Entertainment and Politics
Communication 418/618
Spring 2008

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Course Description:
For years politics and entertainment have had a flirtatious and tumultuous relationship: The political comedy of the Smothers Brothers, to the realistic presidential drama of The West Wing, to presidential candidate appearances on late-night comedy programs. In this course, we will look at some examples of this relationship throughout history, with a specific focus on the latest trends in "poli-tainment" from 1992 to the present. We will discuss this growing phenomenon, examine its causes and effects, and critically examine the normative implications for citizenship and the healthy functioning of a democracy.

Required course material:

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION
Deadlines are fixed. To help you schedule your work throughout the semester, dates for exams are included in this syllabus. If you have a conflict with an exam date posted in this syllabus, contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange for a make-up exam. No extensions will be granted unless in the case of medical or family emergency.

Readings and Participation. For this class to be a success, students must read before attending class. This doesn’t mean skim – this means read. The portion of the grade (15%) reserved for “attendance and participation” is based on your performance in BOTH of those categories: attendance AND participation in class discussions. In the event that students are not fulfilling this obligation, I reserve the right to assign pop quizzes on the class readings.

Academic Honesty. The University of Delaware requires all acts or attempted acts of academic dishonesty be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) plagiarism, cheating, or sabotaging another student’s work. Any student who participates in such activities will be expelled from this course and receive a grade of “F.” For more information, please consult the Student Guide to University Policies.

Grading
Letter grades are calculated as follows:
93% = A  
90% = A-  
87% = B+  
83% = B  
80% = B-  
77% = C+  
73% = C  
70% = C-  
67% = D+  
63% = D  
60% = D-  
59% or less = F

Assignment Details:

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Total = 100%  
Total = 100%

Assignments - COMM 418

Exams  
Dates Oct 9 AND Nov 20
There are two closed-book exams that will be administered in class and will include multiple choice, fill in the blank, and short answer essay questions.

Final Project  
Total = 30% of final grade. Due last 2 weeks of class
Students will work in groups to complete a final project on the topic of their choice. Students choose a genre or form of politically relevant entertainment programming and complete a literature review on the history, evolution, and potential impact of said programming. The project must have a point of view regarding the implications of the chosen programming. Is it harmful? Beneficial? Both? Might it depend on who is watching? Results will be written up in a 10-15 page paper (15% of final grade) and will be presented to class during the last two weeks of the semester (15%). Students are encouraged to consider unique and creative ways to engage the audience (our class) in the content of the presentation.
Assignments - COMM 618

Exams

Dates Oct 9 AND Nov 20

There are two closed-book exams that will be administered in class and will include multiple choice, fill in the blank, and short answer essay questions.

Recent Research Article Summary (15%) Due last day of class

Students enrolled in 618 will choose a genre or form of politically relevant entertainment programming and complete a literature review on the history, evolution, and potential impact of said programming. The project must have a point of view regarding the implications of the chosen programming. Is it harmful? Beneficial? Both? Might it depend on who is watching?

Class Lecture on Topic of Choice (15%) Due Date TBA

Each student enrolled in 618 will choose one entire class period during which he/she will teach the class. This includes reviewing the readings for the given class period, engaging students in discussion, illustrating points in the readings with real life examples – including audio visual aids.

Course Topics
(in the order in which they will be presented)

• The BIG Picture
  o WebCT: W. Lance Bennett, Chapter one of News: The Politics of Illusion (forthcoming edition)
  o WebCT: Murray Edelman, Constructing the Political Spectacle Chapter 1
  o WebCT: Murray Edelman, Constructing the Political Spectacle Chapter 7
  o Via Email: Michael Delli Carpini and Bruce Williams: Let us Infotain You.
  o Jones, Jeffrey (in Entertaining Politics) Chapter 1

EXAM 1: in class Oct 9
[Note: to help us efficiently cover a large body of literature, we’re going to work in groups to cover a handful of the following studies. Each group will be responsible for providing a study summary to the class, as well as a brief account of the study’s methods (experiment, survey, or content analysis), results, and conclusions. As a class we will critically dissect each study’s impact and issues of validity.]

October 14th:
Soft News: Straddling the line between news and entertainment

Group #1

Group #2

October 16th:
The West Wing

Group #3

Group #4

October 23rd:
Medical and Crime Dramas

Group #5

Group #6

Group #7
• **Televised Political Humor: Looking Back**
  - *Smothered*: video about the Smothers Brothers

• **The Daily Show: What is it?**

• **Late-night comedy: Content**
  - Niven, Lichter, and Amundson (in *Laughing Matters*) *Our First Cartoon President: Bill Clinton and the Politics of Late-night comedy*, p. 151 – 170.
  - Jones, Jeffrey (in *Entertaining Politics*) Chapter 4

• **Political Satire**
  - Caufield, R. P. (in *Laughing Matters*) *The Influence of “Infoenterpropagation:” Exploring the Power of Political Satire as a Distinct Form of Political Humor*.
  - Jones, Jeffrey (in *Entertaining Politics*) Chapters 5 and 6

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**EXAM 2: in class November 20th**

• **The Daily Show: Helpful or harmful to democracy?**


• **Current debate**: is the intersection of entertainment and politics ultimately healthy or dysfunctional?


  - Jones, Jeffrey (in *Entertaining Politics*) Chapter 9

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**Final Presentations: In class last 2 weeks of semester**