

Course Title: Contemporary British Broadcasting

Instructor: Carol Nahra

While the US from the outset let market forces rule with minimum regulation, Britain has always regarded broadcasting as a medium which needed to be reined in. As early as 1920, the British decided to avoid going the American way when it came to broadcasting, dismissing it as too commercial. With the establishment of the BBC as a monopoly (which lasted until the mid 1950s,) and the introduction of a license fee British broadcasters set down a very different path than Americans. Built on the idea that broadcasting must exist not only to entertain the public, but to inform and educate as well, British broadcasting to this day remains a lively mix of genres and programmes, with extensive influence throughout the world. The BBC is known globally for both the quality of its documentaries, and its world class radio. The last 15 years has seen an explosion in British broadcasting exports, from Who Wants to be a Millionaire to Pop Idol, to Wife Swap. While competition from commercial television such as Channel 4 has always kept the BBC on its toes, today's broadcasting culture has never been more competitive, or held more choice for consumers. The BBC is struggling to hold on to its privileged license fee in a rapidly fragmenting digital age: will it be able to? This class will explore the history of British radio and television broadcasting, its role in British society and culture, its global impact, and its place in today's digital world.

Topics covered:

1. Public Service Broadcasting, past, present and future
2. Competition in British Broadcasting, from ITV onwards
3. BBC radio through the ages, and its role in society today
4. The birth of Channel 4 and the Independent Production Sector
5. Documentaries and their importance to British cultural identity
6. News, current affairs and reality television
7. British foreign correspondents from Alistair Cooke to John Simpson
8. British broadcasting exports and the explosion of global formats, from Who Wants to be a Millionaire to The Office to Pop Idol
9. Socio-realist drama, soap operas, and broadcasting as a tool for social good
10. British programming institutions, from The Archers to The Today Programme to Question Time
11. Experimental British television and radio
12. OFCOM, its role and impact on content
13. Multicultural programming in British broadcasting

14. Broadcasting in the digital age: challenges and opportunities
15. Multi-platform commissioning, and where its heading
16. The BBC under fire
17. The influence of Rupert Murdoch
18. The evolution of factual formats in the global marketplace: making history sexy.

Course Objectives:

1. To develop a broad understanding of the values-based nature of British radio and television broadcasting and its fundamental differences from the US.
2. To appreciate the differences between the historical and regulatory landscapes for broadcasting in the US and the UK, and to understand the implications of these differences.
3. To understand contemporary British broadcasting, and the challenges it faces in the rapidly changing digital age, as the market fragments and choice proliferates.
4. To develop an appreciation of the genres that British broadcasting has excelled in, particularly documentaries and factual formats, and how these have shaped global broadcasting.

Course Learning Outcomes:

After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Analyse the differences between the US and the UK broadcasting landscapes
- Debate the role of public service broadcasting in digital age
- Discuss the role of British radio in British society, and in the world
- Outline the major developments in British broadcasting
- Discuss the role of the independent production sector and the commissioning system
- Discuss the role of key genres such as factual and drama
- Understand contemporary issues surrounding British broadcasting in the digital age

Required Text:

An Introductory History of British Broadcasting, Andrew Crisell,
Routledge, 2002

Indicative Reading will include:

- *British Television: A Reader*, Edward Buscombe, Oxford University Press, 2000
- *Experimental British Television*, Laura Mulvey and Jamie Sexton, Manchester University Press, 2007
- *An Introduction to Television Studies*, Jonathan Bignell, Routledge, 2004
- Class handouts and web links on contemporary news stories

Co-curricular activities

Guest Speakers, from:

BBC Radio

Channel 4 new media

The Independent Production sector

Field Trips:

The BBC and Sky News

The recording of a television or radio programme

The British Film Institute Mediatheque

A superindie production company

Instructional Methods:

Classes will consist of lectures, group activities, guest speakers, field trips, and student presentations. Students will be expected to be active media users throughout, and will be required to read newspapers and online media as it relates to broadcasting, bringing a news story to discuss to each class. Students will be also expected to regularly listen to radio and television programmes. Classes will begin with discussions of contemporary news stories and programmes.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Regular attendance is essential to achieving a passing grade in a course. A class constitutes lectures, student presentations, discussions, seminars, field visits, tests and examinations.

In addition to physical presence in class, a student's class **participation score of 20%** will be based on the mastery of assigned course readings

as reflected in a consistent contribution to class discussions, in-class exercises, and in asking questions that enrich the on-going discourse. Occasional participation will have a negative impact on a student's participation score.

Class attendance will be formally recorded, and incorporated into a student's final grade. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class. Any student arriving 5 minutes or more late for class will be marked absent for that day, unless the tardiness is excusable. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the course instructor in advance, in the event of an excused absence. Absence from class does not relieve a student of responsibility for assignments. There is a strong relationship between class attendance and success or failure in the classroom. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with the instructor about absences due to illness or family emergency. Class absences are deemed excused at the discretion of the course instructor and require documentation.

An excused absence or an excused reason for being late to class is any documented emergency and/or acute illness or injury directly involving the student. **Unexplained absence is not permitted.** Two consecutive unexplained absences will be flagged immediately by the instructor who will then inform the Co-ops and file an Unsatisfactory Progress Report with the Site Director. The Site Director and the Academic Services Manager will then take a joint decision on further action.

Assessment Plan:

Class attendance and participation (20%)

Short essay (15%)

Mid-term essay (20%)

Student Presentation (20%)

Final Exam (25%)