Overview: Not surprisingly, most mainstream research regarding the media’s impact on political attitudes, opinions, knowledge and behaviors focuses on news and public affairs genres, largely ignoring the vast majority of media content labeled “entertainment.” Spurred in part by technological, economic, cultural and political changes that have increasingly blurred the line between news and entertainment, a small but growing body of empirical research is exploring the political influence of popular culture. In this course we will critically review this literature, focusing on issues of theory, methods, findings and implications. Of particular emphasis will be assessing whether the theory and methods traditionally used to study the impact of news and public affairs media can be applied to the study of entertainment, or if new theories and methods are needed. NOTE: While we will regularly discuss the intersection of entertainment and politics from an “institutional” and a “cultural” perspective (explicitly in the first third of the course and more indirectly throughout the remainder of the course), the primary emphasis is on the “influence” of entertainment on political attitudes, opinions, knowledge and behaviors.

Requirements: The course is organized as a seminar, which means all students are expected to attend all classes, to have read and thought about all readings prior to the class for which they are assigned, and to participate actively and productively in class discussion. To facilitate discussion all students will submit (to me as well as their fellow students) ONE question to be discussed in each class no later than 12 NOON the day of that class. In addition, all students will be required to complete four interrelated writing assignments: (1) a five page theory-based paper that poses an original research question related to some aspect of the potential impact of entertainment media on political attitudes, opinions, knowledge and/or behaviors; (2) a ten page review paper that summarizes the existing literature relevant to your research question, critically assesses this literature, and argues why more research is needed; (3) a ten page research design paper that presents and explicates one or more theory-based hypotheses related to your original research question and describes the data and methods to be used in testing these hypotheses; and (4) a 25 to 30 page final paper that combines revised versions of the first three papers into a single, coherent manuscript. Students will also have the option of actually conducting the proposed research and including the findings in their final paper, though this is not required.
While evaluating student performance is a subjective process, final grades will be based on roughly the following formula:

- Class Participation: 20%
- Discussion Questions: 10%
- Research Question Paper: 15%
- Literature Review Paper: 15%
- Research Design Paper: 15%
- Final Cumulative Manuscript: 25%

READINGS: All class readings will be available through Blackboard or will be placed on reserve in the ASC Library.

COURSE CALENDAR

January 10: Introductory Comments

January 17: Theoretical Underpinnings to the Study of Entertainment and Politics: Irrelevance, Distraction or Learning?

January 24: Theoretical Underpinnings to the Study of Entertainment and Politics: Social Control or Political Resistance?


January 31: Theoretical Underpinnings to the Study of Entertainment and Politics: The Semi-Autonomous Citizen?


February 7: Historical and Contextual Underpinnings to the Study of Entertainment and Politics: The Breakdown of the News-Entertainment Distinction?


**February 14: The Political (and Politically Relevant) Content of Entertainment Media**


**February 21: Integrating Entertainment into the Mainstream Media Effects Literature**

• Jennings Bryant and Dorina Miron. 2002. “Entertainment as Media Effect,” in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (editors), *Media
February 28: “Entertainment” versus “News:” Comparative Effects


March 7: Spring Break – No Class
March 14:  Soft News & Talk Shows


March 21:  Satire and Comedy

March 28: Dramas and Docudramas (Part One)


April 4: Dramas and Docudramas (Part Two)

April 11: New Media and New Genres


April 18: Concluding Remarks and Discussion: Developing a Research Agenda for the Study of Entertainment and Politics.