

Communications Studies (COMS) 591 S01
Senior Seminar in Communication
Winter 2013
Tuesday 12:30-15:15

Instructor: Dr. Dawn Johnston
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00 – 12:00 or by appointment (and if the door is open, drop by anytime)

Course Description

The topic of this senior seminar is Reality Television. A genre of television that has exploded in the last decade, reality programming is now ubiquitous; it is cheap to produce, easy to cast, and works with generic conventions as entrenched as any sitcom or drama. Television scholars are paying increasing attention to reality television, and are often highly critical of the genre's tendency to cultivate, perpetuate, and exploit stereotypes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, education, geography, age, and ability, among other identity categories. In this seminar, we will analyze the genre of reality television and its place in the television landscape of the 21st century.

Additional Information

Please be aware that much of this course deals with the artifacts, experiences, and products of popular culture. As such, some of the material we study manifests coarse language, sexuality, and violence. If this is a problem for you, please see the instructor or your TA.

This is an inquiry-based seminar, where students will be responsible for participating in discussion, leading discussion, conducting independent research and working as part of a group. Regular attendance is expected and participation will be crucial. Readings must be completed in advance of class, and students are expected to participate fully in seminar discussions of all assigned readings.

If you are not a regular reality television viewer, you may find it useful to spend some time watching the shows we will discuss in advance of the class in which we will discuss them. Many of these shows are readily available on television or online.

Objectives of the Course

This course has the following major objectives:

1. To provide you with the opportunity to co-ordinate and integrate the knowledge, skills, and experiences you have acquired during your studies;
2. To provide you with the opportunity to create a major research project drawing on course material and personal interests, which you will present to the class and expand into a formal research paper;
3. To encourage you to think and research across disciplinary boundaries;
4. To help prepare you for the expectations of graduate level study and professional work.

Internet and electronic communication device information

Laptops are permitted for note taking only. **iPods, cellphones and gaming devices may not be used at all during class.** Please respect the instructor and your fellow students. Improper use of electronic devices will impact your participation grade.

Textbooks and Readings:

Kavka, Misha. *Reality TV*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Pozner, Jennifer. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010.

Additional required readings to be posted or linked on Blackboard throughout the semester.

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation:	Weekly	10%
Group Presentation:	Throughout term (sign up)	30%
Research Proposal:	February 26	10%
Research Essay:	April 9	30%
Final Presentation:	April 2, 9, and 16	20%

Participation: Seminars are different than lectures, and inherently require active participation. Participation is not measured solely by how often you speak up. Informed, thoughtful contributions to discussion are more important than frequent contributions. An ability to demonstrate familiarity with the required readings is also crucial. Attentive listening matters – students who interrupt others, distract their classmates, or violate the electronic communication device policy will see an impact on their participation grade. Students are also expected to participate by engaging with the presentations of fellow students by attending presentations, asking questions, and offering thoughtful and constructive commentary.

Group Presentation: Throughout the months of February and March, a group will be responsible for leading our seminar discussion each week. A signup sheet for presentation groups will be available on the first day of class – those who do not sign up will be assigned to a group. Each group will be responsible for one topic area – gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. As a group, you will select a reality show that speaks strongly to your topic, as well as a required reading for the class. The reading might be one of the unassigned readings from your textbooks, or it might be a book chapter or journal article that you have found in your research that speaks well to either your particular show or your specific topic. **You must provide the required reading to the instructor at least two weeks in advance of your presentation.** The instructor will approve your reading (both for content and copyright clearance) and circulate it to the class. As a group, you will be responsible for showing a segment of your selected television show, analyzing the show's connection to your topic (ideally by utilizing your selected reading), and leading the class in discussion. Presentations will take place in the first half of each seminar. Groups are strongly advised to arrange a meeting with the instructor to discuss your plans for the presentation. Working together effectively will be crucial for this group project, as it composes a significant component of your course grade, and unless there is extraordinarily compelling evidence to indicate otherwise, all group members will receive the same grade.

Research Proposal: Your research proposal will outline the analysis you intend to undertake for your research essay. This proposal should be no more than 350 words, and should identify your research question, its relevance to the course, and your plan of how to engage with your question (through primary research, secondary research, or a combination thereof). Your proposal should also include a preliminary annotated bibliography of five scholarly sources that you expect to be useful in the preparation of your essay. Proper APA or MLA citations are expected, accompanied by a 3-5 line annotation explaining the relevance of the source to your research. *Please remember that any research involving human subjects requires ethics consent – the instructor can support you in applying, but you must leave ample time to apply for and receive ethics approval.*

Research Essay: The research essay for this course gives you an opportunity to combine out-of-class research with the topics explored in the seminar. You may choose to pursue a brand new topic relating to reality television, or you may choose to dig further into a topic that you began to explore in your group presentation. Please note: If you do pursue a group-based topic for your individual essay, you may use **either** the same show **or** the same topic (gender, race, class, etc.) – not both. Your paper should be 2300-2500 words in length, and should be double-spaced, in a 12 point font, with one inch margins. You may use either MLA or APA format for citations. Word count should appear on the front page of your essay. More information on the term paper will be provided in class and on Blackboard.

Final Presentation: Your final presentation is an individual oral presentation on your research essay. You will have 8-10 minutes to present a summary of your research – your topic, your theoretical/analytical framework, your findings – followed by five minutes of questions/discussions from your instructor and classmates.

Unless prior written permission has been granted, assignments must be submitted in person at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. Assignments submitted electronically or deposited in the drop box will be considered late and will have marks deducted accordingly.

All assignments must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Please note: If your class is held in the evening, the Registrar's Office will make every attempt to schedule the final exam during the evening; however, there is NO guarantee that the exam will NOT be scheduled during the day.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, **students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**

For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading System

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

(Revised, effective September 2008)

	Grading Scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99
A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, A- would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. F will be converted to zero.

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources. **These rules apply to oral presentations as well as written assignments.**

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at the following link;
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see
<http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:
<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

To be posted on Blackboard in the first week of classes