

## TELEVISION GENRES – DECEMBER 2013

DC 229 (Section 502)

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 11:00am to 3:00pm (Dec 2-12)

Room: CDM (CS&TC) 708

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: M,T,W,TH 9:00am to 11:00am. (I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you will be stopping by).

Office: CDM 616

[ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu)

### **Course Description:**

The purpose of this class is to enable students to study scripted television from the professional's point of view. The course involves critical analysis of successful scripted television shows, their narrative structures and themes. Programs of various genres and eras will be examined. Students will learn how to recognize basic structural elements in finished episodes. Students will develop a language with which to discuss television as well as a toolbox of techniques to use when creating television. Key concepts to be discussed include: basic structure, types of shows, genres of shows, character tropes, means of creating and sustaining tension, themes and advancements in form.

“More than jazz or musical theatre or morbid obesity, television is the true American art form.”

- Kenneth Parcell, 30 ROCK

We'll take a 'nerd's eye' view of the TV landscape over the last two decades. From THE X FILES to LOUIE we're going to analyze and discuss 20 of the most important and influential shows in television history. You'll learn all about the writer-centric art form of scripted television, where it's been and where it's heading. From the basic structure of FRIENDS to the ornate themes of MAD MEN, we study serials and procedurals, network and cable shows, principal leads, partnerships and ensembles, comedy and drama, prevalent themes, innovations in content and form, the impact of DVR, the impact of the internet and why there are SO many shows about lawyers, doctors and cops. You'll laugh, you'll learn and you'll never look at television the same way again.

### **Prerequisites:**

None.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will be able to explain, in well-written prose, what a television episode is about and or how it was produced. In addition to learning how to analyze and interpret narrative scripted television, students also gain an understanding of how the development process affects the final content. Students will not only watch and analyze television, they will learn the socioeconomic and technological factors impacting the genre and industry. The papers in this class focus on students' understanding of Basic Structure, Character, Theme and eventually a complete analysis.
- Students will be able to comment on the relationship between form and content in a work. They will learn the generic expectations of a particular form and how an artist (writer, producer, actor, etc) can complicate, enrich or subvert these expectations. Analysis and examination of the relationship between form and content represents the bulk of this course. Students are given a framework of knowledge regarding what to expect from half-hour and hourlong scripted programming, both in terms of form and content. Once this framework has been established, students examine ways in which artists used the form to deepen the audience's sense of

character, tension and theme. Students investigate these relationships through class discussions, exam questions, several shorter papers and a longer final paper in which they write a complete analysis for a television series.

- Students will be able to assess the formal aspects of their subject and put these qualities into words, using, when appropriate, specialized vocabulary employed in class and readings. To better equip them in their analysis of television, students will learn a mix of common cinematic and literary language in addition to specialized screenwriting and film-making vernacular. This language will be employed in class discussions, exams and several papers.
- Where appropriate, students will be able to consider the original audience to witness a work of art and consider how their expectations differ from our own. This examination may include the elements of form, rhythm or style, the visual material and aesthetic of a piece. Students will be able to articulate a subject as well as write about it, explaining how narrative and aesthetic elements comprise a particular style of television (art). Students will learn about the context in which each episode aired and how this context affected its original reception. Students will also learn about the genre of television, how it has evolved over time and the technological innovations shaping the genre today.

### **Writing Expectations:**

There are two 2-3 page Papers and one 6-10 page Final Paper in this course. Papers are expected to be free of spelling and grammatical errors. **It's** YOUR work, YOU'RE responsible for **its** clarity.

### **Online Course Management System:**

CoLWeb: <https://col.cdm.depaul.edu> Here students will find lecture slides, lecture videos, links to streams of the episodes for this course and any other relevant information they may need. This is where students will upload your assignments for this course. Login with Campus Connect information.

### **Homework:**

All assignments for this course must be typed and submitted on ColWeb. **NO LATE WORK IS ACCEPTED!**

### **Reading:**

The Revolution Was Televised by Alan Sepinwall. Touchstone, reprint edition, May 2013.

**ISBN-10:** 1476739676, **ISBN-13:** 978-1476739670

### **Viewing:**

Students may find it helpful to watch the episodes we are going to watch in class beforehand. Students will definitely find it helpful to re-watch the episodes they are expected to write about. Digital copies of all episodes will be available on ColWeb.

### **Pop Quizzes:**

Pop Quizzes will be given periodically to make sure students are staying current with the reading. These quizzes will be five questions directly related to the readings. If you have read the pages, you should have no problems passing the quizzes.

### **Grading:**

Homework: 30% (Breakdown (12/5), Character Paper (12/16), Theme Paper (12/18)).

Midterm: 25%

Final Paper: 35%

Participation/ Pop Quizzes: 10%

## THE SCHEDULE

### **December 2:**

Lecture: The Basics. Development, Situation Comedy, The Police Series.

In-class viewing: NEWSRADIO “The Public Domain” & LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT “Raw”

**READING AT HOME:** Sepinwall: Prologue “Let's be careful out there...” (You may be quizzed on this material next class).

### **December 3:**

Lecture: Types of Shows: The Principal Lead. The Unruly Woman Sitcom, The Hospital Drama.

In-class viewing: 30 ROCK “Pilot” & HOUSE “Pilot”

Lecture: Types of Shows: Partnerships, The “Gay” and “Queer” Sitcom, Science Fiction.

In-class viewing: WILL & GRACE “Pilot” & THE X FILES “Pilot”

**HOMEWORK:** Breakdown a show of your choosing. (You may not use any of the shows we'll be watching in class. It would be a smart choice to breakdown the show you intend to write about for your Final Paper). Samples will be provided.

**Due on ColWeb: December 5 at 11:00am.**

### **December 4**

Lecture: Types of Shows: Ensembles

In-class viewing: FRIENDS “The One With Two Parties,” “The One with the Embryos” & SIX FEET UNDER “Pilot”

**Homework:** Character Paper. Write a Three Page Paper on the characters of SIX FEET UNDER. Who are the main characters, how are they characterized and how do they relate to one another? Discuss each characters' Want, Need and Life Dream. A handout with further questions will be provided.

**Due on ColWeb: Monday, December 16 at 9:00pm.**

### **December 5**

Lecture: Tension: Intersecting Storylines

In-class viewing: SEINFELD “The Slicer” & THE WIRE “Old Cases”

**READING AT HOME:** Sepinwall: Chapter 3 “All the pieces matter...” (You may be quizzed on this material next class).

**Homework:** Take Home Midterm. Open notes, open lecture.

**Due on ColWeb: Monday, December 9 at 11:00am.**

### **December 9:**

Tension: Non-linear narrative

In-class viewing: ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT “Pilot” & DAMAGES “Pilot”

### **December 10**

Lecture: Theme: Family. Adult Animation.

In-class viewing: THE SIMPSONS “Lisa on Ice” & THE SOPRANOS “Pilot”

**READING AT HOME:** Sepinwall: Chapter 2 “All due respect...” (You may be quizzed on this material next class).

### **December 11**

Lecture: Theme: Gender Roles. The Costume Drama.

In-Class viewing: LOUIE “Poker/Divorce,” “Barney/Never” & MAD MEN “Maidenform”

**READING AT HOME:** Sepinwall: Chapter 11 “It's a time machine...” Chapter 6 “Do you want to know a secret?...”, Chapter 12 “I am the one who knocks!...” Epilogue “Don't stop believing...” (You may be quizzed on this material next class).

**Homework:** Theme Paper. Watch the SOUTH PARK episode “Margaritaville” and discuss its themes. A handout will be provided.

A link to the episode can be found here: <http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s13e03-margaritaville>

**Due on ColWeb: Wednesday, December 18 by 9:00pm.**

## **December 12**

Lecture: Innovations in Form. The Action Drama.

In-class viewing: MODERN FAMILY “Fizbo” & LOST “Walkabout”

Lecture: Taking Risks. Post Water Cooler TV.

In-class viewing: COMMUNITY “Remedial Chaos Theory” & BREAKING BAD “Pilot”

## **Final Paper:**

Watch and discuss a TV show of your choosing. Talk about its structure, its tensions, the type of characters and architecture the show employs and what themes the show explores. 6-10 pages.

**Due on ColWeb Monday, December 23 at 9:00pm.**

## **SCHOOL POLICIES:**

### **Online Instructor Evaluation**

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over two weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online at <https://mycti.cti.depaul.edu/mycti>

### **Email**

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at [CampusConnect](#) is correct.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>

### **Plagiarism**

The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: Students in this course should be aware of the strong sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism

entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

**Incomplete**

An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

**Resources for Students with Disabilities**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted either the PLS Program (for LD, AD/HD) or The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370 Phone number: (773)325.1677 Fax: (773)325.3720 TTY: (773)325.7296