SATIRE TV AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE  
(Advanced Topics in Television Studies – COMM 455)  
Spring 2010

Course Description
This course explores the relationship between satire television and democracy in the United States. More specifically, it analyzes the rise of “infotainment” or “fake news” programming -- such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* -- and its impact on the public sphere. The course contextualizes this type of programming in terms of substantial technological and market changes in the television industry, which have led to the emergence of a “post-network” era. The development of a corporatized, multichannel television system has significant political consequences, including the blurring of the lines between news and entertainment. Fake news and parody shows emerge in this context, often interrogating the power of political and media institutions and offering audiences alternative and critical perspectives on social and political problems. However, while such rebellious and democratic potential of comedy is often celebrated, the course also investigates when and how television satire might contribute to reinforce stereotypes and dominant social norms. After comparing fake news shows to other genres, the course develops a detailed analysis of the political consequences of televised political parody, especially in relation to its role in the establishment of a democratic public sphere.

This course presumes basic knowledge of television terms and methods of media analysis. It draws on knowledge gained from other communication classes, especially the core seminars, to develop a critical and comprehensive analysis of the role of satire television in American politics and society. Communication majors who wish to take the seminar as a capstone course must also enroll in COMM 511 for 0 credits. Communication majors taking this course as their capstone experience are expected to apply skills and knowledge gained from other courses. They will therefore be expected to explore in more detail the linkages between media texts, cultural relations, and the political economy of media industries.

Course Goals and Objectives
There are two central goals in this class: first, the development of conceptual and analytical tools that will enable students to analyze the role of television satire in the construction of a democratic public sphere; second, students will learn how to develop a detailed and critical analysis of the history, contents, and political significance of televised political parody.

Our objectives to reach these goals include learning how to:
- apply theories and concepts to develop a critical and comprehensive analysis of the role of television humor in the construction of a democratic public sphere;
- identify key historical trends in the television industry and in the development of fake news shows;
- analyze the social and political significance of satire television;
- conduct research and gather data in library archives to apply the analytical frameworks of the course in the development of a specific case study.
**Blackboard**
Blackboard will be used for posting announcements, assignments, and other information. It will also be used for online discussions. The system can be accessed at <http://mytulane.blackboard.com/>. If you have problems using the system, you can call the help desk: 862.8888.

**Course Texts**

The three books are available through Tulane Bookstore.

**Required texts**
Besides the three textbooks, we will also work with several articles and book chapters which will be available online at Blackboard. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the classes for which they are listed in the syllabus. All students should have hard copies of the texts and bring them to the respective sessions. Failure to do so will affect your participation grade.

**Attendance**
The class meets weekly, with two sessions on every Wednesday (the first from 12:00 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. and the second from 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.). Regular attendance is required and attendance will be taken in every session. You can miss four sessions (2 days) without penalty in your participation grade. Ten unexcused absences (5 days) will result in the final grade recommendation of a “WF.”

**Use of laptops and cell phones**
The use of cell phones and pagers is prohibited during class hours, unless the professor has given previous authorization for emergency situations. Chatting, e-mailing, internet browsing, or any activity not related to official class activity will affect your participation grade negatively and may result in other penalties. Laptops are permitted solely for the purpose of taking notes, but students who want to use them need to submit a written request in advance to the professor. If you are authorized to use a laptop, you will be required to submit your notes to the professor as an email attachment at the end of the class. The quality of the notes will not affect your grade, but the authorization to use the laptop can be suspended if they are not considered sufficient.

**Evaluation**
Your final evaluation will be based on the following:

1) **Midterm exam**: Students will take an in-class midterm exam which will cover the first two units (Parts I and II). A list of possible questions will be delivered to students in advance and two of the questions will be on the exam. The mid-term is a closed book exam. Students should bring a pen and a blank blue book on the scheduled date for the exam;

2) **Final paper**: Students will be required to write a 14-page (cover page, tables, figures, and references excluded) final paper, spaced 1.5, with font size 12. Specific guidelines for the paper will be given later;
3) **Participation**: Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. To have an effective participation, students should complete the assigned readings prior to the sessions for which they are listed in the syllabus and be ready to discuss them. Attendance will also be considered when assessing participation;

4) **Readings summaries**: Students should bring a one-page summary of the reading/s assigned for each session. They can be typed or hand-written, and should include the student’s full name and the date of the session. Summaries will be graded as “sufficient” and “insufficient” and only the former will satisfy the requirement. If you deliver all summaries and they are graded “sufficient,” you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade (you can miss up to four sessions without penalty). If you do not, your grade will be proportionally lowered down to a possible “F” (50 points). Summaries are due in the beginning of the respective session and therefore they cannot be sent by email or delivered after the respective class;

5) **Analysis of a political satire show**: Students will be in charge of developing a close textual analysis of five full episodes of a fake news show (such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*). The results of the analysis should be presented orally in class and in a written report. The written report should be about eight-page long (cover page, tables, figures, and references excluded), spaced 1.5, with font size 12. Students will also prepare a 15-minute oral presentation of the report. Oral presentations should make use of visual support softwares (such as PowerPoint) and should also include some clips of the program. More specific guidelines for the written and oral components of the report will be given later.

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readings summaries</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>25 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of a political satire show</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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**Grading scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94.0 to 100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0 to 93.9</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0 to 89.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84.0 to 86.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0 to 83.9</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>77.0 to 79.9</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>74.0 to 76.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0 to 73.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67.0 to 69.9</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60.0 to 63.9</td>
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<td>F</td>
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**Academic dishonesty**

Remember that plagiarism is a form of cheating. Do not present someone else’s ideas without citing the source. This course adheres strictly to the Code of Academic Conduct of the Newcomb-Tulane College, available at: [http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm](http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm)
Course Schedule

PART I
INTRODUCTION: HUMOR, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND THE RISE OF FAKE NEWS IN POST-NETWORK TELEVISION

January 13
Introduction to the procedures and contents of the course.

January 20
Session 1 – The concept of public sphere and its critics.
Session 2 – Habermas’ more recent reflections about communication and the public sphere.

January 27
Session 1 – Is there a place for satire in the public sphere? Towards a critical approach to humor.
Session 2 – Political functions of humor and satire TV: reinforcing or challenging the social order?
   * Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones, and Ethan Thompson, “The state of satire, the satire of state.” In Gray, Jones and Thompson (Eds.), Satire TV, pp. 3-19.

February 3
Session 1 – Shits in the television industry: The emergence of the post-network era.
Session 2 – The rise of fake news in the post-network era.
   * Baym, From Cronkite to Colbert, chapter 1, pp. 1-20.
   * Jones, Entertaining politics, chapter 1, pp. 3-15.

PART II
THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE POST-NETWORK ERA:
BROADCAST JOURNALISM, POLITICAL TALK, AND FAKE NEWS COMPARED

February 10
Session 1 – Transformations of broadcast journalism: from modern news to corporatized infotainment.
   * Baym, From Cronkite to Colbert, chapters 2 and 3, pp. 25-59.
Session 2 – The demise of network news?
   * Baym, From Cronkite to Colbert, chapter 4, pp. 61-77.
February 17
Session 1 – The transformation of televised political discourse: The rise of cable and partisan talk.
Session 2 – Fake news as a critique of traditional political television formats.

February 24
Session 1 – The Daily Show versus CNN as news sources.
Session 2 – The limits of fake news’ critique of broadcast journalism.

March 3
Session 1 – Stereotypes in the parody of international news.
Session 2 – MIDTERM EXAM.

PART III
THE DAILY SHOW AND THE COLBERT REPORT:
A CLOSE ANALYSIS

March 10
Session 1 - The Daily Show’s rhetoric and political discourse.
* Amber Day, “And now … the news? Mimesis and the real in The Daily Show.” In Gray, Jones and Thompson (Eds.), *Satire TV*, pp. 85-103.
* Joanne Morreale, “Jon Stewart and The Daily Show: I thought you were going to be funny!.” In Gray, Jones and Thompson (Eds.), *Satire TV*, pp. 104-123.
Session 2 – Student presentations.

March 17
Session 1 – The Daily Show as an alternative political forum.
* Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, chapter 6, pp. 101-121.
* Jones, *Entertaining politics*, chapter 6, pp. 111-143.
Session 2 – Student presentations.

March 24
Session 1 – Parody and politics in The Colbert Report
* Jones, *Entertaining politics*, chapter 9, pp. 185-204.
* Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, chapter 7, pp. 123-143.
Session 2 – Student presentations.

March 31 – No class. Spring Break.
PART IV
CONTEMPORARY CONTROVERSIES OVER SATIRE TV.
CONCLUSIONS.

April 7
Session 1 – Information acquisition and political cynicism: What is the role of satire TV?

Session 2 – Student presentations.

April 14
Session 1 – Presidential caricatures and The Chappelle’s Show: The limits of presidential humor and racial satire.
* Jeffrey Jones, “With all due respect: Satirizing presidents from Saturday Night Live to Lil’ Bush.” In Gray, Jones and Thompson (Eds.), *Satire TV*, pp. 37-63.
* Bambi Haggins, “In the wake of ‘The Nigger Pixie:’ Dave Chappelle and the politics of crossover comedy.” In Gray, Jones and Thompson (Eds.), *Satire TV*, pp. 233-351.

Session 2 – Student presentations.

April 21
Session 1 – Satire TV and the future of the public sphere.
* Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert*, chapter 8, pp. 145-164.

Session 2 – Student presentations. Conclusions of the seminar.

FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY, MAY 6, 10:00 a.m. – noon.
Papers should be delivered at the instructor’s office: 219 Newcomb Hall. Late papers will not be received.