



Boston University British Programmes
British Television Studies
Dr Christine Fanthome
COM FT 318
Elective A, Core Phase

I Class description

This course focuses on British television, tracing its historical development from the early years of the BBC to the present day, identifying key influences and analysing its impact on British culture. In so doing it examines the structure of the production industry and its programme output, with particular emphasis on news, soaps, reality TV, children's programming, and televised Shakespeare.

II Instruction Method

Each teaching session will involve a lecture, illustrative material and a class discussion or workshop activity based on the set reading. Students should absorb as much television as they can out of class in order to participate fully in seminar discussions.

**Please note no laptops allowed in the classroom.

III Textbooks/Supplies

Reading Pack available from the library.

IV Course Objectives

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Understand British television's historical, cultural, political and economic contexts.
- Have an awareness of how professionals in the industry work
- Consider the implications of current economic and technological changes in the British television industry
- Show greater insight about the conventions, objectives and structures of specific programme genres

V Evaluation Plan and Grading Criteria

Assessment

Attendance and class participation	10%
Graded essay	40%
Examination	50%
<i>Total</i>	100%

The subject of the essay will be the BBC (title to follow). It should be approximately 2000 words in length and should draw on a minimum of 5 academic sources (text books, journal articles, etc). Websites may be used *in addition* to more traditional sources and *not instead* of them and only academic or industry websites should be used. All quotations and citations should be referenced, and include appropriate page numbers.

The exam will consist of questions addressing key concepts discussed during the module.

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by most faculty members on Boston University's British Programmes.

Grade	Honour Points	Usual%	Definition
A	4.0	93-100	Excellent
A-	3.7	89-92	
B+	3.3	85-88	
B	3.0	81-84	Good
B-	2.7	77-80	
C+	2.3	73-76	
C	2.0	69-72	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	65-68	
D	1.0	60-64	Low pass
F	0.0	Unmarked	Fail

“Incomplete” or **I** grades are not permitted to be issued by faculty, because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must be completed on time. The grades reflect the quality of the work.

It is also important to realise that grades below C may not be transferable to non BU students' home institutions. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

“Withdrawn” The Boston University Provost has announced that faculty members may no longer assign grades of "W" (Withdrawn). In supporting this policy, the Registrar's Office will no longer assign W grades on individual students' official Boston University records, even if the grade sheet has a "W" recorded for a student. Alternative grades to "W" are "F" (Failing) or "MG" (Missing Grade).

A This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

A- Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and

systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or inapt expressions.

B+, B, B- This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

C+, C, C- Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of the class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range. Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a C grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student's own work except where properly cited.

D A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

F The failing grade indicates the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- *Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- *So poorly written as to defy understanding
- *So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- *Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- *Demonstrates evidence of plagiarism

VI Schedule

SESSION 1

Introduction to the course

Historical overview part one: The early days of the BBC:

- origins of 'public service broadcasting'
- definition and development of BBC standards
- legacy, influence and relevance in today's multi-channel environment

Viewing: *Auntie: The Inside Story of the BBC*, programme 1 (BBC)

Initial seminar questions: How relevant is Lord Reith's view to the BBC's role today? What does this indicate about the future of the BBC?

Reading:

Crisell, Andrew, (2002), *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 2nd edition, London and New York: Routledge, Chapter 4: 'The Golden Age of Radio and the Rise of Television' pp. 68-82, and Chapter 5: 'Television: The First Years of Competition' pp. 84-105.

SESSION 2

Historical overview part two: from monopoly to multi-channelled environment:

- ITV and the 'golden age'
- Channel 4 – narrowcasting for the masses
- BSkyB; Channel 5; Freeview
- Re-defining and maintaining quality standards

Viewing: Showreels from the BBC; ITV; C4 and Five which reveal each channel's marketing stance and audience strategy

Initial seminar questions: How has the broadcasting landscape changed? What are the repercussions of the changes? How can quality be defined and maintained in today's multi-channelled environment?

Reading:

Fanthome, Christine, (2003), *Channel 5 – the early years*, Luton: University of Luton Press, Part 1: The Context of Contemporary Broadcasting, pp 1 - 34

McGown, Alistair (Ed), (2004), *The Television Yearbook 2005*, London: BFI, pp 46 – 60 and pp 74 - 85

Mulgan, Geoff, (Ed), (1990), *The Question of Quality*, London: BFI pp 4 - 32

SESSION 3

Industry insight:

- An overview of industry structure; producer-broadcasters; publisher-broadcasters; independent production companies; staffing
- Case study: the art of scheduling in today's market (includes a team scheduling exercise)
- Case study: *Restoration* (BBC) – how the process of commissioning TV programmes operates

Viewing: *Restoration* (BBC)

Initial seminar question: Why is *Restoration* so successful? In what ways does its composition and approach suit its position in the schedule?

Reading:

TV listings magazine, eg *Radio Times*

Gomery, Douglas, and Hockley, Luke, (Eds), (2006), *Television Industries*, London: BFI

Chapter 4: 'Making Programmes' and Chapter 5: 'Selling and Television'.

SESSION 4

Understanding Television Audiences

This session will focus on an overview of quantitative and qualitative TV audience research. It will look at the audience data collected by BARB, examining how the peplemeter works and the information that it delivers on

ratings, reach and the demographic breakdown of audiences. It will also examine qualitative audience measurement such as questionnaires, surveys, interviews, diaries, focus and friendship groups and consider Len Ang's theories relating to the "unknowable" audience. Class activities will include textual analysis of a selection of iconic advertisements and simulated focus groups and related analysis.

Viewing

A selection of iconic advertisements

Reading:

Len Ang, (1991), *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, Routledge, London, part one pp 15 - 41

Judith Williamson, (1978), *Decoding Advertisements; Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, Introduction and Chapter 1: 'A Currency of Signs', pp 11 - 40

SESSION 5

Children's Television:

- traditional perception of children's TV needs and wants
- moral panics
- active and passive viewers
- case study: the development of children's programming on Five from launch to the present day

Viewing: *Teletubbies* (BBC); *Fifi and the Flowertots* (Five); *Peppa Pig* (Five) *Newsround* (BBC)

Initial seminar question: What do research findings indicate regarding British parents' attitudes to the programming they want for their children? Is this an international view?

Reading:

Atwal, K, Millwood-Hargrave, A, and Sancho, J, (2003), *What Children Watch – An analysis of children's programming provision between 1997 – 2001, and children's views*, London: BSC and ITC, pp 71 – 100, starting 'The Role of Television'

Hannah Davies, David Buckingham and Peter Kelley, 'In the worst possible taste: children, television and cultural value', in Robert C Allen and Annette Hill, (2004) *The Television Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, pp 479 - 493

SESSION 6

Soaps:

- overview of development of British soaps
- key conventions of the soap genre
- key differences between British and American expectations

Viewing: *EastEnders* (BBC); *Coronation Street* (ITV); *Eldorado* (BBC)

Initial seminar question: Why did the BBC's new flagship soap *Eldorado* fail? What does this tell us about the expectations of British audiences?

Reading:

Buckingham, David, (1987), *Public Secrets: EastEnders and its audience*, London: BFI, Introduction and Chapter 1: 'Creating the Audience' pp 1 – 34
Robert C Allen, 'Making Sense of Soaps', in Robert C Allen and Annette Hill, (2004) *The Television Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, pp 242 – 257

SESSION 7

News:

- defining news values
- objectivity and perceived obstacles
- critical analysis and deconstruction of various news bulletins from diverse channels (class exercise)

Viewing: Examples of news bulletins from various channels; *Bethlehem Year Zero* (ITV), ('news' bulletin depicting the birth of Christ – which illustrates news conventions)

Initial seminar question: Can news ever be simply 'a window on the world'?

GUEST SPEAKER – Nora Dennehy, Senior News Producer, BBC

Reading:

Crisell, Andrew, (2006), *A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside the Box*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 5

Creeber, Glen, (Ed), (2001), *The Television Genre Book*, London: BFI, pp108 - 124

SESSION 8 Tuesday 13 February

Reality TV:

- Overview of key British reality shows
- Identifying the source of component parts of this new hybrid genre
- Changing perceptions of 'celebrity'
- The implications and consequences of interactivity, eg voting

Viewing: *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me out of Here* (ITV); *Big Brother*, (C4); *How not to get on Big Brother* (Channel 4)

Initial seminar questions: How real is reality TV? Does the rise of reality TV suggest that this genre is democratising or dumbing down TV output?

Reading:

Christopher Dunkley, 'It's not new and it's not clever', from Cummings et al (2002), *Reality TV: How Real Is Real?*, Institute of Ideas

Deborah Jermyn, Deborah, and Holmes, Su, (Eds), (2004), *Understanding Reality Television*, London: Routledge, Chapter 5 pp 111 – 135

SESSION 9

Drama: Televising Shakespeare

- historical origins of the success of the single drama
- televising Shakespeare (pros and cons; adhering to the original text or adapting the stories for the contemporary audience;)

Viewing: *Shakespeare Re-Told* (BBC); *Macbeth* (BBC)

Initial seminar questions: Is televised Shakespeare relevant to today's audiences? What are the commercial difficulties of producing and distributing the single play in today's multi-channelled environment?

Reading:

Crisell, Andrew, *A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside the Box*, (2006), Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 9
Creeber, Glen, (Ed), *The Television Genre Book*, (2001), London: BFI, pp8 – 46
Davies, Anthony, and Wells, Stanley, (Eds), *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press – Chapter 4 - Michele Willems, 'Verbal-Visual, Verbal-Pictorial or Textual Televisual? Reflections on the BBC Shakespeare Series' pp 69 - 85, and Chapter 5 - Neil Taylor, 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare', pp 86 - 98

SESSION 10

FINAL EXAM see BU website for updates:

VI Terms and Conditions

*****Attendance at all classes and visits is mandatory. Students missing lectures without a doctor's letter or authorisation from the Director or from the Placements' Team will automatically be docked a – or a + from their final grade. Persistent lateness will also be penalised in the final grade. A register of attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session and marks will be awarded for attendance. Absence can be conveyed either by advising a senior member of staff in the Academic Affairs Office with a request that the information be passed on to me; or by emailing me prior to class. Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable. Appointments for interviews for internships should not conflict with class times.***

Any student who is unable to attend a class, or take part in an assignment because of religious reasons, must give notice in advance of class. He/she will be required to make up for time lost. In this situation arrangements must be made with another student for class notes to be shared. Written papers must be delivered before agreed deadline, failure to hand in the paper will result in deducted marks.

I will make some time available in each session for students to raise questions etc. Should students wish to discuss matters with me in person I will also be available during the break mid-lecture and at the end of class. Alternatively, please feel free to e-mail me with questions. If you have problems with the availability of reading materials (all of which should be in the library) please contact me either through the Academic Affairs Office or via e-mail.

Plagiarism

Boston University's *Code of Student Responsibilities* states:

The value of any grade, credit, honour or degree received by a student presupposes that all work submitted by a student is his or her own. A student who uses or relies upon the work of others or who, except under conditions expressly permitted by the instructor, furnishes assistance to another student, violates the standards of the University. Students must insist upon academic honesty and integrity from their fellow students and must report promptly any case of alleged violation of academic conduct. Failure to do so is a violation of this code.

Plagiarism can take many forms, including the reproduction of published material without acknowledgement, or representing work done by others as your own. This includes the increasingly common practice of purchasing and downloading work from Internet "paper mills." You should be extremely careful when submitting work for this course that all work is correctly sourced. Prints outs of websites that have been used in research may be required by the lecturer in cases of a grade dispute and all website based reference material should be kept by the student until after the end of the semester