

**LIBS 415.01H: Exploration in Visual Cultures: The Oprah Phenomenon**  
**Dr. Emily L. Newman**  
East Texas A&M University

Spring 2025

Mon, Wed 2:00p-3:15p

Classroom: Talbot Hall 201

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Office: Talbot Hall 211

For Office Hours, email to schedule an appointment (F2F or Zoom)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OUTCOMES**

This course examines visual culture through the lens of Oprah Winfrey's career, media empire, magazine, philanthropy, social activism, and more. This course examines how Oprah Winfrey has shaped and been shaped by visual culture, from her pioneering television presence to her impact on social media and beyond. Through critical analysis and multimedia exploration, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of how Oprah Winfrey became a global phenomenon.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- enhance visual literacy and critical thinking skills
- develop writing skills
- acquire a working knowledge of intersectionality, particularly emphasizing the interactions between gender, race, class, and sexuality
- become better able to analyze and dissect important videos, documents, magazines, and criticism
- apply interdisciplinary scholarship and its theoretical underpinnings through designing and carrying out an independent research project.
- develop the skills to research multiple disciplinary fields
- generate and effectively communicate scholarly material
- ability to work both independently and productively, while developing effective time management skills.

**ASSESSMENT:**

Students' ability to meet the course objectives and learning outcomes will be evaluated through written assignments, discussion posts, video project, and an annotated bibliography.

**NO REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

There are no required textbooks for this course, all of our readings will be available online. We will also be listening to podcasts regularly. It is possible you might have to rent a film for a nominal fee during the course of the semester.

### WORKLOAD:

The rule of thumb for time required for course study and preparation each week for a face-to-face class or an online course during the spring and fall semesters is three times the number of credit hours (or 9 hours per week) for the course. You need to plan accordingly. If you find yourself unable to complete course requirements in a timely manner, refer to the University's withdrawal policy and the appropriate dates. Incomplete grades are only granted for extreme emergencies. Being "overloaded" either from other class assignments or job commitments are not considered to be emergency situations. For this class, you should expect an hour to an hour and a half of work for each class period (so around three hours a week). If you desire, you can work ahead and start the projects early, just remember to follow due dates and engage in conversation in discussion posts!

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS: \*

**Engagement:** Each person is expected to participate fully in class, by following the guidelines listed below.

- **Preparation:** reviewing readings and material before class
- **Focus:** avoiding distractions during in-person and online activities
- **Presence:** engaged and responsive during all activities
- **Asking Questions:** in class, out of class, online, offline
- **Listening:** hearing what others say, and also what they are not saying
- **Specificity:** referring to specific ideas from reading and discussions
- **Synthesizing:** making connections between reading and discussions

**Attendance:** Each student in this course is allowed no more than **three** unexcused absences. Each absence after this results in the lowering of the grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. When a student accrues **more than eight unexcused absences** the instructor has the right to drop the student from the course or to give them a failing grade. Unexcused absences require no explanation. For an absence to be considered excused, appropriate documentation must be presented. Excused absences are defined in The Student Guidebook and various university policies, but the policy employed in this class is confined to the following: (1) Participation in pre-approved University activities such as athletic events, sponsored field trips, and travel for specific University-related academic reasons; (2) Verifiable legal proceedings; (3) Documented cases of illness, injury, or emergencies. **All such excuses must be shown to the instructor in original, written, documentary form within 7 days of the absence(s) together with a photocopy for the instructor's records.** (Please understand that this copy is a student's only record of an absence.) In lieu of documentation, absences become unexcused and are counted as such.

**Discussion:** Each student will write numerous times to the discussion page for the class. There will be clear class prompts, with word counts for you to follow. Discussions are due Tuesdays and Thursdays prior to the start of class. No late posts or make-up posts will be allowed.

## Assignments:

Throughout the course, you will have numerous written assignments, including videos and short papers. The assignments must be uploaded on time will NOT be accepted via email, unless specified. This also includes a short research project, and a reflection paper that addresses your time in the course.

## Grade Breakdown:

20% - Discussion Posts  
13% - Branding Oprah  
10% - *The Bluest Eye* Paper  
15% - Book Club Assignment  
17% - Where are they Now? Oprah Connections  
10% - Annotated Bibliography  
10% - Favorite Things Assignment  
5% - Reflection paper

## Grade Scale:

A = 90%-100% (exceptional)  
B = 80%-89% (good)  
C = 70%-79% (average)  
D = 60%-69% (minimally sufficient)  
F = 50%-59% (failure)

**Note:** Personal computer problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the school or local library, office service companies, an Internet cafe, or a bookstore, such as Barnes & Noble, etc.

## DISCUSSION:

Each person will bring their own experiences to this class and should feel comfortable expressing their opinions and vulnerabilities. The classroom is a safe environment, and each student should behave with integrity and treat their peers with respect.

## HANDING IN ASSIGNMENTS

Each assignment must be uploaded on time. Discussion posts will not be accepted after their due date. For other assignments, for each class day late, the grade will be deducted. **Assignments will NOT be accepted over ONE week late.**

## SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

## NONDISCRIMINATION NOTICE

East Texas A&M University will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

## CLASSROOM POLICIES:

### **Statement on Student Behavior:**

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenet of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct).

All students must show respect toward the instructor and the instructor's syllabus, presentations, assignments, and point of view. Students should respect each others' differences. If the instructor determines that a student is not being respectful towards other students or the instructor, it is the instructor's prerogative to ask the student to leave, to refer the student to the department head, and to consider referring the student to the Dean of Students who may consider requiring the student to drop the course. Please refer to pages 42 – 46 of the East Texas A&M University Student guidebook's Codes of Conduct for details.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students at East Texas A&M University are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. There is **no tolerance** for any kind of academic dishonesty in this course. This includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, cheating on exams, theft of instructional material or exams, representing the work of someone else as one's own, and misrepresenting absences. Academic dishonesty is a severe transgression and may result in referral to the Dean of Students, expulsion from class and/or the University, and a failing grade.

It is the student's responsibility to:

1. research and write their own papers
2. give proper credit through documentation when using words or ideas of others
3. rely on their own knowledge when taking tests
4. refuse to give another student the opportunity to be dishonest

### [Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.03](http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/undergraduates/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateAcademicDishonesty.pdf)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/undergraduates/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateAcademicDishonesty.pdf>

### [Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.10](http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/graduate/13.99.99.R0.10GraduateStudentAcademicDishonesty.pdf)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/graduate/13.99.99.R0.10GraduateStudentAcademicDishonesty.pdf>

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The use of ChatGPT, Copilot, or any other AI platform or tool to generate ideas, write content, or produce any material is strictly prohibited in this course.

This class is designed to develop your writing skills, and if you are using AI, you are not writing or learning. This is because the use of AI diminishes opportunities to learn from our experiences and from each other, to play with our creative freedoms, to problem-solve, and to contribute our ideas in authentic ways. In a nutshell, college is a place for learning, and this AI simply cannot do that learning for us.

Any work written, developed, created, or inspired by generative artificial intelligence does not lend itself to our learning goals and is a breach of ethical engagement and our academic integrity policy. Using AI opens up academic honesty issues, both because it raises the question if the work is "your" work, and also because tools like ChatGPT rely on taking material from uncredited scholars and writers. If discovered that you have used any type of AI for your work, you will face negative consequences, which will include failing the assignment and potentially failing the course and facing discipline from the university.

*Please be cautious using tools like Grammarly, which can be very helpful with spell check and grammar help but should be avoiding when they generate content.*

### TURNITIN

East Texas A&M University uses Turnitin software to help students avoid plagiarism and cheating. Turnitin is a 'text-matching' software which is designed to educate students regarding appropriate citation and referencing techniques. Turnitin is also used to provide East Texas A&M University with confidence in the academic integrity of students work. Turnitin does this by comparing a student submission against an archive of Internet documents, Internet data, a repository of previously submitted papers, and subscription repository of periodicals, journals, and publications. Turnitin then creates an 'Originality Report' which can be viewed by both lecturers and students, which identifies where the text within a student submission has matched another source.

### EAST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SUPPORTS STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

The Counseling Center at East Texas A&M University, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit [www.tamuc.edu/counsel](http://www.tamuc.edu/counsel)

### STATEMENT ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ADA ELIGIBLE STUDENTS:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services  
East Texas A&M University, Waters Library, Room 162  
Phone (903) 886-5150, Fax (903) 468-8148

[StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu](mailto:StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu)

Website: [Office of Student Disability Resources and Services](#)

After contacting the Office of Student Disability Resources and Services, it is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor of what accommodations are needed **IN ADVANCE** of when they are needed (for example, if testing accommodations are necessary, please inform the instructor with appropriate documentation at LEAST one week before the test date).

### EMAIL POLICY:

Email is the preferred form of communication, with a general response time of 24 hours during the week (do not expect replies over the weekend). For all emails sent, please **include full name, student ID, and the class** that you are attending. Do not send emails to myself and other professors at once, as each professor has different issues to address. You are allotted three absences for this course; plan accordingly and there is no need to contact me about unexcused absences that are incorporated into this allowance. For excused absences, you need to bring in a hard copy of appropriate documentation of your absence.

### GRADE POLICY:

If you have concerns regarding a grade, email me **within one week of receiving the assignment back** clearly explaining why you think the assignment was addressed incorrectly. After the email is received, we will then set up an appointment to discuss the concern.

### CAMPUS CONCEALED CARRY

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in East Texas A&M University buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and East Texas A&M University Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations. For a list of locations, please refer to (<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>) and/or consult your event organizer).

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all East Texas A&M University campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

## **TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS**

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements:

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

[https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser\\_support.htm](https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm)

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

## **ACCESS AND NAVIGATION**

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or [helpdesk@tamuc.edu](mailto:helpdesk@tamuc.edu).

## **COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT**

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here: <https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

## **MINIMAL TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PROGRAMS NEEDED**

At a minimum, you must have access to and be able to use Microsoft Office 2013, 2010, 2007 or Open Office. Microsoft Office is the standard office productivity software utilized by faculty, students, and staff. Microsoft Word is the standard word processing software, Microsoft Excel is the standard spreadsheet software, and Microsoft PowerPoint is the standard presentation software. Copying and pasting, along with attaching/uploading documents for assignment submission, will also be required. If you do not have Microsoft Office, the university provides access here:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/facultystaffservices/academictechnology/documents/Office-365-Students.pdf>

## **SYSTEM MAINTENANCE**

Please note that on the 4th Sunday of each month there will be System Maintenance which means the system will not be available 12 pm-6 am CST.

## The Oprah Phenomenon Course Schedule

\*Subject to change\*

### OPRAH

1/13 - Intro

1/15 – Talk Show History

- LISTEN: Making Oprah Bonus: Making Donahue

1/20 – MLK Day

1/22 – Oprah’s Beginnings

- LISTEN: Making Oprah: No Strategy, No Plan, No Formula (podcast)

1/27 – Oprah Matures

- LISTEN: Making Oprah: Skinheads and Scented Candles (podcast)

1/29 – Distinguishing Oprah

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Evolves Past Phil, Jerry, Sally, Geraldo, and More (podcast)

2/3 – The Triumph of Oprah

- LISTEN: Making Oprah: YOU GET A CAR! (podcast)

2/5 – The Oprah Brand (no class in person)

- READ: Janice Peck, “The Oprah Brand and the Enterprising Self,” in *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*. Boulder, CO and London: Paradigm Press, 2008, 175-210.
- READ: Damiana Gibbons, “Oprah Winfrey’s Branding of Personal Empowerment,” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, edited by Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007, 277-92.

2/10 – NO CLASS, **Branding Oprah Project DUE**



# The Oprah Phenomenon Course Schedule

\*Subject to change\*

## BOOK CLUB

2/12 – Introduction to the Oprah Book Club

- READ: Malin Pereira, “Oprah’s Book Club and the American Dream,” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, edited by Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007, 191-206.
- LISTEN: You Get A Podcast!: Oprah Loves Toni Morrison w/Dennis Tyler (podcast)

2/17 - *The Bluest Eye*

- READ: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 1970 (any edition). Read first half of book (preface, *Autumn*, and *Winter*).

2/19 - *The Bluest Eye II*

- READ: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, 1970 (any edition). Finish book (*Spring*, *Summer*, and Afterword)

2/21 – ***The Bluest Eye Assignment Due***

2/24 – Book Club Analysis and Assignment

- READ: Edith Frampton, “From the Nobel to Oprah: Toni Morrison, Body Politics, and Oprah’s Book Club,” in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprafication of American Culture*, edited by Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010, 145-160.
- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Gets Duped by James Frey w/Glory Edim (podcast)

2/26 – *The Color Purple*

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah, Actress w/Wesley Morris (podcast)
- READ: “Timeline” in Lise Funderburg and Scott Sanders, *Purple Rising*, New York: Atria, 2023, 6-15.

3/3 – *The Color Purple*

3/5 – *The Color Purple* (now with music!)

- READ: “The 1982 Novel” and “The 1985 Film” in Lise Funderburg and Scott Sanders, *Purple Rising*, New York: Atria, 2023, 16-61.

3/10 and 3/12 - Spring break

# The Oprah Phenomenon Course Schedule

\*Subject to change\*

## CASE STUDIES

3/17 – Meat

- **Book Club Assignment Due**
- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Goes Vegan (podcast)

3/19 – Fashion and Makeovers

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah and Fashion with Avery Trufelman (podcast)
- READ: Kathryn Lofton, “Diverting Conversions: The Makeover as Social Rite,” in *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, 82-117.

3/24 – Oprah and Tyler Perry and Abuse

- **Where are They Now? Select Your Celebrity Due**
- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah and Tyler Perry (and Madea Too) (podcast)

3/26 - RACE I: Oprah is Black

- READ: Tarshia L. Stanley, “The Specter of Oprah Winfrey: Critical Black Female Spectatorship,” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, edited by Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007, 35-50.
- READ: Linda Kay, “My Mom and Oprah Winfrey: Her Appeal to White Women,” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, edited by Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007, 51-64.

3/31 – RACE II: Black Hair

- READ: Kennell Jackson, “What is *Really* Happening Here? Black Hair among African-Americans and in American Culture,” in *Hair in African Art and Culture*, 175-185.
- READ: Lori L. Tharps, “Black Hair is...,” in *Textures: The History and Art of Black Hair*, eds. Joseph L. Underwood and Tamika N. Ellington (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Museum and Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2021),

4/2 – RACE III: Oprah deals with Race

- READ: Heather Laine Talley and Monica J. Casper, “Oprah Goes to Africa: Philanthropic Consumption and Political (Dis) Engagement,” in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprafication of American Culture*, edited by Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010, 99-114.
- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Opens a School w/Elizabeth Todd Breland (podcast)

## The Oprah Phenomenon Course Schedule

\*Subject to change\*

### 4/7 – RACE IV: Oprah Transcends Race

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Confronts Racism in Forsyth, GA with Carol Anderson (podcast)
- READ: Janice Peck, “Transcending Race’: The Racial Politics of Oprah Winfrey and New Liberalism,” in *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*. Boulder, CO and London: Paradigm Press, 2008, 135-174.

### 4/9 – Oprah and Politics

- **Where are They Now? Video Due**
- READ: Sarah Henstra, “The Politics of Talk: The ‘Oprah’ Interview as Narrative,” in *Studies in Popular Culture* 30, no 2 (spring 2008): 59-77.

### 4/14 – WEIGHT I: Everywoman

- READ: Jennifer Rexroat, “I’m Everywoman’: Oprah Winfrey and Feminist Identification,” in in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture*, edited by Trystan T. Cotton and Kimberly Springer, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010, 19-32.

### 4/16 – WEIGHT II: Getting Thin or Getting Fit

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah Runs a Marathon w/Natalia Petrzela (podcast)
- READ: Ella Howard, “From Fasting toward Self-Acceptance: Oprah Winfrey and Weight Loss in American Culture,” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, edited by Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007, 101-124.

### 4/18 – **Annotated Bibliography: Reach out to a Librarian Due**

4/21 – Oprah and Music

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah and Hip-Hop, From Ice-T to Jay Z with C. Brandon Ogbunu (podcast)
- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Oprah and Beyonce with Treva Lindsey (podcast)

4/23 – Oprah and Celebrities

- LISTEN: You Get a Podcast!: Special: The Oprah-Oz Conundrum (podcast)

4/28 – Oprah and Spirituality

- Annotated Bibliography Due
- READ: Kathryn Lofton, “Practicing Purchase: The Prosperity Gospel of a Spiritual Capitalism,” in *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, 20-50.

4/30 – Favorite Things

**5/2 – Favorite Things Paper Due**

**5/5 - Reflection Paper Due**