

**Re-Certification Report**  
**RTV 3405 – TV and American Society**

**Sub-Committee #3**  
**General Education Committee**  
**University of Florida**  
**May 4, 2012**

**Members, Sub-Committee #3**

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**Course Information:**

Title: *RTV 3405 – TV and American Society (S)*  
Enrollment: 175/200  
Main Lectures: M 10-11; W 10 / T 10-11; R 10  
Location: Weimer 1064 / Weimer G034

**Instructors:**

This course is taught by TAs: Ms. Maridith Miles and Ms. Jessica A. Mahone. Each TA is responsible for one section of the course. There are no faculty affiliated with the course.

TAs are supervised by Department Chair David Ostroff  
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## **Recommendation**

The Sub-Committee concluded that *RTV 3405 TV and American Society* meets the requirements and expectations of a General Education course, and the Sub-Committee recommends “**Re-Certify**” for RTV 3405, with the area designation of Social and Behavioral Sciences (S).

## **Overview of Review Process**

The recertification review process included 9 components: (1) obtaining a syllabi provided by the two instructors; (2) holding a pre-review meeting with the two instructor and their Department Chair; (3) providing the Department Chair with a series of ten questions regarding the course; (4) attending course main lectures; (5) conducting informal conversations with students enrolled in the course; (6) preparing a draft report; (7) sharing the draft report with the instructors and Department Chair for feedback; (8) holding a post-review meeting with the Department Chair; and (9) preparing a final report for the General Education Committee.

## **Syllabus and Course Content**

According to each of the syllabi submitted by the course instructors, RTV 3405 introduces students to the history of television and the medium’s effects on American society. Students learn about the invention of television; milestones in the history of television; media effects theories; the political, social, cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects of television content; and new television technologies.

The course syllabi include the standard required components: course title and description, General Education areas of designation (S), instructor and TA contact information, office hours, course objectives, assignments, grading, readings, and a weekly schedule of topics and content, as well as course management guidelines, campus resources for students, etc. Overall, course content, methods, assignments, and readings relate to the course objectives. Course content follows the weekly schedule of topics. Student evaluation include a full range of grades, including minus (-) grades. Readings are current and offered a range of perspectives. Student learning objectives for Social and Behavioral Sciences are clearly defined within the syllabi and are addressed adequately through course lecture, discussion, and assignments.

## **Pre-Review Meeting**

At the pre-view meeting, Sub-Committee members described the purpose and specific steps involved in the re-certification review. Dr. David Orstoff provided a background on the current state of the course. Of note, Dr. Ostroff identified that the course had initially been designed and taught by a faculty member, but the faculty member had unexpectedly passed away. Since then, the course has fallen to TAs for instruction and design. Both TAs currently teaching the course attended the pre-review meeting and provided substantial information about the course design and pedagogy. The Department of Telecommunication plans to hire a faculty member who will supervise the course.

Each TA confirmed the numerous ways in which RTV 3405 is designed and taught to meet the objectives for General Education requirements. The two TAs work together to design

the course in order to maintain parity between the two sections. Both TAs confirm that actual classroom practice does adhere to General Education objectives. In addition, Dr. David Ostroff replied to ten written questions regarding the ways in which RTV 3405 meet the requirements for General Education (see Appendix 1).

Though not a direct responsibility of this sub-committee's review charge, General Education Sub-Committee #3 is obligated to note that RTV 3405 is desperately understaffed. Each of the two sections is taught by a single TA; one has 200 students in one section and the other has 175 students. There appears to be no direct faculty involvement with the course. While the two TAs have performed excellently in managing these sections, they are being asked to fulfill a much larger labor role than should be expected of graduate students.

## **Lectures**

Members of Sub-Committee #3 attended lectures for each of the two sections offered during spring semester 2012. The lecture content for each section matched the topics indicated in the syllabus' weekly schedule of topics. The Spring Semester 2012 Schedule of Courses includes two sections of RTV 3405, both taught by TAs. The TAs use a common syllabus, and they meet regularly to coordinate lecture topics and content to follow the master syllabus' weekly schedule.

At one lecture, the instructor opened with leading questions, followed by posing specific questions. These guiding questions lead to additional questions between and among the instructor and the students. Discussion focused generally on raising awareness and encouraging students to assess their existing belief systems about television programming, and introducing a range of approaches to examine how television projects and reinforces societal knowledge, beliefs, and behavior.

For example, one lecture focused on examining the term, "minorities of status," as depicted in television program content. The instructor noted that a discussion of "minorities" typically involves factors such as race and ethnicity. However, "minorities of status" can include any group placed in a situation or circumstances that encourage isolation and negative stereotyping, with implications for mocking and exclusion. The instructor introduced several examples involving "minorities of status" in television programming, then students added a number of examples to the list (e.g. gender, advanced age, people with disabilities, sexual preferences, political affiliations, religious beliefs, obesity/body types, athleticism, regional/geographical idiosyncrasies, law enforcement, physicians, professors, college students, hair color).

The instructor included specific examples of "minorities of status" with film clips – sometimes provocative – taken from actual television programs. Students analyzed the clips, identified negative stereotyping targeted at the various groups, discussed inaccuracies and misinformation conveyed, and suggested alternatives that counter the negative stereotypes and depict groups in a realistic and positive light.

Overall, the exercise lead students to analyze critically their acceptance of stereotypical thinking and artificially constructed norms of implied behavior, develop their own hypotheses and explanations about motivations for stereotyping, and suggest accurate and positive alternatives to these practices.

The other lecture followed a similar approach, posing questions to guide students through the day's materials. A good deal of this section's lecture addressed concepts of perception and

rhetoric. The instructor used numerous provocative examples and encouraged students in critical thinking approaches to better understand the examples as well as larger concepts. Using an unstated framework of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, the instructor showed students how to engage television advertisements critically rather than as passive viewers.

Interestingly, given the size of the class—200 students—the instructor encouraged comments and responses from students. The instructor did a remarkable job of managing this classroom structure, and it was clear that students were engaged and interested in the course.

### **Student Conversations**

Conversations with students enrolled in RTV 3405 occurred following each of the two observed lectures. Most students acknowledged knowing that RTV 3405 is a General Education course, with some not knowing the specific area of designation, Social and Behavioral Sciences. Student engaged freely in conversation about the course. Hours spent watching television among the students ranged from a very few hours per week to 10 hours or more per week.

In one section, about half of the students enrolled acknowledged being in the course specifically for General Education credit; the remaining half were taking the course as part of their major. Both the TA and the students acknowledged the difficulties in directing a single course at both majors and non-majors; yet, both populations of students identified that the course effectively reached each student group. Some noted that the course challenged their attitudes and beliefs about television programming by prompting personal introspection concerning the medium and the messages.

A number indicated the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they gained from the course caused them to become more selective in their personal viewing habits, with some reducing the total number of hours spent watching television, and all reporting an improved ability to critically analyze content, detect negative stereotypes, and deconstruct media messages based on principles learned in the class. One student mentioned specifically the new insights gained about the pervasive influence of television on societal attitudes and behavior. Overall, students believed RTV 3405 contributes positively to their general education.

### **Post-Review Meeting**

Members of Sub-Committee #3 provided Dr. David Orstoff the draft of this report and then met with him on April 25, 2012 to discuss the contents of the report. Dr. Orstoff agreed with the content of the report, but did request that the following clarification be added: RTV 3405 was originally taught by a faculty member who passed away unexpectedly. The course was then covered by TAs out of necessity. The Department of Telecommunication hopes to hire a faculty member who will supervise the course. This information has been added to the Pre-Review Meeting section of this report, as Dr. Orstoff did inform of the Sub-Committee of this situation at the initial meeting.

### **Conclusions**

Sub-Committee #3 feels confident with the analysis, interactions, and outcomes that occurred in conducting the review of RTV 3405. The two TAs who manage this course are effective and professional; they work to ensure continuity between the two sections. The course

provides a forum that encourages critical analysis of and communication about the role of television in American society. Students are asked to examine their assumptions about television. In order to do so, they are introduced to theories, histories, methodologies, and disciplinary principles that expand their understanding of television as a communicative media. RTV 3405 represents a substantial, effectively taught course that proves challenging and enlightening for students. In that respect, the course contributes meaningfully to the general education of students, particularly in terms of promoting diversity and appreciation for the Social and Behavioral Sciences.

## **Appendix 1:**

### **Generic Discussion Questions Related to RTV 3405**

**1. Do course objectives adequately cover the nature and extent of course content?** This course is intended to familiarize students with television as a tool of communication and help them to understand its effects on their world. We cover many topics from changes in technology, to theoretical perspectives, to specific types of televised content, all in an effort to help the student gain a basic understanding of how television developed, how people interact with television (and how that has changed over time), and how it affects American society socially, culturally, psychologically, cognitively, and physically. Therefore, we outline the following six objectives at the beginning of the course:

- To identify the history and development of television in terms of both technology and culture
- To identify the major theoretical perspectives (and their components) used to study television
- To be able to apply major theoretical perspectives to televised content, and form hypotheses regarding effects on society
- To understand the behavioral, cognitive, affective, and political effects of television in terms of both individual and social outcomes
- To understand the major functions of television in American society
- To develop media literacy skills and the capacity to be an alert and conscientious consumer of television

We believe that, while there is a great deal of content covered in this class, these objectives outline the basic understanding that any student should have about television's role in our society – both now and in the past – and these goals are kept in mind throughout the semester while presenting new content.

### **2. Do course objectives connect directly to course content, and to the weekly schedule of topics?**

Each of the objectives listed above is both directly connected to a specific lecture or series of lectures and indirectly connected throughout the semester as we make connections for students (or ask them to make the connections themselves) between what we have already learned (regarding theoretical perspectives, the functions of television in society, the types of effects, etc) and specific content currently on television. Specifically, our first objective – To identify the history and development of television in terms of both technology and culture – is covered in the first two to three weeks of the course, beginning with television's invention, through popular adoption of television, into changes in technology and changes in viewing habits, and end with today's convergent media environment. We also discuss milestones in programming and technology, and highlight major historical events that unfolded on television. Our second objective – To identify the major theoretical perspectives (and their components) used to study television – is introduced within the first several weeks of the course and then reinforced at beginning of each new set of lectures. Students are given an understanding of many major theoretical perspectives regarding televised communication at the beginning of the course. Then, two or three different theories are connected to each specific televised content topic (i.e. political advertising, reality television,

stereotypes on television, etc.) throughout the semester. The third objective – To be able to apply the major theoretical perspectives to televised content, and be able to form hypotheses regarding effects on society – is directly related to the second. While presenting the theories we ask students to follow them to their logical conclusion, and use class discussion to get students to come up with their own expectations regarding television's effect on society as viewed from one particular theoretical perspective. Our fourth objective – To understand the behavioral, cognitive, affective, and political effects of television in terms of both individual and social outcomes – is addressed in almost every lecture. We begin the semester discussing generic types of media effects (learning, emotions and evaluations, behavior, etc.). Most lectures then aim to address behavioral, cognitive, and affective effects as they relate to each specific topic. The political effects of television are presented in a separate unit in the middle of the semester, however, we also connect some of the other material presented to political effects; for example, "How does group representation on TV affect our political views?". Understanding the six major functions of television in American society, our fifth objective, is presented in the very first lecture of the course and acts as the foundation for the rest of the semester. All of the content presented in the course is related back to an understanding of how television functions in society. Our final objective – To develop media literacy skills and the capacity to be an alert and conscientious consumer of television – is a theme throughout the course. We dedicate one lecture early in the course specifically to understanding these skills and why they are important, and then ask students to use these skills in connection with the content presented throughout the semester.

**3. Do course assignments relate clearly to the course objectives?** Our course exams and quizzes directly address television's history, content and effects, knowledge of and application of the theoretical perspectives presented, and television's functions in society. We try to use questions that move beyond rote memorization and require application of the material presented. In addition, some extra credit assignments require that students apply several of the course objectives to content presented in the course. For example, during the political unit we offer extra credit for a critique of a student's favorite political commercial. We ask that they use their understanding of media effects, media literacy skills, and application of communication theories in order to evaluate the commercial. Students are asked to judge who the intended audience was, what the producers were trying to accomplish, and what appeals were being used, and then put these things together and use a theory presented in class to offer an evaluation of whether or not the advertisement was successful.

**4. Are required readings current, with opportunities available to students for extended reading?** We use the most recent edition of a textbook that presents television from a cognitive psychology perspective. To supplement this, additional readings are selected from recent literature (book chapters and scholarly articles). We also frequently send news articles that we come across that relate to course content. These are not required, but can enhance understanding of the material and put it in a contemporary context. For example, in preparation for the unit on the representation of identity on television, students were sent an article about the Trayvon Martin case. This was used as a springboard to discussions of how representations of race are tied into perceptions of other concepts such as good and bad and how stereotypes are often reinforced, both in scripted television and on televised news. Although there is no formal extended reading list, students are told that they can request lists of additional readings about any of the topics covered throughout the semester. Students frequently email or ask in class for extended resources which we are happy to provide. Students who are writing papers for other courses also request additional resources – revealing that students in our course very often find ways to relate this material to studies outside the College of Journalism and Communications.

**6. Do students participate in a process to generate and test hypotheses?** Students do not formally participate in a process to generate and test hypotheses, however, some exercises in class directly mimic this process. For example, in covering the three broad categories of media research (content, exposure, and effects), students are asked to propose a topic and then they are walked through the process of

research related to that topic in each of the three areas. In the course of class discussion, students are asked to formulate research questions that relate to each area, and we talk about ways we'd answer these questions. Class discussion includes such examples as asking students to imagine that their only knowledge of or contact they have with a specific group of people or a place is through television. Then, using Cultivation Theory, students are asked to describe what they could expect to think about that group or place.

**7. How do course objectives, content, assignments, and readings address scientific developments in the discipline, with implications (pro and con) for the individual and society?** The course's ultimate objective is by and large to present to students an understanding of the implications of television for individuals and society and to encourage them to be savvy media consumers in light of that. We discuss the evolution of television technology, and how this evolution has affected how television is used. For example, television used to be a domestic medium and something that the entire family watched as a group; now, it is mobile, individual, and fragmented. Scientific developments in the measurement of media effects are also discussed. We look at how newer technologies, such as eye-tracking and measurement of skin conductance provide us with new information about reactions to different content on television. We discuss changes in theoretical perspectives and paradigm shifts, such as the shift from an assumption of direct effects to the current model of limited effects. We also work to present the latest available scholarship related to each particular topic. For example, the stages of minority representation presented in the textbook was developed in the 1960s and has undergone considerable changes as "minority" has been redefined and expanded in the last 50 years. I trace the changes in that concept to incorporate both the original understanding and the adaptations that have been necessary as scholarship and society have changed.

**8. How do course objectives, content, assignments, and readings address logical reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills (oral/written/digital), and writing in multiple formats?** There are no writing assignments given in this course. We do, however, address logical reasoning, critical thinking, and communication skills throughout the semester. The required readings provide a means of understanding the content itself, and also different perspectives from which to interpret the effects of televised content. In lectures students are guided through an evaluation process using different theoretical perspectives. For example, during the Reality television lectures, students are asked to evaluate this type of programming from a Uses & Gratifications perspective (describing *why* viewers would watch this programming and what they got out of it), as well as from a Cultivation perspective (describing how reality television might affect a person's conception of the world, or of a specific group of people), and finally from a Social Learning perspective (describing what types of behaviors or physical characteristics might be modeled by watching a reality program over time). In doing this, we are asking that the students draw on their logical reasoning and critical thinking abilities. In addition, when used as a part of class discussion, these "assignments" help students to develop effective oral communication skills.

**9. How do course objectives, content, assignments, and readings address the *Student Learning Outcomes* for the area of Social and Behavioral Sciences?**

***Content:***

*Know key themes, principles, and terminology within that discipline.*

Central to understanding the role of television in American society is being familiar with its terminology and principles. As one example, in discussing the effects of television content, it is necessary to know the meaning of terminology related to picture composition and video editing techniques. To a great extent, the course is built around key themes in the discipline such as television and the political system; standards of good journalism; media literacy; and representations of identity.

*Know the history, theory and/or methodologies used within that discipline.*

The course addresses topics such as the major theories used to explain television effects, such as Cultivation, Social Learning, Agenda Setting, and ELM. The theories are presented to include the historical and methodological contexts of their development. The course also addresses the evolution of television technology, and how these changes have affected the television experience for viewers.

*Identify, describe and explain social institutions, structures and processes within that discipline.*

The course addresses the evolution of television and the evolution of our thinking about its effects within the context of the environment in which it operates. As a regulated industry, and one with a connection to the First Amendment, the institutions, structures, and processes of regulation and policy-making are a central element. Further, the course addresses the relationship of television to such institutions as the political, educational, and economic systems. Finally, the impact of the television industry's own structure and imperatives are discussed to provide an explanation of why it behaves in the ways it does.

***Critical Thinking:***

*Apply formal and informal qualitative and/or quantitative analysis effectively to examine the processes and means by which individuals make personal and group decisions.*

Throughout the course lectures and class discussions ask students to apply theories of effects within the context of specific examples of television's role. As but one example, in discussing television's role in the political system, students will discuss why a particular television commercial is effective or how the content of political debates establish an agenda of issues for the media to discuss.

*Assess and analyze ethical perspectives in individual and societal decisions.*

The course addresses this in some detail about such areas as television news, including reporters' objectivity, and the role of media in watchdog function. Other examples include the impact of media literacy (and illiteracy) as a factor in the impact of television advertising; television content aimed specifically at children; and stereotyping and presentation of identity in programs and commercials.

***Communication:***

*Communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively in forms appropriate to the discipline, individually and in groups.*

Students participate in course discussions are learning to articulate their understanding of the media, its technologies, and effects through use of proper terminology. Students expand their knowledge and ability to evaluate media.

**10. Overall, how does RTV 3405 contribute to the general education of students in the General Education area of Social and Behavioral Sciences?** Television is ubiquitous in American society. It is a part of our everyday lives. This is true whether we are students or retirees, store managers or CEOs, unemployed or employed, young or old, etc., and we stress this from day one in this course. Understanding television's effects in our society is applicable and even helpful to students in any discipline. For example, business students take away an understanding of television's effect on marketing, while education majors take away an understanding of how television can affect learning. As a mass communication medium that everyone uses, it is important to understand how and why it is used, as well as how it shapes the world in which we live.