

Comm 383 – Media Criticism
Dr. Celeste Lacroix
Fall 2008 (Tues night)

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Office Hours:

Tuesdays 2-3, Thursdays 2-4 and by appointment

Course Objectives:

Media Criticism is designed to provide you with an understanding of, and an ability to analyze and evaluate, media texts. In this course, you will be exposed to a variety of methods and approaches to criticism, particularly critical approaches to television and film texts. By the end of this course, you should:

- Have the knowledge and skills to be a more critical consumer of media.
- Understand both the foundations of, and current trends in, the field of media studies.
- Have been exposed to the breadth and depth of approaches to media criticism through numerous specific examples.
- Be able to conduct your own research and critical interrogations of media texts.

Textbook and Readings:

- Vande Berg, L.R., Wenner, L.A., and Gronbeck, B. E. (2004). *Critical approaches to television* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Houghton, P. M., Houghton, T. J., and Peters, M. F. (2007). *APA: The Easy Way*. Baker College Publications.
- Readings on e-reserve. These are accessed though the library homepage—password: *comm383*, or you can photocopy hardcopies available at the Circulation Desk.
- I will sometimes send additional class materials to you via email. **Check your Edisto accounts for mail.**

Policies:

- ☒ This is a discussion/activity-formatted course. Your attendance is imperative to your understanding and application of the materials. In other words, you must attend. **Absences in excess of two (2) will lower your grade by 30 points** for each additional absence. **Arriving late or leaving class early counts as a half absence.** Five (5) or more absences (either excused or unexcused) will result in a flunking grade for the course.
- ☒ **All work must be typed, double-spaced, appropriately cited in APA style, proofread, and stapled or paper-clipped when you hand it in. Use Times New Roman 12-point font and no more than 1 inch margins.** For each of these minimum criteria not met, your paper will be subject to a letter grade penalty. In addition, if I find more than ten (10) errors of any kind in the first two (2) pages of a document, you will automatically receive a D for that assignment (assuming a complete assignment).
- ☒ Late work will be subject to a “letter grade per day” penalty. **Assignments are due at the start of class** (unless otherwise announced).
- ☒ In order to succeed in this course, you MUST do the assigned readings. Chapter reading assignments in the text may also include sample articles at the ends of chapters---you are responsible for these as well!
- ☒ Turn off all cell phones & blackberries. Laptops may only be used for note-taking. NO web surfing or emailing.
- ☒ **You should familiarize yourself with the rules of plagiarism articulated in the Student Handbook and other policies of the Code of Conduct. Any paper that is plagiarized in whole or in part will receive an “F.” If you are found guilty of plagiarizing the final paper, you will receive an “XF” grade for the course.**
- * Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements to meet course requirements, should contact the professor as soon as possible, but no later than August 31, 2008.

Assignments:

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| In-Class Media Text Analyses (5 @ 10 points each) | 50 |
| In-Class Quizzes on E-reserves Reading (4 @ 5 points) | 20 |
| Small Group Presentation | 40 |

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| Paper 1 st Section | 40 |
| 1 st Examination | 50 |
| 2 nd Examination | 50 |
| Final Paper - Original Media Criticism | 100 |

You may earn a total of 350 points in this course. The letter grade equivalents for the final point totals are as follows:

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|-----------|----|
| 326 – 350 | A |
| 315 – 325 | A- |
| 305 – 314 | B+ |
| 291 – 304 | B |
| 280 – 290 | B- |
| 270 – 279 | C+ |
| 256 – 269 | C |
| 245 – 255 | C- |
| 235 – 244 | D+ |
| 221 – 234 | D |
| 210 – 220 | D- |
| Below 209 | F |

Description of Assignments:

In-Class Media Text Analyses: On five occasions, we will view a media text in class (typically an episode from a television series, a film, or film clips). In groups of approximately five members chosen that day in class, you will analyze the text applying the critical approach we have recently studied. In order for you to receive the total 10 points available for each of these analyses, you will have to have **completed the required reading** in the text and be familiar with the critical approach being applied, **attend class** the day(s) of the analysis, **participate in your group’s discussion**, and you must share in the presentation of your group’s analysis to the class (in other words **you must speak**). At times, these analyses will span two class periods, so you must be in attendance all days in order to receive the full ten points.

In-Class Quizzes on E-reserves Reading: On several occasions, you will be called upon to answer *specific* questions about the articles assigned on e-reserves. These will come in a “quiz” format, and will ask you to write about the thesis, theoretical concepts, texts examined and critical approaches in the articles...so be prepared!

Examinations: The exams will have both objective and essay questions. Exam #1 will cover material from chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Exam #2 will cover material from chapters 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

Small Group Presentations: See attached document.

Paper 1st Section: **Be sure to see course policies affecting written work above.** In preparation for the final Media Criticism, you will write the first 4-6 pages of the original critical research you are pursuing for your final paper. In this document you should:

1. Introduce and justify your choice of text(s)---the piece(s) of media you intend to criticize.
2. Provide a rationale for the critical approach you have chosen as your method for critiquing said text.
3. Include a **cited** literature review of the supportive scholarly literature and popular press material you will use as resources in your final paper. The final paper requires a minimum of **eight (8) cited sources, at least four of which must be scholarly sources (journal articles or books)**. **YOU SHOULD INCLUDE AS MANY OF THESE SOURCES AS POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME.**
4. The References page must also be included (see APA style guide).
5. **You will hand the graded version of this document in again with your final paper.**

I highly recommend that you write this “first partial draft” in the narrative style of the final paper so that you can simply edit this document as necessary (or suggested), and you will have a 4-6 page head start on your final paper! This assignment should help better prepare you for the “big” paper by giving me an opportunity to provide you with feedback. The more accurate and developed these pages are, the better feedback you will receive. **I also recommend that you meet with me individually** sometime between Monday, October 27th and Thursday, October 30th.

Final Paper – Original Media Criticism: You will research and write a substantial (13-15 pages) media criticism of your own. This will be original research for which you will choose a media text or texts to analyze and will utilize a critical method (or combination of methods) which we have studied. Your paper will be a developed presentation of this critique. Please see again the paper style/writing policies noted above and you must adhere to APA style guidelines. The outline presented in Chapter 4 of the textbook may provide you with a helpful guide for the organization and development of your paper, as will the example articles in the textbook and e-reserves articles. **You must also attach the graded proposal to your final paper.**

Tentative* Course Schedule:

Reading due

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|---------|--|---|
| T 8/26 | Course introduction, Assignments explained Activity | none |
| T 9/2 | The Power of Media Debates about Media and Its Effects Scholarly Criticism vs. Popular Press Criticism | Chapters 1 & 2 |
| T 9/9 | Auteur Criticism In-class Analysis #1 | Chapter 9 (including article pp. 246-257) & Zettl article (e-reserves) |
| T 9/16 | Semiotic/Structural Analysis Genre Criticism In-class Analysis #2 | Chapters 5 (not “Dr. Who” 86-109) & 6 (including “Doogie” 129-138) & Swiger (e-reserves) |
| T 9/23 | In-class Analysis #2 (cont.) | Battles and Hilton-Morrow, Clover (e) |
| T 9/30 | Rhetorical Criticism Narrative Criticism In-class analysis #3 | Chapter 7 (including “1984” 175-195), Chapter 8 (including “9/11” 211-228) & Weisman, Campbell articles (e) |
| T 10/7 | In-class analysis #3 (cont.) | |
| T 10/14 | Fall Break! Enjoy! | |
| T 10/21 | Examination #1 Discussion of Proposal and Paper Writing Media Criticism | Chapter 4 (not on 1 st exam) |
| T 10/28 | Cultural Criticism Approaches In-class analysis #4 | Chapters 14 (incl. “Cheers” 412-420) & 15 (incl. “Buffy” 464-472) |
| T 11/4 | Proposals Due In-class analysis #4 (cont.) | Young, Brookey and Westerfelhaus (e) |
| T 11/11 | Ideological Criticism In-class analysis #5 | Chapter 11 (incl. “Real World” 313-328) & Hall article (e) |
| T 11/18 | Reader-Oriented, Audience Ethnographic Criticism | Chapters 12, 13 & Cohen article (e) (incl. “Dream Team” 343-356 & “All-American Girl” 370-388) |
| T 11/25 | Paper Discussion Time | |
| T 12/2 | Papers Due , Course Conclusion | |
| T 12/16 | Examination #2 ***4pm – 7pm | |

*** The professor reserves the right to change this syllabus and course schedule at any time.**

