Overview: This is a course about contemporary social and political life in urban South Korea—to use a complex and problematic concept, about Korean modernity. It focuses on present conditions and their historical background: on the growth of Korean capitalism, on the perspectives of workers, white-collar employees, and students over time, on the lifestyles of the new middle class as well as other social transformations, and on the struggle for democracy and its aftermath. We will read ethnographies of corporations, consumption, residential living, and protest. We will also watch several recent films.

Course Activities: Class discussion is paramount, and most classes will begin with student presentations designed to get things going. There is also a significant amount of formal and informal writing for this course. This course carries the Global Cultures flag.

Assignments/Grading: I’ve tried to structure this course to make discussion—both in class and online—a significant aspect of your grade. Please come to class with the readings completed, if at all possible. If we really start slacking off here, I reserve the right to institute quizzes.

There will also be some more traditional writing assignments. I will grade writing based upon the presence and quality of an argument, your use of sources, and the structure and style of your paper. Please do try to be accurate in grammar and spelling; I encourage you to use the writing center or to have a friend read over a paper for errors. That said, I will not mark off for minor English errors unless they get in the way of comprehension or seem to indicate laziness on your part. I am here to teach writing, not grammar, and there is a difference.

Online reactions/discussions for at least 10 weeks 20% (2% each, low scores beyond 10 dropped)
One short (4-5 pp.) paper 10%
One midterm paper (7-8 pp.) 20%
One final paper/project (about the same) 25%
Class leadership on readings/film 10%
(A and B presentations)
Class participation/attendance 15%

Online reactions/discussions: For each week of the class, there is a discussion board forum on Canvas. For most weeks at least, sometime before the end of the day of the Friday of that week, please post a comment. So, for example, for the week of September 4 (Tuesday), you should post by Friday September 7 at the end of the day if you want to receive credit.
Postings should be about a paragraph long or longer. You can comment on something we talked about in class. You can comment on a reading, or critique it, or raise a question, or highlight something you think is particularly important (explaining why). You can comment on another students’ post—please do read other students’ posts—or engage in (respectful) debate. Please try to do a mix of these over the semester—if you are only commenting on what others write, I will get the impression that you are not reading. I may drop into the board myself, on occasion.

Don’t summarize the readings for the sake of summarization. Don’t simply say something is interesting, or good/bad, or that you agree/disagree without justifying your position.

These posts are worth two points each, and serious engagements will merit a two. Since there are more than ten weeks to the course, you have ample opportunity to overwrite any bad grades with better grades – I will count your top ten at the end.

Finally, toward the final project, please keep a running file of what you wrote for each week.

*Short paper:* I will assign a short paper very early on to get a feel for your writing, and to give you a feel for how I read papers.

*Midterm paper:* This will be a larger assignment. It will be based on course readings (so no outside research is necessary) but will be conceptual. There should be some choice of topic.

*Final paper/project:* TBD, and likely will include some options. One possibility would be a paper asking you to reflect on your reading reactions and present some overarching narrative of the course. If you want to do a research paper, it can work for this assignment also.

*Class leadership on readings/film:* A and B class presentations (A=5%, B=5%): Each student will be required to give one A presentation and one B presentation over the course of the term. A presentations should be in the 5-10 minute range (NOT more than that). Please offer an overview of the main points and arguments of the reading or readings for that day’s class; please do NOT attempt a full summary. B presentations should be 5 minutes, tops. Please present three questions arising from the readings for that day’s class as a basis for beginning class discussion. Open-ended, comparative, or conceptual questions tend to be better than closed-ended, factual questions.

We will sign up for presentations in the first few classes. Note that not every class meeting will have presentation slots.

Note: if you lead class discussion on a film, it might be a good idea to screen the film yourself in advance, unless you are good on the spot. Such is the price of being a cinephile.

*Class participation:* This is a discussion-based class, and you will be rewarded for the quantity and quality of your participation. Attendance is one factor here as well (I will take attendance at the beginning of some classes, and bad attendance without proper
notification will certainly hurt). At the same time, if you are the vocal type please be respectful of other students and give others a chance to speak as well.

**I will make use of** plus/minus grading. Generally, I regard averages >=92 (rounded) as an A, 89-91 as an A-, 87-88 as a B+, 82-86 as a B, and so on at equivalent points down the scale.

**Readings/Films:** I’ve ordered the following books for this course, all available at the Coop. They are also on reserve at PCL. I recommend buying/acquiring the books (there or elsewhere) as soon as you commit to the course, if possible, since the Coop returns books to the publisher early in the term and it is best to order additional books early if that becomes necessary:

- Jesook Song, *Living on Your Own*.
- Roger Janelli with Dawnhee Yim, *Making Capitalism*.
- Jiyeon Kang, *Igniting the Internet*.

All other readings will be on Canvas.

Films are also an important component of this course. If you miss a showing in class, I expect you to go and watch the film yourself at the Fine Arts Library. You may need to request the film in advance.

**Schedule:**

30-Aug *Introduction*

04-Sep *Modernization, Modernity, Modernism*


06-Sep *Cinematic Modernity/ism*

**Film:** *The Aimless Bullet* (오발탄) (1961)

11-Sep *Discussants:*
**Film:** *The Aimless Bullet* (concludes)

**Short paper assigned**

13-Sep *Life in A Korean Corporation (circa the 1980s)* Discussants: 


18-Sep Discussants: 

Janelli with Yim chs. 3-4.

20-Sep Discussants: 

Janelli with Yim chs. 5-7, Conclusion.

25-Sep *Labor, Gender, and Citizenship* Discussants: 


27-Sep *Workers, Suffering, Sacrifice, Struggle*

**Short paper due**

**Film:** *A Single Spark* (아름다운 청년 전태일) (1995)

02-Oct Discussants: 

**Film:** *A Single Spark* (concludes)

04-Oct *Students, Intellectuals, and the Minjung* Discussants: 

Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2007), Intro and chs. 1-3. {Note: This is a long reading. Get started during the Single Spark viewing.}

09-Oct Discussants: 

Lee, chs. 4-6.

**Second paper assigned**

11-Oct Discussants:
Lee, chs. 7-8 and Conclusion.

16-Oct *Gender, Consumption, Apartments* Discussants: ____________________


18-Oct Discussants: ____________________

Nelson, chs. 3-4.

23-Oct Discussants: ____________________

Nelson, chs. 5-6.

Pak Wan-sô, “Identical Apartments”

25-Oct *Dialectics of Consumption in the 1990s-2000s* Discussants: ____________________

**Second paper due**


30-Oct *On Advertising* Discussants: ____________________


01-Nov Class and Cosmopolitan Striving Discussants: ________


06-Nov Just Because: The End of Grand Narrative?

**Film**: *Attack the Gas Station* (주유소 습격 사건) (1999)

08-Nov Discussants: _____________

**Film**: *Attack the Gas Station* (concludes)


13-Nov Apartments, Again: Dilemmas of Single Youth and “Post-Revolutionary Affect”

Discussants: _____________

**Final project/paper assigned**


15-Nov Discussants: _____________

Song, chs. 3-4.

20-Nov Familialist Pressures and LGBTQ Strategies Discussants: _____________


27-Nov  *The Revolution This Time: Youth, Media, Protest*  
Discussants: ____________________________


29-Nov  Discussants: ____________________________

Kang, chs. 3-4.

04-Dec  Discussants: ____________________________

Kang, chs. 5-6 and Conclusion.

06-Dec  *Scandal/Politics*  
Discussants: ____________________________


Final paper due in week after classes end – exact date TBD.

There is no in-class final exam for this course.