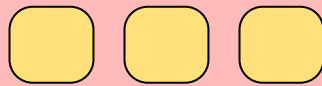● FALL 2023

● TUESDAYS
11:00–1:45
MANNING 208

INLS 842

Seminar in

Popular Materials

in Libraries

Instructor:

Casey Rawson, Ph.D.

Contact me:

crawson@email.unc.edu
bit.ly/rawsonoffice

About *the course*

The conflict between elite and popular culture has had a long history, and many of the battles have taken place over library collections. Even now, some librarians still see libraries as cultural bastions, which should acquire and maintain only "high quality" materials. However, all public libraries and an increasing number of academic libraries now consider that providing readers with books for pleasure reading is a major part of their mission.

This course will examine the place of popular materials within society and, specifically, within libraries. The course will provide students with an overview of a variety of mass media with the greatest attention being paid to popular adult literature. Students will learn about the increasingly important role of "readers' advisor" in libraries and how readers' advisors can help connect readers to the type of literature they wish to read. The major genres of popular literature will be examined in depth. Attention will also be given to readers' advisory tools and techniques, and the problems of acquisition, storage, dissemination, and preservation of popular materials.

⚹ Required Materials ⚹

Many of our course readings will come from the book *Genreflecting: A Guide to Popular Reading Interests* (8th Ed., 2019) by Diana Tixier Herald and Samuel Stavole-Carter. There are two print copies available on reserve in Davis Library. You are not required to purchase your own copy of this book, however you may choose to if you want to have it as a reference in your future work. Other course readings will be available in Canvas as PDFs. In addition, in the second half of the course, you will be asked to read at least one book in each of the genres we will discuss as a class. Which specific book you read for each genre is up to you, and you are welcome to get started on this reading anytime (though if you read titles far in advance of the relevant discussion, I would encourage you to take notes or write a reflection that you can draw on in class to keep your memories fresh).

Learning Objectives

1 Students will be able to describe the historical and current role of popular materials in libraries.

2 Students will examine the role played by readers' advisors in libraries and learn techniques for matching patrons to popular materials.

3 Students will become familiar with a wide variety of popular material types and will examine a specific area of popular materials in depth and gain experience in communicating that knowledge to an audience.

4 Students will apply their learning to confidently deliver readers' advisory services in the real world.

Course *Policies*

My teaching philosophy is grounded in relationships and shared meaning-making. This means that I believe people learn best when they are given the opportunity to construct their own understanding of content through authentic engagement with ideas and with each other. I strive to create learning environments that support and honor students' identities and prior knowledge. **Who you are as a learner and as a person matters to me.** That means that I am always open to student feedback and suggestions. If something is bothering you, talk to me about it!

Attendance Policy

Joining class via Zoom is an option if you are sick or out of town, but is not a great substitute for in-person attendance. Please make every effort to not miss more than one class. Send Casey an email letting her know you will be absent as early as possible.

Late Work Policy

Most assignments in this course cannot be turned in late because they will be presented or discussed in class on the due date. If something prevents you from completing assignments on time, please reach out to Casey as early as possible.

COVID Policy

Masks will not be required this semester, **however** I do ask that if you are feeling ill, please either stay home and listen into class via Zoom (preferred) or wear a mask to class and monitor your social distancing.

Communication Policy

Email is my preferred mode of communication. While I try to respond to student emails within one business day, please note that I generally do not check my email in the evenings or on weekends.

Assignments & Grading

Assignments in this course have been designed to help you develop the skills you will need to be an effective reader's advisor. In addition to being practical, I hope you will also find these assignments fun! There are five required assignments for the course and one optional assignment which you can complete if you want to earn an H grade for the course:

1. Reading annotations
2. "Secret shopper"
3. #BookTok book talks
4. Genre presentations
5. Reader's advisory in the real world (final assignment)
6. (Optional, for H grade) Book reviews

Details about each of these assignments can be found on the next pages.

I do not assign numerical grades on assignments. Instead, I aim to provide qualitative feedback aligned with the goals of each assignment. A P (pass) grade for the course requires satisfactory completion of all five required assignments, engaged participation in class, and no more than two absences. An H (high pass) grade requires satisfactory completion of all six assignments, engaged participation in class, and no more than one absence.

Assignment 1: Reading Annotations

We will use the commenting features within Google drive to collaboratively (but asynchronously) discuss our course readings this semester. This is a great way to share your thoughts about a reading, ask questions, or make connections in a low-pressure, informal way. Your comments also allow me to understand what parts of the readings stood out to folks or were confusing, which in turn allows me to better design each week's class session.

You are not expected to comment on every reading, or even to comment every week. **Out of the 12 lessons for which commenting will be available, I would like for you to participate in this activity in 9-10 of them** (though you are certainly free to comment every week).

As with our in-person discussions, please monitor your contributions to ensure that they are respectful and refrain from using derogatory or hurtful language. It is fine to disagree with each other, but when this happens, please critique ideas, not individual people.

Comments do not have to be in formal / academic language. Your comments might fall into several different categories (there are probably others too!):

- Reactions / responses (including emotional responses) to the text. These can be positive or negative - you are definitely not expected to agree with everything we read!
- Questions about the text or inspired by the text.
- Connections between the text and other things you've read or experienced.
- Links to related resources that connect to or extend the ideas in the reading.
- Responses to your classmates' posts.

Assignment 2: Secret Shopper

For this assignment, you will experience reader's advisory from the user's perspective by engaging in at least two RA interactions. Choose one public library where you are not already known (not somewhere you work, in other words, and one bookstore. Visit each of these locations and ask a staff member to help you select a good book to read. Then, pay close attention to what happens next: what questions are you asked? What tools, if any, does the staff member use to help you find a book? Were you directed to resources that met your stated criteria for a "good book?" If the first person you speak with is unhelpful, you can ask another staff member at the same location. Since this is a "secret" shopper assignment, you should not identify yourself as a library science student. You do not need to purchase or check out a book to complete this assignment!

In addition to noting the details of the interactions themselves, I would also like you to pay attention to the physical space of the library / bookstore and how that space facilitates or impedes the task of "finding something good to read." What types of displays do you see? How helpful is signage in the space? How are the books arranged and classified on shelves, endcaps, or other areas? Are staff visible - is it clear who you should ask for help? Optionally, you can take pictures of relevant displays, layouts,shelves, etc.

Click here

for a list of local bookstores and libraries.

As soon as possible after each interaction, write a description of what happened and what you saw at each location accompanied by an evaluation of the experience that incorporates ideas from our first few weeks of course readings and discussions. Then, compare and contrast your experiences at the library versus the bookstore in light of their different institutional goals (public service vs. profit). The document you turn in should be approximately 3 single-spaced pages in length: one page of description and reflection for each site, plus one page of comparison / synthesis. Photos can be included in this length as long as they do not take up more than about 1/3 of each page. **Due 9/12; post to Canvas before class and be prepared to discuss in class.**

Assignment 3: #BookTok Book Talks

Click the picture for links to sample #BookToks!

One critical skill that all reader's advisors must develop is the ability to describe books to potential readers in ways that efficiently and enthusiastically communicate the appeal factors of the title. One way that librarians have traditionally done this is through in-person booktalks, often delivered as part of (and themed to align with) another library program or event. Now, however, there are more ways than ever to share book recommendations with your users. One particularly popular option is TikTok, where readers review, discuss, and joke about books using the hashtag #BookTok.

For this assignment, you will produce 2-4 short TikTok style booktalk videos. Each video should be between 30 seconds and 3 minutes in length with a total length of around 5 minutes. While you can find #BookTok videos that are positive and negative, the goal of library booktalks is to market your collection and connect books with readers who will enjoy them, so your videos should provide only positive recommendations. As you plan your #BookToks, consider the appeal factors that you want to highlight for each title.

Your videos can focus on only one book each, or you can choose to share multiple books in the same video. You can use any program or technology you want and have access to - cell phone videos are fine! Canva has a variety of TikTok video templates that you may want to use to make the design process easier, and you can join my class to access Canva's premium features for free (link available in Canvas).

You are not required to actually post your videos to TikTok for this assignment, though you certainly can if you want! Alternatives include sharing your videos within Canva, uploading your video files to Google Drive or your UNC OneDrive and sharing the folder with me, or uploading to YouTube and setting the viewing permissions to "unlisted" (which will allow me to see the video, but will keep it from appearing in public searches). You can turn these videos in at any point in the semester. **At least one video must be turned in on or before 10/17, and all videos must be turned in on or before 12/5 (our last day of class).**

Assignment 4: Genre Presentation and Discussion Facilitation

The second half of this course will consist of "deep dives" into the most popular adult reading genres. This assignment involves three parts: a presentation, discussion facilitation, and a handout.

Each student will develop an introductory classroom presentation on one type of genre fiction (a few students may need to work in pairs; we will discuss this in class). Your presentation should last for 30-40 minutes and should cover the following (not necessarily in this order):

- **Basics:** How is the genre defined? Does it have specific subdivisions?
- **History:** How has the genre changed over the years?
- **Key Books and Authors in the Genre:** What are the books and authors from this genre that should be known by any well-read librarian?
- **Appeal:** What are the appeal factors of this genre? Can you characterize the individuals who are most attracted to this type of fiction? Why do people read this genre rather than another? Using whatever sources seem appropriate, including contacts with subject or genre enthusiasts if they are available, address the question: *why is this genre popular?*
- **Current Awareness:** How can you keep up in this genre with new content, authors and creators, etc.? With what resources/tools should RA's be familiar?
- **Prizes and Awards:** Does the genre have a means of recognizing the "best" examples of the genre?
- **Libraries:** How well do libraries do in providing information about and developing collections of this genre? What collections development tools are most useful? Are there any specific libraries with outstanding holdings in this genre that we should be familiar with?
- **Special Issues:** Does this genre present any special problems or challenges in readers' advisory? Is there any controversy or "drama" within the genre that RA's should be familiar with?

What's my job if I'm in the audience?

To prepare for your class-mates' presentations, you should read one title of your choice from each of the genres being discussed that day along with the relevant chapter provided in Canvas. During the presentation, your job is to engage: pay attention, ask and answer questions, and share your thoughts!

After the presentation, the presenter(s) will lead a class discussion to include talking about the books representative of the genre that have been read by their classmates. The organization and mode of these discussions is up to you (in other words, you don't just have to stand in the front and pose questions to the entire group; feel free to use small groups, structured discussion protocols, worksheets or digital discussion aids, etc.). The discussion should last 30-40 minutes (aim for 70 minutes total between your presentation and discussion).

The final piece of this assignment is the development of a handout that your classmates can keep as a reference for your genre. You should post a PDF version of this handout to our Canvas discussion forum before your presentation begins. Your handout should be approximately 2-3 pages in length and should include at least the following elements:

- Title of the Genre
- Your name and date of preparation (best in a footer)
- No more than one page that summarizes what you feel are the most important takeaways from your presentation
- Current top 5-10 authors in the genre (list of names)
- 5-10 classic titles in the genre (please note sub types if needed); provide title, author and book cover image, as well as a 2-4 sentence summary of the book.
- 5-10 "hot right now" titles in the genre (please note sub types if needed); provide title, author and book cover image, as well as a 2-4 sentence summary of the book.

You are not required to make this handout "pretty," however if you like using Canva or a similar program to create handouts, feel free! We will sign up for genres and presentation dates in class on our first day. Genres that I definitely want to include are science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, mystery, literary fiction, romance, horror, and thriller. Other genre options include Westerns, narrative nonfiction (e.g. true crime or historical biography), memoirs, graphic novels, LGBTQ+ fiction, adventure, gentle reads, or women's literature. If you are interested in a genre outside of those listed here, let's talk about it!

Assignment 5: Readers' Advisory in the Real World

The overarching purpose of this class is to prepare you to offer effective readers' advisory services in your future career. The final assignment in this class offers you an opportunity to practice those skills in the real world by providing readers' advisory service to five people you know.

First, choose four adult people. You can choose *almost* anyone for this assignment (just not anyone from this class): roommates, partners or spouses, coworkers, family members, your best friend's cousin's girlfriend's mom, whoever! For each person you choose:

- Conduct a readers' advisory interview using the skills you have learned in this course. The length of the interview is up to you; an effective RA interview might take 5 minutes or 30. Interviews can be in person or over zoom, but should be synchronous (i.e. no e-mail interviews please).
- Based on your interview, develop a reader profile for this person.
- Use the reader profile to develop a suggested reading list for that person. Your reading list should include 5-10 books. Each book should be accompanied by a brief description that emphasizes the appeal factors that may be attractive to the person, along with any similarities to other books or media the person indicated already liking.
- Share the profile and list back with the person. Ask for feedback: how accurate do they think your profile of them is? Are the books you chose for them good fits?

Click the picture to view an assignment sample!

After you have completed all four, write a brief reflection (no more than 2 pages single spaced) that synthesizes your experience. You may choose to address questions like: How comfortable were you with the RA interview, and did that comfort level increase from Person 1 to Person 4? What questions in those interviews were most helpful to you? Least? How did the different personalities of your subjects impact the information you received from them? How successful did they find the interaction, based on any feedback they gave you? What does all this mean for your future in library work?

On or before our last day of class, you will turn in your four reader profiles and suggested book lists plus your reflection paper. In class that day, we will debrief together about this assignment and about the course as a whole.

Assignment 6 (Optional, for H grade): Book Reviews

Among the many professional tools available to Readers' Advisors, book reviews are critical. Titles that are likely to be popular in your library will be reviewed by publications like *Publishers Weekly, Booklist, Library Journal*, and *Kirkus,* and reading these reviews can help you quickly get a sense of the books' appeal factors and likely audience. In addition to reading reviews, many reviews are also written by librarians. Using sites like netgalley.com, conference exhibits, or other means, librarians can access Advanced Reading Copies (ARCs) of upcoming books to review for their own collections and/or for professional publications. *Library Journal*, for example, is always looking for more reviewers (and while this is unpaid work, it is a good resume item and a way to contribute to the field).

If you choose to complete this assignment, you will write professional reviews for five of the books you choose to read in the second half of our course (any five, not necessarily the ones you thought were best). Your reviews should have the primary purpose of helping a librarian select (or not) and appropriately market the title to their users and should follow the *Library Journal* guidelines (additional advice available on the page linked above):

- The reviews are addressed to the educated generalist, rather than the subject specialist, and designed to present the information needed for the selection decision in a highly condensed form.
- Therefore, within 175–200 words, the review must include:
    - a brief statement of the thesis or description of the contents,
    - a critical appraisal of both substance and execution,
    - information on the experience of reading (or appeal),
    - and an indication of what readers would be best served by the book in question.

You can (and should!) read other *Library Journal* reviews to help with this assignment, but try not to read reviews (from LJ or elsewhere) of the books you are reviewing - I want the review to be *yours*. **If you choose to complete this assignment, you must let me know by email no later than 12/5, and your reviews will be due on December 9 (our scheduled exam date) by 11:59pm.**

Course Calendar

See Canvas for a complete schedule including readings and assignment due dates.

Date	Topic
8/22	Course intro; Appeal factors
8/29	History of readers' advisory; The role of popular materials in libraries
9/5	No class - university wellness day
9/12	RA Interviews; Understanding the Reader
9/19	Collecting popular materials (guest speaker: Tracy Babiasz, CHPL)
9/26	Keeping up: RA tools and techniques
10/3	Marketing popular materials
10/10, 10/17, 10/24, 10/31, 11/7, 11/14, and 11/21	Genre presentations
11/28	Optional drop-in office hours
12/5	Course wrap-up and final assignment discussion

Students with Disabilities

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. See the ARS Website for contact information: https://ars.unc.edu or email ars@unc.edu.

SILS Diversity Statement

In support of the University's diversity goals and the mission of the UNC School of Information and Library Science, SILS embraces diversity as an ethical and societal value. We broadly define diversity to include ability, age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, immigration status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. As an academic community committed to preparing our graduates to be leaders in an increasingly multicultural and global society we strive to:

- Ensure inclusive leadership, policies, and practices
- Integrate diversity into the curriculum and research
- Foster a mutually respectful intellectual environment in which diverse perspectives and experiences are valued
- Recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from traditionally underrepresented groups
- Participate in outreach to underserved groups in North Carolina and beyond

The statement is our commitment to the ongoing cultivation of an academic environment that is open, representative, and reflective of the concepts of equity and fairness.

~ The Faculty and Staff of the UNC School of Information and Library Science