TELEVISION CRITICISM

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COMM 3301 Fall 2012  Time: T 2-445, R 2-315  Location: OCNR 133
Office Phone Number: 825-5993

Course Description:
This course presents an introduction to the industrial, political, aesthetic, and cultural analysis of American television. Students will read a variety of critical, theoretical, and historical essays about television in order to engage a range of issues and debates concerning the industry, programming, and the audience.

Student Learning Outcomes:
After taking this course, the student will be able to:
1. Demonstrate understanding of television history and critical approaches to the study of television.
2. Apply critical models to past and current TV programs and genres.
3. Examine the cultural role and impact of television.
4. Create critical commentary about TV content and style.

Required Course Texts:
Television and American Culture, Jason Mittell. Oxford University Press, 2009. Additional readings will be made available online via Blackboard.

Evaluation: Since this is a criticism course, grades are primarily based on written assignments rather than exams. Detailed descriptions of the writing assignments briefly described below will be distributed and discussed in class.

- **TV Journal**: 10%. (Diary + 750-1000 word essay)
- **Programming Flow Analysis**: 10% (750-1000 word essay) An essay in which you analyze and describe the programming strategies a channel uses to attract and maintain an audience.
- **Narrative Analysis**: 15% (1200-1500 word essay) A critical essay in which you analyze narrative structure in a particular series of your choosing.
- **Cultural Analysis**: 15% (1200-1500 word essay) A critical essay in which you analyze how a program represents a particular controversial social issue or is symptomatic of cultural tensions or change.
- **Ancillary Content/Paratext Analysis**: 15% (1200-1500 word essay): A critical essay in which you describe how ancillary content or paratexts expand a series.
- **Weekly Quizzes**: 20%. Multiple choice and short answer. Some will be group quizzes.
- **Screening Presentation**: 5%. You will do a short (5-10 minute) introduction to one of our weekly screenings to tie it to course content and begin class discussion.
- **Attendance and Active Participation in Discussion**: 10%
Grade Scale: A = 100-90, B = 89-80, C = 79-70, D = 69-60, F = 59 and under.

Course Policies

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. Two absences are acceptable, but any additional unexcused absences will cause a five-point deduction from your attendance and participation grade, and you many not make up any missed work. Excused absences require official documentation. Two "lates" (more than five minutes after class starts) equal an absence.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism
University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in an automatic zero on the assignment and further disciplinary action.

Dropping a Class
Events sometimes occur that make dropping a course seem necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class.

Classroom/Professional behavior
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Additionally, students are expected to:

1. **Silence and put away cell phones. Texting (including the reading of texts!) is not allowed in class.** Your social life will survive until the break, I promise.
2. **Come to class on-time.** Do not get up and leave early.
3. **Participate in class discussions.** In addition to the enlightening lectures, our goal during each class will be to have a lively, informed discussion. You will not get an “A” if you do not regularly contribute to class discussion in a productive manner.
4. **Be responsible for any information and materials missed when absent.**
5. **Complete readings and assignments as assigned.** All assignments must be handed in on time; exceptions will be made only for extraordinary cases and
official documentation is needed. Exams may not be rescheduled. Do not make
travel plans that conflict with exams.
6. **Proofread all work before turning it in.** Really. Even blog posts.
7. **Seek help with writing if necessary.** The Writing Center of TAMU-CC, located
in GSSC 112, provides free help for students at any stage in the writing process.
More information is available at the Center for Academic Student Achievement
website, casa.tamus.edu.
8. **Properly cite sources.** Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form, and will
result in an automatic zero for the assignment and further disciplinary action. A
useful guide to citing references in APA style is located at
9. **Respect the privacy and opinions of fellow students.** I expect students to
participate in discussion, and I expect students to respect each other’s (hopefully
well-informed) opinions. Grades and course performance are considered private
information. Students are not to openly to discuss their grades (good or bad)
inside my classroom.
10. **Meet with the instructor during office hours.** I will not discuss individual
student grades in the classroom. I will, however, be happy to discuss grades on
papers, exams, course performance, etc. during office hours. I also do not allow
the following topics to be openly discussed in the classroom: student opinions
about other faculty, student opinions about other students, student grades in
other classes.

*Notice to Students with Disabilities*: Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi complies
with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for
qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class,
please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas
A&M University–Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come
see me. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning
disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office
(located in 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

**Academic Advising**: The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an
Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor
will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and
the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood
203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

***Grade Appeal Process.*** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade
Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate
academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures,
or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of
proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student
with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the
instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in
the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process,
see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure
13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible
through the University Rules Web site at
http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or
guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.
Course Schedule

You are expected to have done the readings by the day listed. We will also have various TV programs screened in class throughout the term, as time permits.

Thursday 8/23 Why TV?: An Introduction to the Course

TV History, Style, and Industry Structure

Tuesday 8/28 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 1
Thursday 8/30 TV JOURNAL DUE. Reading: Watts, “Melancholy, Merit, and Merchandise”

Programming & New TV Structures

Tuesday 9/4 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 2
Thursday 9/6 Reading: Brooker, “Living on Dawson’s Creek”

Public Interest and Documentary TV
Tuesday 9/11 Reading: Corner, “Civic Visions”, Baym & Gottert, “30 Days”
Thursday 9/13 Reading: Mittell, Chapters 3 & 4

Modes of Production
Tuesday 9/18 PROGRAMMING ANALYSIS DUE. Reading: Mittell, Chapter 5;
Thursday 9/20 Reading: Thompson, Comedy Verite

Narrative Structures
Tuesday 9/25 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 6
Thursday 9/27 Reading: Newman, “Beats, Scenes, Arcs”

Tuesday 10/2 Reading: Sconce, “What If?”
Thursday 10/4 Reading: Newcomb, Situation & Domestic Comedies; Havens, “Guy-Coms”

Tuesday 10/9 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS DUE.
Thursday 10/11 Reading: Newcomb & Hirsch, “Television as a Cultural Forum”

TV & Cultural Politics
Tuesday 10/16 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 7
Thursday 10/18 Reading: Hendershot, “Parks & Recreation and the Cultural Forum”

Tuesday 10/23 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 8, pp. 305-329.
Thursday 10/25 Reading: Gray, “Amazing Race”, Acham, “Everybody Knows They’re Black”

Tuesday 10/30 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 8, pp. 329-353.
Thursday 11/1 Reading: Levine, “Finding Feminism in Grey’s Anatomy”

Quality TV & Taste
Tuesday 11/6 **CULTURAL ANALYSIS DUE** Reading: McCabe and Akass, “It’s Not TV, It’s HBO”; Newcomb, “This is Not Al Dente”  
Thursday 11/8 Reading: Newman, “Everyday Italian”

**Cult TV**  
Tuesday 11/13 Reading: Mittell, Chapter 9  
Thursday 11/15 Reading: Jenkins, *Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten*; Scott, “Battlestar Galactica”

Tuesday 11/20 Reading: Jenkins, “Walking Dead”; Hills, “The Prisoner”  
Thursday THANKSGIVING

Tuesday 11/27 Sconce, “Meta-Comedy”; Thompson, “Good Demo, Bad Taste”  
Thursday 11/29 **ANCILLARY CONTENT/PARATEXTUAL ANALYSIS DUE**

Tuesday 12/4 Final Thoughts

Final Exam Day: Final rewrites due.