

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Communication and Media Studies (COMS) 591 S01
Senior Seminar in Communication
Winter 2017

Thursday, January 12 – Thursday, April 6 inclusive
No class on Thursday, February 23
Thursday 12:30-15:15

Instructor: Dr. Dawn Johnston
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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00 – 11:30 or by appointment

Course Description

Through the lens of a particular topic, each section of COMS 591 explores a variety of ways in which communication builds social and cultural values. Students undertake a major project that will integrate their understanding of the communication history, theory and methodology they have studied throughout their degree.

The topic of this senior seminar is Reality Television. A genre of television that has exploded in the last decade and a half, reality programming is now ubiquitous; it is cheap to produce, easy to cast, and works with generic conventions as entrenched as any sitcom or drama. Television scholars have paid significant attention to reality television, and are often highly critical of the genre's tendency to cultivate, perpetuate, and exploit stereotypes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, education, geography, age, and ability, among other identity categories. In this seminar, we will analyze the genre of reality television and its place in the television landscape of the 21st century.

Additional Information

Please be aware that much of this course deals with the artifacts, experiences, and products of popular culture. As such, some of the material we study manifests coarse language, sexuality, and violence. If this is a problem for you, please discuss your concerns with the instructor as soon as possible.

This is an inquiry-based seminar, where students will be responsible for participating in discussion, leading discussion, conducting independent research and working as part of a group. Regular attendance is expected and **participation will be crucial**. Readings must be completed in advance of class, and students are expected to participate fully in seminar discussions of all assigned readings.

If you are not a regular reality television viewer, you may find it useful to spend some time watching some of the shows the authors write about. Many of these shows are readily available on television or online.

Objectives of the Course

COMS 591 has the following major objectives:

1. To provide you with the opportunity to co-ordinate and integrate the knowledge, skills, and experiences you have acquired during your studies;
2. To provide you with the opportunity to create a major research project drawing on course material and personal interests, which you will present to the class and expand into a formal research paper;
3. To encourage you to think and research across disciplinary boundaries;
4. To help prepare you for the expectations of graduate level study and professional work.

Textbooks and Readings

Kavka, Misha. *Reality TV*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Pozner, Jennifer. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010.

Additional required readings to be posted or linked on D2L throughout the semester – every week that there is a group presentation, there will be an additional assigned reading selected and posted by the presenting group. These additional required readings will be posted at least one week in advance of the class in which they will be discussed.

Internet and electronic communication device information

Laptops and tablets are permitted for note taking only. **Phones and gaming devices may not be used at all during class.** Please respect the instructor and your fellow students. Improper use of electronic devices will impact your participation grade.

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation:	Weekly	10%
Group Presentation:	Throughout term (sign up)	20%
Research Proposal:	March 2	15%
Research Essay:	April 6	35%
Final Presentation:	March 30 and April 6	20%

Participation: Seminars are significantly different than lectures, and inherently require active participation. Participation is not measured solely by how often you speak up. Informed, thoughtful contributions to discussion are more important than frequent contributions. An ability to demonstrate familiarity with the required readings is also crucial – contributions to class discussions which reveal that the contributor has not completed the readings will not carry the weight of contributions clearly informed by the readings. Attentive listening matters – students who interrupt others, distract their classmates, or use electronic devices in a way that distracts the instructor or other students will see an impact on their participation grade. Students are also expected to participate by engaging with the presentations of fellow students by attending

presentations, asking questions, and offering thoughtful and constructive commentary. Students are invited to submit a short reflective evaluation of their own participation on the last day of class, particularly if they feel that there were factors which may have limited their active contributions to class discussions.

Group Presentation: For our classes between February 9 and March 23, a group will be responsible for leading our seminar discussion each week. A signup sheet for presentation groups will be available on the first day of class – those who do not sign up will be assigned to a group. Each group will be responsible for one topic area – gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. As a group, you will select a reality show that speaks strongly to your topic, as well as a required reading for the class. The reading might be one of the unassigned readings from your textbooks, or it might be a scholarly book chapter or academic journal article that you have found in your research that speaks well to either your particular show or your specific topic. **You must provide the required reading to the instructor at least two weeks in advance of your presentation.** The instructor will approve your reading (both for content and copyright clearance) and circulate it to the class via D2L. As a group, you will be responsible for playing a segment of your selected television show, analyzing the show's connection to your topic (ideally by utilizing your selected reading), and leading the class in discussion. Presentations will take place in the first half of each class period. Groups are strongly advised to arrange a meeting with the instructor to discuss your plans for the presentation. Working together effectively will be crucial for this group project, as it composes a significant component of your course grade, and unless there is extraordinarily compelling evidence to indicate otherwise, all group members will receive the same grade. As senior students (and adults) you are expected to be able to work effectively as a group and to work out any small conflicts that arise during your preparation for the presentation. If major group issues arise, you must contact the instructor well in advance of your presentation, not **after** your presentation is completed or the grade is assigned.

Research Proposal: Your research proposal will outline the analysis you intend to undertake for your research essay. This proposal should be no more than 350 words (excluding bibliography), and should identify your research question, its relevance to the course, and your theoretical and/or methodological plan for how to engage with your question. Your proposal should also include a preliminary annotated bibliography of five scholarly sources that you expect to be useful in the preparation of your essay. Proper APA citations are expected, accompanied by a 3-5 sentence annotation explaining the relevance of the source to your research. *Please remember that any research involving human subjects requires ethics consent – the instructor can support you in applying, but you must leave ample time to apply for and receive ethics approval.*

Research Essay: The research essay for this course gives you an opportunity to combine out-of-class research with the topics explored in the seminar. You may choose to pursue a brand new topic relating to reality television, or you may choose to dig further into a topic that you began to explore in your group presentation. Please note: If you do pursue a group-based topic for your individual essay, you may use **either** the same show **or** the same topic (gender, race, class, etc.) – not both, and it will be crucial that you not include in your individual paper any content from your group presentation that was created either by your group or by individuals other than yourself. Your paper should be 2300-2500 words in length, and should be double-spaced, in a 12 point font, with one inch margins. You should use APA format for citations. Word count should appear on the front page of your essay. More information on the term paper will be provided in class and on D2L.

Final Presentation: Your final presentation is an individual oral presentation on your research essay. You will have 7-8 minutes to present a summary of your research – your topic, your theoretical/analytical framework, your findings – followed by 3-5 minutes of questions from your instructor and classmates. All presentations will take place in the final two classes of the semester, so the presentation time limits will be enforced!

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Electronic submission of assignments is not permitted unless prior written permission has been granted.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at marked final exams in SS 320. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that the proper version is submitted (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission). Including a version date in your file name may be useful.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Student Accommodations:

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.

- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. All assignments will also be marked using letter grades. See chart below for how D2L converts letter grades to percentages.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, letter grades will be converted to the midpoint of the percentage range, as shown in the final column of the table below.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations* *
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%

1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	0-49.99%	0%

* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

** These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, or observations) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

This course does not have course-based ethics approval, so any student wishing to undertake primary research involving surveys, interviews or observations is required to apply for their own ethics approval. This can be a time-consuming process, so students interested in pursuing research with human participants should begin planning early in the semester.

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/ http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds
SU WELLNESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health 403-266-HELP (4357) http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

This is the tentative schedule of topics and readings for this course. Any changes to this schedule will be communicated via D2L, and you are responsible for keeping abreast of any such changes. You should have completed the readings prior to the classes in which we will be discussing them. Readings marked MK are from the Misha Kavka *Reality TV* text and readings marked JP are from the Jennifer Pozner *Reality Bites Back* text. You will notice numerous occasions on which a reading is TBA – these readings, like those from our textbooks, are REQUIRED and will be selected by the presenting group and posted on D2L at least one week prior to discussion of them. You will receive a D2L message informing you when each reading is posted – it is your responsibility to ensure that you are receiving the D2L emails and are keeping on top of the required reading.

While only selected chapters of the two textbooks are REQUIRED reading, the remaining chapters of both texts are certainly recommended, as they provide an excellent context for the history, development, and significance of the reality television landscape, and may prove to be helpful in your research.

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments
January 12	Introduction	No required readings
January 19	History of the genre and why we should care	MK: Introduction MK: Chapter One JP: Introduction
January 26	Screening and discussion of <i>Cinema Verite</i>	No required readings
February 2	The Business of Reality TV and Cult of Celebrity Screening of <i>Unreal</i>	MK: Chapter Five
February 9	Topic: Constructions of Femininity	JP: Chapter Three TBA (Group 1)
February 16	Topic: Constructions of Masculinity	JP: pp 239-256 TBA (Group 2)
February 23	No classes – Reading Week	No required reading
March 2	Topic: Youth, Aging and Beauty	JP: Chapter Two TBA (Group 3) Research Proposal Due
March 9	Topic: Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation	JP: pp 261-265 TBA (Group 4)

March 16	Topic: Constructions of Race and Ethnicity	JP: Chapter Five TBA (Group 5)
March 23	Topic: "Class" and Consumption	JP: Chapter Four TBA (Group 6)
March 30	Final Presentations	No required readings
April 6	Final Presentations	No required readings Research Essay Due