

ENGLISH 4810: Television as Literature

(v. 1.0)

9:00 – 10:15 T/Th | EH 229

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The Course

The average American watches about 5 hours of television a day. We are told that this is bad. We are told that television is bad for us, that it is bad for our families, and that it is wasting our time. But not all television is that way. Some television shows have what we might call “literary pretensions.” Shows such as *Twin Peaks*, *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *The Wire*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, *Veronica Mars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *LOST* have been both critically acclaimed and the subject of much academic study. In this course, we shall examine a select few of these shows, watching complete seasons as if they were self-contained literary texts.

In other words, in this course, you will **watch TV and get credit for it**. You will also learn to view television in an active and critical fashion, paying attention to the standard literary techniques (e.g. character, theme, symbol, plot) as well as televisual issues such as lighting, music, and camerawork.

Texts

Students will be expected to own, or have access to, the following:

Firefly (\$18 on amazon.com; free on hulu.com) and ***Serenity*** (\$4 used on amazon.com)

LOST season one (\$25 on amazon.com; free on hulu.com or abc.com)

Battlestar Galactica season one (\$30 on amazon.com)

It is in your best interest to buy or borrow these, if only to make it easier for you to go back and re-watch episodes for your assignments.

I also am recommending, but not requiring, the following:

Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2008.

Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran. London: I. B.Tauris, 2008.

I also expect you to read the relevant wiki pages for each episode.

Assignments

Two major assignments: 20% each

I am open to some negotiation on these assignments. You might write two analytical essays about the shows. You might write analytical essays about the fan sites or commentary about the shows. You might track the ways the shows had to negotiate with the networks to get on the air (this is particularly useful for Joss Whedon’s shows). You might do a group project of some kind (no more than four to a group, please). You might go crazy and remix an episode and turn in a movie file. *I want you to get creative here*. These are three series that people get awfully nerdy

about, and ***I want you to feel free to get nerdy if you want.*** If you've seen all of *BSG* or *LOST*, you can certainly consider how what we're discussing connects to the larger narrative arc. **The assignment must have critical value and add to our understanding of the series or the form. I will also ask for a brief proposal of your intended project.**

Project Proposal: 2.5% each

A brief page describing your intended project. I will provide feedback on these.

Mid-term and Final Examinations: 12.5% each

A mid-term and final examination.

Quizzes: 20% total

A series of frequent quizzes based on the episodes we will be watching.

Fan Site/Wiki/DVD Commentary Analysis: 5%

A two-page analysis of a fan site, wiki article, or DVD commentary, focusing specifically on what it adds to our understanding of the topic. It is in your best interest to focus on one of the various "theory" pages for this (e.g. the Numbers in *LOST*, Blue Sun in *Firefly*, etc).

Future Series Proposal: 5%

This class will be offered again in the future, and I would like to hear your recommendations for series I should consider. Proposals should be a 1-2 page description of the series, the critical issues it grapples with, and the reasons it might be worth academic attention.

Policies

Attendance is mandatory. I will take roll every day. You may miss this class FOUR TIMES without penalty. Each absence after the fourth will result in a half letter grade (5 points) reduction of your final grade.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Unless prior arrangements are made, if assignments are not delivered into my hands then and there, they will be considered late.

Late work will be penalized 1/2 letter grade for each day it is overdue. This includes weekends.

I will not accept ANY assignment turned in via email unless prior arrangements have been made. This is for your protection. I receive far too much email on a daily basis, and there is a very good chance that your assignment might be lost.

I expect you to behave civilly and respectfully at all times (both to me and to your peers). Should you behave inappropriately (sleeping, reading the newspaper, doing other work in my class, etc.) you will either a) be counted absent for the day, b) be asked to leave the class and then counted absent. In short, behave appropriately and respectfully.

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus to accommodate the dynamics of the class.

Plagiarism is the attempt to claim another's work as your own. The WSU Student Code defines plagiarism as "the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person or group's ideas or work" (Section 6-22, part IV, subsection D). Any attempt to claim credit another's work, in whole or in part, is a violation of this policy and is regarded by the Composition Program as a serious offense, and plagiarism may result in failure of the courses.

Contingency Plans: In the event of a catastrophic event or campus closure, we will continue to provide instruction via email and web resources. It is imperative that you provide a working email address *that you check on a regular basis*.

Accommodations

Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in room 181 of the Student Service Center. SSD can also arrange to provide course materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary. Weber State University recognizes that there are times when course content may differ from a student's core beliefs. Faculty, however, have a responsibility to teach content that is related to the discipline and that has a reasonable relationship to pedagogical goals. If you, as a student, believe that the content of the course conflicts with your ability to pursue a topic, you may request a resolution from the instructor. Please see WSU policy 6-22 for further clarification on this policy.

Schedule

Week One	What We're Watching	What's Due
T 8.25	Introductions	
Th 8.27	<i>Firefly</i> , "Serenity," "The Train Job" and "Bushwhacked"	"Telling Television Stories" (handout); J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson, "Reavers and Redskins: Creating the Frontier Savage"
Week Two		
T 9.1	<i>Firefly</i> , "Shindig" and "Safe"	Alyson Buckman, "'Much Madness is Divinest Sense': <i>Firefly</i> 's 'Big Damn Heroes' and Little Witches"
Th 9.3	<i>Firefly</i> , "Our Mrs. Reynolds" and "Jaynestown"	Laura Beadling, "The Threat of the 'Good Wife': Feminism, Postfeminism, and Third-Wave Feminism in <i>Firefly</i> "
Week Three		

T 9.8	<i>Firefly</i> , "Out of Gas" and "Ariel"	Mary Alice Money, " <i>Firefly's</i> 'Out of Gas': Genre Echoes and the Hero's Journey"
Th 9.10	<i>Firefly</i> , "War Stories" and "Trash"	
Week Four		
T 9.15	<i>Firefly</i> , "The Message" and "Heart of Gold"	
Th 9.17	<i>Firefly</i> , "Objects in Space"	Whedon, DVD director's commentary
Week Five		
T 9.22	<i>Serenity</i>	Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan, "'The Alliance Isn't Some Evil Empire': Dystopia in Joss Whedon's <i>Firefly/Serenity</i> "; Stacey Abbott, "'Can't Stop the Signal': The Resurrection/Regeneration of <i>Serenity</i> "
Th 9.24	<i>LOST</i> , "Pilot" (parts one and two)	Davies, " <i>LOST's</i> State of Nature"
Week Six		
T 9.29	<i>LOST</i> , "Tabula Rasa" and "Walkabout"	Proposal for major assignment due
Th 10.1	<i>LOST</i> , "White Rabbit" and "House of the Rising Sun"	
Week Seven		
T 10.6	<i>LOST</i> , "The Moth" and "Confidence Man" and	

	"Solitary" and "Raised by Another"	
Th 10.8	TBA	
Week Eight		
T 10.13	<i>LOST</i> , "All the Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues" and "Whatever the Case May Be"	
Th 10.15	<i>LOST</i> , "Hearts and Minds" and "Special"	Major Assignment Due
Week Nine		
T 10.20	<i>LOST</i> , "Homecoming" and "Outlaws"	Mid-term Examination
Th 10.22		
Week Ten	<i>LOST</i> , "...In Translation" and "Numbers"	
T 10.27	<i>LOST</i> , "Deus Ex Machina" and "Do No Harm"	
Th 10.29	<i>LOST</i> , "The Greater Good" and "Born to Run"	
Week Eleven		
T 11.3	<i>LOST</i> , "Exodus"	Proposal for major assignment due
Th 11.5	<i>BSG</i> mini-series	
Week Twelve		

T 11.10	<i>BSG</i> , "33" and "Water"	Christopher Deis, "Erasing Difference: The Cylons as Racial Other"
Th 11.12	<i>BSG</i> , "Bastille Day" and "Act of Contrition"	Erika Johnson-Lewis, "Torture, Terrorism, and Other Aspects of Human Nature"
Week Thirteen		
T 11.17	<i>BSG</i> , "You Can't Go Home Again" and "Litmus"	Fan Site/Wiki Analysis Due
Th 11.19	<i>BSG</i> , "Six Degrees of Separation" and "Flesh and Bone"	C. W. Marshall and Matthew Wheeland, "The Cylons, the Singularity, and God"
Week Fourteen		
T 11.24	<i>BSG</i> , "Tigh Me Up, Tigh Me Down," and "Hand of God"	Major Assignment Due
Th 11.26	Thanksgiving	
Week Fifteen		
T 12.1	<i>BSG</i> , "Colonial Day" and "Kobol's Last Gleaming"	Casey, "'All This Has Happened Before': Repetition, Reimagination, and Eternal Return"
Th 12.3	Wrap Up	Future Series Proposal
Week Sixteen		
T 12.8	Final Exam 9:30 – 11:20	