

POT3075: American Politics and Popular Culture (81935)

(TR: 09.25-10.40) POS2041, or consent of the Instructor

Location: 15/1209

Instructor: Paul G. Harwood

Office: 51/2404.

Office Hours: TR 10.45-11.45, 3-4.30 only.

This course explores how, and to what effect, American popular culture shapes our mediated political reality. We will explore a host of issues during the semester, among which include the role of celebrity in contemporary politics, the globalization of American politics and popular culture, and the U.S. polity as framed by situational-comedies. The learning outcome is to gauge the interrelationship between political and media systems; and the concepts of power and democracy in relation to U.S. culture, media and politics.

Required Readings

Postman, Neil 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York, Penguin. [B]

Other materials will be made available [A]

All other readings are available on-line [O]

Computer Account

For this course you must have an email account and access to blackboard.

Course Requirements/ Grade Breakdown

Attendance:

Attendance is required. In fact, **more than three absences will result in an automatic "F"** for the course.

Participation: 10%

In-class participation: 10%

Your participation in-class is an integral part of the course's learning experience and is so reflected in the grading method. In-class participation will count for 10% of your final grade.

Irrelevant, off-the-subject commentary will not count. As part of class participation, each student will occasionally lead the discussion about some of the assigned readings.

Take-Home Essay: 20%

On September 30th, 2008 the essay question will be given. It will cover material covered to that date.

The paper must be typed using 12pt. font, Times- New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The paper should be no more than five pages in length, excluding the references. Grammar and writing style will be taken seriously in the grading of this assignment. The paper should be free of misspellings and grammatical errors. Correct citation of materials is also required. **Plagiarism is unacceptable and anyone caught engaging in the practice will receive an automatic F for the assignment and may also expect to fail the course.**

This paper is due in class on October 7th, 2008.

Cultivation Analysis: Crime on TV: 10%

You are required to submit a paper that closely and critically evaluates one prime time drama. The program chosen must be approved by the instructor. The purpose of the paper is to evaluate the portrayal of crime in television programming using content analysis techniques.

Grammar and writing style will be taken seriously in the grading of this assignment.

The paper should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced.

Submit assignment as an email attachment.

Due: November 13th, 2008.

Data Analysis: 20%

During the semester you will be required to analyze data concerning American Politics and Popular Culture.

You will, to fulfill the data analysis component of the course, submit a 1-2 page report about your analysis of some of the data. Before you can analyze the data, you'll have to collect it. During mid-late September you'll be required to collect data for one night (5-9pm or 9pm-1am) in the Public Opinion Research Lab (51/2222). More details to be given.

If you've never done data collection or analysis, don't panic. No prior knowledge of statistics is required. Tutorials on SPSS and SDA will be given in this course.

1-2 page report due: December 4th, 2008.

Exam: 40%

There will be one examination, composing 40% of your total grade. The exam will consist of multiple choice questions (50%) and a short essay question (50%). The exam is graded on a scale of A, B, C, D, F in descending order of excellence.

A = 90 and above
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = 59% and below.

The exam date: During exam period

The exam, with proper preparation, should not be a daunting task. A list of five possible essay questions will be given out in-class one week prior to the exam. Of the five essay questions, three will appear on the exam, from which you answer only one.

Makeup examinations will be given only under unusual circumstances, such as in the event of serious illness or a death in the family. Documentation (doctor's note/ death certificate) will be required. Make-up exams will consist of an essay (100%). The essay question will not be given to you ahead of time.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is unacceptable and anyone caught engaging in the practice may expect to fail the course. The instructor may submit all course papers to turnitin.com, a plagiarism detection service retained by the Political Science and Public Administration Department.

Important Notices

The University of North Florida is committed to making reasonable accommodation to individuals with disabilities. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please inform the professor prior to the first assignment. Students should not expect that, if they do poorly on an assignment, to claim, at that time, a disability. This statement is to preclude that problem, and allow people with disabilities to be treated fairly and appropriately.

The instructor reserves the right to change the course syllabus at his discretion to enhance the learning process.

Course Schedule

08/28: Introduction

Introduction and course objectives

08/28-09/02: Terms of Analysis

What is politics? What is culture? What makes culture popular?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Zoonen Liesbet. 1998. "A day at the zoo: political communication, pigs and popular culture." *Media, Culture and Society* 20:183-200. [A]

08/28: Reading Day- no class

09/04: American Culture(s): I

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Merelman, Richard. 1984. *Making Something of Ourselves. On Culture and Politics in the United States*. Ch.1. "The Limits of Culture Vision in America." [A]

09/09-09/11: American Culture(s): II

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Postman, Neil 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Ch.3 Typographic America. [B]

Tuchman, Gaye. 1991. "Pluralism and Disdain" In *America at Century's End*, ed. Alan Wolfe. [A]

09/16-09/25: The Medium is Technology or Message?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Tichi, Cecelia. 1991. *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*. Ch. 2
Electronic Hearth [A]

Postman, Neil 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch.1 "The Medium Is The Metaphor;" Ch. 2
"Media as Epistemology." [B]

09/18 and 09/23: No class due to data collection in lab one night during this period

09/30-10/02: Selling America: Advertising And The American Dream

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Marchand, Roland 1985. *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940*. Ch.1 "Apostles of Modernity." [A]

Gold, Philip. 1987. *Advertising, Politics and American Culture: From Salesmanship to Therapy*. Ch.1 "The American Ad." [A]

Postman, Neil. 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch.9 "Reach Out and Elect Someone." [B]

10/07-10/09: Politics and Celebrity Culture

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Boorstin, Daniel. 1987. *The Image*. Ch.2 "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event." [A]

Gamson, Joshua. 1994. *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. "Conclusion: Celebrity, Democracy, Power and Play." [A]

10/14-10/16: Informed v. Informational Citizenry?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Schudson, Michael 1991. "National News Culture and the Rise of the Informational Citizen" In *America At Century's End*. [A]

Boorstin, Daniel 1975. *Democracy and Its Discontents: Reflections on Everyday America*. Ch.3 "TV Myopia: Too Much Too Soon." [A]

Postman, Neil. 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch. 4 "The Typographic Mind." [B]

10/21-10/23: Media Effects: Community and Civic Participation

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Putnam, Robert. 1995. "[Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America.](#)" *PS: Political Science and Politics*. [O] (From [JSTOR](#))

Postman, Neil 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch.6 "The Age of Show Business." [B]

Rheingold, H. 1992. "[A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community.](#)" [O]

Turkle, S. 1995. "[Virtuality and Its Discontents: Searching for Community in Cyberspace.](#)" [O]

10/28-10/30: Media Effects: Reality TV, get real!

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Haney, Craig, Curtis Banks and Phillip Zimbardo. 1973. "[A Study of Prisoners and Guards in a Simulated Prison.](#)" *Naval Research Reviews*. [O] (From [Zimbardo.com](#))

11/04-11/06: Media Effects: Family Matters?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

S. Robert Lichter, Linda S. Lichter and Stanley Rothman. 1994. *Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture*. Ch.4. "All in the Family." [A]

Cantor, Paul. 1999. "[The Simpsons: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family.](#)" *Political Theory* 27: 734-749. [O] ([From UNF library catalog](#))

Postman, Neil. 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch. 8. "Shuffle Off to Bethel." [B]

11/11-11/13: Media Effects: Portraying Crime

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Ruddock, Andy 2001. *Understanding Audiences: Theory and Method*. Ch.4. "Cultivation Analysis." [A]

S. Robert Lichter, Linda S. Lichter and Stanley Rothman. 1994. *Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture*. Ch.8. "Prime Time Crime." [A]

Gerbner, George. 1976. "[Living with Television: The Violence Profile.](#)" *Journal of Communication*. [O]

11/18- 11/20: Media Effects: Terrorism, War, The Establishment, and the Media

Read and be prepared to discuss:

S. Robert Lichter, Linda S. Lichter and Stanley Rothman. 1994. *Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture*. Ch11. "The Establishment." [A]

Postman, Neil 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch.7 "Now... This" [B]

11/25: Media Effects: Melting Pot Politics, Multiculturalism and Pop Culture

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Zook, Kristal. 1999. *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*. Ch.1 "Blood Is Thicker Than Mud" and Conclusion. [A]

11/27: Thanksgiving Holiday

University Closed

12/02-12/04: Media Effects: Sex, Lies and Videotape--Politics, Gender and Pop Culture

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Douglas, Susan 1994. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. "Introduction" & "Epilogue." [A]

Postman, Neil. 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Ch. 11. "The Huxleyan Warning."

Exam Period

Written Exam