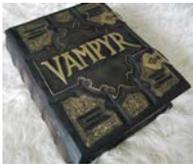




Welcome to the Whedonverse: Feminism, Fandom, and Popular Culture

Dr. Edmond Y. Chang | University of Oregon | Autumn 2015

WGS 199
CRN 17368
MW 12-1:20 PM
Pacific 30
Autumn 2015
University of
Oregon
Dr. Edmond Y.
Chang



"Fandom, after all, is born of a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn't fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn't frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it."
—Henry Jenkins

GEORGE LIPSITZ in "The Case for Studying Popular Culture" argues that "the messages of popular culture circulate in a network of production and reception that is quite serious." This class will take up the challenge of reading, exploring, critiquing, even creating popular culture through the lenses of scholarship, television, film, and everyday media. Specifically, we will look at the words, works, and fandoms of Joss Whedon—including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Avengers*, and *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD*. Given that Whedon has been praised and criticized for his representations of women and characters of color, this class will unpack and analyze the intersections of cultural formations like race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality in both primary texts and fan cultures.

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity and a willingness to explore and interrogate interdisciplinary lines of inquiry. Our class will be organized around a survey of texts engaging scholarship, media, and popular culture. This class will take up everyday culture as critical practice, explore what it means to close read and think critically, and how popular culture can be deployed as theory, as dramatizing the concerns, wonders, struggles, and politics of lived life and experience. This class will spend the semester reading, thinking, watching, discussing, researching, playing, and writing about various narratives and how and what these texts argue, reveal, narrate, hide, perpetuate, and complicate the world we live in.

SPECIFICALLY, our course goals include:

- We will develop and demonstrate a familiarity with a range of texts, terms, and theories of the study of fandom and popular culture.
- We will identify and articulate different ways to explore, close read, analyze, and critique fandom and popular culture.
- We will consider questions and intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, nation, culture, and power.
- We will use popular culture as vernacular theory to think, talk, write, and interrogate the world around us.

WE WILL spend the quarter asking and addressing difficult, challenging, and sometimes discomfoting ideas, questions, and topics, focusing on different identities, bodies, histories, desires, experiences, and even struggles and violences. Whether on the page, screen, on campus, or in the community, we will explore and engage multiple perspectives, levels of familiarity with the material, and heady and heartfelt responses. In other words, our class will be a safe, respectful, but not necessarily comfortable space. While pushing boundaries and comfort zones are essential to critical thinking, making connections, and intellectual and personal freedom, see me with concerns and queries, for reasonable accommodations, and for further resources on campus.

"...the hardest thing in this world...is to live in it. Be brave. Live. For me."
—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

"I think it's always important for academics to study popular culture, even if the thing they are studying is idiotic. If it's successful or made a dent in culture, then it is worthy of study to find out why."
—Joss Whedon



Required Course Texts & Materials

- WGS 199 Course Reader (available via Campus Copy)
- Wilcox, Cochran, Masson, and Lavery, Eds. *Reading Joss Whedon*.
- Web access and an active University of Oregon email account.



Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from WGS 199 with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

Course Requirements

- Presentation (10%)
- Response Papers (50%)
- Critical Review (10%)
- Class Participation (30%)

Critical Context & Question Presentation (10%)

You will be required to sign up for an oral presentation individually or in a small group. For your presentation, you will read and watch the texts assigned for a particular week, generate a critical question or two, and get class discussion started for the day. Outstanding presentations will make connections between the theoretical readings, the week's media text, and the course goals. A short single-spaced half-sheet or 1-page handout copied for the whole class is encouraged. Presentations are 4-6 minutes, may include media, and each presenter must have a speaking part.

Critical Response Papers (50%)

The majority of the writing you will do for this class is in the form of short, critical, analytical response papers. These single-spaced, one-page writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, analyses of, and articulations of the texts and connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These responses are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments. You will be required to generate a response paper approximately every other week for a total of 6. See the response paper prompt for details.

Critical Review (10%)

You will be required to write a short, 500-750 word, single-spaced critical review of a text not covered by the course that you believe fits the critical, theoretical, and intellectual stakes of this class. You will locate a text, close read the text, and generate an academic critique and assessment of the text's value for study. In other words, what text might you include in a class like ours? You **must** have your text **approved** by the instructor. The critical review will be turned in and published on the course blog.

Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Moreover, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class and interactions with me and others, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** in presentations and group work, and 5) your care and use of the class *Canvas*—henceforth called the "class blog"—bookmark the address, check and comment regularly, think of the blog as an extension of class: <https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/46997>.

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on

"I always advise children who ask me for tips on being a writer to read as much as they possibly can. Jane Austen gave a young friend the same advice, so I'm in good company there."
—J.K. Rowling



"Imagination is more important than knowledge."
—Albert Einstein

"I've overheard your theory 'nostalgia's for geeks' / I guess sir, if you say so, some of us just like to read / One second I'm a Koons, then suddenly the Koons is me / Pop culture was in art, now art's in pop culture in me."
—Lady Gaga



Response Paper Formatting

1) 1" margins top, bottom, left, and right on each page.

2) Single-spaced block header with your name, date, course, my name.
For example:

Student Name
WGS 199
September 28, 2015
Chang

3) Response (week number and title (e.g. Week #2: Race in *The Great Gatsby*).

4) Response papers are single-spaced and can be in block paragraph format.

5) Standard Times Roman Font, 12 point only.

6) Correct MLA citation and bibliographic format. Bibliography if necessary.

time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the day, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and will be mark as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your overall participation grade for the class. **Moreover, absences for more than 9 class sessions (50% of class time or more) will result in a failing grade regardless of reason. There are no excused or unexcused absences.** If you know you are going to or must miss class, please let me know (via email) as soon as possible and make any necessary arrangements. When you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes or see me during office hours in order to make up missed work in a timely manner. You are always responsible for all material covered during your absence.

Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format (or if necessary Rich Text Format).

All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. Unless instructed otherwise, **all papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions.** All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in, lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment at least a couple of times during the drafting process and certainly **BEFORE** you exit the document for the last time and leave the computer. This way, even if you lose your flash drive or your paper gets mysteriously erased, you still have a copy in your e-mail files.

Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the semester, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:

- **Outstanding (A/A+):** Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
- **Strong (B+/A-):** Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
- **Good (B-/B):** Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
- **Acceptable (C/C+):** Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
- **Inadequate (D/D+):** Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.



Late Assignments

All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade for every day that they are late. So, if your essay is late by one day and you received a B- for your work, then your final grade would be a C+. Moreover, I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I DO NOT accept assignments via email.** Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.

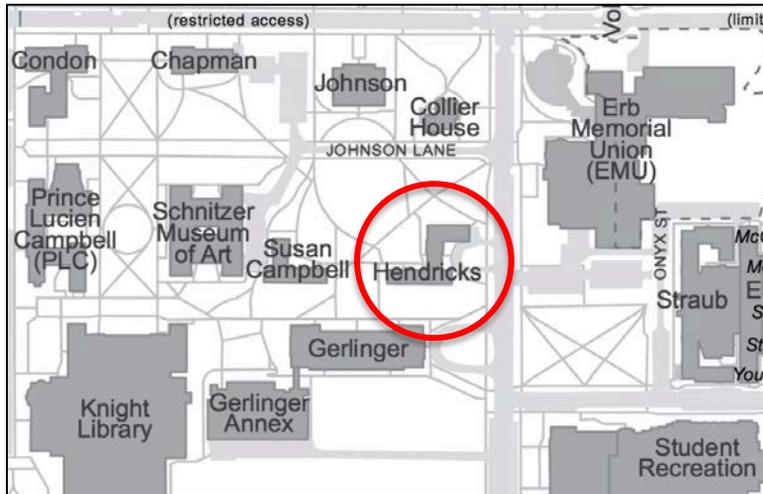


Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed in the left sidebar. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see me early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located on the third floor of Hendricks Hall (southeast of the EMU), Room 322. See <<http://map.uoregon.edu/>>.

Contact Ed

Office:
322 Hendricks
Office Hours:
MW 1-3:30 PM
or by appointment
E-mail:
echang@uoregon.edu
AIM or Google Talk:
EDagogy



I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the main WGS office in 315 Hendricks Hall. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via AOL Instant Messenger or Google Talk (nickname: EDagogy); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to me; also, be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

You can find additional writing and academic help at the Teaching and Learning Center on campus, a good resource for this class and other classes. The TLC is located in 68 Prince Lucien Campbell (PLC) Hall and offers a variety of services including help with reading, papers, brainstorming ideas, and research. See <<http://tlc.uoregon.edu/>> to make an appointment and for more information. Further resources, both on- and off-campus can be found on the Links page of the course website: <<http://www.edmondchang/courses/199/links.html>>.

Academic Integrity

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions at any time. For our class, plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class



Learning (With) Technology

Unless you have an official accommodation, the use of technology in our classroom is a privilege, not a right. Mobile devices like phones, media players, and cameras should be off and put away. Computers and tablets should be used for note-taking, in-class work, and readings only. Print is generally preferred for course texts and readings, but full-size e-versions are acceptable provided the student is able to readily highlight, annotate, and index. Finally, be conscientious and respectful in the use of the course website and social media and post no material from class to the internet or non-class sites without explicit permission from the instructor and the class. Keep in mind these three rules:

- 1) Use the Right Tool for the situation and the task—keep it simple and elegant,
- 2) Practice Best Practices—it must improve or enhance your learning,
- 3) Be a Good Neighbor—it cannot distract or detract from others' learning.

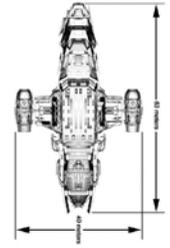
Inappropriate use and abuse of technology in class will result in the taking away of technology privileges for the offending student and/or class as a whole.

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. Any plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in failure of this course. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Please review the University of Oregon's Guidelines for Plagiarism at <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>.

"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities."
—Maya Angelou

Accommodations

Please let me know in the first week of class if you require academic accommodations based on a disability registered with Accessible Education Services. The University of Oregon is an inclusive learning environment. For more information, contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>.



Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

The University of Oregon is committed to ensuring that all students have access to a quality learning experience and the opportunity to pursue their academic goals in a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment. Any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, and gender-based stalking and bullying is contrary to the community values of the institution. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, and so on. As your instructor, I have a mandatory reporting responsibility and am required by law to share with the University any information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus. For more information about policies and resources or confidential reporting options, see the Office of Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity: <http://aaeo.uoregon.edu/sexual-harassment-assault> or the Dean of Students' page on Student Conduct & Community Standards: <https://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>.

"Now go, and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make good art."
—Neil Gaiman

syl-la-bus: n 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements
2: subject to change

Chang / WGS 199 / Autumn 2015 / University of Oregon

Mon 9/28
First Day of Classes

September						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Week 1: September 28-October 2

Introduction to the Course & Syllabus

Whedon, "On Strong Women Characters,"

<http://genius.com/Joss-whedon-on-strong-women-characters-annotated>

Dries, "Watch Joss Whedon Make a Perfect Speech About the Word

Feminist," <http://jezebel.com/watch-joss-whedon-make-the-perfect-speech-about-the-wor-1460080685>

Berlatsky, "What Joss Whedon Gets Wrong About the Word 'Feminist,'"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/what-joss-whedon-gets-wrong-about-the-word-feminist/281305/>

Lipsitz, "The Case for Studying Popular Culture"

Jenkins, "Introduction" & "Interview," *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*

Wilcox et al., "Much Ado About Whedon," *Reading Joss Whedon*

Buffy, Episode 1.1 "Welcome to the Hellmouth"

Wilcox, "Buffy: An Introduction," *RJW*

Jowett, "Introduction," *Sex and the Slayer*

Week 2: October 5-9

Buffy, Episode 2.7 "Lie to Me"

Buffy, Episode 2.17 "Passion"

Pender, "'I'm Buffy, and You're...History'"

Week 1 or 2 CR is required.

Week 2 (cont.)

Mendlesohn, "Surpassing the Love of Vampires"
Jowett, "Buffy, Dark Romance, and Female Horror Fans"

Week 3: October 12-16

Buffy, Episode 3.13 "The Zeppo"
Jowett, "Tough Guys" and "New Men," *Sex and the Slayer*

Week 4: October 19-23

Buffy, Episode 4.10 "Hush"
Buffy, Episode 5.7 "Fool for Love"
Overbey & Preston-Matto, "Staking in Tongues: Speech Act as Weapon in Buffy"
Fuchs, "Race and Displacement in *Buffy and Dark Angel*," *Undead TV*

Week 5: October 26-30

Buffy, Episode 5.16 "The Body"
Buffy, Episode 6.7 "Once More With Feeling"
Stanley, "Buffy's Season 8, Image and Text," *RJW*
Schultz, "Hot Chicks with Superpowers," *RJW*

Week 6: November 2-6

Angel, Episode 1.1 "City Of"
Angel, Episode 5.14 "Smile Time"
Masson, "Angel: An Introduction," *RJW*
McCracken, "At Stake: Angel's Body, Fantasy Masculinity, and Queer Desire in Teen Television"

Week 7: November 9-13

Firefly, Episode 1.1 "Serenity"
Firefly, Episode 1.2 "The Train Job"
Cochran, "Firefly and Serenity: An Introduction," *RJW*
Le, "Frustrations of an Asian American Whedonite"
<http://www.racebending.com/v4/featured/frustrations-asian-american-whedonite/>

Week 8: November 16-20

Dollhouse, Episode 1.1 "Ghost"
Lavery, "Dollhouse: An Introduction," *RJW*
Koontz, "Echo, Narcissus, and the Male Gaze in *Dollhouse*," *RJW*
Sutherland and Swan, "There is No Me; I'm Just a Container," *RJW*

Week 9: November 23-27

Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog
The Avengers
Willis, "The Rhetoric of Posthuman Negotiation," *RJW*
Guffey, "Joss Whedon Throws His Mighty Shield," *RJW*
Baroza, "What's the Deal with All of the POC on Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.?"
<http://thenerdsofcolor.org/2015/03/31/whats-the-deal-with-the-poc-characters-on-agents-of-s-h-i-e-l-d/>

Week 10: November 30-December 4

Much Ado About Nothing

Week 11: December 4-11

Last Day of Instruction 12/4
Final Exams Begin 12/7
Grades Due 12/15

October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Week 5 or 6 CR is recommended.

11/26-11/27
Thanksgiving Recess

November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Critical Review Due