

(Revised September 1, 2006)

COURSE PROPOSAL

Art Education 367.03 *Criticizing Television*
Theatre 367.03 *Criticizing Television*

Course Description:

In this course we will critically examine American popular television and its relationship to issues of social diversity. Recognizing the significant influence this technology has on our individual and social experiences, we will consider all programs types, including news, sports, weather, reality TV, movies made for TV, advertising, talk shows, comedy, drama, and other modes of programming.

We will explore the phenomenon of television in American culture by viewing it, discussing it, reading about it, and writing about it. Some key questions we will consider include:

- How does television programming in the United States empower (or disempower) people?
- Whose presence is missing and whose voices are silenced in popular television programming?
- What are the aesthetic, creative, and persuasive strategies of television programming, and how do these strategies affect perceptions of social diversity?
- What does television provide to individuals and society: Information? Entertainment? Education? Social cohesiveness? Pleasure? Companionship? Distraction?
- Whose values are reflected in television programming?
- Does television represent realities? Construct realities? Refute realities?
- What is reality? Who decides what reality is? How can we discern what is real or fantasy, fact or fiction in television programming?
- Who decides that a particular program or genre is "good," or "bad?" How are these values determined? How are these values communicated to, and internalized by, viewers?
- How can theoretical perspectives and television criticism methods be used to understand social diversity as it relates to television in American life?
- What are the underlying assumptions of theoretical perspectives and research methods? What are their strengths and limitations?

GEC Second Writing and Social Diversity Course

Criticizing Television is a GEC second writing and social diversity course designed to extend and refine your expository writing and analytic reading skills by exploring the pluralistic nature of American society through a critical analysis of American popular television. In our study of popular television, we will gain an appreciation of the significance of diversity in American society and an informed understanding of how the values of tolerance and equality are expressed through television programming and in television viewers' behaviors.

Through the activities of viewing, reading about, and writing about popular television in America we will encounter and critically examine issues of social diversity including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Students will gain an understanding and appreciation of television as a social institution that reflects and influences, yet is shaped by, society's desires, hopes, and fears. Ultimately, by exploring the ways in which television advances or limits the agency of individuals and groups, students will develop an understanding of television's significance for attitudes and beliefs regarding diversity in our society.

GEC second level writing objectives

Second writing courses are designed to develop students' skills in writing, reading, critical thinking, and oral expression. In *Criticizing Television*, we will write both formally and informally about a variety of television texts and programming; we will use writing as an instrument for exploring the relationship of television and social diversity issues in American society, and as a significant site of learning itself. Engaging in reading, writing, and oral expression activities, students will develop personal critical responses that interrogate television's role in shaping attitudes and beliefs about social diversity.

To meet GEC second level writing and social diversity objectives, instructor-directed and student-directed discussions will provide opportunities to apply critical and theoretical perspectives including semiotics, postmodernism and socio-cultural theories to television programming and television viewing experiences. We will read and analyze academic and popular writings about television, developing a critical awareness of the rhetorical strategies, audiencing, and goals of different forms of television criticism.

During the quarter, students will demonstrate the ability to read and write with comprehension, clarity, and critical acuity regarding television and positive and negative criticism of it. To this end, students will write at least 7,000 words of edited prose focused on their demonstrating:

Effective application of television critical methods in the analysis and interpretation of television programs and texts, audience responses, and television viewing contexts.

Clear articulation of ideas about television and its uses and consequences.

Logical argumentation including clearly stated claims and reasons and evidence for their acceptance regarding issues of television programming and its influence on viewers.

Personal investment in articulating knowledge and expressing argumentation about television and issues it raises.

Skills of research, speaking, argumentation, and active listening concerning television criticism.

GEC social diversity in the United States objectives

Social diversity courses give significant treatment to the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States with special attention to issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. In *Criticizing Television*, we will write both formally and informally about the relationship of television and social diversity issues in American society, and as a significant site of learning social values, cases of inequality, and issues of social justice regarding diverse peoples.

During the quarter, students will demonstrate the ability to read and write with comprehension, clarity, and critical acuity. To this end, students will write at least 7,000 words of edited prose focused on their demonstrating:

A grasp of how the phenomenon of television contributes to understanding the larger human condition, particularly in matters of race, ethnicity, gender, and class inequalities.

An understanding of how television programming can be representative, or even critical of, the cultures and historical periods in which it is created and received.

An understanding of the aesthetic, affective, and intellectual appeal of television and its influence on human values.

An understanding of television's multiple, simultaneous, overlapping, and contradictory meanings for individuals and society; that is, as a distinctive artistic expression, source of information, source of education, expression of cultural ideologies, site of resistance, and an instrument of oppression.

Student Learning Outcomes: GEC Second Writing and Social Diversity Course

At the completion of Criticizing Television students should be able to:

Engage in informed television criticism built upon the understanding of a program's unique attributes and its social, historical context in respect to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. *(Meets Social Diversity Objectives by fostering an understanding of American institutions and the pluralistic nature of American society.)*

Explain, appreciate, and value the ways in which myriad viewpoints, choices, and social situations constitute a pluralistic culture, recognizing the important role the media play in shaping individuals' and groups' values of tolerance and equality. *(Meets Social Diversity Objectives by promoting appreciation of the significance of diversity in our society and the importance of the values of tolerance and equality.)*

Explore and problematize American television's role in shaping a diversity of race, gender, and class perspectives, placing personal experiences with television within a broader social and scholarly context. *(Meets Social Diversity Objectives by promoting a critical examination of issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity in American television programming and American television viewing experiences.)*

Critically analyze in writing and in discussion a variety of television programs and literature with the goal of understanding and clearly explaining a program's or text's visual and rhetorical strategies. *(Meets Second Writing Course Objectives for analysis, discussion, and writing with the goals of building on First Writing Course fundamentals: writing characterized by a clear sense of purpose; effectively ordered and fully supported ideas; style appropriate to purpose and audience; and control of grammatical and mechanical elements.)*

Apply television criticism methodology to persuasively communicate in writing and in oral presentations ideas about television's role in shaping awareness of, attitudes toward, and beliefs about race, ethnicity, class, and gender in American society. *(Meets Second Writing Course Objectives for providing students with opportunities to articulate their ideas both orally and in writing.)*

Locate, evaluate, and use written and visual sources (both print and on-line); recognize how sources can be addressed to diverse audiences; make informed choices about research resources. *(Meets Second Writing Course Objectives for providing students with opportunities for research and to develop skills in understanding the conventions, circumstances, and constraints that distinguish various resources.)*

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes for GEC Second Writing and Social Diversity Course

In order to measure the efficacy of GEC Writing Course and Social Diversity Learning Outcomes (above), on day one of the course, we will show the students a video clip from a current primetime broadcast television program and ask them to respond in writing to a series of questions concerning the program's racial representation, cultural stereotypes, attitudes toward gender, aesthetic choices, narrative structure, evident in the production, positioning of the viewer, and presumed audience demographics including social values.

After ten weeks of course instruction through lecture, readings, demonstrations, and discussions on weekly topics listed in the Course Calendar in the syllabus, we expect students to demonstrate significant learning of the themes, topics and issues by responding to the identical video clip at the end of the quarter. Successful students will have much more to say in their final essays compared to their initial essays. Successful students will demonstrate successful application of the course content. Less successful students will not have increase their ability to articulate their responses to television programming, nor will they demonstrate much in the way of sophisticated applications of the course material in response to the video clip. We will look for evidence of change regarding knowledge, skills, and attitudes about television criticism.

On the second day, we will gather further information about the students' prior knowledge of television by administering the Survey of Prior Knowledge (pages 6-7).

Assessment of student learning:

We will assess the students' grasp of how the phenomenon of television contributes to understanding the larger human condition, particularly in matters of race, ethnicity, gender, and class inequalities *by close analysis of their writing by both peers and faculty. Further indicators will be found in the class discussions.*

(Written and Oral Responses to Course Readings specified in the Course Syllabus, pp. 2-3, and the Course Calendar, pp. 10-19.)

We will assess how well students can apply critical methods to television programs and texts *by reflecting on ourselves as audiences and by applying different authors' critical methods that are provided in the course readings.*

(Critical Analysis Papers #1 and # 2, specified in the Course Syllabus, p. 7 and the Course Calendar, p. 12-13.)

We will assess whether the students' can distinguish among the aesthetic, affective, and intellectual appeal of television and its influence on human values *by illustrated oral presentations given by students in class.*

(Mid-term Paper & Presentation, specified in the Course Syllabus, pp. 7-8 and the Course Calendar, p. 15.)

(When we assign each paper, we provide students with a specific writing Rubric that specifies criteria by which their papers will be assessed. See example Rubric, p. 8.)

We will assess the students' understanding of how television programming can be representative, or even critical of, the cultures and historical periods in which it is created and received *by in-class discussions and a close reading of student papers, both through peer review and faculty evaluation.*

(Postmodern TV Paper, specified in the Course Syllabus, pp. 8-9 and the Course

Calendar, p. 16.)

We will assess the students' understanding of television's multiple, simultaneous, overlapping, and contradictory meanings for individuals and society by our own realization of how much we, in our own class, agree and disagree about meanings of what we see. From this experience we extrapolate to greater society as our course readings reinforce.

(Final Paper, specified in the Course Syllabus, p. 9 and the Course Calendar, p. 18.)

Making course improvements

The supervising Professor and the instructor who is teaching the course will assess student learning throughout the course and after the course has ended. We will sample written assignments and exams to learn whether the course is meeting its goals. We will also assess improvement over time, from the Knowledge Survey to Mid-term to Final Exams, and from early assignments to later assignments.

After each section of the course is taught, we will carefully read and analyze student evaluations of the course, both the standardized SEIs from the University and an open-ended essay evaluative instrument developed and used by the Department of Art Education.

Based on student performance in relation to course objectives, and informed by student reaction to course content and delivery, we will continually adjustment the course as needed.

Assuring course continuity

Each time the course is taught by a Teaching Associate or a faculty member, the course syllabus will be updated as needed for timeliness of content by the one teaching the course in consultation with the supervising Professor. Syllabi for the course will be kept on file in the offices of the Department of Art Education and the Department of Theatre for historical reference and to measure the current offering of the course with the objectives identified in this proposal.

Each year supervising professors and instructors of the course from Art Education and Theatre will meet to assure consistency of content, delivery, and maintenance of the course objectives.

Name: _____ Date: _____

SURVEY OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE
Criticizing Television

INSTRUCTIONS: This is a knowledge survey rather than a “test.” It is designed to help the instructor refine the course curriculum. This survey will not be graded, it is for course planning purposes only; your performance will *not affect your grade in the course.*

The survey consists of multiple choice, true or false, and a few brief written response questions. Even if you are unsure of how to respond to what is being asked, please answer each question to the best of your abilities.

Multiple Choice:

Choose the answer you believe is most accurate.

1. Television criticism is

- a. a negative review of a television program in a newspaper or magazine
- b. often informed by theoretical perspectives
- c. an analysis of a television program’s social and historical significance, supported by data and examples
- d. opinion about a television program
- e. b and c

2. The meaning of a television program is affected by

- a. “flow” and “structure of feeling”
- b. an audience’s ideas about the program
- c. the program creator’s artistic choices
- d. both an audience’s and program creator’s ideas, situated within a particular social and historical context
- e. a and d

3. The absence or presence of social diversity in television programs can be influenced by

- a. advertisers and profit margins
- b. lobbyists and special interest groups
- c. Nielsen ratings
- d. hegemony and ideologies
- e. all of the above

True or False

1. True or False: Racist representations and harmful stereotypes in today’s television programs are controlled or eliminated by government control (FCC).
2. True or False: Research shows that television has little influence on a culture’s expectations for physical appearance, success, and social equalities.

3. True or False: Television criticism is objective and unbiased.

Written Response

Answer each question with a few sentences.

1. Does television currently present an accurate reflection of diversity in America?
Please explain your reasoning with a few examples of television shows that you believe do or do not present an accurate view of diversity on TV today.

2. How does television influence a person's ideas about gender, race, ethnicity, or class stereotypes?

3. How might television, or television viewing situations be changed to increase awareness of issues of race, ethnicity, gender, or class?

4. Why should television be studied?

Rubric for Written Component of Midterm (50 points)

Essay Structure (20 points)

Organization: Essay contains introduction, discussion, conclusion, and a page of Works Cited that are relevant to both issues of diversity in the United States and television criticism. (5 points)

Citations: Sources are correctly identified in the essay (APA or MLA style), and are properly formatted in the Works Cited page. (5 points)

Paragraph structure: Paragraphs have a topic sentence, are limited to one idea, and have a transition sentence. (5 points)

Spelling/Grammar/Punctuation: Essay is free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. (5 points)

Essay Content (30 points)

Thesis: Does the essay have a clear, focused thesis statement or question regarding an aspect of television criticism and social diversity? (6 points)

Examples: Are examples effective for supporting the thesis about an aspect of television and social diversity? (6 points)

Connections: Is there appropriate and substantial use of television criticism concepts and social diversity concepts from readings, lectures, and discussions? (9 points)

Critical Thinking: Does essay show evidence of creative, original, critical, and socially aware approaches to the subject matter? (9 points)