

Dear students,

Let me officially welcome you to the class (SPCM 341: Evaluating Contemporary Television). By now, most of you have looked at the syllabus, which is available for download on Canvas. If you haven't, please do so.

If you have, you will have seen that this semester I have opted to focus on the contemporary phenomenon of Netflix. Once exclusively a DVD-by-mail company, competing against the likes of now-defunct video rental companies like Blockbuster, this online streaming service has transformed itself — and the entertainment industry — significantly since its 1997 founding (by Chairman and CEO Reed Hastings). Recently, Netflix has risen to greater prominence thanks to its critically acclaimed original TV series, including *House of Cards*, *Master of None*, and *Orange is the New Black*. These and other programs will be our “case studies” this semester.

No doubt, some of you might be disappointed to see that I am not doing what I've done in the past (i.e., teaching a more traditional, straightforward “Introduction to TV Studies”), and which I will continue to do in the future. However, the online setting is conducive to alternative approaches, and — given the concentrated nature of an eight-week summer semester — it is incredibly difficult to squeeze in the kinds of course material that I would typically bring to bear on the subject when I teach SPCM 341 in actual CSU classrooms (i.e., face-to-face) over a sixteen-week semester.

Conversely, some of you might be excited to venture into something new and admittedly unusual, and indeed this summer course (which I'm labelling “NETFLIX STUDIES: TV in the Twenty-First Century”) is not like many other courses taught at CSU or, for that matter, other U.S. universities. Major industrial changes in the age of Netflix are occurring swiftly, seemingly on a day-to-day basis; one need only subscribe to the *Hollywood Reporter* to see just how quickly the company has “disrupted” the global mediascape and altered consumers' perception of content distribution. We'll be tracking some of those changes and disruptions this semester, even as they continue to take place.

Regardless of your interest in Netflix, my goal this semester is to enhance your understanding of the current landscape of media production and consumption and to help you hone your critical-analytical skills, making you a more savvy audience member attuned to the underlying “messages” or meanings of cultural texts, be they reality TV series like *Nailed It!* and *Queer Eye* or lauded dramas like *Narcos* and *Mindhunter*.

I will be posting the first audiovisual “mini-lecture” late this evening. Please make sure that you've listened to (and looked at) that material before writing your first reading response. That initial assignment requires you to read the first chapter of Amanda Lotz's *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. Entitled “Understanding Television at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era,” that chapter is the longest piece of writing that you'll be asked to read this semester. But it is also the most important: a foundational text that will arm you with

information for the days and weeks to come. Read it completely, and be prepared to respond to some questions that I'll be posting this evening as well.

All of your reading responses this semester will be posted on Canvas. Additionally, you will be asked to post blogs related to particular topics/talking points this summer, and the place to do that is: www.NetflixStudies.com. I recently sent invitations to all students, giving each of you an "author" role that will allow you to post your own blogs. Your first blog posting will be due Thursday. Look (and listen) for details soon.

Please contact me if you have any questions. Remember: As an online course, SPCM 341 will sink or fly depending on your willingness to maintain a strong work ethic, completing readings/screenings and writing online responses frequently. I hope to make it a fun, interesting, and edifying experience for you.

Best,
Scott

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