

**FTT 30450: Television Criticism and Aesthetics
Spring 2008**

Prof. Christine Becker
Office: 230D DPAC, 631-7592
Mailbox: 230 DPAC (FTT office)
Email: cbecker1@nd.edu
Office Hours: MW 1:30-2:30 & Thur 3-4 or by appointment

Lectures & discussions: MW 3-4:15pm 223 DeBartolo Hall
Screenings: Tu 7-9pm Browning Cinema

Required Texts

- *Critical Approaches to Television (CAT)* 2nd edition, Vande Berg, Wenner & Gronbeck
- Library E-reserve and Concourse Readings

Course description: This course focuses primarily on prime-time narrative television, both scripted and unscripted. Across the semester, we will seek, first of all, to understand narrative television as a unique meaning-producing medium, dissecting television's formal structures and its distinctive visual and aural aesthetic. Second, we will cover a number of critical methodologies that have been applied to the medium under the rubric of academic television studies, such as semiotics, ideological analysis, and cultural studies. Thus, our primary goals will be to understand how narrative television makes meaning and to explore how media scholars approach narrative television in meaningful ways. More specifically, the course's learning goals are to enable students:

- To identify, assess and employ primary concepts and methods of televisual analysis and criticism
- To apply those concepts and methods to various narrative television programs
- To identify and evaluate how television's forms relate to wider economic and cultural contexts
- To channel critical observations into competent written criticism
- To gain a greater appreciation for television texts and contexts

Grade Breakdown

15% Class participation, preparation, and quizzes
25% Topic reports
15% Midterm paper (due February 25)
25% Final paper (due April 30)
20% Final Exam (on May 5, 4:15pm)

IMPORTANT INFO

Attendance: You are expected to attend all class meetings, including screenings. I will, however, grant you three free absences (whether excused or unexcused and including screenings) across the semester. For every absence in excess of the three, the class participation and preparation grade will be lowered by a grade level (e.g. A- to B+, B to B-, etc.) at the instructor's discretion. If you miss a screening, you can view the week's screening in the Hesburgh Library AV Center before Wednesday's class meeting.

Class participation & preparation grade: This grade rewards you for the effort you put toward this class both inside and outside the classroom. Some things that count under this grade: verbal participation—

based on quality, not quantity—attentive listening and viewing, quizzes, in-class free-writes, keeping up with readings and screenings, and coming to class on time (habitual lateness will negatively affect this grade)

Readings

In addition to the textbook reading, there are individual articles assigned on most days. Because of the prohibitive expense to students, I no longer use a printed course packet. Instead, these articles are available on a library e-reserve page, with a few additional articles placed on our Concourse space. On the syllabus, you should assume that any article listed is available on our e-reserve page, unless it is indicated that it is on Concourse. You should read each article for the day it's listed on the syllabus.

Paper Policies: Late assignments and papers will lose a grade level for every late day (e.g. an A will be reduced to an A-, an A- to a B+, etc.). If you hand in an assignment to my mailbox or e-mail it to me, it is your responsibility to confirm that I received it on time. “You mean you didn’t get my paper? I e-mailed it to you but must have sent it to the wrong address” is not an acceptable reason for a late paper. Even if it’s the internet’s or someone else’s fault, you’re responsible for getting your work in on time. If you need an extension, you must request it at least a week before the due date for any assignment.

Honor Code: You are beholden to the tenets of the university’s Honor Code for every aspect of this class (see www.nd.edu/~hnr/code). Plagiarism, copying, and other forms of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with University policy. Plagiarism is any instance of trying to pass off the ideas and/or words of others as your own, whether they are from published sources, web sources, or your peers. Come see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Above all, simply cite sources for any ideas in your assignments that come from somewhere other than your own brain.

Course Schedule

Week 1 Introduction to the Course

January 16: Amaya, “Film is the New Low, Television the New High” (<http://flowtv.org/?p=76>)

Week 2 Introduction to TV Criticism and Aesthetic Form

January 21: CAT Chs. 1 & 2

***Report #1 Due

Screening: *Studio 60, Seinfeld, Airline*

January 23: Smith, “Plotting a TV Show About Nothing”

Week 3 Television Narrative

January 28: Kozloff, “Narrative Theory and Television”

Screening: *Scrubs, How I Met Your Mother, House*

January 30: Newman, “From Beats to Arcs”

Sconce, “What If?”

Week 4 Television Characters

February 4: watch *Freaks and Geeks, Everybody Hates Chris*

Screening: *Book Group, Spaced, Friday Night Lights*

February 6: Butler, "Building Narrative: Character, Actor, Star"
***Report #2 Due

Week 5 Television Style

February 11: Mittell, "The Elements of Television Style" (on Concourse)
Screening: *CSI*, *Newsradio*, *The Office*

February 13: Lury, "Case Study: CSI"
Barker, "Television Production Techniques as Communication"

Week 6 Case Study: British Sitcoms / Stepakoff visit

February 18: Hills, "Contemporary Sitcom"
Screening: FTT Talks with Jeffrey Stepakoff
February 20: Jeffrey Stepakoff in class

Week 7 Style & Semiotics

February 25: CAT 67-83
***Midterm paper due
Screening: *The Hills*, *24*
February 27: Peacock, "24: Status and Style"

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 Political Economy & Industry Analysis

March 10: CAT 259-277
Jenkins, "Buying Into *American Idol*"
Screening: *Homicide*
March 12: CAT 278-290

Week 9 Genre Study

March 17: CAT 111-138
Screening: *Dragnet*, *Homicide*
March 19: Mittell, "Policing Genres"
***Report #3 Due

Week 10 Authorship Study

March 24: No Class (Easter Break)
Screening TBA
March 26: CAT 235-240
Shattuc, "Television Production"

Week 11 Ideological Analysis

April 7: CAT 292-308
Screening: *The Real World*, *Ugly Betty*
April 9: CAT 313-328
Beltran, "Rooting for Betty"
***Report #4 Due

Week 12 Gender Representation

March 31: CAT 450-454

D'Acci, "Television, Representation, and Gender"

Screening: *Murphy Brown, Two and a Half Men, Grey's Anatomy*

April 2: CAT 154-174

Week 13 Cultural Studies

April 14: CAT 358-361, 390-408

Screening: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Beavis and Butthead, South Park*

April 16: Parks, "Brave New *Buffy*"

Kellner, "*Beavis and Butthead: No Future for Postmodern Youth*" (on Concourse)

Week 14 Fan Culture

April 21: McKee, "Fandom"

Screening TBA

April 23: Andrejevic, "Watching Television Without Pity"

***Report #5 Due

Week 15 Unboxing Television: Future Trends in TV Criticism and Aesthetics

April 28: Kompare, "Acquisitive Repetition"

Lotz, "Television Outside the Box"

No Screening

April 30: No reading

***Final Paper Due

****FINAL EXAM****

MONDAY, MAY 5, 4:15-6:15PM