Introduction:

Triggered by a high choice media environment, media industries are moving from a “broadcasting” model, which creates programs designed for a general audience, to a “narrowcasting” model, which creates programs targeted toward small niche audiences. As a part of this strategy, media industries are beginning to notice fandoms and even actively cultivate them. Additionally, the development of the internet has contributed to a significant growth of fan communities online. Fans can connect easily across great geographic distances to find other fans of media objects. Matt Hills argues that fandom is a remarkably common experience. Whether it’s Foucault, the Beatles, or The Hunger Games, we are all fans of something. As a source of community, belonging, media activism, and political protest, fandom deserves the attention of rhetorical critics, media scholars, and communication researchers. In this class, we will take up that task by discussing fan identity, fan discourse, and fan culture.

The course will be divided into three parts. Part One will consider what fandom is, its defining characteristics, and the scholarly debates surrounding those characteristics. Here, we will consider how fans build fan communities both in person and online, while also considering the role of media industries in supporting or discouraging fan communities. Part Two will consider how fans deploy rhetoric to engage media industries, considering questions of media activism aimed to return television shows to the air or aimed at changing industry practices. Part Three will consider how fans deploy rhetoric to engage political institutions and public issues. Here, we will draw from studies of social movement rhetoric and public sphere theory to examine how fans make public arguments based on fictional popular culture objects. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to methodological issues related to studying fans, audiences, online discourse and rhetoric that utilizes popular culture as cultural resources and argumentative warrants.

Course Questions and Learning Goals:

Course questions outline our learning goals for the semester. They should also guide your reading and note-taking. By the end of this course, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. How do researchers treat definitions of fandom and fan engagements of media industries and political institutions?
2. What methodological approaches can scholars use to study fans, fan culture, and fan-based rhetoric?
3. What theoretical assumptions undergird research on fans and fan communities?

Classroom Climate:
Respect: Learning about communication and rhetoric involves risks. We will talk about positions on political and social issues and the ways in which we deliberate about those issues. Try to understand, not judge, other people. Our classroom needs to be a safe place to explore communication contexts and an open place to reconsider our preconceptions of communication, its power, and its use in our everyday lives. This means that everyone should be referred to by the name they prefer, the correct pronunciation of their name, and the pronoun they prefer (like she, ze, he, or they). Please be respectful throughout the course. If you feel uncomfortable, do not hesitate to talk to me privately during office hours.

Schedule (meeting 3 times per week):

Part One: Definitions and Contours of Fandom

Week 1:
Introductions and Syllabus
   Reading: Complete introductory questionnaire
A History of Fans
   Reading: Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom”
Why Fans and the Studies of Fans are Important
   Reading, Gray, Sandvos, and Harrington, “Why Study Fans?”

Week 2:
Fans as Textual Poachers
   Reading: Jenkins, Textual Poachers
Fans in Convergence Culture
   Reading: Jenkins, Convergence Culture
Fandom as Community
   Reading: Busse and Gray, “Fan Cultures and Fan Communities”

Week 3:
Fandoms as Performative
   Reading: Osborne and Coombs, “Performative Sport Fandom”
Fandom as Global
   Reading: Harrington and Bielby, “Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies”
Fans as Academics
   Reading: Stein, “Aca-Fans”

Week 4:
Examples of fan studies: Women and Romances Part 1
   Reading: Radway, Reading the Romance: Introduction
Examples of fan studies: Women and Romances Part 2
   Reading: Radway, Reading the Romance: Chapter 1
Examples of fan studies: Women and Romances Part 3
   Reading: Radway, Reading the Romance: Chapter 2 and Conclusion
Week 5:
Examples of Fan Studies: Nebraska and Football Part 1
   Reading: Aden, *Huskerville*, Introduction
Examples of Fan Studies: Nebraska and Football Part 2
   Reading: Aden, *Huskerville*, Chapter 1
Examples of Fan Studies: Nebraska and Football Part 3
   Reading: Aden, *Huskerville*, Chapter 2 and Conclusion

Week 6:
Review for Exam #2
Exam #2:

   Part Two: Engaging Media Industries and Other Fans

Week 6 Continued:
Fans as Publics Part 1
   Reading: Livingstone, *Audiences and Publics*, Chapter 1

Week 7:
Fans as Publics Part 2
   Reading: Livingstone, *Audiences and Publics*, Chapter 3
Fans as Publics Part 3
   Reading: Livingstone, *Audiences and Publics*, Chapter 8
Fans in a Public Sphere Part 1
   Reading: Butsch, *Media and Public Spheres*, Chapter 1

Week 8:
Fans in a Public Sphere Part 2
   Reading: Butsch, *Media and Public Spheres* Chapter 5
Defining Fan Activism
   Reading: Brough and Shresthova, “Fandom Meets Activism”
Reviewing the Literature
   Reading: Bennett, “A Critical Review of the Literature”

Week 9:
Fans and Protesting Cancellation
   Reading: Scardaville, “Accidental Activists”
Fans and Protesting Casting
   Reading: Lopez, “Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in the Last Airbender”
Fans and Visibility
   Reading: Scott, “The Politics of (In)Visibility in Comic Book Culture”

Week 10:
Fan Practices and Social Justice
   Reading: Hunting, “Queer as Folk and the Trouble with Slash”
Review for Exam #2
Exam #2

Part Three: Engaging Political Institutions and Other Citizens

Week 11:
Fan Practices as Civic Practices in Democracy:
Reading: Van Zoonen, Entertaining the Citizen
Historical Cases of Fan Citizenship Performances Part 1
Reading: Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, Chapter 1
Historical Cases of Fan Citizenship Performances Part 2
Reading: Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, Chapter 2

Week 12:
Fans and Utopia
Reading: Duncombe, “Imagining No-place”
Fans and Politics in a Public Sphere
Reading: Hinck, “Theorizing a Public Engagement Keystone”
Wonder Woman Fan Citizenship Performances
Reading: Yockey, “Wonder Woman for a Day”

Week 13:
Captain American Fan Citizenship Performances
Reading: Phillips, “Captain America and Fans’ Political Activity”
PowerPoint
Reading: Reynolds, Chapter 5: Design Principles
Presentations
Reading: Prepare Presentation on Fan Activism Project

Week 14:
Presentations
Reading: Prepare Presentation on Fan Activism Project
Presentations
Reading: Prepare Presentation on Fan Activism Project
Final Exam Review

Assignments:

Warm-Ups: For time in class to be most useful, you must come to class prepared—that means I expect you to read and engage the assigned material before class. To encourage you to read the material carefully, to help you “re-load” the material into your head for class, and to help you take stock of what was clear and unclear, you will be required to complete a Warm-Up during the first five minutes of class each day. On a piece of paper with your book closed and your notes put away, please complete the following:

1) Summarize one key point or key term from the reading for today. This should be 4-5 sentences long.
2) Write one question that you have about the reading. This may be a question for clarification or a question for discussion.

This assignment will not only help you engage the material fully, it will also help me tailor the class to your particular needs as students, responding to your questions right away. You will be graded on a check-plus, check, and check-minus scale. A check is full credit (1 point), a check-plus is extra-credit (1.25 points), and a check-minus is half-credit (0.5 points).

Leading Discussion: To complete this assignment, you will pair with another student and choose in-class discussion questions and activities to lead class once during the semester. Each pair will sign-up for one class period to lead discussion. This is an opportunity for you to better learn the material by teaching it to others and an opportunity for you to structure and guide your own learning. You are required to meet with me during office hours 3-4 days before you lead discussion and to turn in your preparation materials and any materials used in class. This assignment is worth 75 points.

Fan Activism Project: In this class, we will be reading theoretical accounts and detailed explanations of fan-based public engagement, including both media activism and political activism. The Fan Activism Project gives you the chance to put this into practice. In groups of 2-3 students, you must conduct a fan activist project in which you use a media object to argue for change at the civic level or the media industry level. You may advocate for that change through blog posts, videos, images, etc. But they must form a coherent and persuasive argument. This project invites you to be creative and to make new connections between media and public issues. This project consists of two parts: a proposal (50 points) and the final product (150 points).

Exams: There will be three multiple choice exams in this course.

Points for this course:
Exam #1: 100 points
Exam #2: 100 points
Exam #3: 100 points
Leading Discussion: 75 points
Fan Activism Proposal: 50 points
Fan Activism Project: 150 points
Warm-Ups: 25 points
Participation: 25 points

Total Points Possible: 625 points

Bibliography of Course Readings:


