Contemporary Vietnam: Class, Family, and Gender
SOCL 280 / 3 Credit Hours
Offered Fall and Spring Semesters
Instructor: Nam Nguyen

Meeting Time & Location

Tuesday: 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM
Location: TBA

Course Description

As clearly stated in its title, this course furnishes its students with a critical examination of contemporary Vietnamese culture from a cultural studies perspective. Concentrating on the political dynamics of contemporary culture, cultural studies helps us to understand changes and reinventions in modern Vietnamese culture, and figures out the roles of various agencies in shaping and reshaping “national culture” within global contexts.

A number of key issues in the development of modern Vietnam, including national identity, family, social classes, and gender, will be discussed in this course. Moreover, through the exploration of archaeology, literature, performing arts, and gastronomy, the course employs various approaches from different disciplines to scrutinize how the Vietnamese have received, assimilated and localized foreign factors to enrich their cultural life. Thus, it urges students to develop fresh ways of understanding the diversity and motivity of Vietnamese culture. The course will examine how contemporary Vietnamese culture and history have been perceived, shaped and presented through mainstream media and official discourses.

In order to help students better understand local culture and strengthen their spirit of community engagement, “Service Learning” (or “Experimental Learning”) is part of this course. Students must complete 38 hours of service learning to partially fulfill the course requirements. Students will also have a chance to discuss their service learning experience in class during Session 5 of the course. Mr. Richard Albright will be in charge of these activities. An orientation prior to the beginning of the course will provide students with a concrete guidance to the service learning.

In addition to selected readings, documentaries (and occasionally, a feature film) are introduced in class. These cinematic materials not only provide students with vivid images of a changing
Vietnam, but also bring up several issues that might have not been discussed in the readings. Excerpted clips from the assigned videos will be shown in class for discussion.

**Requirements**

Attendance: Regular attendance is crucial; bad attendance will result in a lower grade

Reading: Students are expected to cover all assigned TEXTS before attending classes

**Weekly Responses**

- During your study abroad semester, you will be paired with a Vietnamese peer. Select one of the assigned readings of the week, and discuss ONE issue that you find most interesting with your Vietnamese partner. Based on your discussion (and social observations), write a 500-word response and email it to the instructor ONE day prior to class. Please note that the conversation with your Vietnamese student peer is NOT a sociological fieldwork, but provides you with a chance to review your selected issue from a local and comparative perspective.
- Each student will have a five-minute in-class presentation during the semester. The presentation will be counted toward “Attendance and class participation” (see GRADING below).

**Tests**

- Two 10-minute multiple-choice quizzes scheduled for Sessions 7 and 12.
- A final paper: This will be the analysis of a cultural issue introduced during the course, or recommended by the instructor. The analysis should be from a cultural studies perspective. More importantly students should incorporate their Vietnam experience into their reading/analysis of the selected works. The final paper should be from 6 to 8 pages in length.
- Students are encouraged to browse over the course’s contents and figure out what they are interested in the most. Starting from Session 6 students should submit their potential paper topic(s) with the instructor for approval. Paper outline and references are due during Session 7.

**Service learning:** See “Course Description”

**Student Assessment**

- Attendance and class participation: 20%
- Weekly responses from readings and discussions with Vietnamese peers: 30%
- Service learning: 5%
- Two ten-minute multiple-choice quizzes on the readings and lectures (10% each): 20%
- Final Paper: 25%

**Class Schedule**

SESSION 1 (Aug. 25):
Vietnamese Culture as Seen from Inside and Outside Vietnam

- Peter Cody Hunt, "An Introduction to Vietnamese Culture for Rehabilitation Service Providers in the US", at http://cirrie.buffalo.edu/culture/monographs/vietnam.pdf

**Screening**

Biological and Cultural Diversity, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koQjksrfd1o
Oppa Saigon Bet Café Style, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0HlBiSPcYQ

SESSION 2 (Sept. 1):
A Glimpse of Cultural Studies and Vietnamese History


**Screening**


SESSION 3 (Sept. 8):
Reconstructing the Past, Reshaping National Identity


**Screening:**

- “Dong Son Echoes,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvu6JBF3kvs

SESSION 4 (Sept. 15):
Continuously Changing Religious Lives


**Screening:**

“Drums on the Red River”, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6F2Oolwkk8

SESSION 5 (Sept. 22):
Family, Community, and the State

Screening:
“Vietnam’s Ancestor Worship – Death Anniversary Rituals,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y10XCrTmPSI

SESSION 6 (Oct. 6):
Social Classes in Late Socialist Vietnam

Screening:
“Vietnam Boom,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATg4Z2jLJ8c

* IN-CLASS DISCUSSION: YOUR SERVICE LEARNING EXPERIENCE *
* SUBMIT YOUR POTENTIAL PAPER TOPIC FOR APPROVAL *

SESSION 7 (Oct. 13):
Disparities within Social Classes

Screening: TBA

* First Quiz (Covering the contents of the first six sessions) *

SESSION 8 (Oct. 20):
Gender Issues in Socio-Cultural Contexts
- Catherine Earl, “Middle Classes in Post-Reform Ho Chi Minh City”, in Vietnam’s New Middle Classes – Gender, Career, City, Copenhagen K, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), pp. 1-35.

Screening:
“Building Gender Equality in Vietnam,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpYay-aGItA

SESSION 9 (Oct. 27):
Various Paths of Life in a Changing Society
- Catherine Earl, “Living in Twenty-First Century Ho Chi Minh City”, in Vietnam’s New Middle Classes – Gender, Career, City, pp. 87-109.
SESSION 10 (Nov. 3):
Family Planning and Divorce


*Screening:*
“War of the Lotuses – A Divorce Mock Mediation,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDNr0spaaDU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDNr0spaaDU)

SESSION 11 (Nov. 10):
Assimilating and Localizing Foreign Actors


*Screening:*
“Saigon Electric” (A feature film, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuT2s49dN7U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuT2s49dN7U))

* PAPER OUTLINE & REFERENCES DUE THIS WEEK *

SESSION 12 (Nov. 17):
Stories of the Three Cities – Hanoi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh (aka. Saigon)


*Screening:*
“Hanoi Public Market,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78m8VetEWTU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78m8VetEWTU)

* SECOND QUIZ (Covering contents from Sessions 7 to 12) *

SESSION 13 (Nov. 24):
Different Tastes of Vietnam


*Screening:*

* FINAL PAPER DUE ON DECEMBER 6, 2015 BY 11:00 PM LOCAL TIME *