TELEVISION CRITICISM

Dr. Ethan Thompson
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MEDA 3301.001 & .101 BH 205 MW 12-1:50 Fall 2017
Office Phone: 825-5993
Office Hours: MW 2-3:00/TR 11-12:30 and by appointment

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.

About the Professor: Ethan Thompson (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is the producer and director of TV Family, a feature-length documentary, the author of Parody and Taste in Post-War American Television Culture, and the co-editor of the books How to Watch Television and Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era. He spent the fall 2015 semester as a research and teaching fellow with the Peabody Awards program in Athens, Georgia.

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. Analyze critical essays and identify argument, use of evidence, and stylistic strategies.
3. Create critical commentary about TV content and style.

Required Course Texts:


How to Watch Television, Ethan Thompson & Jason Mittell, editors. NYU Press, 2013.

Also Required: One package of 3x5 notecards for essay & discussion responses.

Recommended: Our course time (12-1:50 MW) includes time for in-class screenings. You will need to draw upon additional screenings for course assignments. For this reason, subscription to Netflix and/or Hulu is recommended but not required.
**Evaluation:** Since this is a criticism course, grades are primarily based on written assignments rather than exams. Detailed descriptions of the assignments will be given during the semester.

Columns: 4 @ 100 points each; 400 total points total. About 700 - 1000 words each, with specific instructions for each.
- Column 1: Oral History of TV (100 points)
- Column 2: Pilot (100 points)
- Column 3: Style (100 points)
- Column 4: Cultural Criticism (100 points)


Quizzes: 10 points each: 100 points total, 10% of grade.
Peer review of columns: 100 points total, 10% of grade.
Essay Discussion Lead: 50 points, 5% of grade. Once during the semester you and a partner will be responsible for leading class discussion on an essay.
Essay Discussion Cards: 50 points total, 5% of grade. Respond to prompt and turn in card at beginning of class.
Attendance/Participation: 100 points total, 10% of grade.

Course Point Totals and Grades
900 - 1000 points = A
800 - 899 = B
700 - 799 = C
600 – 699 = D
599 and under = F

**E-Communication Policy:**
- CONTACT ME THROUGH BLACKBOARD MESSAGES FOR THIS COURSE.
- I will respond to messages within 24 hours (usually sooner), except for Friday at 3 pm until Monday at 9 am.
- I will be happy to talk on the phone with you during my office hours.
- I am also happy to meet with you in person during office hours or some other time arranged in advance!

**Attendance**
- Attendance is mandatory. Two unexcused absences are acceptable, but any additional unexcused absences will cause a 5 point reduction from your attendance and participation grade. Excused absences require official documentation. Two “lates” (or leaving early) 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. **Complete readings and assignments as assigned.** All assignments must be turned in on time; exceptions will be made only for extraordinary cases and official documentation is needed.
2. **Proofread all work before turning it in.** Really.
3. **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.tamucc.edu.
4. **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.
5. **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 discuss their grades (good or bad) inside my classroom.
6. **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.

Course Schedule

**NOTE:**
- All quizzes and final drafts of columns are due Friday before midnight unless otherwise noted.
- If we are constrained by time, I may require that you view lecture videos online prior to class.
- This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.
WEEK 1 Introduction to TV History & Structure
8/28: First day of class. Read: *How to Watch Television*: Introduction
8/30: READ: Mittell, Ch. 1; *How to Watch Television*: Banks
Assessment: Syllabus Quiz

WEEK 2 TV History and Structure, continued.
9/4: Labor Day Holiday
9/6: READ: *How to Watch Television*: Kompare
Assessment: Quiz: Mittell Ch. 1.

WEEK 3 Programming Strategies
9/11 READ: Mittell, Ch. 2; *How to Watch Television*: Sandler.
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell Ch. 2. COLUMN 1 DUE

WEEK 4 Cultural Criticism
9/18 READ: Mittell, Ch. 7
Assessment: Hendershot quiz

WEEK 5 Narrative Strategies (Pilot)
9/25: READ: Mittell, Ch. 6 to page 234
9/27: READ: Sconce, “Repetition with Difference” PDF
Assessments: COLUMN 2 DUE (Draft Wednesday, Final Friday)

WEEK 6 Narrative Strategies (Drama Series)
10/2: READ: Newman, “Beats, Scenes, Arcs” PDF
Assessments: COLUMN 2 DUE (Draft Wednesday, Final Friday)

Week 7 Narrative Strategies (Comedy)
10/9: READ: Mittell, Ch. 6, pp. 234-267; *How to Watch Television*: Mittell
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell Ch. 6 part two

WEEK 8 Modes of Production and Meaning
10/16 READ: Mittell: Ch. 5; *How to Watch Television*: Butler
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell, Ch. 5

WEEK 9 Nonfiction
10/23 READ: Mittell: Ch. 3 & 4; *How to Watch Television*: Baym & Gottert
10/25 READ: *How to Watch Television*: Jones, Johnson
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell Ch. 3 Quiz: Mittell Ch. 4, COLUMN 3 DUE (Draft Wednesday, Final Friday)

WEEK 10 Race and Nation
10/30 READ: Mittell, Ch. 8, pp. 305-329
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell, Ch. 8 part 1

WEEK 11 Gender
11/6 READ: Mittell: Ch. 8, 329-344; *How to Watch Television*: Levine
**WEEK 12 Sexuality**
11/13 READ: Mittell, Ch. 8, pp. 345-353; *How to Watch Television*: Becker
11/15 READ: *How to Watch Television*: Miller
Assessments: Quiz: Mittell Ch. 8 part 2

**WEEK 13 Fans & Cult TV**
11/22 (DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING) COLUMN 4 PEER REVIEW
Assessments: COLUMN 4 DUE (Draft Wednesday, Final Monday)

**WEEK 14 Final Essay Preparation**
11/27: Essay Conferences
11/29: Essay Conferences

**WEEK 15 Final Essay Peer Review**
12/4 Draft of final essay due, peer review in class.

**Final Essay Due Day & Time of Final Exam:** MONDAY, 12/11, 1:30 pm

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**Disabilities Accommodations:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance 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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466 or log onto [http://cla.tamucc.edu/advising/](http://cla.tamucc.edu/advising/).

**Grade Appeals:** As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, 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 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 complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

Statement of Academic Continuity: In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.