

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication and Culture**  
**Communications Studies (COMS) 591 S01**  
**Senior Seminar in Communication**  
**Fall 2014**  
**Thursday, September 11 – Thursday, December 4 inclusive**  
**Thursday 12:30-15:15**

**Instructor:** Dr. Dawn Johnston  
**Office**  
**Location:** SS 234  
**Office Phone:** 403-220-3199  
**E-Mail:** debjohns@ucalgary.ca  
**Office Hours:** Thursdays 10:00 – 12:00 or by appointment (and if the door is open, drop by anytime)

### **Course Description**

The topic of this senior seminar is Reality Television. A genre of television that has exploded in the last decade, 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 are paying increasing 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 see the instructor, and think carefully about whether this particular section of COMS 591 is the best fit for you.

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 the shows we will discuss in advance of the class in which we will discuss them. 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 are permitted for note taking only. **iPods, cellphones 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)	25%
Research Proposal:	October 23	15%
Research Essay:	November 27	30%
Final Presentation:	Nov 27 and Dec 4	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. 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.

**Group Presentation:** For our classes between October 2 and November 13, 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 book chapter or 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. 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 seminar. 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.

**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 plan for how to engage with your question (through primary research, secondary research, or a combination thereof). 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 or MLA 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. Your paper should be 2300-2500 words in length, and should be double-spaced, in a 12 point font, with one inch margins. You may use either MLA or 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 must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

### **Submission of assignments**

Unless prior written permission has been granted, assignments must be submitted in person at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. **Assignments submitted electronically or deposited in the drop box will be considered late and will have marks deducted accordingly.** If it is not possible to submit directly to the instructor at the specified time, 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.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. 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>

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments).

### **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.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

## 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. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. 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 System & Department of Communication and Culture Grade Scale

Work in this course will be graded using letter grades. The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in Communication and Culture:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department 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	F	00 - 49.99%	0%

requirements.			
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## 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 <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

## Academic Misconduct

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

## Research Ethics

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

## Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (PIC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:picarts@ucalgary.ca">picarts@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> • Calgary Police Service	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 <b>Emergency: call 911</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emergency Text Messaging</b></li> <li>• <b>Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</b></li> <li>• <b>Safewalk Program</b></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a></p> <p>If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (<b>220-5333</b>). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a></p>
<p><b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>IT help line</b></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a> 403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a></p>
<p><b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Writing Support Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Student Services Mobile App</b></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a></p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a></p>
<p><b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Faculty of Arts Reps</b></li> <li>• <b>Student Ombudsman</b></li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html">http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a></p>
<p><b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Counselling Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Health Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</b></li> <li>• <b>Online resources and tips</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a></p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a></p> <p><b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b></p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a></p> <p>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.</p>

## Schedule of Lectures and Readings

To be posted on D2L in the first week of classes