

# SYLLABUS

## AMST 442-01

Television & American Culture  
SPRING 2016

meets: Tuesdays & Thursdays  
2:30pm-3:45pm  
room: UH-339

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Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 1-2pm

When television is good, nothing--not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers--nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air...I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland.



-Newton Minow

Chairman of the FCC, 1961



I see our relationships to popular culture as shaping our political identities in profound ways...Popular culture often expresses ideas or perspectives that are outside the consensus framed by the news media and are allowed to be expressed here precisely because popular culture is not taken seriously.

How is anything gonna change if we're all at home watching *Buffy*?



-Kathleen Hanna

Feminist artist and activist

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the history and culture of television in America. From *I Love Lucy* to *Empire*, television has both shaped and reflected a range of cultural values. As America's most popular mode of storytelling, television provides us with a never-ending list of possibilities for discussion. Though we cannot broach them all, this course attempts to examine the history and technology of television, cultural representations and values, popular story forms, the environment of television, as well as the complex relationship between television and its audiences. We will also discuss new avenues for television in the digital age. We will begin the course with TV's introduction after WWII and discuss shows and televised events right up until the present day. We will be watching television (in class and at home), reading about television and asking questions about the place of television in our lives. Hopefully, through discussion and critical analysis, we will begin to understand the power of TV and debate its transformative capabilities.

# TEXTS

For this class you will need the text below and selected PDF articles posted on Titanium



1. Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture*,  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2010  
ISBN: 978-0-19-530667-5  
(any edition is fine)



2. Selected Articles. **The articles are all posted in PDF format on Titanium.** You do not have to print them all out for class, but many students find them a valuable resource for our discussions as the articles are often jumping-off points for the class.

The above text is available at **Little Professor Book Center** ([fullertontextbooks.com](http://fullertontextbooks.com))

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This is an upper-division course, and as such, students are expected to read the assigned material and come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Upper-division level reading comprehension and writing skills are also expected. **The reading load is anywhere between 75-150 pages per week**, which is average for an upper division course in the humanities. Specific course requirements include a midterm, 3 assignments, an in-class essay, and a final paper. Participation/attendance is mandatory for this class. In order to achieve maximum participation points, students must come to class prepared to discuss the readings and contribute thoughtfully to class discussion.

## ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate students will be expected to 1) write an article length final paper (18-20 pages instead of 10), and 2) will be held to a higher standard for assignments, participation, and exams.

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Grading for this course will consist of **+ or - letter grades**. I do not use grading curves. Grades of "Incomplete" are only given under special circumstances (i.e. catastrophic personal or family emergencies) and must be discussed with me as soon as possible.

Graded Course Requirements	
Midterm Exam	20%
In-Class Episode Analysis	20%
"Opening Credits" Assignment	4%
Big Bang Theory Assignment	4%
Paper Proposal	5%
Participation & Attendance	12%
Final Paper	35%

A	93-100	C+	77-79.99
A-	90-92.99	C	73-76.99
B+	87-89.99	C-	70-72.99
B	83-86.99	D+	67-69.99
B-	80-82.99	D	60-66.99
		F	0-59.99

**Midterm Exam (20% of your grade):** An in-class short answer exam.

**In-Class Episode Analysis (20% of your grade):** An in-class essay analysis of an episode screened in class.

**Final Paper Proposal (5% of your grade):** A 1-2 page document detailing your approach to the Final Paper assignment.

**“Opening Credits” Assignment (4% of your grade):** A 1-2 page document analyzing the opening credits of a show of your choosing.

**“Big Bang Theory Episode Analysis” Assignment (4% of your grade):** A 2-3 page document analyzing an episode of *The Big Bang Theory*.

**Final Paper (35% of your grade):** An 8-10 page research paper (15-20 pages for graduate students) on a television topic of your choosing. This paper will be submitted digitally via Titanium at the end of the semester.

**Attendance/Participation (12% of your grade):** I will take attendance each day. **Students are allowed (2) two absences during the semester without penalty.** It is recommended that you use them for true emergencies. Additional absences (for whatever reason) will result in lowering of the attendance score. In-class participation is also required. For further details on what qualifies as “A” level participation in this class, please see the rubric posted on Titanium.

**Quizzes** If I suspect that the class has not done the reading, I will give a 2-point pop quiz, the points for pop quizzes come out of the in-class participation points. If you are absent and miss a quiz, you miss out on those points.

## CLASS POLICIES

**Tardiness & Absences:** If you must be absent due to a religious holiday, let me know in advance so I do not lower your attendance score. If you come to class late (after I have taken roll), you must come up after class that same day and remind me that you were in attendance. If you are absent, you must get notes from a classmate, as I do not post lecture notes up on Titanium, nor do I give students copies of my lecture notes.

**Make-up Exams:** Make-up exams will only be given under special circumstances with a doctor’s note. Unless you make arrangements with me in advance, exams taken after the set exam date will be automatically docked one letter grade.

**Classroom Courtesy:** I expect a certain degree of professional courtesy in your discussions with me and other students. We are all responsible for maintaining a respectful class environment. I ask that you please:

- Be on time, as I get started quickly and give important updates at the beginning of class.
- Refrain from talking or any other form of inattention during lecture.
- If you have to be late or leave early, do so quietly.
- No texting, messaging, or conversations via phone, tablet, or laptop.
- Taking notes via tablet or laptop is fine, so long as you use it for notes only
- Don’t record lectures without my permission and only if you are authorized to do so by DSS.
- Pay attention during screenings. During screenings of documentaries, television shows, or other media clips, I expect you to take notes and examine them critically. This is not time for you to tune out and be “entertained.” I will generally ask you to connect the readings/lectures to anything I screen in class. Please refrain from talking or commenting during the screenings.

**Availability of Classroom Media Materials:** I cannot provide copies or access to of all of the screenings shown in class, so be sure to take good notes on the screenings and if you miss class, get notes.

**A Note on Media Material:** Since this is a course that examines American culture via television, we will be viewing documentaries, television shows, and other media materials in class. **I do not censor for violent material, language, or any other reason.** Some cable television programs, documentaries, and other media may contain material deemed offensive or that may confront traumatic issues. If you do not want to be exposed to such materials, I suggest dropping this course.

**Instructions for the Course Readings & Reading Questions:** **Please have all of the readings for the week completed by the time you get to class on Tuesday.** Reading questions are posted on Titanium. **I don’t collect or grade the answers to reading questions**, but they are posted to help guide your reading. I generally refer to those questions in discussion, but even if we don’t discuss a reading, in class you are still responsible for understanding it and those questions do help in that regard.

# CSUF COURSE POLICIES

**DSS Students:** If you are a DSS student, Please let me know in advance if you need me to provide exams or any other assignments to the DSS office. I present a lot of media clips, including sound clips and video clips in my courses, so please let me know how best to make them available to you.

**Policy on Selling Lecture Notes:** Per California Education Code Section 66450, it is illegal to reproduce course lectures—including your own hand-written or typed lecture notes—for commercial purposes. Any student who violates this code will be referred to the Dean of Students Office, Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action under the Student Conduct Code.

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** CSUF's UPS 240 Nondiscrimination Policy ensures "a commitment to valuing diversity, discourages the use of derogatory or disparaging language and other forms of expression and, particularly, condemns those who insult persons on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, citizenship, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, or veteran status." I value that commitment in this course.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity is about making sure that the work we do here is honest and that we treat this course and the University with the respect they deserve. The most basic **things to avoid** so as to maintain academic integrity are as follows:

- Cheating on exams or assignments
- Asking for points you didn't earn
- Submitting papers you did not write (plagiarism).
- Using the words or ideas of others in your writing without attributing them to the source (plagiarism).

Plagiarism is a serious offense. I expect you to use your own words and ideas in your assignments and on the exams. When citing the words or ideas of others please use quotation marks and cite your source. . The University's policy on Academic Dishonesty is available on the CSUF website, as well as in the current Course Catalog. It is your responsibility to be knowledgeable about this topic. Plagiarism results in an automatic "F" in this class and can result in expulsion from the University. **I report any plagiarism in my courses immediately to Judicial Affairs and start the process of an official University investigation, so please make sure your work is your own.** If you aren't sure what constitutes plagiarism or want to know more about CSUF's policies, please visit the website found at: [http://www.fullerton.edu/deanofstudents/Judicial\\_Affairs/Plagiarism.htm](http://www.fullerton.edu/deanofstudents/Judicial_Affairs/Plagiarism.htm)

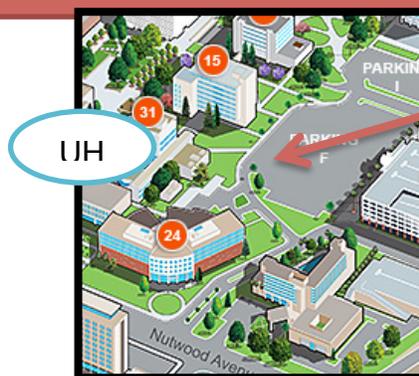
## Emergency Procedures

Familiarize yourself with the campus policies and procedures in advance so you know what to do in case of an earthquake, fire, or any other disaster. In the event of an emergency, please adhere to the guideline found at: <http://prepare.fullerton.edu/>.

**If a campus emergency results in cancellation of class, please go to Titanium, as I will do my best to post an update on how it affects us and any changes to due dates or assignments.**

## Campus Evacuation Procedures for room UH-319:

**Go down the stairs and out to the Faculty/Staff parking lot (Lot F)**



# READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

\*\*\*\*TITANIUM shuts down every week on Thursdays after 10pm for maintenance\*\*\*\*

## PART 1 TELEVISION'S FORM AND FUNCTION

### WEEK 1 – JAN 26 & 28

**TUES: Introductions**

No readings.

**THURS: Reading Television**

Mittell, "Introduction: Why Television?" (p. 1-13)

**Screening: *Friends***

### WEEK 2 – FEB 2 & 4

**Television and the Cold War Part 1**

Tichi, "Electronic Hearth" (PDF – 2 parts)

Spigel, "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television & Domestic Space" (PDF)

**Screening: *The Twilight Zone***

**DUE IN CLASS ON THURSDAY – "OPENING CREDITS ASSIGNMENT"**

### WEEK 3 – FEB 9 & 11

**Television and the Cold War Part 2**

Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism & Freud: Discourses of Gracie & Lucy" (PDF)

Newcomb & Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum" (PDF)

**Screening: *The George Burns & Gracie Allen Show, I Love Lucy***

### WEEK 4 FEB 16 & 18

**Television Narratives, Soap Opera, and Commercials**

Mittell, Chapter 1: "Exchanging Programming" (p. 17-53)

Chapter 2: "Exchanging Audiences" (p. 54-97)

Chapter 6 "Telling Television Stories" (p 213-268)

**Screening: *various commercials, clips of General Hospital***

**DUE IN CLASS ON THURSDAY – "BIG BANG THEORY ASSIGNMENT"**

### WEEK 5 – FEB 23 & 25

**Television News and the Public Interest**

Mittell, Ch 3: "Serving the Public Interest" p. 99- 125

Ch 4: "Televised Citizenship" p. 126-158

Jones, "Fox & Friends: Political Talk" (PDF)

**Screening: Clips from *The Daily Show, Democracy Now, and network news***

### WEEK 6 – MAR 1 & 3

**Social Change on Television**

Mittell, Ch 7: "Screening America" p. 269- 298

**Screening: *All in the Family***

### WEEK 7 – MAR 8 & 10

**TUESDAY: MIDTERM**

**In Class MIDTERM EXAM**

Entire class time will be devoted to the exam.

**THURSDAY:**

**Working Class Images & The Male Buffoon**

Butsch, "The Working Class Male Buffoon"

**Screening: documentary *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class***

## **PART II REPRESENTATION AND THE POWER OF TELEVISION IMAGES**

### **WEEK 8– MAR 15 & 17**

#### **Working Class Images & The Male Buffoon**

Mittell, Chapter 7 “Screening America” p 269-304

Screening: TBA

### **WEEK 9 – MAR 24 (no class Mar 22)**

#### **Working Women**

Rowe, “Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess” (PDF)

Screenings: *Roseanne*

### **WEEK 10 – MAR 29 & 23 – SPRING RECESS - Class does not meet**

### **WEEK 11 – APR 5 & 7**

#### **Irony & The Simpsons**

Mittell, Chapter 7 “Screening America” p 269-304

Dettmar, “Learning Irony with *The Simpsons*” (PDF)

Matheson, “The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life” (PDF)

Screening: *The Simpsons*

**\*PAPER PROPOSAL DUE THURSDAY by 11:59pm VIA TITANIUM\***

### **WEEK 12 – APR 12 & 14**

#### **Representing Race & Ethnicity on Television**

Mittell, Chapter 8 “Representing Identity” p 305-354

Gray, “Reaganism and the Sign of Blackness” (PDF – 2 parts)

Screening: selections from the documentary *Color Adjustment*

### **WEEK 13 – APR 19 & 21**

#### **LGBT Images on Television**

Mittell, Chapter 8 “Representing Identity” p 305-354

Serano, “Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depict the Trans Revolution in Lipstick & Heels” (PDF)

Connolly, “Homosexuality on Television: The Heterosexualization of *Will & Grace*” (PDF)

Screening: *Will & Grace*

### **WEEK 14 – APR 26 & 28**

#### **In Class Episode Analysis**

**Screening on Tuesday & In-Class Essay Exam on Thursday**

## **PART III POST-NETWORK REALITIES**

### **WEEK 15 – MAY 3 & 5**

#### **Reality Television**

Raphael, “The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV” (PDF)

Prose, “Voting Democracy Off the Island: Survivor’s Republican Ethos” (PDF)

Mittell, Chapter 9, “Viewing Television” p 357-382

Screening: TBA

### **WEEK 16 – MAY 10 & 12**

#### **Television in the Digital Era**

Mittell, Chapter 11, “Television’s Transforming Technologies” p 403-437

Screening: TBA

**FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY MAY 19<sup>th</sup> BY 11:59PM  
via Titanium Only (no paper copies)**