (January 23-27)

→ C.S. Lewis: Western religious tradition, childhood and nostalgia
  - The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis
    o “Light in the Forest” from The Magician’s Book. Laura Miller.
  - The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis
    o Discussion continued

Week Three (January 30-February 3)

→ J.R.R Tolkien: High fantasy tradition, cross-media revival, and cultural phenomenon
  - Watch The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers
  - The Lord of the Rings, discussion continued

Week Four (February 6-10)

→ Looney Tunes: Individualism, subversion and American exceptionalism
  - Looney Tunes, selected episodes
    o “Introduction” from Reading the Rabbit. Kevin Sandler.
  - Looney Tunes, selected episodes
    o Discussion continued

Week Five (February 13-17)

→ J.K. Rowling: “Literature,” moral hegemony and roleplay
  - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone by J.K. Rowling (first third)
    o “Literature” from Keywords for American Cultural Studies
  - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone by J.K. Rowling (second third)
    o Discussion continued

Week Six (February 20-24)

  - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone by J.K. Rowling (final third)
    o Discussion continued
  - Harry Potter fan culture – browse links on Collab to fan fiction, discussion forums
    o “Apprentice Wizards Welcome: Fan Communities and the Culture of Harry Potter.” Rebecca Sutherland Borah.

Week Seven (February 27-March 2)

→ Pokemon: Globalization, merchandising and commodification
  - Pokemon. Episodes 1-3
    o “Panic Attacks: Anti-Pokemon Voices in Global Markets.” Christine Yano.
  - Pokemon. Episodes 5-7
    o Discussion continued

Week Eight (March 5-March 9)

  - SPRING BREAK

Week Nine (March 12-16)

→ Stephenie Meyer: Feminism, gender, sexuality and the family
  - Twilight by Stephenie Meyer
  - Twilight by Stephenie Meyer

“Twilight’s Feminist Backlash.” The Guardian, 7/15/2010

Week Ten (March 19-23)
- Twilight by Stephenie Meyer
  - Discussion continued
- New Moon (film)
  - In-class screening

Week Eleven (March 26-30)
  ➔ Avatar: The Last Airbender: Narrative, nation and radiant textuality
  - The Last Airbender, Season 2: Earth. Episodes 1-3
  - The Last Airbender, Season 2: Earth. Episodes 6-7, 10
    - “Nation,” Keywords for American Studies

Week Twelve (April 2-6)
- The Last Airbender, Season 2: Earth. Episodes 11-14
  - “Identity and Offline Play,” from Children Under Construction: Critical Essays on Play
- The Last Airbender, Season 2: Earth. Episodes 17-20

Week Thirteen (April 9-13)
  ➔ Suzanne Collins: Violence, performance and authenticity
  - The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
    - “Fresh Hell: What’s behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?” The New Yorker, 6/14/2010
  - The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
    - “Reality TV and Voyeurism.” Mark Andrejevic.

Week Fourteen (April 16-20)
- The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
  - Finish discussion

  ➔ Phillip Pullman: Tradition, spirituality and secularism
  - The Golden Compass by Phillip Pullman

Week Fifteen (April 23-27)
- The Golden Compass by Phillip Pullman
  - “Religion” from Keywords for American Cultural Studies
- The Golden Compass by Phillip Pullman
  - Finish discussion

Week Sixteen (April 30-May 1)
- Wrap up course