

Introduction to American Cultures

AMST 216, Section
Fall 2013, 3 Credit Hours
Monday, Wednesday, Friday's, 12:00-1:15PM

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Course Description:

This course is described as the "introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American cultures and the field of American Studies". Thus, this course draws upon a rich legacy of cultural examination, assessment and interrogation in the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. Specifically, this section will first acclimatize students to the methods of interdisciplinary, cultural criticism under the explicit presumption that institutionalized racism, sexism, classism and homophobia exist; that these concepts are systemic throughout society and require our collective effort to remedy. Further, this course will introduce you to the study of US popular culture with a specific focus on the production, communication and dissemination of categories of being and identity, the use of discourses of power and the regulatory regimes communicated through commercial US television. *Please Note: Your continued enrollment beyond the first week of class affirms your willingness to abide by the conditions set forth in this document.*

Course Objectives:

Successful students will:

- Know of and understand theoretical concepts of race inequality within American television culture
- Know of and understand the theoretical concepts of teleliteracy, telenarrative structure, genres, representation(s), intertextuality and character archetypes
- Be capable of applying criticism of the relationship(s) between telenarratives and US popular culture, given the preceding two objectives
- Formulate persuasive, critical communication skills to include, writing and presentation on these subjects as indicated in various assessments throughout the course

Required Texts:

O'Donnell, Victoria. Television Criticism, Sage Publications, 2013
Dixon, Wheeler Winston. Streaming: Movies, Media, and Instant Access, 2013
Electronic Reserve Articles

Course Policies And General Information¹

Academic Etiquette: Class will begin promptly at 12:00 Noon. Arriving late or leaving early is not acceptable. Your participation in this course is predicated on principles of reciprocal respect, tact, courtesy, and professionalism. I require your complete attention and tolerance for a diversity of voices expressed in class (especially voices espousing unpopular views). Class discussions will therefore follow these principles thereby fostering a respectful and safe learning environment. Likewise, disruptive behavior² will not be tolerated. In order for us to learn from each other, we have to allow each other to make mistakes and to offer unpopular positions for debate. However, name-calling and other forms of verbal harassment will not be tolerated and will result in students being asked to leave the class³.

Cell Phones and Other Communication/Electronic Devices: Turn off your cell phones, and other electronic devices *before* entering the classroom (including laptop computers, iPods, iPads, PDAs, etc.); Do *not* wear headphones, earbuds, etc. in the classroom. If your device goes off more than once during the semester, or I discover you texting in class, I will immediately deduct points (at my discretion and without notifying you) from your participation grade. Students who violate this policy will have to turn your phone into me at the beginning of every class, to be returned to you at the end of class, for the duration of the semester..

Academic Integrity: In all instances, you must do your own work. There is no excuse for plagiarism, or for submitting another's work, ideas, or wording as your own, or for not doing your own work. In simple terms, plagiarism is the act of using another person's words or work without giving them credit for it. You are encouraged to read *WSU's Academic Integrity Policy*. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty, whether intentional or unintentional, may result in a grade of "F" for the assignment in question, or a grade of "F" for the entire course, at my sole discretion. Should there be any suspicion of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty, I will discuss the situation with you first and then with the Chair of department. I may then alert the Office of Student Conduct, which may result in an academic integrity hearing and university sanctions against you. If you are at any time unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or academic dishonesty, contact me and I will clarify it for you.

Disability Accommodation: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Access Center (Washington Building 217) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center.

Campus Safety Plan/Emergency Information: In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the following websites: (1) <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> (Campus Safety Plan); <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> (Emergency Management Plan); and (3) <http://alert.wsu.edu> (WSU Alert Site).

¹ Prerequisites for enrollment in this course include either CES 101 or WST 200

² Arriving late, leaving early, talking during lecture, reading the newspaper, etc.

³ Such request will also necessarily count as an absence

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is compulsory and because you have enrolled in this course I assume that you are interested in the material and want to be here. Therefore I expect you to assume responsibility for your education. I will take attendance *every* class and those students who arrive *after* attendance has been recorded will be marked absent. Thus, lateness equals an absence. Moreover, “attendance” and “participation” shall be construed as being in class both mentally as well as physically. You are allowed **3 absences, period**. Missing a 4th class will result in the reduction of your final grade by one letter (e.g. A- reduced to a B-). On the **5th absence** you will receive an “F” grade in the course. Only approved and documented “sponsored university events” will be exempted from this rule⁴. Arrangements for makeup work must, therefore, be made **at least one week** in advance pursuant to *University Regulation no. 73*.

You are expected to come to class having completed all of the readings assigned for that day. It is also to your advantage to listen closely to lecture material and to take notes during lectures and films. This course asks you to read texts closely and responsively. This means that if you want to do well you will actively engage with your books by writing questions in the margins, circling key terms, looking up words you do not know, and underlining themes or issues you find intriguing. Responsive readers think of themselves as having a dialogue with the author and use reading as the basis for formulating their own interesting ideas, questions, and arguments.

Coursework Expectations: Written work is to be turned in during class, on time and in the format required for each assignment. Late work will not be accepted without penalty unless accompanied by a doctor’s note or another form of official documentation of an emergency. In all cases those forms of documentation provided will be subject to my exclusive judgment regarding validity.

If you are anticipating: *computer glitches, being the victim of street crime, bad planning, a Senate filibuster, embarrassing messages from “Mom” on your Facebook wall, animal attacks, hurtful comments by close friends, terrorism, seeing your new brother in law on Cops, being struck by space junk, unforeseen cataclysmic acts of God, suburban malaise, urban ennui, a date ending with an interview with Chris Hansen, the paralysis of analysis, rude tweets, trouble with your Toyota accelerator pedal, loss of hope in your audacity or vice versa, losing your mojo or anything else that might interfere with your completing your assignments in a timely way, get your work started early.*

Students, who by virtue of their absence have missed an assignment eligible to be made up, must turn in their work **no later than the next** normally scheduled class meeting, provided that work is accompanied with the appropriate documentation described above (electronic files are **not accepted**). While this is *not* a writing class per se, your ability to effectively and persuasively communicate your thoughts on paper *is directly related* to your ability to succeed in this course⁵. This course will utilize the Chicago citation style; familiarize yourself with it **before beginning** any written assignments. Deviations from **any** of these standards will result in point reductions.

⁴ <http://www.registrar.wsu.edu/Registrar/Apps/AcadRegs.ASPX> #73

⁵ All written assignments must conform to the standard conventions of academic writing: e.g., typed in 12 point, *Times New Roman* font, with all 1” margins and double spaced with page numbers centered at bottom on each pg.

Course Performance: As you can gather from the detailed syllabus I have provided for you, the only thing you can do to get a passing grade in the class is complete the work assigned in the syllabus on time and without excuses. In order to pass the class (i.e., obtaining at least a C-) you need to do two fundamental things: (1) follow the syllabus, and (2) do the assigned work *well*. In order to do better (i.e., obtaining at least a B), you need to follow the syllabus and do the assigned work *very well*. And in order to receive an excellent grade in this class (i.e., at least an A-) you need to follow the syllabus and *excel in your work*. Thus, it is the quality of your work what will guarantee your grade. What does this all mean? Essentially, I am warning you that the level of effort you put into the class, *may not correspond to the quality* of your work (which is what ultimately matters in obtaining a grade). That is, sometimes a person's best effort may only earn them a "C".

Therefore, please know that I will tolerate no drama at the end of the semester about how you "wanted an A in this class" and are actually getting a C- and can I do something to help you "improve your grade." My standard response to that kind of request will always be: "sorry, but you had an entire semester to work on improving your grade."

Last, But Not Least is the "How Is That My Problem" Clause: I am a very busy person, and as an instructor, my role in this class is to teach you about effects of intersecting social markers and to generally prepare you for the professional world. I feel the need to warn you, then, that often times I will have a standard response to many of your "problems" or "conflicts." The response will usually be a variation of "How is that my problem?" *Before* you raise any issue with me, understand that your personal matters should bear *no effect* on me or on how this class is conducted. It is ultimately up to you to make your own decisions, but decisions, even in college, have consequences attached to them. Please keep that in mind. Many students' low grades are a result of not closely following assignment directions, class policies or not expending enough effort. It is your responsibility to be aware of the policies on this syllabus and follow them appropriately. If you miss class it is your responsibility to check with your classmates to find out what you have missed. And though you are always welcome to follow up with me if you are absent, *do not* ask me if you "missed anything important."

Incompletes: No incompletes will be given in this course absent *extraordinary* circumstances (i.e., medical or family emergency), and the student *must be passing* the class at the time the incomplete is requested.

Grading Procedures: I will try to remain as faithful as possible to this syllabus. However, I reserve the right to amend any and all due dates (readings, assignments, presentations, exams, etc.) which are subject to change without notice. However I will endeavor to announce these changes as far in advance as possible and to grade assignments as efficiently as practicable.

Reading Responses (20)	200 Points
Participation & Presentation	200 Points
Research Paper	100 Points
Total:	500 Points

Grading Scale

100 – 94 = A
93 – 90 = A –

Suggests that a student's work is outstanding to excellent; the student's work reflects an engaged comprehension of the course content and shows thoughtful insight into the complexities of the course. Student shows an attentive engagement with the course.

89 – 87 = B+
86 – 83 = B
82 – 80 = B–

Suggests that a student's work is very good to good; the student's work reflects a very strong, engaged, and solid understanding of course material. Occasionally, the student's work doesn't go the extra step in critical analysis.

79 – 77 = C+
76 – 73 = C
72 – 70 = C–

Suggests that a student's work is adequate; the student's work reflects a fair, but essentially disengaged, grasp of the course material and doesn't go very far in comprehension, or reflects a lack of understanding of the issues represented in the material. Student's work is un- or underconsidered and unclearly written.

69-67=D+
66-63=D
62-60=D-
59-0=F

Course Assignments

Reading Responses (200pts): These responses should one page in length, *single spaced* students must turn in their reading responses at the beginning of class; if you are late or absent, you will receive *a zero*. Each graded reading response will be worth up to 10 points for a total of 200 points, provided that students turned theirs in on time on the date checked. Additionally, students must compose a one page summary that reflects on the cumulative strengths and weaknesses of their reading responses over the course of the semester, and what they have or haven't learned from the assigned readings. In order to get full credit, all reading responses *should not summarize the readings*, but rather identify an important observation that resonates with you *and* explain why you found that observation personally relevant while tying it to other readings, films, lectures, etc. in the course.

Participation & Presentation (200pts): Students should arrive prepared to engage with the material assigned for that day in class. Your contributions to class discussion are assessed based *not on quantity but quality*; e.g. moving the discussion forward in new directions while linking theoretical concepts to tangible examples. This grade may also include small group discussion(s). Student participation grade is generally comprised of my critical assessment of your contributions to the course's progress. This determination is based on two objective criteria; *first* the frequency (e.g. regularity) of your comments and *second*, (and more importantly) the quality of those comments in pursuit of a given line of inquiry relevant to the day's assigned reading or activity. Of these two criteria, more weight will be assigned to the second than the first.

For your presentation, students will be paired with a partner and collaboratively select a contemporary television series to critique. They will then develop and conduct an in-class presentation that will be evaluated according to criteria set for in O'Donnell's text. Fifty percent of their presentation grade will be derived from the class and 50% will be derived from the instructor, the averages of which will be totaled for their presentation grade.

Research Paper (100pts): You will author a research paper of *no less than 8 double spaced pages* (Bibliography and endnotes, etc. not included), on a subject of your choice germane this class (the subject of which must be approved of in advance in consultation with the instructor). This research paper will attempt to assess the current status of your subject of study, and it's contemporary relevance to US telenarratives that analyze the larger discourses of power and privilege within American Culture. The paper will conform in all respects to the standard conventions of writing, e.g. 1" margins, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, an attached Bibliography of scholar sources, etc. Students will receive additional instructions for this assignment later in the semester.

8/19/2013	Introduction, Syllabus Review
8/21/2013	“Becoming Teleliterate” <i>E-Reserve</i>
8/23/2013	“Tele-conditioning and the Postmodern Classroom” <i>E-Reserve</i>
8/26/2013	“Claims” <i>E-Reserve</i>
8/28/2013	“Experts as Claims-makers” <i>E-Reserve</i>
8/30/2013	Ch.6 Rhetoric and Culture –Television Rhetoric to pg.148
9/2/2013	Labor Day – No class!
9/4/2013	Ch. 7 Representation
9/6/2013	Ch. 7 Representation - Continued
9/9/2013	“Shopping for Identity” <i>E-Reserve</i>
9/11/2013	<i>How TV Ruined Your Life S1E6P1 & S1E6P2 (Episode 11 & 12)</i>
9/13/2013	Ch.3 Television Style
9/16/2013	Ch.4 Television, the Nation’s Storyteller
9/18/2013	Ch. 5 Television Genres
9/20/2013	Research Instruction – Holland & Terrell Library
9/23/2013	“Television’s Future”, "... TV Having Second Golden Age" <i>E-Reserve</i>
9/25/2013	“Reality TV”, “The Office as Reality Viewer Training” <i>E-Reserve</i>
9/27/2013	“Playing It Straight: Reality Dating Shows...” <i>E-Reserve</i>
9/30/2013	“Race, Aging and Gay In/Visibility on U.S. Television” <i>E-Reserve</i>
10/2/2013	“Indecency on Television” <i>E-Reserve</i>
10/4/2013	Midterm Exam
10/7/2013	<i>How TV Ruined your Life S1E5P1 & S1E5P2 (Episode 9 & 10)</i>
10/9/2013	Ch.1 The Work of the Critic
10/11/2013	Ch.2 Demystifying the Business of Television
10/14/2013	“Set Your TV Free” <i>E-Reserve</i>
10/16/2013	“Brilliant But Cancelled” Documentary
10/18/2013	“On Demand” <i>Streaming</i>
10/21/2013	“The Lost Age” <i>Streaming</i>
10/23/2013	“The Lost Age” - Continued
10/25/2013	“Content Wars” <i>Streaming</i>
10/28/2013	“Content Wars” - Continued
10/30/2013	“The Moving Platform” <i>Streaming</i>
11/4/2013	“Streaming the World” <i>Streaming</i>
11/6/2013	Ch.9 Guidelines for Television Criticism
11/8/2013	Ch.9 Guidelines for Television Criticism - Continued
11/11/2013	Veteran’s Day – No Class!
11/13/2013	Presentations
11/15/2013	Presentations
11/18/2013	Presentations
11/20/2013	Presentations
11/22/2013	Presentations
11/25/2013	Thanksgiving Vacation – No Class!
11/27/2013	Thanksgiving Vacation – No Class!
11/29/2013	Thanksgiving Vacation – No Class!
12/2/2013	Final Exam

Electronic Reserve Articles

- Abelman, Robert. "Becoming Teleliterate." In *The Televiewing Audience: The Art & Science of Watching TV*, by Robert Abelman, 61-84. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2002.
- Best, Joel. "Claims." In *Social Problems*, by Joel Best, 29-47. New York: WWW Norton, 2008.
- Best, Joel. "Experts As Claimsmakers." In *Social Problems*, by Joel Best, 97-123. New York: WWW Norton, 2008.
- Greenblatt, Allan. "Television's Future." *Congressional Quarterly Researcher*, Vol.17, No.7, 2007: 145-168.
- Haggerty, Maryann. "Reality TV." *Congressional Quarterly Researcher*, Vol. 20, No.29, 2010: 677-700.
- Halter, Marilyn. *Shopping for Identity*. New York: Schocken Books, 2000.
- Johnson Jr., Michael. "Race, Aging and Gay In/Visibility on U.S. Television." In *Family Ties, Factsof Life and the Real World: Everything I Know About Myself I Learned from Television*, by Debbie and Kathleen Ryan Macey, 187-199. Lexington Books, 2012.
- Jost, Kenneth. "Indecency on Television." *Congressional Quarterly Researcher* , Vol.22, No.40, 2012: 965-988.
- Kocela, Christopher. "Cynics Encouraged to Apply: The Office As Reality Viewer Training." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2009: 161-168.
- Kottak, Conrad Phillip. "Teleconditioning and the Postmodern Classroom." In *Conformity and Conflict*, by James Spradley. Allyn & Bacon, 2002.
- Levy, Steven. "Set Your TV Free." *Wired Magazine*, April 2009.
- Reuters. "Time Warner CEO Says TV Having Second Golden Age." *The New York Times*, September 28, 2009.
- Tropiano, Stephen. "Playing It Straight: Reality Dating Shows and the Construction of Heterosexuality." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2009: 60-69.