

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication, Media and Film**

**Communication and Media Studies (COMS) 591 S01**  
**Senior Seminar in Communication and Media**  
**Fall 2019 BLOCK WEEK**  
**August 26-30 inclusive**  
**MTWRF 9:00 – 17:00**

**Instructor:** Dr. Dawn Johnston  
**Office Location:** SS 234 and SS 102 (please confirm location if you book an appointment with me).  
**Office Phone:** 403-220-3199  
**E-Mail:** debjohns@ucalgary.ca  
**Office Hours:** Because this is a block week course, office hours are by appointment and I will be available to meet with you both in advance of the course and throughout the fall semester.

### **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 two decades, 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 quite attentive 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**

The weekly schedule of topics and readings can be found at the end of this outline and on D2L. Students are responsible for reading and following all course and university policies discussed in this outline. Pre-session study is required, as outlined in the schedule of readings at the end of this outline.

Please be aware that much of this course deals with the artifacts, experiences, and products of popular culture, and that we will be examining constructions and representations of identity. 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 a block week course. We will be in class from 9am-5pm Monday through Friday.** This is an extremely intensive learning format, and will require your full attention for all five days. There will be assigned reading and some research/writing each night, so students should do everything they can to avoid planning any additional activities (work shifts, volunteer activities, etc.). Students should expect to spend approximately two hours each night during the week in preparation for the next day's class. This intensive learning format can be exciting and invigorating, but it can also be exhausting, so do whatever you can to protect your time during the week of classes! 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 discuss with the class and expand into a formal research paper;
3. To encourage you to view one topic through multiple theoretical and methodological lenses;
4. To help prepare you for the expectations of graduate level study and/or 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 will be posted or linked on D2L throughout the week – for each group presentation, there will be an additional assigned reading selected and posted by the presenting group. These additional required readings will be posted by end of day Tuesday and they will be discussed in class on Friday.

## Policy on the use of Electronic Communication Devices

Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones may be used in class only for course-related purposes and in a way that is not distracting others or negatively impacting the learning environment. **No audio or video recording is allowed in any class without the instructor's permission.**

## Assignments and Evaluation

Participation:	Daily	10%
Critical Reading Response:	Monday, August 26	10%
Group Presentation:	Friday, August 30	20%
Research Proposal:	Friday, September 20	15%
Research Essay:	Friday, October 25	35%
Daily Reflection Essays:	Daily	10%

**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. Active engagement with your group members during the allotted class time will also be taken into consideration for your participation grade. Students are invited to contact the instructor directly if they feel that there are factors which may limit their active contributions to class discussions.

**Critical Reading Response:** This short assignment (300-400 words) asks students to choose **one chapter** from **either** the Pozner **or** the Kavka text and write a summary of the author's key points, arguments, and assertions, as well as a short critical response. As part of that critical response, students will be asked to identify **two key questions** that the reading has inspired them to raise in our forthcoming class discussion of these topics. This assignment is due by 11:59pm on the first day (Monday) of block week – full assignment guidelines will be provided in the pre-session study requirements.

Group Presentation: On the final day (Friday) of block week, each group will be responsible for leading our seminar discussion for approximately 75 minutes (45-50 minutes of presentation, plus facilitating discussion). Groups will be randomly created through D2L and students will receive their group assignment by mid-August. 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 should be an 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 by end of day Tuesday.** The instructor will approve your reading (both for content and copyright clearance) and circulate it to the class via D2L on Wednesday. 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. Groups are strongly advised to discuss with the instructor 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 compelling and documented 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. **You will be given at least one hour each day to work with your group during class time – this should be adequate time to prepare your presentation together, though you may choose to connect in advance of block week and/or spend some additional time out of class working on components individually.**

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.

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.

Daily reflections: 10% of your course grade is attached to short daily reflections. You will be asked to write 150-250 words reflecting on one of the major themes or discussion topics each day of the course. You must complete **four** of these reflections to an acceptable standard (as outlined in a posted rubric) in order to receive the 2.5% allotted to each assignment – partial grades may be assigned for work that does not meet the standard. You will be given the final half hour of class each day to write this reflection, or you may choose to do it from home in the evening — it must be submitted to the D2L dropbox by 11:59pm each day. If you had more than one major point of reflection that you wanted to write about on a given day, you may choose to write up to two reflections (each following the guidelines) on the relevant days. These reflections are meant to encourage you to think about how the discussions of the day shaped your understanding of reality tv and its impact on contemporary culture. While you are always encouraged to write in a clear and coherent manner, I am more concerned, in this particular assignment, with the content of your reflection than with the precision of its form. These assignments are due by 11:59pm each day. Rewrites will not be permitted.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

**Note:** You do not have to complete all the assignments and exams in order to receive a passing grade in this course.

If you miss a required course component, please contact your instructor as soon as possible.

### Submission of Assignments

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments and submit through the appropriate drop box on D2L. **Note:** It is your responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that you submit the proper version (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission).

### Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a partial letter 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); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/). Students who require an accommodation 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) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should provide supporting documentation to support their request; however, instructors may not require that a medical note be presented. For the policy on supporting documentation the use of a statutory declaration, see Section M.1 of the *University Calendar*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html>. Also see FAQs for Students: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/appeals/student-faq>

### Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses 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 and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

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

The following table outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. Final grades are reported as letter grades. For components graded using percentages or numerical scores, those values will be used directly in calculating the final course grade, while for components graded using letter grades, the letter grades will be converted to the midpoint values listed in the final column of the table below in calculating the final course grade.

In this course, the reading response, research proposal, research essay, participation and group presentation will be graded using letter grades. The reflections will receive a numerical score.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations*
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%

	subsequent courses in the same subject			
<b>1.00</b>	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	<b>D</b>	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
<b>0.00</b>	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	<b>F</b>	0 - 49.99%	0%

\* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: 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. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

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.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/resources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html)

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, please consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to [https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success?utm\\_source=ssc&utm\\_medium=redirect&utm\\_campaign=redirect](https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success?utm_source=ssc&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=redirect)

### Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright ([www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf)) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

### 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, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics>. This course does not require or allow research with human participants.

### Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferrals of exams and course work, requests for reappraisals, and other matters, please see the relevant sections in the *University Calendar*:  
<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html>

### Student Support Services and Resources

Please visit <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk.

For resources on D2L, visit <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students>. IT support is available at [itsupport@ucalgary.ca](mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca) or by calling 403-220.5555.

### Schedule of Topics and Readings

Because this is a very intensive block week course, **the readings listed below (other than those identified as TBA) are considered required pre-session study**. You should finish reading them in advance of the first day of block week. Please do not leave these to read the night before we discuss them, as you will have other reading and writing assignments to complete in the evenings.

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. The readings listed as TBA that will be selected by the presenting groups are REQUIRED and will be posted on D2L by end of day Tuesday.

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
August 26	Introduction to course History of the genre and why we should care  Screening and discussion of <i>Cinema Verite</i> <b>Formation and Meeting of Presentation Groups</b>	MK: Introduction MK: Chapter One JP: Introduction
August 27	The Business of Reality TV and Cult of Celebrity Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity Screening of <i>UnReal</i> Presentation Group Work	MK: Chapter Five JP: Chapter Three JP: pp 239-256
August 28	Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Youth, Aging and Beauty Screening of <i>UnReal</i> Presentation Group Work	JP: pp 261-265 JP: Chapter Two
August 29	Constructions of Race and Ethnicity “Class” and Consumption Workshopping of individual research topics Presentation Group Work	JP: Chapter Five JP: Chapter Four
August 30	Group Presentations	TBA: selected readings