A Cultural History of Television

Instructor: Prof. Susan Murray

Office hours:

Class schedule/Location:

COURSE DESCRIPTION: An examination of the various media through which people have attempted to communicate their ideas & emotions; focus on the electronic media of the 20th century as they affect our perceptions of reality & interaction with others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
By the end of the course, students will:

- understand the cultural and industrial history of American television
- understand and be able to employ the methodological practices involved in the writing of the history of broadcasting
- know the primary theorists who have engaged with discourses of television

REQUIRED READINGS:
Additional weekly readings available at Blackboard site.

ASSIGNMENTS & RESPONSIBILITIES
1. Attendance and Participation (20% of final grade): Students must attend every class and participate in discussion.
2- Two exams: (each worth 20% of final grade): One midterm and one final (final is not cumulative) will be given in class. Each one will consist of 2-3 essay questions.
3. **Paper proposal** (worth 10%): must include thesis questions, 1-2 paragraph description of project, bibliography of at least three secondary sources that you plan to use in your paper.

3. **Research paper** on a topic in television history (worth 30% of final grade—). Due: December 12th. Must involve both primary and secondary sources.—15 pages.

**GRADING CRITERIA**

Grading Scale: 94-100 A; 90-93 A-; 87-89 B+; 83-86 B; 80-82 B-; 77-79 C+; 73-76 C; 70-72 C-; 67-69 D+; 63-66 D; 60-62 D-; 0-59

A = Excellent  
This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights and well-reasoned analysis. “A” work includes skillful use of source materials and illuminating examples and illustrations. “A” work is fluent, thorough and shows some creative flair.

B = Good  
This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and broad level of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source material, along with examples and illustrations, are used appropriately. “B” work is reasonable, clear, appropriate and complete.

C = Adequate/Fair  
This work demonstrates a basic understanding of course material but remains incomplete, superficial or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source material may be used inadequately or somewhat inappropriately. The work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations and may be hard to follow or vague.

D = Unsatisfactory  
This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding and fails to demonstrate the most rudimentary elements of the course assignment. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

F = Fail  
Work was not submitted or completed according to parameters (page length, topical focus, types of sources), or completely failed to express the most basic and elementary aspects of the course.
SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introductions/Approaches to Television

Week 2: Where it all Began: Radio — Networks, Legislation, Commercialization
Reading: Michele Hilmes, “NBC and the Network Idea: Defining the American System” (NBC book)
Michele Hilmes, “Radiating Culture” (blackboard)
Socolow, “Always in Friendly Competition: NBC & CBS” (NBC book)
Christopher Sterling, “NBC and the FCC Inquiry” (NBC book)

Week 3: National Narratives — Radio pt 2
Listening: My Favorite Husband, Burns & Allen, Jack Benny, Fred Allen
Reading: Susan Douglas, “The Invention of the Audience”
Margaret T. McFadden, “America’s Boyfriend Who Can’t Get a Date: Gender, Race, and the Cultural Work of the Jacky Benny Program.”
Leah Lowe, “IF the Country’s Going Gracie, So Can You”
Lynn Spigel, “Domestic Ideals and Family Amusements” (Chapter One of “Make Room for TV”)

Week 4: 1950s TV
Screening: The Goldbergs, Texaco Star Theatre, I Love Lucy, Burns & Allen
Reading: Lynn Spigel, pp. 36-181.
Thomas Schatz, “Desilu, I love Lucy and the Rise of Network TV”

Week 5: Late 1950s — Public Relations Crises
Screening: Twenty One, Marty, Queen for a Day, The Comedian
Reading:
Charles Van Doren, “All the Answers”
Douglas Gomery, “NBC Loses its Leadership in the 1950s”
William Boddy, “TV’s Public Relations Crisis of the Late 1950s William Boddy, “The Honeymoon is Over”

Week 6: 1960s
Screening: Smothers Brothers, I Dream of Jeannie, Mod Squad
Reading: Mark Alvey, “Too Many Kids and Old Ladies’: Quality Demographics and 1960s U.S. Television”
Jeffrey S. Miller, “What Closes on Saturday Night” (NBC book)
Lynn Spigel, “The Fantastic Family Sitcom”
Steven Classen, “Blacking Out: Remembering TV and the Sixties”

Week 7: 1970s

Week 8: MIDTERM

Week 9: Screening: Maude, All in the Family, Flip Wilson, Laugh-In, Three’s Company
Victoria Johnson, “You’re Gonna Make it After all”
Elena Levine “Sex with a Laugh Track”
Christin Acham, “What you See is What You Get: Soul Train and the Flip Wilson Show”

**Week 10: Public Broadcasting, Public Access & Alternative TV**
Screening: Joan Does Dynasty, Paper Tiger Retrospective, Ombibus, etc.
Reading: Eric Freedman, “Public Access/Private Confession” (NBC book)
Deirdre Boyle, “A Brief History of American Documentary Video”
Laurie Ouellette, “Oasis of the Vast Wasteland”

**Week 11: Cable TV & 1980s programming**
Screening: TBA
Reading: John McMurria “A Taste of Class” (cable book)
Megan Mullin, “The Moms ‘n’ Pops of CATV” (cable book)
Berreta E. Smith-Shomade, “Target Market Black” (Cable book)
Kompare, “TV Land: Cable and Satellite as Boutique Television”
Janet Staiger, “The Cosby Show”

**Week 12 : 1990s – 2000s Programming**
Screening: Friends, Ellen, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy
Reading: Ron Becker, “Prime-Time Television in the Gay 90s”
Amanda Lotz, “Must See TV” (NBC book)
Katherine Sender, “Dualcasting: Bravo’s Gay Programming and the Quest for Women Audiences (cable book)
Dana Polan, “Cable Watching” (Cable book)
++++Paper Proposal due at the beginning of class++++

**Week 13: Convergence and Conglomeration**
Screening: TBA
Reading: Christopher Anderson, “Creating the Twenty first Century Television Network: NBC in the Age of Media Conglomerates. (NBC book)
Kevin S. Sandler, “Life without Friends” (NBC book)
Francois Bar and J. Taplin, “Cable’s Digital Future” (cable book)

**Week 14: Reality TV**
Screening: TBA
Reading: Anna McCarthy, “Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt and Me”: Postwar Social Science and the First Wave of Reality TV”
John Corner, “Documentary Diversions”
Mark Andrejevic, “Visceral Literacy: Reality TV, Savvy Viewers and Autospies”
Ted Magder, “Television 2.0”

**Week 15: FINAL**

+++++++Paper due: xxxxx ++++++++++++
Schedule, readings, and screenings are subject to change