Introduction:

The importance of sports has grown in American popular culture and across the world, and will likely continue to do so in the future. With this growing importance comes increased stakes, including the business viability of professional sport franchises, a sense of belonging for fans, and the state of American democracy. In this class, we will define sports fans before moving to consider the contours of sports fandom and how they influence American society. Along the way, we will consider questions of ethics, democracy, difference, and belonging. By the end of class, you will have an understanding of how sport shapes our world as fans and how fans and industry leaders can leverage that power. This class adopts a critical-cultural perspective of communication and how it influences sport, media, culture, politics, and community.

Course Questions and Learning Goals:

Course questions outline our learning goals for the semester. They should also guide your reading and note-taking. By the end of this course, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1) How can we define sports fans?
2) What is the relationship between sports and politics?
3) What is the relationship between sports and belonging or exclusion?
4) How can fans and industry leaders leverage sports fandom in ways that are both powerful and ethical?

Assignments:

Exploring Sports Fan Cultures: A major goal of this class is to practice identifying the contours of particular sports fan cultures, including their history, their practices, and their values. Toward this end, you will research the sports fan culture of one of the sports teams on our campus. You will gather data using participant observation and interviews. Through your project you must answer four main questions: 1) What is the history of the fan culture you are studying? 2) What are the fan practices of this fan culture? 3) What are the values of this fan culture? 4) Who is typically excluded and/or marginalized in this fan culture? You will complete the project by writing a blog post and presenting your work in class. Before you begin work on your project, you will turn in a proposal, outlining what we already know about this fan culture based on scholarly research and archival research on campus and identifying the sport events you will attend and the people you will interview. Then, you will turn in your field notes and interview questions and transcripts along with your final blog post when the project is complete.

Points for the Fan Cultures Assignment:
Proposal: 50 points
Field Notes: 25 points
Interview Questions and Transcripts: 25 points
Final Blog Post: 50 points
Final Presentation: 50 points
Total for the Fan Cultures Assignment: 200 points

Communication Criticism Blog Posts: You will write two blog posts critiques. These must consider some recent sports event and the implications it has for fandom. These blog posts must be 2,000 words long and must take a critical approach to communication. That is to say, these blog posts must do more than summarize or report the sports event. These blogs posts will articulate the way in which a particular sport event shifts power, affects community, or influences democracy. Each blog posts is worth 50 points, for a total of 100 points for this assignment.

Two Exams: There will be two exams in this class: one midterm exam and one final exam. They will be multiple-choice, closed book exams. Each exam will be worth 125 points.

Total Points for this class:
Fan Cultures Project: 200 points
Communication Criticism Blog Posts: 100 points
Exam #1: 125 points
Exam #2: 125 points
Participation: 50 points
Total: 600 points

Schedule (meet 3 times per week):

Part 1: Defining Sports Fans:
Week 1:
Syllabus and Introductions
Sports Fans as Customers
  Reading: Quinn, “Chapter 1: Fans and Dollars,” *Sports and Their Fans: The History, Economics, and Culture of the Relationship Between Spectator and Sport*
Sports Fans as Consumers
  Wenner, “Sport, Communication, and the Culture of Consumption”

Week 2:
Sports Fandom as Enjoyment
  Reading: Raney, “Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Enjoyment and Disposition”
Sports Fandom as Social Relationships
  Reading: “Gantz, “Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Fanship and Social Relationships”
Sports Fandom as Fan Cultures and Communities
Reading: Billings, Butterworth, and Turman, “Chapter 4: Sports Fan Cultures”
Communication and Sport,

Week 3:
Defining Sports Fandom
Reading: Osborne and Coombs, “Performative Sports Fandom”
Sports Fans vs. Media Fans
Reading: Reysen and Branscombe, “Fanship and Fandom: Comparisons between sport and non-sport fans”
Sports Fans and Anti-Fans:
Reading: Theodoropoulou, “Chapter 23: The Anti-Fan within the Fan: Awe and Envy in Sport Fandom, ”Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World,

Week 4:
How to study fan cultures: Developing research questions
How to study fan cultures: Doing participant-ethnography
Malley and Hawkins, “Chapter 4: Writing Fieldnotes,” Engaging Communities: Writing Ethnographic Research
How to study fan cultures: Conducting interviews

Part 2: Sports Fandoms

Week 5:
Football and Fan Values
Aden, Huskerville

Week 6:
Soccer and Globalization
Sandvoss, A Tale of Two Games

Week 7:
Soccer and Protests
Kuhn, Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics

Week 8:
Screening of Hillsborough (1996)
Exam #1 Review
Exam #1 (Midterm)

Week 9:
Baseball and George W. Bush’s Democracy
Butterworth, Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity

Week 10:
Baseball and Democracy from 1880-1940
Reading: Elias, *Baseball and the American Dream: Race, Class, Gender, and the National Pastime*
Reading: Lou Gehrig, “Farewell to Baseball”

Part 3: Exclusions (Gender, Race, and Neoliberalism)

*Week 11:*
Neoliberalism and Sports Fans
  Reading: Newman and Giardinia, “Neoliberalism’s Last Lap? NASCAR Nation and the Cultural Politics of Sport”
Talking about Femininities in Sport
  Reading: Bruce, “Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Women and Femininities”
Why Women Watch Sports
  Reading: Toffoletti and Mewett, “Chapter 1,” *Sport and its Female Fans*

*Week 12:*
The Marginalization of Women Fans
Talking about Race in Sports Fandom
  Andrews, “Reflections on Communication and Sport”: On Celebrity and Race”
Race and Sports Fans
  MacDonald, “Mapping Whiteness and Sport: Introduction to the Special Issue”

*Week 13:*
Peer Review Final Blog posts for the Sport Fan Cultures project
Screening of *Through These Gates* (2013)
Student Presentations

*Week 14:*
Student Presentations
Student Presentations
Exam #2 Review

Exam #2 (Final Exam)