



Critical Television Studies

COMM 4350 / COMM 5350
CRN: 24919 / 28029

T/Th 12:00 – 1:20 pm

Quinn Hall #103

Spring Semester – 2022

Instructor: Roberto Avant-Mier, Ph.D.
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Phone: (915) 747.6588
Office Hours: Tue. & Thur. 8:30 am – 10:30 am (or by appointment), or Virtual (by appt)
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Required Texts:

REQUIRED Book: ***Gramsci and Media Literacy: Critically Thinking about TV and the Movies***
Author: **E. Engstrom & R. Beliveau** Year: **2021** Publisher: **Rowman & Littlefield**
<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781793619853/Gramsci-and-Media-Literacy-Critically-Thinking-about-TV-and-the-Movies>

Course Description:

The goal of this course is to increase the understanding of basic concepts and principles regarding the study of television as a form of communication, and specifically, television (and to some extent, film) through the lens of critical theory and research. Therefore, this course will introduce you to the theory and research in the area of critical theory, and will help you apply this knowledge in order to better understand televisual culture as meaning-making cultural practice (and therefore in understanding media and communication more generally). From a communication perspective, it will improve your understanding of media & communication through interdisciplinary theories on media and popular culture. Finally, and most importantly, the course will emphasize a critical/cultural approach to communication and will apply a “critical” approach to television, media, and communication studies.

Course Objectives: In this course you should,

- Become familiar with “critical television studies” through understanding critical theory, critical perspectives, and research.
- Develop a working vocabulary of terms and concepts that relate to critical television studies as well as communication and popular culture theory & research.
- Discover the importance of various interdisciplinary theories in studying television, media, and popular culture.
- Become more self-reflexive and knowledgeable about media, popular culture and communication.
- Develop media literacy skills for better understanding popular culture and communication.

Course Policies & Details:

1. ATTENDANCE:

In accordance with the Dept. of Communication Attendance Policy, **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED** as a condition of successful completion of all courses in the department. **Second, after missing any class session, a student is responsible for finding out about assignments**, due dates, announcements, handouts, and so forth that were covered during the missed session, and for making up any missed work. The student is also responsible for obtaining class notes from a classmate (not the professor) for the session, and for learning material from that session for any relevant exams or quizzes.

Third, the equivalent of 1 week of absence from any course will reduce a student's course grade by percentage points on their eventual "Attendance & Participation" grade. However, absence from a combined total of 3 weeks of class meetings will result in automatic failure of the course. Thus, if the class meets once a week, 3 missed sessions means automatic failure. If a course meets twice a week, 8 missed sessions will result in failure of the course, and a combined total of 9 missed class sessions will result in automatic failure of a course that meets 3 times per week. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Fourth, absences for any reason, including illness, personal crises, athletics or other extra-curricular activities are included in this total. If a student is involved in any activity that might require that student to miss 3 or more weeks of a particular course, then that student should not enroll in the course. If a student is involved in any activity that might require that student to miss an exam or quiz, then that student should not enroll in the course.

Next, it is important to note that tardies (arriving late to class) will also be marked and counted, and a simple class rule is that excessive tardies/lates will result in the reduction of the student's final grade. More specifically, for "Attendance & Participation" purposes two tardies will be considered the same as one absence (for final grading). [2 tardies/lates = 1 absence]

Finally, students are required to keep track of their own absences, and therefore should not expect the instructor to regularly report absences or notify students in case of attendance issues or problems (unless as a courtesy by the instructor, determined by the instructor's discretion).

2. DATES/DEADLINES:

All assignments and exams/quizzes will be scheduled far in advance, and due dates for exams and assignments are announced in this syllabus. **Therefore, you must plan your work and personal schedule far in advance to accommodate these deadlines and policies.** Because the attendance policy dictates that you will (for the most part) be present in class, make-ups and late work are therefore largely irrelevant. Otherwise, for a few special cases at the discretion of your instructor, late work will be docked one letter grade for each day late (each calendar day, not each day of class).

3. EXAMS:

Make-up tests will not be given, except for emergencies. If a student misses an exam or quiz because of a documented emergency or situation, he/she will be required to fulfill an alternative assignment. Only in extreme circumstances will your instructor make arrangements with you to complete your coursework through alternative assignments.

4. ADA STATEMENT (Re: The *Americans with Disabilities Act*):

The University of Texas at El Paso seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Accommodations & Support Services (CASS) to make arrangements for accommodations in advance.

5. CASS POLICY (Center for Accommodations & Support Services):

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations & Support Services (CASS) at (915) 747.5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu. Or visit their office located in the UTEP Union – East, Room #106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass. CASS staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.

6. PHONES / ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

Cell phones or other personal electronic communication devices are NOT permitted during class, so phones should be turned off AND put away during class. Laptops for note-taking are permitted, only with (a.) instructor permission and (b.) as long as the student sits in the front rows of the classroom. [In other words, students cannot sit in the back rows when they are using laptops.]

7. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence, and students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. **Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline.** Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, submitting work for credit that is attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act that gives or attempts to give unfair advantage.

8. COVID-19 PRECAUTION STATEMENT:

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are encouraged to report your results to covidaction@utep.edu, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support and help with communication with your professors. The Student Health Center is equipped to provide COVID-19 testing.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission wear face masks when indoors in groups of people. The best way that Miners can take care of Miners is to get the vaccine. If you still need the vaccine, it is widely available in the El Paso area, and will be available at no charge on campus during the first week of classes. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit epstrong.org.

9. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALES:

Assignments

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| * Attendance & Participation | 30 % |
| Mid-Term Exam: | 20 % |
| Quizzes (2 total / 15% each) | 30 % |
| Final Project/Presentation: | 20 % |

* Attendance & Participation Points Earned

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|----------------|--|
| 0-1 absences = | 90-100% for attendance grade |
| 2-3 absences = | 80-89% for attendance grade |
| 4-5 absences = | 70-79% for attendance grade |
| 6-7 absences = | automatic "D" for final grade |
| 8 or more = | automatic failure of course / "F" or "W" |

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| <p>NOTE:</p> <p>2 Tardies = 1 Absence</p> |
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Numeric Scale – Letter Grade Achieved

90 – 100 = **A** 80 – 89 = **B** 70 – 79 = **C** 60 – 69 = **D** below 60 = **F**

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE — Spring 2022

| <u>Week</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Be ready to do/discuss this:</u> |
|-------------|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | T 1/18 | Introductions, syllabus & course overview | a. Log in to Blackboard System b. Get syllabus |
| | Th 1/20 | a. Defining “Critical Television Studies” b. Introducing the “Critical” Paradigm/Tradition | [Notes] [Notes] |
| 2 | T 1/25 | a. Culturalists and Populists b. Matthew Arnold: Sweetness & Light | * Article by J. Storey, Ch. 1 |
| | Th 1/27 | a. F. R. Leavis: Mass Civilisation b. Marx/Engels: Ruling Class & Ruling Ideas | * Article by J. Storey, Ch. 2 * Article by J. Storey, Ch. 7 |
| 3 | T 2/ 1 | a. Marx: Base and Superstructure b. Engels: Letter to Joseph Bloch | * Article by J. Storey, Ch. 8 * J. Storey, Ch. 9 |
| | Th 2/ 3 | [Applying critical theory to popular music] | * b. hooks, “Gangsta Culture...” |
| 4 | T 2/ 8 | a. Adorno: On Popular Music b. Notes on The Frankfurt School | * J. Storey, Ch. 10 |
| | Th 2/10 | a. Notes on class as culture | * S. Vancour: “Popularizing Classics” |
| 5 | T 2/15 | QUIZ #1 | |
| | Th 2/17 | a. A. Gramsci: “Hegemony, etc.” b. Bennett: The Gramscian Turn | * J. Storey, Ch. 11 * J. Storey, Ch. 12 |
| 6 | T 2/22 | Louis Althusser: Ideology and the ISA’s | * J. Storey, Ch. 27 |
| | Th 2/24 | a. Stuart Hall: Notes on ‘the Popular’ b. Stuart Hall: Culture as a Battlefield | * J. Storey, Ch. 45 |
| 7 | T 3/ 1 | Stuart Hall: The ideology of race | * “ <i>The Whites of their Eyes</i> ” |
| | Th 3/ 3 | [Case Study: “ <i>The Great White Hoax</i> ”] | * Online video, see Bb for details |
| 8 | T 3/ 8 | a. Lana Rakow: Feminist Approaches b. Chris Weedon: Feminism and Principles... | * J. Storey, Ch. 18 * J. Storey, Ch. 29 |
| | Th 3/10 | <u>MID-TERM EXAM</u> | |

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|----|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 9 | 3/14 – 3/18 | SPRING BREAK | (No classes) |
| 10 | T 3/22 | a. "Communication as Culture" | * J_Carey, "Comm. as Culture" |
| | | b. John Fiske: The Popular Economy | * J. Storey, Ch. 37 |
| | Th 3/24 | Simon Frith: Defending Popular Culture | * S_Frith, "The Good, Bad..." |
| 11 | T 3/29 | Gramsci & Media Literacy, "Introduction" | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 1 |
| | Th 3/31 | A Gramscian Approach to Media Literacy | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 2 |
| 12 | T 4/ 5 | Gramsci, Film, TV, & Streaming... | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 3 |
| | Th 4/ 7 | [Case Study: " The Mask You Live In "] | * Online video, see Bb for details |
| 13 | T 4/12 | Hegemonic Masculinity in Media | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 4 |
| | Th 4/14 | [Case Study: " Killing Us Softly "] | * Online video, see Bb for details |
| 14 | T 4/19 | QUIZ #2 | |
| | Th 4/21 | Gender and Marvel's "New Man" | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 5 |
| 15 | Th 4/26 | Gramsci & Media Literacy, "Conclusion" | Engstrom/Beliveau, Ch. 6 |
| | T 4/28 | [Student presentations: Order TBD] | |
| 16 | T 5/ 3 | [Student presentations: Order TBD] | |
| | Th 5/ 5 | [Student presentations: Order TBD] | |
| 17 | Thurs. May 12 th | FINAL EXAM | [As per university schedule] |

5/ 18

FINAL GRADES DUE

Further Research & Reading Suggestions:

- ***Critical Approaches to Television (2nd Edition)***, by L.R. Vande Berg, L.A. Wenner, and B.E. Gronbeck (2003, Pearson)
- ***Film & Television Analysis: An Introduction to Methods, Theories, and Approaches***, by Harry B. Benshoff (2016, Routledge)
- ***Critical Ideas in Television Studies***, by J. Corner (1999, Oxford University Press)
- ***Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*** [4th ed.], by J. Storey (2009, Pearson/Longman)
- ***Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched***, by M. Andrejevic (2004, Roman & Littlefield)
- ***Tribal Warfare: Survivor and the Political Unconscious of Reality Television***, by C. J. Wright (2006, Lexington Books)
- ***The CSI Effect: Television, Crime, and Governance***, by M. Byers & V.M. Johnson (1999, Lexington Books)
- ***Dear Angela: Remembering My So-Called Life***, by M. Byers et al. (2007, Lexington Books)
- ***Gossip Girl: A Critical Understanding***, by L. Bindig (2014, Lexington Books)
- ***The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching The Bachelor and The Bachelorette***, by R.E. Dubrofsky (2011, Lexington Books)
- ***Popular Culture and the Future of Politics: Cultural Studies and the Tao of South Park***, by T. Gournelos (2009, Lexington Books)
- ***Humor and Latina/o Camp in Ugly Betty: Funny Looking***, by T. González and M. Sauers (2015, Lexington Books)
- ***The Changing Vampire of Film and Television***, by T. Kane (2006, McFarland)
- ***Sense8: Transcending Television***, Ed. by D. Shaw & R. Stone (2021, Bloomsbury Press)