

SPCM 341 401 – Evaluating Contemporary Television

Netflix Studies: TV in the Twenty-First Century



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May 14 - July 8, 2018 - ONLINE

General Course Description

This course introduces students to the field of television studies, providing the critical tools with which to analyze historically significant texts as well as contemporary productions from a variety of different perspectives.

Specific Course Description

Despite its ubiquity and influential power as a cultural form, television has often been overlooked and even dismissed as little more than a diversion in our everyday lives. As a result, the experience of watching TV has frequently been compared to other “leisure activities” in which participants — far from being mentally engaged — can let their minds rest (or wander) and momentarily “escape” the real world. However, it is *because* of its ubiquitous presence in our lives that television demands scrutiny, particularly with regard to the means by which it generates both consensus and debate about matters of great political and social importance. In this course, we will take television seriously as a popular persuasive force, one that is capable of narrative complexity and thematic profundity as well as artistic preeminence in this age of digital media, mobile viewing, online file sharing, and instant Internet access to classic programs of yesteryear.

We are in the midst of what some commentators call a new “Golden Age of Television,” initiated nearly two decades ago by HBO programs like *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* and, more recently, AMC hits like *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*. Also referred to as “Peak TV,” the current cultural moment is marked by an abundance of viewing options and offerings, much of which is now available through various streaming services (as opposed to traditional broadcast channels). At the heart of Peak TV is a host of critically lauded series that will receive special attention in this class, including *House of Cards*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Master of None*, *Mindhunter*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *BoJack Horseman*, *Dear White People*, *Jessica Jones*, and *Stranger Things*. These shows share something in common: they are all examples of Netflix original programming, available for online consumption via the world’s most popular on-demand, subscription-based media provider/distributor. In addition to watching episodes from these and other Netflix programs, we will employ four main approaches or methodologies to better understand the cultural significance and ideological role played by this misunderstood medium. Those four approaches — industrial/institutional analysis, formal/textual analysis, audience/reception studies and critical/cultural studies — together comprise the theoretical framework that we will use throughout the semester.

Topics include, but are not limited to: media regulation, production practices, labor issues, product placement, audience measurement, the long-tail strategy, the experience of binge-watching, network branding, post-network industrial developments, genre categorization, televisual style, acting/performance, reality TV, animation, the politics of representation, transmedia storytelling, fandom, and Netflix-related controversies.

The Netflix Effect

Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century

Edited by Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith-Rowsey



Required TEXT

[available for purchase at the CSU bookstore and through online booksellers]

Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith-Rowsey, eds., *The Netflix Effect* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[make sure that you acquire the above textbook prior to the third day of class]

Supplemental Purchase

Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski, eds., *The Age of Netflix* (McFarland, 2017). [optional/not required]

CONTENT NOTE:

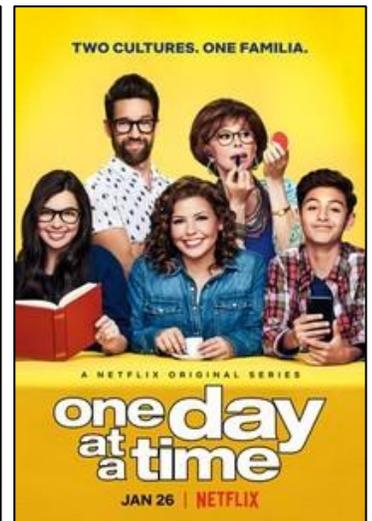
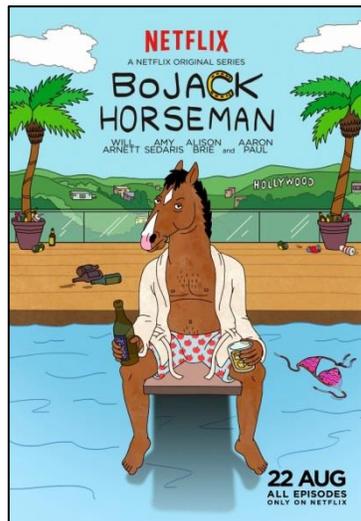
Please bear in mind that some of the TV programs that we will watch this semester foreground themes and contain images that you might find offensive. Viewer discretion advised.

Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access

The Age of NETFLIX

Edited by CORY BARKER and MYC WIATROWSKI

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to “binge-watch” several episodes from selected Netflix programs, in addition to a few television series of your own choosing. Your viewing journals for each of those programs — *House of Cards*, *BoJack Horseman*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *One Day at a Time* (plus three more TV shows that you have selected as case studies) — will be emailed to the professor at the beginning of each week. These journals should detail your moment-to-moment comprehension of formal, narrative, and thematic elements, and should conclude with a brief assessment of that show’s overall cultural significance. **** A NETFLIX SUBSCRIPTION IS REQUIRED FOR THIS COURSE ****



In addition to teaching students how to analyze televisual texts through the use of critical terminology specific to the medium, one of my aims this semester is to introduce you to important contemporary TV programs that you have NOT already viewed outside of class. Your choice of programs will occasionally determine the specific questions that you will be asked to answer as part of your reading responses and blog entries.

On the first day of class, you will be given instructions on how to post blogs on the course website: www.NetflixStudies.com. Because your posts will be available for public viewing, it is important that you be respectful of others’ opinions and that you adopt a mode of intelligent civility that reflects positively on the university, the course, the professor, and your peers.

ASSIGNMENTS, GRADE PERCENTAGES, and RESPONSIBILITIES

<p>CLASS PARTICIPATION, WEEKLY VIEWING NOTES, and COMPLETION OF READINGS 25%</p>	<p>Students are required to take an active role as participants in this class. It is imperative that you complete the assigned readings and screenings and prepare questions for the online discussions. Failing to respond to the prompts will result in a low final grade. Also, you are required to respond to your peers' online postings (on Canvas and on NetflixStudies.com), offering productive feedback throughout the semester.</p>
<p>TV "THINK PIECES" (BLOGS) and CANVAS READING RESPONSES 50%</p>	<p>Throughout the semester, students will write and submit online responses and blogs detailing their thoughts about the required screenings and readings. In the audio portion of the online PowerPoint lectures, you will receive information about each journal entry, asking you specific questions related to the weekly topics covered in class. The purpose of these online "think pieces" is to encourage students to apply theories and concepts learned throughout the semester in creative and sophisticated ways. Detailed observations should be made about the episodes and the required readings, and these should be posted before the deadlines. Additional details forthcoming.</p>
<p>MIDTERM ESSAY (6 pages) 20%</p>	<p>In addition to the short online responses that you will complete throughout the semester, you are to write a 6-page paper that delves into the formal and stylistic elements of one Netflix program (comparing that show's audiovisual properties to other Netflix programs). After consulting with me about your topic, you must research your chosen TV series and then write a textual analysis that demonstrates how visual elements related to cinematography and mise-en-scene as well as the show's sound design all function to communicate underlying themes.</p>
<p>TV PITCH [NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES] (1 page) 5%</p>	<p>Your final project (due at the end of the semester) is a one-page proposal for an original series that you would hypothetically pitch to TV executives. This exercise is designed to be a creative means for you to demonstrate your understanding of Netflix programming as well as your originality with regards to a TV show's basic premise, characters, and narrative trajectory.</p>

general notes about this course

Papers: All papers should be typed, double-spaced, with 1" margins and in 10-12 pt. font (include page numbers). Be sure to follow the instructions for the assignments carefully, answering each of the required questions.

Plagiarism: "Plagiarism" means turning in written work as your own that is not your own. **Do not quote or paraphrase a text without including appropriate citations.** When you take the work of another individual without indicating that the ideas expressed are not your own, you are **stealing**. Academic dishonesty is **grounds for suspension**.

It is imperative that you take responsibility for your own learning progress over the semester. This entails not only keeping up with the readings, but also managing learning activities without constant monitoring or oversight from the instructor. Students who are inspired to learn about television (and media studies in general) will succeed.

✓	DATE	ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS, READINGS, and REQUIRED VIEWINGS
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 14 (Monday)	[1] post a brief introduction about yourself on CANVAS (including questionnaire) [2] read Amanda Lotz, "Understanding Television... of the Post-Network Era" (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 15 (Tuesday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #1 (CANVAS) [2] write and post READING RESPONSE #1 before 10:00 p.m. (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 16 (Wednesday)	[1] read Cameron Lindsey, "Questioning Netflix's Revolutionary Impact" (pp. 173-184) [2] listen to <i>Business Wars</i> podcast (episode 1: "Netflix vs. Blockbuster – Sudden Death")
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 17 (Thursday)	[1] read Gerald Sim, "Individual Disruptors and Economic Gamechangers" (pp. 185-201) [2] write and post BLOG #1 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 18 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #2 (CANVAS) [2] read Sarah Arnold, "Netflix and Myth of Choice/Participation/Autonomy" (pp. 49-62)
WEEKEND WORK binge-watch <i>House of Cards</i> , Season One (episodes 1 – 6) (be sure to take viewing notes while watching these six episodes)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 21 (Monday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-6 of <i>House of Cards</i> (email) [2] read Neta Alexander, "Catered to Your Future Self" (p. 81-97)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 22 (Tuesday)	[1] watch "Your Netflix is Special" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwHzqYNOWTA) [2] write and post READING RESPONSE #2 before 10:00 p.m. (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 23 (Wednesday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #3 (CANVAS) [2] read Casey McCormick, "Forward Is the Battle Cry" (pp. 101-116)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 24 (Thursday)	[1] read Zach Snider, "The Cognitive Psychological Effects of Binge-Watching" (pp. 117-128) [2] write and post BLOG #2 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 25 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #4 (CANVAS) [2] read Kevin McDonald, "From Online Video Store to Internet TV Network" (pp. 203-218)
WEEKEND WORK watch first season of ONE of the following Netflix programs (and take viewing notes): [a] <i>13 Reasons Why</i> , [b] <i>Bloodline</i> , [c] <i>Mindhunter</i> , [d] <i>Narcos</i> , or [e] <i>Ozark</i>		
	May 28 (Monday)	University Holiday (NO CLASS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 29 (Tuesday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-6 of your chosen show (email) [2] read Daniel Smith-Rowsey, "Imaginative Indices and Deceptive Domains" (pp. 63-79)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 30 (Wednesday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #5 (CANVAS) [2] write and post READING RESPONSE #3 before 10:00 p.m. (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 31 (Thursday)	[1] watch the first/pilot episodes of <i>Godless</i> , <i>Lost in Space</i> , and <i>Santa Clarita Diet</i> [2] write and post BLOG #3 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)

<input type="checkbox"/>	June 1 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #6 (CANVAS) [2] read Maira Bianchini, “Netflix and Innovation in <i>Arrested Development...</i> ” (CANVAS)
WEEKEND WORK binge-watch One Day at a Time , Season One (episodes 1 – 6) (be sure to take viewing notes while watching these episodes)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 4 (Monday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-6 of One Day at a Time (email) [2] write and post BLOG #4 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 5 (Tuesday)	[1] watch “The One...the Scenes” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L3gFYWU3hs) [2] read Manuel Betancourt, “Make 'Em Laugh Track” (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 6 (Wednesday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #7 (CANVAS) [2] write and post BLOG #5 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 7 (Thursday)	[1] read Victoria O’Donnell, “Television Style” (CANVAS) [2] watch the first/pilot episodes of Altered Carbon and A Series of Unfortunate Events
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 8 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #8 (CANVAS) [2] watch the first/pilot episodes of The Get Down and Sense8
WEEKEND WORK MIDTERM PAPER DUE [Visual Style and Sound Design] Submit your paper before 5:00 p.m. Sunday (CANVAS)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 11 (Monday)	[1] binge-watch BoJack Horseman , Season One (episodes 1-6) [2] read Emily Nussbaum, “The Bleakness and Joy of <i>BoJack Horseman</i> ” (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 12 (Tuesday)	[1] watch first/pilot episode of Flaked + first 2 episodes of Arrested Development Season 4 [2] read Jason Mittell, “Characters” (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 13 (Wednesday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #9 (CANVAS) [2] write and post READING RESPONSE #4 before 10:00 p.m. (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 14 (Thursday)	[1] watch first/pilot episodes of F is For Family and Big Mouth [2] read Holly Randell-Moon, “The Man from Isis: Archer and... Adult Cartoons” (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 15 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #10 (CANVAS) [2] write and post BLOG #6 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
WEEKEND WORK binge-watch episodes 1-4 of ONE of the following Netflix documentary series: [a] Evil Genius , [b] Flint Town , [c] The Keepers , [d] Last Chance U , or [e] Making a Murderer		
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 18 (Monday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-4 of your chosen documentary series (email) [2] read Sudeep Sharma, “Netflix and the Documentary Boom” (pp. 143-154)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 19 (Tuesday)	[1] watch ONE of the following: 13th (2016), Joshua (2017), or Icarus (2017)

<input type="checkbox"/>	June 20 (Wednesday)	[1] write and post BLOG #7 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com) [2] watch <i>The Square</i> (Jehane Noujaim, 2013) [extra credit opportunity]
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 21 (Thursday)	[1] watch the first/pilot episodes of <i>Nailed It</i> and <i>Queer Eye</i> [2] read Scott Roxborough, "Netflix/Amazon Driving a Reality TV Renaissance" (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 22 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #11 (CANVAS) [2] write and post BLOG #8 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
WEEKEND WORK binge-watch <i>Orange is the New Black</i> , Season One (episodes 1 – 6) (be sure to take viewing notes while watching these six episodes)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 25 (Monday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-6 of <i>Orange is the New Black</i> (email) [2] read Maria San Filippo, "Doing Time: Queer Temporalities" (Canvas)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 26 (Tuesday)	[1] read Brittany Farr, "Seeing Blackness in Prison" (pp. 155-170) [2] write and post READING RESPONSE #5 before 10:00 p.m. (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 27 (Wednesday)	[1] watch first/pilot episodes of <i>Dear White People</i> and <i>On My Block</i> [2] listen to KCRW's <i>The Business</i> podcast (May 14, 2018 episode: Justin Simien interview)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 28 (Thursday)	[1] watch first/pilot episodes of <i>Luke Cage</i> and <i>Jessica Jones</i> [2] read Nico Lang, "Luke Cage and the Racial Empathy Gap" (CANVAS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 29 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #12 (CANVAS) [2] write and post BLOG #9 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
WEEKEND WORK binge-watch episodes 1-4 of ONE of the following Netflix shows: [a] <i>The End of the F***ing World</i> , [b] <i>Daredevil</i> , [c] <i>Iron Fist</i> , or [d] <i>Punisher</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	July 2 (Monday)	[1] submit viewing notes for episodes 1-4 of your chosen show (email) [2] watch first episode of <i>Stranger Things</i> + <i>Black Mirror</i> "USS Callister" (season 4, ep. 1)
<input type="checkbox"/>	July 3 (Tuesday)	[1] write and post BLOG #10 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com) [2] read CarrieLynn Reinhard, "AKA Marvel Does Darkness" (CANVAS)
	July 4 (Wednesday)	University Holiday (NO CLASS)
<input type="checkbox"/>	July 5 (Thursday)	[1] watch <i>Dave Chappelle The Bird Revelation and Equanimity</i> [2] write and post BLOG #11 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)
<input type="checkbox"/>	July 6 (Friday)	[1] listen to the audio of PowerPoint mini-lecture #13 (CANVAS) [2] write and post BLOG #12 before 5:00 p.m. (www.Netflixstudies.com)

TV Pitch DUE Saturday, July 7, before 5:00 p.m. (CANVAS)

ENJOY THE REST OF THE SUMMER!