

**FTT 40495: Television as a Storytelling Medium**  
**Fall 2009**

Prof. Christine Becker  
230D DPAC, 631-7592  
becker.34@nd.edu  
Office Hours: MW 3-4:30 or by appt.

**Seminar:** MW 1:30-2:45pm 204 DeBartolo  
**Screening:** M 7-9pm 317 DeBartolo

In a communications world dominated by visual culture, television has become society's primary storyteller. Stories are packaged and presented for our consumption in scripted dramas and sitcoms, unscripted reality shows and docudramas, news broadcasts and sporting events, and even commercials. Through exploring the structures, methods, meanings, and impacts of television's various narrative forms, this course will consider how the medium of television enables creators and viewers to tap into the fundamental cultural practice of storytelling.

**Course Goals:** Overall, our goals will be to develop the skills and tools necessary for understanding contemporary television's primary storytelling techniques, thereby uncovering why these techniques are so compelling for so many to watch. More specifically, by the end of this course students should be able to:

- Reflect on how television studies scholars approach television storytelling as a serious object of study and television series as aesthetically valuable for formal and cultural analysis
- Understand the components and techniques of prime-time scripted storytelling, including those of episodic, serial, and contemporary complex series
- Explain how narrative structure, narration, and narrative worlds constitute the central components of prime-time scripted storytelling
- Analyze the narrative structure, narrational techniques, and narrative worlds of prime-time scripted television programs using the terms and techniques common to narratology and the narrative study of television
- Assess the storytelling techniques of other forms of television narrative, such as soap operas, reality television, news, sports and advertisements, and recognize the ways in which these forms utilize similar and differing storytelling techniques in comparison to prime-time scripted series
- Apply standards and theories of television storytelling to particular programs to consider their efficacy
- Produce original works of television narrative analysis

**Required reading:** There is no textbook for this course, only individual articles that are available on the course electronic reserve page from the library's website.

**Grading Breakdown:**

Participation and preparation: 15%  
Response papers: 20%  
Long paper (all components): 35%  
Short paper: 10%  
Final exam: 20%

**Unit I: Introductions**

**Week 1 Introduction to the Course**

Aug. 26: Mittell, "Lost in a Great Story"

**Week 2 Introduction to Television Narratology**

No Screening

Aug. 31: Abbot, "Defining Narrative"

Sept. 2: Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television"

(Recommended: Mittell, "Telling Television Stories")

**Unit II: Prime-Time Scripted Storytelling**

**Week 3 Narrative Structure: Episodes**

Screening: *House, Frasier, Seinfeld, Arrested Development*

Sept. 7: Epstein, "Writing the Script"

(Recommended on Concourse: *House & Frasier* scripts)

Sept. 9: Smith, "Plotting a TV Show About Nothing"

**Week 4 Narrative Structure: Seasons**

Screening: *Arrested Development*

Sept. 14: Newman, "From Beats to Arcs"

Sept. 16: No reading

**Week 5 Narrative Structure and Narration: Contemporary Complex Formats**

Screening: *The West Wing, Six Feet Under*

Sept. 21: Mittell, "Narrative Complexity"

Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-Baroque"

Sept. 23: Feuer, "HBO and the Concept of Quality Television"

**Week 6 Narration: Temporality**

Screening: *How I Met Your Mother, 24*

Sept. 28: Murphet, "Narrative Time"

\*\*\*Long Paper Component #1 Due

Sept. 30: Birk, "A Narratological Analysis of 24"

Furby, "Interesting Times"

**Week 7 Narration: Agency and Perspective**

Screening: *X-Files, Ally McBeal, Scrubs*

Oct. 5: Chatman, "A New Point of View on 'Point of View'"

Seibel, "The Multi-Layered Ontology of *The X-Files*" (Concourse)

Oct. 7: Smith, "Getting Into Ally's Head"

**Week 8 Narrative Worlds: Setting and Character**

Screening: *Deadwood, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Oct. 12: Newcomb, "The Sense of Place in *Frank's Place*"

Abbott, "Character and Self in Narrative" (Concourse)

Oct. 14: Pearson, "Chain of Events" (Concourse)

\*\*\*Long Paper Component #2 Due

Fall Break

### **Week 9 Narrative Worlds: Creating (Pilots) and Ending (Finales) the World**

Screening: *Arrested Development*, *Veronica Mars*, *Six Feet Under*

Oct. 26: Mittell, "These Questions Need Answers"

Oct. 28: Askwith, "Do You Even Know Where This is Going?"

Feuer, "Discovering the Art of Television's Endings"

### ***Unit III: Beyond the Prime-Time Script***

#### **Week 10 Soap Operas**

Screening: *One Life to Live*

Nov. 2: Allen, "Making Sense of Soaps"

\*\*\*Long Paper Component #3 Due

Nov. 4: Warhol, "The Climax and the Undertow"

Mumford, "How Things End"

#### **Week 11 Observational Reality TV**

Screening: *The Real World*, *Intervention*, *The Deadliest Catch*

Nov. 9: Stradel, "A Day in the Life of a Reality TV Writer"

Reid, "Theorizing Reality" & "*Real World: la panoptique*" (Concourse)

Nov. 11: Kilborn, "Docu-soaps: The Basic Ingredients"

#### **Week 12 Competition Reality TV**

Screening: *Survivor*, *Top Chef*

Nov. 16: Haralovich and Trosset, "Expect the Unexpected"

Nov. 18: No reading.

\*\*\*Complete Long Paper Due

#### **Week 13 News**

Screening: Online news stories

Nov. 23: Dunn, "TV News as Narrative" (Concourse)

Thanksgiving Break

#### **Week 14 Sports**

Screening: ND-USC game

Nov. 30: Sullivan, "Broadcast Television and the Game of Packaging Sports"

Dec. 2: Daddario, "Gendered Sports Programming"

#### **Week 15 Commercials**

Screening: Ads

Dec. 7: Budd, Craig, and Steinman, "Advertising and Conventions of the Commercial"

Esslin, "Aristotle and the Advertisers"

Dec. 9: No reading

\*\*\*Short Paper Due

**FINAL EXAM: Monday, December 14, at 8am**