

American Television
ENGL 381

Professor Rashna Richards

Office: 307 Palmer
Office Phone: 843-3399

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-1:50
Email: richardsr@rhodes.edu

Semester: Spring 2013

Class: MWF 12:00-12:50
Screening: W 7:00-9:00

Room: 203 Palmer
Room: 34 Barret

Course Description

"Wake up, turn on the television, get ready, leave for work/school, go home, turn on the television, sleep: a fairly standard day in the life of the average person in a developed nation," argues Jonathan Gray. Since the 1950s, the ritualistic practice of TV viewing has become embedded in American cultural life. Television is both a technological apparatus and a socio-political force; it educates, informs, entertains, and functions, as Larry Gelbart put it, as "a weapon of mass distraction." TV has been criticized for promoting inanities and praised for advancing democratic culture. This course offers an examination of American television as cultural communication, paying close attention to its texts and technologies, contexts and audiences. While we will sample historical perspectives, our primary focus will remain on developments in the era of cable and satellite television and television's future in digital convergence. The semester will begin with a consideration of how media scholars have conceptualized and theorized television. Then we will examine particular TV genres and investigate the impact of new media and globalization on twenty-first-century television. Finally, we will turn to AMC's *Mad Men* to explore how this drama, set at a time when TV first became an integral part of "the life of the average person in a developed nation," tells the story of American discontent in the post-9/11 era. **Prerequisite:** Any 200-level film class, preferably ENGL 202, or permission from instructor.

Standard of Work: This is an advanced film studies course and is not recommended for students who are unfamiliar with rigorous visual analysis. The readings are intellectually challenging, as are the viewings. You will need to take careful notes on the screenings, readings, and in-class discussions. In addition, assignments will expect you to engage critically with complex issues in television criticism and employ them in your writing. Therefore, do not take this course if you're expecting an easy ride.

Course Policies

<p>Note 1: These policies will be applied without exceptions. In the interest of fairness to fellow students, please don't expect or ask for special accommodations or exemptions.</p>

<p>Note 2: Failure to remember or follow any of these policies will result in severe penalties to your professionalism grade.</p>
--

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes. Do not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. You are allowed three class absences and one screening absence over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Save these absences for extracurricular activities or medical/personal emergencies. After the fourth absence, each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from your final course grade. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation/professionalism grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. Paper copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the deadline. Computer glitches or printing problems are not legitimate excuses for late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. Fair warning: if you do not volunteer, you will be called on to contribute to class discussions. A student who disrupts class or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads or does homework for another class, chats with a neighbor, leaves the classroom, or simply dozes off should expect a very low participation grade. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your professionalism grade; you may also be marked absent for that day.

Electronic Devices: The use of all electronic devices is forbidden in this class. You should turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, before class begins. If you are observed texting, you will be marked absent for that day.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. You don't need to make an appointment to stop by during my office hours. If those times don't work, see me before or after class so we can set up another time that is mutually convenient. Appointments cannot be made by email.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns, since the impersonal medium of electronic communication is a poor substitute for a genuine face-to-face conversation. Email should only be reserved for emergencies, when your question cannot wait to be answered until the next time we meet. Please regard email correspondence as formal communication and abide by rules of professional etiquette. Email is absolutely not the medium for negotiating special requests, addressing grade concerns, or discussing ideas for assignments; those issues must be handled in person.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, google or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. You are advised against posting your work on the internet, since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. You are also advised to save drafts of your work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and, if convicted, the student will receive an F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, please consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

Participation/Professionalism	20%	200 points
Essay #1	20%	200 points
Essay #2	20%	200 points
Essay #3	40%	400 points
Total	100%	1000 points

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation/Professionalism: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Active engagement will be rewarded, and disengaged behavior will be penalized. From time to time, you will be quizzed or asked to respond to specific short-answer questions on the week's film or reading. Quizzes are always unannounced, and they cannot be made up. Failure to follow any course policies or guidelines will hurt your professionalism grade.

Essay #1 (4-5 pages): For the first essay, you will be given several critical statements about television. You will choose one of those statements to write an analytical essay on the medium. No research is expected for this paper.

Essay #2 (4-5 pages): For the second essay, you will assess television's relationship to cinema by analyzing a specific TV show. Research guidelines will be provided.

Essay #3 (12-15 pages): The final project for the class is a research paper on some aspect of television studies. You will be given several prompts, which you will use to develop your own topic for the project. You will be required to research your topic comprehensively. Your paper will be evaluated on the originality of your approach, the rigor of your analysis, and the thoroughness of your research

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90

B+ = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80

C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70

D+ = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60

F < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Materials

- Edgerton, Gary R., ed. *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011. Print. (MM)
- Wasko, Janet, ed. *A Companion to Television*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Print. (CT)
- Additional essays—handouts (*)

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: What Is TV?

Wed., Jan. 9 Introduction to the course

No Screening

Fri., Jan. 11 Discussion

Week 2: How Do We Study TV?

- Mon., Jan. 14** Ellis, "Broadcast TV as Sound and Image"*
Wed., Jan. 16 Newcomb and Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum"*
Screening from *Breaking Bad*
Fri., Jan. 18 Kellner, "Critical Perspectives on Television from the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism" (CT 29-47)

Week 3: TV and Aesthetics

- Mon., Jan. 21** No classes: Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Day
Wed., Jan. 23 Newton, "Television as a Moving Aesthetic" (CT 103-25)
Screening from *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, from *The Goldbergs*
Fri., Jan. 25 Deming, "Locating the Televisual in Golden Age Television" (CT 126-41)

Week 4: TV and Commerce

- Mon., Jan. 28** McAllister, "Television Advertising as Textual and Economic Systems" (CT 217-37)
Wed., Jan. 30 Banks, "Keeping 'Abreast' of MTV and Viacom" (CT 256-69)
No Screening
Fri., Feb. 1 Calabrese, "The Trade in Television News" (CT 270-88)
 Introduction to Essay #1

Week 5: From Ozzie and Harriet to Ozzy Osbourne

- Mon., Feb. 4** Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs"*
Wed., Feb. 6 Dow, "'How Will You Make It on Your Own?'" (CT 379-94)
Screening from *The Cosby Show*, from *Curb Your Enthusiasm*
Fri., Feb. 8 Torres, "Television and Race" (CT 395-408)

Week 6: TV Genres I

- Mon., Feb. 11** Geraghty, "The Study of Soap Opera" (CT 308-23)
Wed., Feb. 13 Shattuc, "The Shifting Terrain of American Talk Shows" (CT 324-36)
Screening from *Big Brother*, from *Keeping up with the Kardashians*
Fri., Feb. 15 Hill, "Reality TV" (CT 449-67)

Week 7: TV Genres II

- Mon., Feb. 18** **Essay #1 due**
 Real, "Television and Sports" (CT 337-60)
Wed., Feb. 20 Edgerton, "'Where the Past Comes Alive'" (CT 361-78)
Screening from *The Daily Show*, from *The Colbert Report*
Fri., Feb. 22 Baym, "*The Daily Show*"*

Week 8: TV and Globalization

- Mon., Feb. 25** Moran, "Configurations of the New Television Landscape" (CT 291-307)
Wed., Feb. 27 Mirrless, "The Future of Television"*
 Introduction to Essay #2
No Screening
Fri., March 1 Discussion cont.

Week 9: TV at the Movies

Mon., March 4	Wagner and MacLean, "Paranoia"*
Wed., March 6	Houston, "The King of Comedy"*
Screening	Weir, <i>The Truman Show</i>
Fri., March 8	Discussion cont.

Week 10: Spring Break**Week 11: Cinematic TV**

Mon., March 18	Nelson, "Quality TV Drama"*
Wed., March 20	Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television"*
Screening	<i>Mad Men</i> (S1:E1, S1:E9)
Fri., March 22	Essay #2 due
	Butler, "'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'" (MM 55-71)

Week 12: The Contexts of *Mad Men*

Mon., March 25	Hernandez and Holmberg, "'We'll Start Over Like Adam and Eve'"*
Wed., March 27	Grady, "The Fall of the Organization Man"*
No Screening	
Fri., March 29	No classes: Easter Recess

Week 13: The Role of Women

Mon., April 1	White, "Mad Women" (MM 147-58)
	Introduction to Essay #3
Wed., April 3	Haralovich, "Women on the Verge of the Second Wave" (MM 159-76)
Screening	<i>Mad Men</i> (S2:E5, S2:E6)
Fri., April 5	<i>Mad Men</i> (S2:E13)

Week 14: The Culture of Capitalism

Mon., April 8	Davidson, "'A Mother Like You'"*
	Siska, "Men Behaving as Boys" (MM 195-208)
Wed., April 10	Pierson, "Unleashing a Flow of Desire"*
No Screening	
Fri., April 12	No class: Hendrix-Rhodes Film Studies Research Symposium

Week 15: Nostalgia and/or Critique

Mon., April 15	Anderson, "Uneasy Listening" (MM 72-85)
Wed., April 17	Perlman, "The Strange Career of <i>Mad Men</i> " (MM 209-25)
Screening	<i>Mad Men</i> (S2:E1, S3:E1)
Fri., April 19	Lavery, "'The Catastrophe of My Personality'" (MM 131-44)

Week 16: Reflections on TV

Mon., April 22	Newcomb, "Learning to Live with Television in <i>Mad Men</i> " (MM 101-14)
Wed., April 24	O'Sullivan, "Space Ships and Time Machines" (MM 115-30)
No Screening	
Fri., April 26	Essay #3 due by noon—leave in box on my office door (307 Palmer)