Politics Through Popular Culture  
COMM 495/595 :: Fall 2009

Professor: Dr. Jeffrey Jones
Office: BAL 3012
Office Phone: 683-6267
E-mail: jpjones@odu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 3-4:40, and by appointment (via e-mail)
Class: T/TH 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m., BAL 2070
Web site: http://www.odu.edu/al/jpjones

Course Overview:  
The understanding of what constitutes politics and political life typically occurs through  
two means—the study of political institutions and elites by political scientists, or the  
examination of these actors by and through the news media. This class takes an alternative  
approach, seeking instead to examine how people make sense of politics in their daily lives  
through popular media. By looking at television comedies and dramas, representations  
and narratives in cinema, popular song, and even Internet parody, we turn our attention to  
the ways in which politics is engaged through popular cultural texts. We examine the ways  
in which such venues offer up different narratives of politics, and provide different means  
of making sense of and critiquing politics and power than is done by news media. Students  
should leave this course with an understanding of how and why the increasingly frequent  
interactions between entertainment media and politics are not, as critics maintain, a  
negative development for American democracy, but rather, offers the potential for an array  
of engagements with political life unavailable through other forms of mediated politics.

Requirements:
Mid-Term and Final Exam (30% each): All exams are essay, so please bring a blue exam booklet. Each will cover the readings and lecture/discussions for each respective section of the course. Hence, the final exam is not comprehensive.

Film Paper (25%): You will select from one of five thematic groups from which to write a 10-page paper, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, one inch margins, pages numbered with title! You will write a critical analysis based on your viewing of two films (from a list provided or in consultation with the instructor) within your subject area. Those subject areas include The Presidency and Congress; National Security and Intelligence; Military and War; Media; Issues and Lobbyists. The due dates for the paper (depending on what group you select) vary, so please consult the schedule below. After completing your paper, you and your peers will present your findings/arguments before the entire class. The presentation will count toward your participation grade (below). More information will be provided at a later date.
In-class Participation (15%): The construction of a good class is greatly dependent on your coming to class prepared. Preparation means more than simply having read the material. It means that you have reviewed the material, considered what it means, perhaps have even written some notes or important points, and come to class ready to engage both your professor and your peers. Our working through the class texts, however, will be based on more than simply how you feel about them or your opinion about the issue under scrutiny. You should offer precise, articulate, informed and thoughtful comments. Your participation grade will be based on how well you have achieved this goal, not simply how much you talk in class. Failure to talk at all, of course, has its obvious consequences. Your participation grade is 10% of the overall score, and is measured by 1) class attendance, 2) verbal comments that reference the reading, 3) engagement with your professor’s and fellow students’ arguments, and 4) participation in your group’s film discussion (see above).

Class Policies
Contacting the Professor:
The best way to reach me is via e-mail (rather than office phone). While the medium encourages instantaneous communication, recognize that it may take at least 48-hours before I can respond to all e-mails. Therefore, please be patient if a response to your inquiries is not at the pace you would prefer. Also, please put “COMM 495” in the subject line of your e-mail messages to me.

Grades:
The following grade scale applies to all written work: A = 95; A- = 92; A-/B+ = 90; B+ = 88; B = 85; B- = 82; B-/C+ = 80; etc... If you would like to discuss how to improve your grades, please come see me during office hours (I don't discuss graded work in the hallway or after class). There is a 24-hour rule on the return of graded work. That is, 24-hours must pass before you are allowed to communicate with the professor about your grade. That means no verbal discussions or flaming e-mails. After 24-hours, I will be happy to talk to you about your grade.

Attendance and Missed Tests:
Roll is taken and used in the calculation of your participation grade. Excused absences include only the following:
- Illness that requires medical treatment (must provided written documentation of doctor or health clinic visit)
- Death in immediate family (must provide obituary)
- Official college sponsored activity (must provide note from college personnel)

Paper Submission and Late Papers:
Papers are due at the beginning of class. Papers submitted after that time will be deducted one letter grade per calendar day (note: calendar day, not class day). Late papers should be can either be given to me directly. If you do not give the paper to me directly, please
have the department **secretary put a time/date stamp** on the paper and initial it. Also, I do **not accept papers via E-mail**. You are responsible for printing your work yourself.

**E-mail account activation**
As a participant in this class, you are required to have an active ODU e-mail account. This is important for class communication, as well as required for you to access Blackboard and to fill out the teaching evaluations at the end of the semester.

**Course Evaluations**
As a participant in this class, you are **required** to fill out a student evaluation of teaching performance on-line at the end of the semester. This also helps me in modifying the class in the future to make it better. **Beware of the ranking system**: remember that all of the questions are put in the affirmative. Therefore, 5 ("strongly agree") is best, while 1 ("strongly disagree") is worst.

**Blackboard Readings**
A substantial amount of reading is posted in .pdf files (readable with Adobe Acrobat) in Blackboard.

**Student Progress and Withdrawing from the Class**
The last day to drop this class is **Tuesday, November 10**. Your first exam will be returned prior to this date, so please make your decision of continuance accordingly.

**Students with Disabilities**
Reasonable accommodations are provided for students with disabilities. Students should present me with the appropriate documentation from the Office of Disability Services and contact me as soon as possible to discuss the appropriate accommodations.

**Disruptive Behavior**
The Office of Student Judicial Affairs has published a guide on College Classroom Conduct. In short, you should refrain from:

- arriving late
- conversing during a lecture
- answering a cell phone (or allowing it to ring by not turning it off)
- packing to leave before class is finished
- eating in class
- sleeping
- studying unrelated materials in class
- text messaging on your phone
- Using a laptop to IM

Therefore, please turn off cell phones (including the buzz mode), and no text messaging. And again, please note: **The usage of laptop computers, cell phones, personal assistants, or Blackberries are prohibited.**
**Writing Basics**

Remember to include or address the following items. Failure to address these will result in grade deductions.

1. Page numbers
2. Title of your work (give it some name that invites the reader to be interested, something beyond the name of the assignment)
3. Spell Check
4. Grammatical Errors

**Editing**

It is highly recommended that you ask someone to **edit your writing** prior to submission. Every article, book, news story, etc., that you see in print is the product of several sets of eyes. Students should develop the habit of having someone mark their papers for grammatical errors or awkward syntax and phrasing. Learn to give and take criticism productively.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is one example of violating copyright law. Furthermore, there are no acceptable instances in written language of using someone else’s words without quotation marks. If you plagiarize, you will receive a hearing through the judicial affairs division of the Office of Student Services. More likely than not, you will be suspended or expelled in addition to receiving the grade of F. It is my belief that at least half of student plagiarism cases occur because students **do not know what it is** or how to avoid it. Please see the information sheet available on the library’s webpage (http://www.lib.odu.edu/libassist/tutorials/Plagiarism/index.htm), and take it upon yourself to learn the proper means of citing someone else’s words and ideas.

**Required Readings:**


Schedule and Readings

Legend:
- Homer = Homer Simpson Goes to Washington (Foy)
- EP = Entertaining Politics (Jones)
- ETC = Entertaining the Citizen (van Zoonen)
- Satire TV (Gray, Jones, and Thompson)

T Sept. 1: Class Introduction

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS
TH Sept. 3: A Cultural Approach to Mediated Citizenship
Blackboard Reading: Jones, “A Cultural Approach to Mediated Citizenship”

T Sept. 8: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge
Reading: ETC, Ch. 1

TH Sept. 10: Rethinking Television’s Relationship to Civic Engagement
Blackboard Reading: EP, Chapter 2

T Sept. 15: Comedy, Humor, Satire, and Parody
Reading: Satire TV, Chapter 1

COMEDIC AND SATIRIC TELEVISION PROGRAMMING
TH Sept. 17: The Daily Show with Jon Stewart
Reading: Satire TV, Chapter 4

T Sept. 22: The Colbert Report
Blackboard Reading: EP, Chapter 9

TH Sept. 24: Satirizing Presidents
Reading: Satire TV, Chapter 2

T Sept. 29: The Social Satire of South Park
Reading: Satire TV, Chapter 10

TH Oct. 1: Attacking Power through Fake Newsmagazines
Blackboard Reading: EP, Chapter 7

T Oct. 6: Race and Politics
Reading: Satire TV, Chs. 11 & 12
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TH Oct. 8</td>
<td>Mid-Term Exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Oct. 13</td>
<td>No Class; Fall Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>THE INTERNET AND FAN CULTURES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Oct. 15</td>
<td>On-line Mash-ups</td>
<td>Satire TV, Ch. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Oct. 20</td>
<td>Audiences and Fan Democracy</td>
<td>ETC, Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Oct. 22</td>
<td>Politicians as Celebrities</td>
<td>ETC, Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FILM AND POLITICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Oct. 27</td>
<td>Populism</td>
<td>ETC, Ch. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Oct. 29</td>
<td>The Presidency and Congress</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Group 1 Papers Due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Nov. 3</td>
<td>National Security and Intelligence</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Group 2 Papers Due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Nov. 5</td>
<td>Military and War</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Group 3 Papers Due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Nov. 10</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Group 4 Papers Due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Nov. 12</td>
<td>Issues and Lobbyists</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Group 5 Papers Due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>MUSIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Nov. 17</td>
<td>Rock and Pop Music</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH Nov. 19</td>
<td>Folk and Country Music</td>
<td>Homer, Ch. 13; Blackboard Reading, TBA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T Nov. 24: Rap and Hip-Hop  
Reading: TBA

TH Nov. 26: ****No Class; Thanksgiving****

**DRAMATIC TELEVISION PROGRAMMING**

**T Dec. 1:** Social Institutions in TV and Film  
Web Reading: [http://flowtv.org/?p=820](http://flowtv.org/?p=820)

**TH Dec. 3:** The Presidency in *The West Wing*  
Reading: Homer, Ch. 5

**T Dec. 8:** CIA and Torture in *24*  
Reading: Homer, Ch. 10

**TH Dec. 10:** Law and Order Programming  
Reading: Rapping, *Law and Justice as Seen on TV*, reading TBA

**TH Dec. 17:** Final Exam, 12:30 a.m.