

**Instructor:** Dr. Christopher White      **Phone:** 294-(4)1343      **Email:** cwhite@shsu.edu  
**Classroom:** in DRCB #319 on T-Days from 9-10:50

**Office Hours:** # 102 M/W 10-11 or 2 to 4 & Th 11-2 & Friday by Appointment

**Texts:** *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture* by Deanna D. Sellnow, 2010 Edition & hand-outs & electronic reserves & Blackboard postings AND your TV.

**Description:** A major assumption of this class is that all cultures "reveal themselves" in the artifacts that are left behind. Artifacts that help explain what a culture celebrates and what values it honors or disdains. Artifacts like: stone-age weapons, Roman statuary, Mayan ruins, fairy tales, religious rituals and of course written texts. Our culture is still current, but it too offers artifacts and various texts that reflect what values are celebrated and what behavior is honored or disdained. *The CBS Evening News, Law & Order, The Office, Oprah, The Simpsons, SNL, American Idol*, ads for Chanel #5 or the Taco Bell website. All these mediated texts -- AND the institutions that produce these mediated texts AND the impact these mediated texts have on audiences -- needs regular and constant attention.

Content (texts)! Institutions! Audiences! You will be expected to keep track of the different -- sometimes significantly different -- perspectives covered in the readings, lectures & screenings. Always take notes -- especially regarding the screenings.

**Objectives:** This course is designed to develop advanced Media Literacy Skills related to the electronic media – its programming, its institutions and its audiences. There will be a considerable writing component: term paper, essays, short writing assignments. You will be expected to hone your writing skills throughout the course. You will be expected to understand 1) the mainstream criticism & analysis offered in the text and also 2) another form of criticism (offered in lectures & handouts) that brings a different focus on the role of the TV industry and TV programming in contemporary American culture. Although the focus is on American television, other media and other media traditions will also be addressed. Various examples of television programming will be screened in-class. Pay attention. Take notes.

**Methods:** Lecture/Discussion/Screenings/Hand-outs/Blackboard Postings. Students are expected to read all assigned articles, handouts, chapters etc. prior to class and to be prepared to actively participate in discussion.

**Grading:** 2 Exams (100+100); Term Paper + Abstract (100 pts); Three Essays (75 pts) and a Diary (25 points)

Grade Scale: A – 360-400      B – 320-359      C – 280-319      D – 240-279      F - 0-239

You will get separate handouts on the paper, on the abstract for the paper, and on the diary. Essay topics will be assigned a week before due day.

**Note:** I am in charge of all discussions. These can be open and freewheeling but when I ask for quiet -- be quiet, and when I change the subject -- follow me. Anyone who in my judgement over-steps the bounds of propriety will be asked to be quiet and/or leave class.

We will watch many screenings in-class -- but this is not your living room. Be quiet. Take notes.

Get permission to bring visitors to class or to record lectures. You will have an opportunity to evaluate this class.

The SAM Center offers excellent study help.

**Make-up exams:** only in extreme circumstances – likely to be essay. **Extra credit:** None  
No beepers, cell phones, palm-pilots, satellite dishes or anything that otherwise beeps, vibrates or whistles allowed in class. No eating, sleeping or doing work unrelated to the class. Live with it. Generally students will refrain from behavior that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process. And please maintain complete honesty and integrity in your academic experience both in and out of this classroom (this from Faculty Handbook).

**Attendance:** after 4 absences your grade will be reduced 20 pts for each additional absence. No excuses. Doctors' notes are not accepted. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting copies of handouts from a classmate, making up work, etc. Don't ask: Hey, Dr. White what did we do in class yesterday? Screenings are shown only once and are not available online or for later viewing. Late is absent. No calling me at home -- never, ever, never -- that's why God created office hours. And I won't call you.

Reading Assignments & Class Topics (Subject to change):

Week One	Introduction and screenings Appendix & Glossary (pp. 177-190)
Week Two	Chapter 1 What Is Popular Culture? (pp. 1-13) Handouts & screenings
Week Three	Chapter 2 The Rhetorical Tradition (pp.25-35) Hand-outs & screenings
Week Four	Television as Cultural Forum (Reserves) Handouts & screenings
Week Five	<i>Northern Exposure</i> and Quality TV (Reserves) Handouts & screenings
Week Six	<i>Roseanne</i> – How Did You Get In My House? (Reserves) <i>Beavis &amp; Butthead: No Future for Postmodern Youth</i> (Reserves)

**FIRST TEST**

Week Seven	Chapter 9 Media-centered Perspectives (pp. 161-173) Handouts & screenings
Week Eight	Chapter 3 Narrative Perspectives (pp. 37-49) Handouts & screenings
Week Nine	Chapter 8 Visual Perspectives (pp. 143-158) Handouts & screenings, <b>PAPER ABSTRACT DUE</b>
Week Ten	Chapter 5 Marxist Perspectives (pp. 71-87) Handouts & screenings
Week Eleven	Chapter 6 Feminist Perspectives (pp. 89-113) Handouts & screenings
Week Twelve	Appendix & Glossary (pp. 177-190)

**SECOND TEST**

**PAPERS DUE AT FINALS DAY & TIME**

**STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY**

*University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. **DISABLED STUDENT POLICY** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that no otherwise qualified disabled individual shall, solely by reason of his/her handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic or Student Life program or activity. Students will be allowed no more than five Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of five Q-drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses to grant permission to drop the class, the student will be required to remain in the class. This limit took effect with the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall 2004 semester will not be included in the five Q-drop limit. Neither will Q-drops from other universities.*

## Term Paper Assignment

General guidelines: Term paper of 10 pages plus Reference Page plus Appendix. Paper must be in APA format, typed or computed, double-spaced and stapled. Do not use plastic or card-board covers. Reference Page must have at least 5 citations from media-related publications, with at least one journal, one newspaper/magazine and one book cited.

Topic: Analysis of a contemporary television series that currently is carried on one of the networks. Check with me on appropriateness of the program you choose to examine.

Due: Abstract due 3<sup>rd</sup> week in November. No late papers excepted.

Hints: Break-up your paper into three major sections & then two sections of supporting material (Reference Page & Appendix).

### Introduction:

One or two pages. This should set up your basic argument or put in context the critical analysis of a given show that will be presented in The Body of the paper. Using at least five (5) sources as supporting evidence and your own thoughts, describe the role of television in contemporary society, explain why it is important to study the medium, its programs, its institutions and/or audiences. You might offer rival theories about the role and impact of TV in contemporary society -- or you might marshal evidence that supports one or another theory of TV's social impact. Try and fashion an interesting opening sentence or two. State your intentions to analyze a certain show at the end of your Introduction.

### The Body:

Critically analyze the TV show you have chosen to focus on. Some possible questions you might address: Production history? Institutional context from which the program has emerged? Primary settings? Main characters or "constellations" of characters? The generic connection of the show? Do central themes or characters support or challenge mainstream beliefs or ideologies? Does the show attempt to address controversial issues? If so, how? What kind of world does the show celebrate? What is it regularly "saying" to its audience?

Conclusion: One page that sums-up your analysis and refers back to issues in the Introduction.

References: One page (in proper format) that lists citations used in the Introduction (or anywhere else).

Appendix: One page summary of each episode of the show you have critically analyzed in The Body of the paper. So – one page devoted to each episode.

### Some Issues to Consider

What is the show's institutional context? It's generic pedigree? Are there unique narrative elements repeated in each episode? What values are celebrated, dismissed or ignored? What are the most regular conflicts? Do unique production values or special effects contribute to the show's narrative or theme? Why might this show have appeal to audiences? Is the program in any way critical of mainstream American experience? Are there features, characters or plot-lines that are similar to those in other mass media texts? Is the title or introductory sequence a clue as to the show's value system or theme?