

**CMST 3107–Rhetoric of Contemporary Media**  
Fall 2014

**Instructor:** Dr. Joni M. Butcher

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**Office Hours:** MWF 8:30-9:30 and 12:00-1:00; or by appointment

**Required Text:** Foss, Sonja F. Rhetorical Criticism. Fourth edition. Waveland, 2009.

**Focus:** This course will focus on the medium of television—specifically, television situation comedies. More specifically, we will evaluate and analyze television sitcoms theme songs from the 1960s to the present (with a brief exploration of the 1950s). We will use various methods of rhetorical criticism to help us understand how theme songs deliver powerful, compacted rhetorical statements concerning such cultural aspects as family, race relations, the anti-war movement, women’s liberation, and social and class distinction.

**Quote:** “There is no sense talking about what TV is unless we also look at what TV *was*, where it came from – and where, in another sense, *we’re* coming from.” (David Bianculli, *Teleliteracy: Taking Television Seriously*)

**Content:** The course will consist of class lecture and discussion as well as viewing clips or full-length episodes from the various shows (themes) to be analyzed. We will examine vocal, visual, and musical texts as well as the historical contexts (including the political, social, and economic environments) surrounding the shows and themes. This course is interested in how rhetorical discourse changes as our culture evolves and our value systems change. Situation comedies have been an important part of our television history and continue to exist today. These sitcoms have developed and changed as our culture has changed. As Joanne Morreale explains in her book *Critiquing the Sitcom*, sitcoms, perhaps more than any other fictional television genre, have provided fodder for major cultural controversies and conversations. Sitcoms both incorporate and contain change; they both address and prevent political action, and they may be both conservative and progressive. By viewing sitcoms from an historical perspective, we are better able to witness the terrain upon which subject positions are offered, negotiated, and consented to (or not) (xii). An integral part of the sitcom is the sitcom’s opening theme. Theme songs are often ignored or taken for granted, but they are a significant part of our media culture. It has been said that television music is the soundtrack of our lives. Thus, by analyzing these sitcoms and their themes, we are able to trace the hopes, concerns, and values of our culture.

**Moodle:** Please check Moodle on a daily basis for announcements or other information. Remember your syllabus, assignments, and additional lecture notes will be posted here. It is your responsibility to access this information. Also, please keep check on your posted grades and let me know immediately if there has been an error in grading.

**E-Mail:** Please check your paws e-mail on a regular basis. If I need to contact you or send out a class e-mail about an assignment or schedule change, I will always use the Moodle e-mail system. This e-mail will be delivered to your LSU account, not your personal e-mail account. So please be aware that you may miss important information if you neglect to check your campus e-mail.

If you e-mail me with a question about an assignment, please allow 24 hours for a reply. If you e-mail me the night before an assignment is due, there is no guarantee I will read and respond to your e-mail before class. There is also no guarantee that I will respond to e-mail over the weekend.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a Coordinator in the Office of Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letter, please meet with me at some point during the first two weeks of class to discuss the provisions of those accommodations.

### **Assignments and Activities**

#### **Quizzes: (250 points)**

There will be 11 quizzes (25 pts. each) over the assigned readings and television episodes. Some quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, others at the end of class. **Missed quizzes cannot be made up.** However, you will be able to drop one quiz for the semester. (This drop can be either a missed quiz or your lowest scoring quiz.) Under certain special circumstances (such as traveling for a University-sponsored event) AND with official documentation **provided to me ahead of time**, a quiz may be taken early. Please make arrangements with me in advance if this applies to you. Again, quizzes CAN NOT be made up after they have been given in class. If you miss more than 1 quiz, you may have the opportunity to regain some or all of the 25 points for up to 2 additional missed quizzes by completing an alternate writing assignment. This assignment consists of a 2-3 page, typed, double-spaced, paper on a topic (assigned by me) relating in some way to the material covered on the quiz. If you choose to do this assignment, it must be requested, completed, and turned in to me within 1 week of the missed quiz. The assignment will be graded and scored according to how thoroughly and accurately you address the given topic. It is your responsibility to request this assignment. It will not automatically be given to you. **I WILL NOT ACCEPT THIS ASSIGNMENT IF IT IS MORE THAN 1 WEEK PAST THE MISSED QUIZ. NO EXCEPTIONS.**

**Please note:** These quizzes are given orally. If you arrive when a quiz is already in progress, you may answer the questions that remain. Questions will not be repeated once the quizzes are collected.

### **Informal Reflection Paper: (50 points)**

You will be asked to write one informal reflection paper. The paper should be typed, double-spaced, and 1½ -2 pages in length. Your paper should address the following questions:

- A) What is one of your all-time favorite TV shows, past or present? Why is the show one of your favorites? What, specifically, do you like about the show? What cultural value(s) do you believe the show upholds, reflects, encourages, questions, challenges, or even mocks? Explain your answer.
- B) In your opinion, which TV show has been one of the most influential in our society or has had the most impact on our culture? Explain your answer.

[Late papers will be accepted, but will be penalized 11 points. Any paper turned in more than one week after the due date will receive an 11 point penalty for each additional class period that it is late.]

### **Midterm Exam: (150 points)**

This exam will cover information from the first half of the semester. It will include true/false, multiple choice, and an essay question.

### **Oral Report: (300 points)**

You and a partner(s) will deliver a 15-20 minute oral report in which you will analyze an opening theme from a sitcom, drama, or other type of media (such as a movie or video game) using one of the six methods of rhetorical criticism we discuss in class. Please clear your choice of opening theme with me prior to the report in order to prevent multiple presentations on the same artifact. Themes are on a first come, first serve basis. Additional guidelines for the oral report can be found on Moodle.

Note #1: I will post a list of shows with interesting opening themes to Moodle a little later in the semester. Please feel free to choose a show from this list or select one of your own.

Note #2: For this semester, **The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Entourage, Desperate Housewives, Scrubs, Weeds, Dexter, Friends, Home Improvement, Boy Meets World, Family Matters, Saved by the Bell, American Dad, Family Guy, The Office,** and **Mad Men** are off limits for the oral report.

Note #3: If you decide to use Generic Description for your method of criticism, you must use three opening themes from the same type of media. If you use Generic Application, you must apply the criteria we set up in class to your chosen artifact (you may use the criteria from 1950s domestic sitcoms or present-day mockumentaries).

Note #4: There is a **10 point penalty** for changing your artifact after the selection due date. There is a **25 point penalty** for changing your method of criticism

without giving me at least 24 hours notice.

[Late penalty for oral reports: 75 points]

**Formal Reflection Paper: (100 points)**

For the formal reflection paper, you will be given the choice of three essay topics. Each topic will ask you to reflect back on what you have learned throughout the semester and offer an educated and enlightened perspective on the issue addressed in the topic. Each essay choice will relate in some way to communication, the media, and television sitcoms. Unlike the informal reflection paper that you wrote at the beginning of the semester (which simply asked for your opinion), this paper will require your opinion, but also require you to rely on the theories and concepts of communication and the media that you learned this semester to back up the claims you make. The paper will be graded according to how thoroughly you address the topic, how well you back up your claims with specific examples, and how accurately you incorporate communication concepts and theories to support your claims. The formal reflection paper will be due at the time of the final exam.

**Final Exam: (150 points)**

This exam will focus primarily on information from the last half of the semester, including information from the oral reports. Although the exam is not necessarily cumulative in terms of methods of criticism and historical background information, you will want to refresh your memory on the opening themes from the first part of the semester as well as certain general information from the beginning of the semester (i.e., general information on sitcoms, cultural values, and the bard).

The format will be similar to the midterm exam. Questions types will include true/false, multiple choice, and choice of 2 essays.

**Course Grading Scale:**

A = 1000-900

B = 899-800

C = 799-700

D = 699-600

F = 599-000

**\*\*\*NOTE:** Your **FINAL GRADE** is based upon the completion of the course requirements. Extra credit work will not be given in order to raise a grade. Please do not ask to write an extra paper, take extra quizzes, or do an extra oral report. If you become concerned about your grade, please come see me as early as possible in the semester.

## Calendar of Assignments

|                                                                                                                                                                |       |                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 8-25  | Syllabus; Introduction to the class; Trivia Game                       |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 8-27  | The Sitcom and Rationale for Theme Songs as Rhetorical Artifacts       |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 8-29  | The Sitcom, cont.                                                      |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 9-1   | <b>No Class: Labor Day</b>                                             |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 9-3   | How does rhetoric function and how do we perform rhetorical criticism? |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 9-5   | Rhetoric, continued                                                    |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 9-8   | The 1960s; <b>Informal Reflection Paper Due</b>                        |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 9-10  | Discuss <i>All in the Family</i> ; Watch episode                       |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 9-12  | Discuss <i>The Jeffersons</i> ; Watch episode; <b>Quiz #1</b>          |
| [ <b>Homework: Read Ch. 5:</b> Fantasy-Theme Criticism (pp. 97-104) and <b>Essay:</b> "Coping with Loss: U2's 'One Tree Hill'" by Kelly Mendoza (pp. 124-127)] |       |                                                                        |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 9-15  | <b>Quiz #2;</b> Analysis of themes using Fantasy-Theme Criticism       |
| [ <b>Homework: Read Ch. 3:</b> Neo-Aristotelian Criticism (pp. 21-29) and <b>Moodle Notes on Vietnam</b> ]                                                     |       |                                                                        |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 9-17  | Discuss <i>M*A*S*H*</i> ; Watch episode                                |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 9-19  | <b>Quiz #3;</b> Analysis of themes using Neo-Aristotelian Criticism    |
| [ <b>Homework: Read Moodle Notes</b> on the <b>Feminist Movement</b> and <b>Feminist Criticism</b> ]                                                           |       |                                                                        |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 9-22  | <b>Quiz #4;</b> Discuss <i>That Girl</i> ; Watch episode               |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 9-24  | Discuss <i>The Mary Tyler Moore Show</i> ; Watch episode               |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 9-26  | Discuss <i>Maude</i> ; Watch episode and clip                          |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 9-29  | <b>Quiz #5;</b> Analysis of themes using Feminist Criticism            |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 10-1  | Analysis of themes, cont.                                              |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 10-3  | <b>No Class: Fall Holiday</b>                                          |
| [ <b>Homework: Read Ch. 9:</b> Narrative Criticism (pp. 307-319) and <b>Moodle</b> notes on <b>Culture Clash</b> ]                                             |       |                                                                        |
| M                                                                                                                                                              | 10-6  | Discuss <i>The Beverly Hillbillies</i> ; Watch episode                 |
| W                                                                                                                                                              | 10-8  | Discuss <i>Cheers</i> ; Watch episode; <b>Quiz #6</b>                  |
| F                                                                                                                                                              | 10-10 | Analysis of themes using Narrative Criticism                           |

M 10-13 **Midterm Exam**

[**Homework: Read Ch. 7:** Ideological Criticism (pp. 209-221) and **Moodle** notes on **The 1950s**]

W 10-15 **Quiz #7;** The 1950s and the Domestic Sitcom

F 10-17 Discuss *The Cosby Show*; Watch episode

M 10-20 Discuss *Roseanne*; Watch episode and clip

W 10-22 Discuss *Married. . .With Children*; Watch episode; **Quiz #8**

F 10-24 Analysis of themes using Ideological Criticism

M 10-27 Analysis of themes, cont.

W 10-29 Changing trends in sitcoms and theme songs

[**Homework: Read Moodle** notes on **Visual Criticism** and **Moodle** notes on **The New Adventures of Old Christine** and **The Middle**]

F 10-31 TBA

M 11-3 Watch episode/clips of *The New Adventures of Old Christine*

W 11-5 Watch episode of *The Middle*

F 11-7 **Quiz #9;** Analysis of themes using Visual Criticism

[**Homework: Read Ch. 6:** Generic Criticism (pp. 137-147) and **Essay:** “An Uncommon Rap Music Video” by Lacey N. Stein (pp. 180-187) and **Moodle** notes on **Mockumentaries**]

M 11-10 Mockumentary Sitcoms; **Selection of Oral Report partner(s) Due**

W 11-12 **Quiz #10;** Analysis of themes using Generic Criticism

F 11-14 **Assign Oral Report Days; Discuss Oral Reports**

[**Homework: Read Ch. 10:** Pentadic Criticism and **Moodle** notes on **It’s Garry Shandling’s Show**]

W 11-17 Watch *It’s Garry Shandling’s Show* clips

F 11-19 **Quiz #11;** Analysis of theme using Pentadic Criticism; **Selection of artifact(s) due for oral report.**

[**Important Note: If your group has not yet chosen an artifact for your oral report, I get to assign you the artifact of my choice.**]

(\*\*Please remember there is a 10 point penalty for changing your artifact after this date.)

**[If you have not already done so, please let me know the method of rhetorical criticism you will be using to analyze your chosen theme. You must give me 24 hours notice if you change your method of criticism. Otherwise, there will be a 25 point penalty.]**

|   |       |                               |
|---|-------|-------------------------------|
| F | 11-21 | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |
| M | 11-24 | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |
| W | 11-26 | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |
| F | 11-28 | <b>No Class: Thanksgiving</b> |
| M | 12-1  | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |
| W | 12-3  | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |
| F | 12-5  | <b>Oral Reports</b>           |

**Final Exam:**

Tuesday, Dec. 9: 7:30am-9:30am; **Formal Reflection Papers are Due** at the time of the Final Exam