

**TSEM 102 SEC 057: Popular Culture & Politics: Comedy, Entertainment,  
Celebrity, and Democracy**

**Spring 2013**

**M, W 2 – 3:15 PM Van Boekkelen (VB) 214**

Professor Amy Becker, PhD

E-mail: [abecker@towson.edu](mailto:abecker@towson.edu)

Office: 113 Stephens Annex

Phone: 410-704-3942

Office Hours: M 10:00AM – 12:30 PM; W 10AM – 11AM, Friday 1 – 2:30 pm (Friday is by prior appointment only; available at other times by appointment)

**Course Description from Towson University Catalog:**

**TSEM 102 SEC 057: Popular Culture & Politics: Comedy, Entertainment, Celebrity, and Democracy:** Writing-intensive seminar focusing on popular politics and the increasing role of entertainment, celebrity, and humor in the public sphere. Subtopics to include: celebrity politics, political comedy, television entertainment, and new media.

**Towson University Seminar Description:**

Focusing on exploration and discovery, this course introduces students to the academic expectations for college-level work and to the intellectual, communication, and collaborative skills needed for academic success. Seminar format emphasizing active learning. Introduces multiple perspectives and may draw from more than one discipline. May not count toward a major. Enrollment normally limited to 20 students.

**Course Outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Prepare and present a compelling substantive interpretation, argument, and/or analysis of a problem or issue in a research paper.
2. Gather and use academic resources effectively and according to the standards and rules of academic integrity in formulating and presenting a substantive interpretation, argument, and/or analysis of a problem or issue.
3. Understand and evaluate the nature and possible causes and implications of events, behavior, problems, and issues from an informed and intellectually balanced perspective.
4. Connect concepts and empirical evidence in logically coherent, valid, and compelling ways.

**Required Textbooks:**

Baumgartner, J. C., & Morris, J. S. (2008). *Laughing matters: Humor and American politics in the media age*. New York: Routledge.

West, D. M., & Orman, J. M. (2003). *Celebrity politics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Van Zoonen, L. (2005). *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc.

**Optional Purchase:**

Amarasingam, A., & Robert, W. (2011). *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on the Real Impacts of Fake News*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

\*\* We will be reading multiple chapters from this book that are available through Cook Library in e-book format. If you'd like a physical copy of the book, it is your option to purchase a hard copy.

**Additional Readings:**

All additional readings are available on the course's e-reserve site. A link to the e-reserve site is on the course blackboard page.

The due dates for all of the readings are listed in the course schedule. **Students are responsible for reading all assigned chapters and articles by the dates specified on the syllabus.**

A bibliography is included at the end of this syllabus.

**Course Blog:**

The video content shared in class will be posted on the course blog:

<http://tsem102politics.blogspot.com/>

**EXPECTATIONS**

- Do the reading! You are expected to complete all reading assignments by the date listed on the course schedule. It is your responsibility to consult the course schedule for particular assignments and to stay current with all chapters and assigned articles.

- While we all love to multi-task, it is expected that you will refrain from using your cell phones (texting, calls, etc.), Facebook, IM, email, etc. while in seminar. If you are experiencing an emergency and might need to step out and accept a call during class, etc. please let me know ahead of time. **Repeated cell phone offenses may impact your attendance/class participation score. The same thing is true for offenses involving laptops and tablets that are being used for activities other than taking notes.**
- You are expected to contribute to discussions and be an active, engaged participant in the classroom. Participation and attendance make up 10% of the final grade. Be sure to maximize your contributions.
- Part of being an engaged member of the classroom means respecting fellow classmates and their contributions to the discussion. Please act accordingly.
- Ask questions. If you don't understand something or would like further clarification, please ask questions during class discussion. Don't be afraid to speak up.
- **Each week's lecture slides will be made available by the Friday of the week before class. Students may bring printed copies to class for note-taking if they like. Posting will discontinue if attendance drops as a result of the posting or if there are attention problems in class (cell phones, non-class related laptop activity, etc.)**

### COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

#### Attendance

- Attendance is expected. I will follow the university policy with respect to attendance (see *Towson University Undergraduate Catalog 2010-2011*, p. 18).
- Absences may be excused if you: (1) have an illness or injury precluding you from attending class; (2) observe a religious holiday that prevents you from class attendance; (3) are required to participate in a university activity by a recognized authority; or (4) experience a compelling, verifiable emergency beyond your control.
- If you anticipate an absence in advance, you must contact me by e-mail **at least one week in advance** to let me know you will be absent during a class session. In the case of an emergency, you must notify me via email **within 24 hours after the absence**. Excused absences will be granted only when the reason for the absence is documented in writing. Supporting documents are required (doctor's notes, etc.). **All excuse notes must be turned in no later than 1 week after the absences. I will not accept notes turned in weeks after the absence or at the end of the semester.** Other absences (funerals, weddings, etc.) will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. **You are responsible for obtaining notes and announcements**

**presented in the class session you missed. I will not provide notes for missed seminars.**

- **Two (2)** unexcused absences are allowed. Please use those wisely. You will **lose 2 points** from your attendance/participation grade for each absence you have over the limit.
- Late arrivals and early departures are not allowed. **2 “late and/or early departures” will count as one unexcused absence.**

#### Contacting Me/Office Hours

- Email ([abecker@towson.edu](mailto:abecker@towson.edu)) is the best way to reach me. You can usually expect a response within 24 hours (though during the week, hopefully less). Please be patient if you email me on a weekend or when I might be traveling. **Please remember that you are emailing a professor and should treat this type of communication differently than an email or text message to a friend.**
- I have tried to schedule my office hours at times that should work well with your schedules and the timing of assignments for the course. If you make an appointment to see me during office hours, I expect that means you will show up on time and be prepared to discuss course material. If for some reason you can't make your appointment, I ask that you email me **at least 24 hours before the appointment to cancel.** I am available by appointment outside office hours. Please email me with your request directly. **If you make appointments and then do not show up, please don't be surprised if this is reflected in your class participation/attendance grade.**

#### Contacting You

- I plan to contact you via email using your towson.edu account. I understand that many of you may use other email accounts/forwarding services. You are still responsible for checking your Towson email address. I will not keep track of personal emails, etc.

#### Late Work

- **Late work will not be accepted.** Work missed for a known, excused absence must be turned in prior to the absence in order to receive credit.

#### Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is using other people's work and ideas without giving them credit. Cheating or plagiarism of any kind may result in one of the following consequences,

an F on the assignment, and/or a grade of “F” for the course. This applies to work on all individual assignments including quizzes, and papers. If you are unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty, please read the *Towson University Undergraduate Catalog*. The departmental policy on plagiarism and cheating can be found online here: <http://www.towson.edu/mccs/docs/PlagiarismMemo.pdf>. You can also consult the university policy online at: <http://www.towson.edu/provost/resources/studentacademic.asp>

### A Word on Liability

- In all assignments, students must comply with all laws and the legal rights of others (e.g., copyright, obscenity, privacy and defamation) and with all Towson University policies (e.g., academic dishonesty). Towson University is not liable or responsible for the content of any student assignments, regardless of where they are posted.

### Civility

- Students are also responsible for complying with the COFAC Civility Code. The policy can be found online here: <http://www.towson.edu/mccs/docs/CivilityCode.pdf>

### Weapons Policy

- Weapons of any kind are forbidden on Towson University’s campus. For additional information go to: <http://inside.towson.edu/generalcampus/tupolicies/documents/06-01.11%20weapons%20Prohibited.pdf>

### Students with Disabilities

- This course is in compliance with Towson University policies for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Disability Support Services (DSS) 7720 York Road, Suite 232, 410/704-2638 (Voice or TDD) <http://www.towson.edu/dss/index.asp>. Students who suspect that they have a disability but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact DSS for advice on how to obtain appropriate evaluation. A memo from DSS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made.

### The Syllabus

- This course syllabus is a contract. I will uphold my end and I expect you to do the same. I reserve the right to make minor scheduling changes if need be as the semester unfolds.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

	Percentage	Points
Exams	40% (2 @ 20%)	80 (40 pts each)
Media Review Assignment	5%	10
Research Paper Abstract & Outline	5%	10
Strategy Memo	10%	20
Research Paper	25%	50
Research Paper Presentation	5%	10
Class Participation & Attendance	10%	20
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>200</b>

Exams (40%, 2@ 20%) Course Outcomes 3,4

- There will be two in class exams this semester. The first exam will take place on **Wednesday, March 6th** and the second exam will take place on **Monday, April 29th**

Media Review Assignment (5%) Course Outcomes 1-4

For this assignment, you are to find a relevant YouTube clip that mixes popular culture and politics. The clip can use humor, music, a celebrity, or a cartoon, etc. to make a political point. In a 500 word online post, you should do the following:

- Summarize what is happening in the video clip
- Discuss whether the video uses parody or satire to make a point
- Apply concepts from the PBS Make Em Laugh Video (viewed in class and available online) to discuss the reach, impact, and significance of the video clip
- Find at least one external source/reading to apply to your argument regarding the significance and impact of the video (cite using APA format)
- Don't forget to link to the video in your post

This assignment is worth 5% of the course grade or 10 points and is due **Wednesday, February 20th**. All assignments will be posted online on blackboard.

Strategy Memo: (10%) Course Outcomes 1-4

For the strategy memo assignment, you are to pick 1 of the choices listed below. **This assignment is due on Monday, April 22nd**

1. You will need to write a 1,000 word strategy memo (~ 3 pages double spaced) to the campaign staff of any candidate running for governor or national office (President, Vice President, Senate, House of Representative), advising them as to whether they should appear on either *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*. In a non-election year, you can pick a prominent national politician who is looking to maintain the

connection with voters. You should spend the first portion of the assignment reviewing a recent episode of **both** *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, applying key concepts learned in class within your discussion and critique of the programs. In the second part of the paper, discuss which program makes better sense for your candidate/politician and why. While this is a creative assignment, your suggestions must ultimately be realistic and plausible additions to the candidate's ongoing campaign/political activities.

2. You will need to write a 1,000 word strategy memo (~ 3 pages double spaced) to the head of an issue advocacy organization or relevant non-profit (i.e., Sierra Club, Planned Parenthood, American Red Cross, American Heart Association) advising them on how they should use celebrity issue advocacy messaging to advance their organization's mission, fundraising, and membership recruitment. You should spend the first part of the memo presenting a comparable example of current celebrity advocacy efforts (e.g., if you're writing to a cancer research organization you might first talk about the advocacy efforts by Katie Couric). As part of your memo, you may suggest working with a particular celebrity advocate or series of advocates, specific social media initiatives, partnerships with particular organizations or industry groups, or new media strategies. While this is a creative assignment, your proposal must be a thoughtful, actionable, and well-researched document. Be sure to apply key concepts reviewed in class when discussing your comparable example and when proposing strategy suggestions for your chosen issue advocacy organization/non-profit.

Research Paper Abstract/Outline/Thesis Statement (5%) & Final Research Paper (25%)  
Course Outcomes 1-4

- The final research paper (8-10 pages of original research) is an integral part of the course and as such is worth 25% of your grade. Over the course of the semester you will work to define an appropriate topic that allows you to apply concepts and theories discussed in class. We will work together to develop this topic along with a thesis statement, abstract for the paper, and detailed outline that will guide you in your writing (worth a separate 5% of the grade). We will work with members of the library staff to learn how to search for appropriate academic research sources, how to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism and academic integrity, and how to properly document sources using APA style. Appropriate research topics might include but are not limited to: (1) a review of celebrity advocacy efforts on a particular political issue, (2) a case study of a celebrity politician, (3) a discussion of the impact of comedy on political behavior (knowledge, voting, media attentiveness, etc.), (4) a historical look at the use of comedy in politics, (5) a study of political cartoons, OR (6) a review of a particular genre of television content (i.e., sitcom, drama) and relevant connections with politics. We will discuss this assignment in greater detail later in the semester.

Research Paper Presentation (5%)

Course Outcomes 1-4

- At the end of the semester, you will present your research paper to the seminar. More details will follow, but you will need to make a ~15 minute presentation to the group.

Class Participation & Attendance (10%)

- 10% of your grade will be based on your participation and attendance. Your score will depend on your contributions to classroom discussion, attendance in seminar, and contribution to peer review of presentations. It is therefore in your best interest to be an active classroom participant. A good way to boost your class participation score is to find videos to share with the class (like on the course blog) or bring in news items for discussion.

Extra Credit

- During the course of the semester, I may offer opportunities to earn extra credit in the course. Sometimes I may ask a 1 pt. quiz question about one of the readings in class. Other opportunities may involve participating in a research study or in other campus activities. Any extra credit points earned will be added to your final course grade at the end of the semester.

**GRADING****Grading Calculations**

<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Points</b>
93-100%	A	186-200
90-92%	A-	180-185
87-89%	B+	174-179
83-86%	B	166-173
80-82%	B-	160-165
77-79%	C+	154-159
70-76%	C	140-153
67-69%	D+	134-139
60-66%	D	120-133
Below 60%	F	Below 120

An "A" paper:

1. Fully completes all parts of the assignment in a thoughtful manner.
2. Has an effective introduction and conclusion.
3. Includes a concise and clear thesis statement or topic sentence.
4. Provides support for arguments with adequate yet focused details.
5. Is well organized and free of grammatical and spelling errors.
6. Acknowledges and document sources.
7. Shows originality and creativity in completing the assignment.
8. Maintains a level of excellence throughout.

A "B" paper does all of the above (1-8) in a superior way, but without the level of originality or creativity of an A paper and/or has some minor errors or flaws.

A "C" paper does all of the above (1-8) in a satisfactory manner but includes more (or more serious) errors or flaws or is missing some of the above (1-8). Note: Rough drafts without additional work often resemble a C paper.

A "D" paper does a poor job with items 1-8 listed above and/or includes numerous errors or flaws.

An "F" paper is missing many of the above (1-8) and/or includes many serious and minor errors or flaws.

**\*\*Rubrics for writing assignments will be supplied on blackboard and discussed in class before the assignment is due**

**[SYLLABUS CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE]**

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Date	Topic	Readings	Classroom
M 1/28	Introduction to Political Entertainment & Review of Syllabus		
W 1/30	Political Entertainment throughout the years	(Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001) Laughing Matters: Ch 3 S/C Effect Intro – Compton chapter	Video: PBS' Make Em Laugh (selected segments 1,2,3,4)
M 2/4	Satire Case Study: <i>The Daily Show with Jon Stewart</i> and <i>The Colbert Report</i>	Laughing Matters: Ch 1 Satire TV Ch 1 Tally Chapter in S/C Effect	Video: PBS' Make Em Laugh (selected segments 10, 11,12)
W 2/6	Parody Case Study: <i>Saturday Night Live</i>	Satire TV Ch 2 (p. 38-49) Laughing Matters: Ch 13 (Baumgartner, Morris, & Walth, 2012)	Video: PBS' Make Em Laugh (selected segments 5,6,7,8)
M 2/11	Online Humor/YouTube	(Tryon, 2008) (Hariman, 2008)	Online Episode/PBS Make Em Laugh <b>Discuss Media Review Assignment</b>
W 2/13	Perceptions & Media Behavior	Laughing Matters: Ch 15,18 (Becker, Xenos, & Waisanen, 2010)	
M 2/18	Political Effects	Laughing Matters: Ch 16,17 Baumgartner & Morris Ch in S/C Effect	
W 2/20	Politician as Comic Actor/Target Case Studies: Sarah Palin, George W. Bush	(Kolbert, 2004) (Becker, 2012) (Dowd, 2009) (Sternbergh, 2006)	<b>Media Review Assignment Due</b>
M 2/25	Comedy on the Silver Screen	NYT & Ebert Reviews of Game Change	<b>Brainstorm paper topics in class</b>
W 2/27	Comedy on the Silver Screen (cont)	(Esralew & Young, 2012) (Flowers & Young, 2010)	

M 3/4	Political Comedy Good or Bad for Democracy?	(Hariman, 2007; Hart & Hartelius, 2007) Delli Carpini & Williams in S/C Effect, Laughing Matters Ch 19	<b>Review paper rubric/assignment sheet</b>
W 3/6	<b>Exam 1</b>		

M 3/11	How to Write a Research Paper		<b>Paper topic proposal due (one page) Meet in Cook Library 526</b>
W 3/13	Research Session with Library (how to find appropriate sources, avoid plagiarism, and how to document sources using APA style)		<b>Meet in Cook Library 526</b>

**SPRING BREAK (March 17 – 24<sup>th</sup>)**

M 3/25	Introduction to Celebrity Politics	West & Orman: Ch 1 (Traub, 2008) Van Zoonen: Ch 1	
W 3/27	Why Celebrities?	West & Orman: Ch 2, 6 (Meyer & Gamson, 1995)	
M 4/1	Celebrity & Issue Advocacy	West & Orman: Ch 5 (Becker, 2013; Kristof, 2009)	<b>Project Thesis Statement, Abstract, and Outline Due</b>
W 4/3	Celebrity & Endorsements	(Pease & Brewer, 2008) West & Orman: Ch 3	
M 4/8	Popular Music & Politics/GOTV	Van Zoonen: Ch 3 Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton, & Epstein, 2008;	
W 4/10	Print: <i>The Onion</i>	(Wenner, 2002) Laughing Matters: Ch 5	Podcast from <i>This American Life</i>

M 4/15	Comedy, Celebrity, & Gender Case Study: Barbara Mikulski	Van Zoonen: Ch 6 (Robson, 2000)	<i>Bossypants</i> audio book
W 4/17	Celebrity Politics: Positive or Negative? Political Entertainment Review	West & Orman Ch 8, 9 Van Zoonen Ch 9 (p. 143-147)	
M 4/22	Politics and Film: <i>Ides of March</i>		<b>Strategy Memo Due</b>
W 4/24	Politics and Film (cont)	Van Zoonen: Ch 7 & Ch 8 NYT & Ebert movie reviews	

M 4/29	<b>Exam 2</b>		
W 5/1	Presentations		
M 5/6	Presentations		
W 5/8	Presentations		
M 5/13	Presentations		
<b>EXAM SESSION – Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup> 8:00am – 10:00 am: Final Papers Due on blackboard no later than 8:00 am</b>			

### **Additional Readings/Bibliography**

- Baumgartner, J. C., Morris, J. S., & Walth, N. L. (2012). The Fey effect: Young adults, political humor, and perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 presidential election campaign. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(1), 95-104.
- Becker, A. B. (2012). Comedy types and political campaigns: The differential influence of other-directed hostile humor and self-ridicule on candidate evaluations. *Mass Communication & Society*, 15(6), 791-812. doi: 10.1080/15205436.2011.628431
- Becker, A. B. (2013). Star power? Advocacy, receptivity, and viewpoints on celebrity involvement in issue politics. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 21(1).
- Becker, A. B., Xenos, M. A., & Waisanen, D. J. (2010). Sizing up The Daily Show: Audience perceptions of political comedy programming. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 18(3), 144-157.
- Delli Carpini, M., & Williams, B. (2001). Let us infotain you: Mediated Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dowd, M. (2009, January 1). What Tina Fey wants. *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved May 26, 2009, from [http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/2009/01/tina\\_fey200901](http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/2009/01/tina_fey200901)
- Esralew, S., & Young, D. G. (2012). The influence of parodies on mental models: Exploring the Tina Fey-Sarah Palin phenomenon. *Communication Quarterly*, 60(3), 338-352. doi: 10.1080/01463373.2012.688791
- Flowers, A. A., & Young, C. L. (2010). Parodying Palin: How Tina Fey's Visual and Verbal Impersonations Revived a Comedy Show and Impacted the 2008 Election. [Article]. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 29(1), 47-67.
- Hariman, R. (2008). Political Parody and Public Culture. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 94(3), 247-272. doi: 10.1080/00335630802210369
- Kolbert, E. (2004, April 19). Stooping to conquer: Why candidates need to make fun of themselves. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved May 26, 2009, from [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/19/040419fa\\_fact1?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/04/19/040419fa_fact1?currentPage=all)
- Kristof, N. D. (2009, November 9). Trailing George Clooney, *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/opinion/19iht-edkristof.1.20303347.html>
- Meyer, D. S., & Gamson, J. (1995). The challenge of cultural elites: Celebrities and social movements. *Sociological Inquiry*, 65(2), 181-206.
- Pease, A., & Brewer, P. (2008). The Oprah factor: The effects of a celebrity endorsement in a presidential primary campaign. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(4), 386-400.
- Robson, D. (2000). Stereotypes and the female politician: A case study of Senator Barbara Mikulski. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(3), 205-222.
- Sternbergh, A. (2006, October 16). Stephen Colbert Has America by the ballots. *New York Magazine*. Retrieved May 26, 2009, from <http://nymag.com/news/politics/22322/>
- Tryon, C. (2008). Pop Politics: Online Parody Videos, Intertextuality, and Political Participation. [Article]. *Popular Communication*, 6(4), 209-213. doi: 10.1080/15405700802418537
- Wenner, K. S. (2002). Peeling the Onion. *American Journalism Review*, 24(7), 48-53.