



# Entertaining Ideas

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## Hello, it's me, your new Interest Group head

By Anthony Ferri ESIG Head



The AEJMC conference in Boston in August was both enjoyable and productive. The Entertainment Studies Interest Group has a number of new

members and new officers and I am sure this will help us continue the work of previous ESIG heads.

I want to thank you for the chance to serve as Head of ESIG. My job is to help you do your job. Please don't be shy to e-mail me at: [anthony.ferri@unlv.edu](mailto:anthony.ferri@unlv.edu)

I want to thank the Immediate Past Head, Brad Yates for his leadership last year and his continued support today. Also, I want to thank all officers and members who made the 2008 conference a success. There are now new officers who are busy collecting panel proposals, sending out paper calls for the Mid-winter and National conferences and getting judges for the review process for research papers.

My goals for the year include: 1. leverage social media for ESIG (Cynthia Nichols and Carole Bell are working on

that), 2. Make "entertainment" much more a part of the papers that are submitted to ESIG, and 3. increase membership.

If you are a member of ESIG, you will get more out of it by participating as a panel judge, moderator, or by submitting papers to both Mid-winter and National conferences.

I want to thank all those who submitted a joint panel proposal. Divisions and Interest groups will decide which panels make it at the Winter Meeting in Jacksonville, Florida on December 5. I am unable to attend but Danny Shipka will attend as the Vice-Head along with Kelly Poniatowski, our Vice-Head elect. Danny will work hard to get our

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## ESIG Enters Realm of Social Media

By Cynthia Nichols Social Media & Newsletter Chair

This fall, the Entertainment Studies Interest Group has decided to boldly go where no one has gone before, to discover new life, new civilization, and... social media?

In an effort to meet the goals of our new head, Entertainment Studies has taken steps to become more visible in the scholarly community. We are now participating on Twitter, facebook, and Blogspot. Although ESIG has actively communicated with its members in the past, these developing technologies will allow our interest group to connect personally with members and colleagues in real time. This will not only strengthen ESIG as a valid interest group (and hopefully, at some point, a division), but it will also allow help us to stay abreast of pertinent information.

As people become more socially oriented

in their online communication, ESIG is going to keep up with the trends. Social media is rapidly evolving; we know it plays an important role in our lives, how we teach, and how we connect with others. So check out our new SM tools, and don't forget, you can contribute to these efforts as well. Below is the information you will need about each:



Look for the new ESIG SM icon.

**facebook** - On facebook? Then you should join the "Entertainment Studies (ESIG) - AEJMC" group. Anyone can join and contribute.

**Blog** - <http://entstudies.blogspot.com/>

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# Sesame Street Turns 40

By Cynthia Nichols Newsletter & Social Media

Sesame Street – the show responsible for my misguided childhood belief that some neighborhoods are populated by extremely tall, talking canaries – turned 40-years-old this month. The iconic children’s show that broke the mold on educational programming has engaged the world with amusingly eccentric skits featuring muppets and monsters, rhyme and rhythm, and curricular lessons. Most of all, it has taught us that education can be fun. While entertaining for generations, Sesame Street has helped kids learn about letters, numbers, and prosocial skills, with positive long-term effects something that have likely thrilled teachers from elementary school on.

How does a show that has done so much for so many celebrate the big 4-0? By kicking off a two-year science initiative about nature and the environment, and by inviting First Lady Michelle Obama over for a little gardening. Although the lessons and themes have changed over the years, Sesame Street has somehow managed to retain its humor, color and ability to make important issues and topics accessible to kids. Most importantly, Sesame Street has always been able to balance informing and entertaining children. It isn’t an easy



Photograph: Richard Termine/AP

job captivating the attention of kids who are bombarded by media messages, but somehow they do it, and do it well.

So, happy birthday, Sesame Street. Thank you for educating generations of kids, helping us learn numbers, letters, and colors, and allowing me to sneak a cookie before lunch. ‘C’ is for Cookie... and that’s good enough for me.

For more information about Sesame Street, read: S. M. Fisch & R. T. Truglio (Eds.) (2001), “G” is for growing: Thirty years of research on children and Sesame Street. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum. ★

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top programs into the National conference. These include: “Branding Entertainment: The Influence and Ethics of Branding on News and Entertainment Media,” “More than Social Networking? Integrating Social Media into Teaching Practices,” “Amusing Ourselves to Death? The Merging of Information and Entertainment in the Age of Infotainment,” and “Forget Afghanistan! Are Jon Gosselin

and Octomom really getting their own reality show? Examining the Role of the infotainment approach to the news.”

I look forward to working with such a great group. Remember, you do not have to be an officer to participate. As I said earlier, submit a paper, volunteer to read/judge papers, or volunteer to be a moderator. - Tony ★

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# New Journal Focuses on Image of Journalist in Pop Culture

By Joe Saltzman Member

Members of the ESIG have founded a new journal focusing on the image of the journalist in popular culture. The IJPC Journal, an online academic journal that adheres to the highest standards of peer review, published its first volume in the fall of 2009.

In the inaugural issue, co-founding editors, Joe Saltzman, Matthew C. Ehrlich, and Sammye Johnson, wrote that The IJPC Journal is “an outgrowth of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project, whose stated mission is to investigate and analyze, through research and publication, the conflicting images of the journalist in film, television, radio, fiction (novels, short stories, plays, poetry), commercials, cartoons, comic books, video games, music, art, and other aspects of popular culture.”

“When I started the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project (IJPC) in 2000, I never thought the field would grow so large so fast,” said Saltzman. “The IJPC Journal is a key component in giving this field of study academic credibility.” The journal is published by the USC Annenberg School for Communication. All research manuscripts are blind refereed.

Directing submission, co-editor Sammye Johnson said, “As an interdisciplinary journal, The IJPC Journal encourages original contributions from a variety of research methods and theoretical perspectives.” She added that the next volume of The IJPC Journal, scheduled for publication in 2010, will feature a special section on “The Image of the Gay Journalist in Popular Culture.” Manuscripts on this and other IJPC subjects, including the image of the public relations practitioner, are welcome.

In addition, IJPC maintains a valuable

database. “There are thousands of ideas for manuscripts contained in the 2009 IJPC Database, which has more than 71,600 entries of journalists in film, television, fiction, commercials, video games, and other aspects of popular culture. The database is an incredible repository and research archive for scholars,” said Saltzman. (For more information about the database, go to <http://www.ijpc.org>.)

Included in the first volume of the online IJPC Journal are four peer-reviewed articles: “Carrying the Banner: The Portrayal of the American Newsboy Myth in the Disney Musical Newsies” by Stephen Siff of Miami University; “On the Front Line: Portrayals of War Correspondents in Marvel Comics’ Civil War” by J. Richard Stevens of the University of Colorado at Boulder; “Moral Dilemmas of an Immoral Nation: Gender, Sexuality, and Journalism in Page 3” by Radhika Parameswaran of Indiana University; and “Looking to the Margins: The ‘Outsider Within’ Journalistic Fiction” by Amanda Rossie, a doctoral student in the Department of Women’s Studies at Ohio State University.

Feature articles include “Comic Book



Journalists Beyond Clark Kent” by Bill Knight of Western Illinois University and “Studying the Journalist in Popular Culture” by Ehrlich. In his introductory essay, Ehrlich explains why it is important to study this topic: “The point for those studying the press’s popular image is always to keep the focus squarely on journalism while moving beyond mere descriptions of the subject matter and avoiding overly simplistic interpretations of what one is seeing. One should look beneath the surface and ask what is really being suggested about what the press is and has been,

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This will have the latest comings and going of ESIG. Contact us to guest blog.

**Twitter** - <http://twitter.com/EntStudies>  
Tweet away my friends, @EntStudies will be listening. Have an interesting article? Send us the link. Want to announce a job? Let us know. Have beautiful data? Brag to us. Follow us, send us tweets, and we’ll share it with the world. (You can even ghost tweet.)

**Gmail** - [entstudies@gmail.com](mailto:entstudies@gmail.com)  
Officers change, but this won’t. If you can’t remember who you are sending informa-

tion to, send it here.

**Listserv** - To join, send an email [listserv@unc.edu](mailto:listserv@unc.edu) with “subscribe aejmc\_esig” in the body of the e-mail. After that, just send your message to [aejmc\\_esig@listserv.unc.edu](mailto:aejmc_esig@listserv.unc.edu) and everyone will get it.

We will try our best to keep you informed of all the latest research, trends, and calls that are our there. So follow, friend, and contact us whenever you have information to share. Or, you can even start the conversation yourself. ★

# Learning the wrong Lessons from Fiction?

## Vampires, Reality, and lessons from popular culture

By Carole Bell Webmaster

“We need old vampire, is it Godrick?, in **True Blood** (I love that show) to bring some civility to these town hall whackos disrupting all.”

“**True Blood** has much to teach us about who's real & who's fake, and why we need to see through what seems to be reality and understand life.”

– Katrina Vanden Heuvel, August 9 2009, via Twitter <http://twitter.com/KatrinaNation/>

Suddenly it seems as though everyone's channeling Maureen Dowd. From off the cuff comments on social networks to lengthy essays, journalists and academics are offering up fiction as a model for real life. Impromptu comments include those of Nation Editor Katrina Vanden Heuvel above. More recently, a less well-known Tweeter, growing increasingly impatient with the Obama administration, wrote: “the @whitehouse should learn from Barlett admin., not Clinton admin. It needs to be done, do it. Keep public option.” [sic] If only the real world were more like the West Wing, that would be great advice. However, President Bartlett benefited from a writing staff headed by producers like legendary democratic bulldog Lawrence O'Donnell, people who

want him to win the fight and control the outcome to make sure he does. Unfortunately, in the real world, no one can guarantee a win, but that doesn't stop us from wistfully comparing our leaders to fictional heroes.

Am I being too literal? Perhaps, but the normative comparison of fiction and reality is not limited to humorous comments in social media. At the other end of the communication spectrum is author Malcolm Gladwell, who indicts real life Southern liberalism through a critique of Atticus Finch in the film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Really, Atticus Finch is used as an exemplar illustrating the limitations and failures of classical southern liberalism, which Gladwell believes has been too accommodating with regard to race. To his credit, Gladwell also describes historical figures, like former Alabama Governor “Big Jim” Folsom in his essay as well, but Finch, he believes, reveals “the limits of Southern liberalism” (Gladwell, 2009). As Gladwell summed it up, “Old-style Southern liberalism—gradual and paternalistic—crumbled in the face of liberalism in the form of an urgent demand for formal equality. Activism proved incompatible with Folsomism” (2009, p. 1). Or Atticus Finchism as it were.

To be clear, it's not that I think entertainment media do not or should not have political content. Entertainment is both art and commerce—naturally it has cultural

### Questions from a Member: Teaching an Entertainment Course

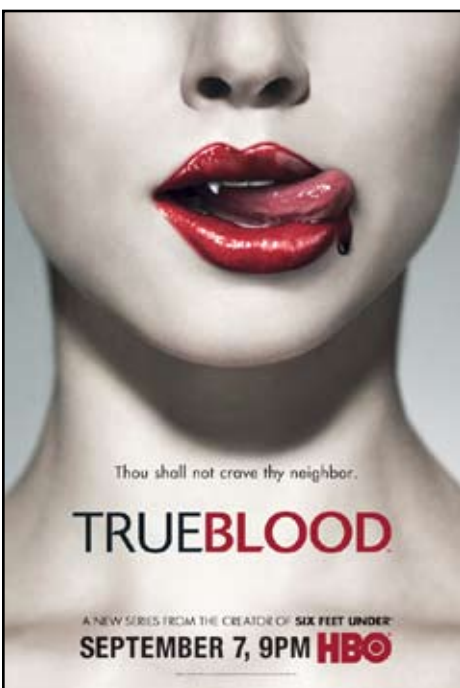
I would be curious to know how many of you teach an introduction to entertainment course. What are the major units? What is the text? I have asked numerous publishers about their “entertainment” books and get a variety of answers that essentially say ‘we don't have any.’ A couple of years ago I had some students gather information on entertainment courses and curricula around the country. Often, these course or curricula were a function of some other discipline (e.g. economics).

I suggest that we develop a least some sort of inventory of programs, courses, and texts on entertainment. We have seen that just about everything can be “entertainment.” A useful exercise would be to create a taxonomy of some sort of what is being taught right now. Send any materials to my UNLV e-mail and I will try to make some sense of it and publish the results online. If I am inundated with a plethora of stuff, I may ask for some help.

- Tony Ferri

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**If there are questions that you would like answered, submit them to:**  
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and political resonance. But, in making such literal connections we risk drawing the most dangerous lessons from fiction. In doing so, these politically savvy social observers are making the kind of error that some social psychologists say most readers and viewers manage to avoid—they treat the elements of fiction which are least likely to be realistic as truth. In

## Entertainment is both art & commerce—it naturally has cultural & political resonance.

shows with explicit political content like the West Wing, plot resolutions are driven by narrative requirements, the ideological leanings of the creators, and commercial wish fulfillment—a desire to give their audience what the creators think they want. They can not be models for how we actually get things done in the real world.

According to the social psychology research, unlike Gladwell and these other writers, most audiences of fictional entertainment at some level understand this. They are most trusting of the background details, those specific parts of the representation that are least connected to the film's central subject, and assume that the ones that are needed to drive the plot development are most manipulated. We can certainly take moral lessons

from fiction. Film, literature and television are key sites where ideas about right and wrong are contested. It's just literal strategic and tactical lessons that are hazardous to our political health. True Blood and The West Wing can no more “teach” us how to manage disruptions at the town hall than Grey's Anatomy can instruct us how to perform neurosurgery.

So, yes, moderate, compromise-seeking politicians make lousy fictional heroes. This is a true, but not particularly helpful political insight. Extremists make worse real world ones. Batman is sexy; but he'd be shot or locked up in the real world. And Jack Bauer could never save the world in 24 hours. A more interesting cultural question that remains is why one culture's heroes are so different from another's. If a television product reflects both the cultural milieu of its creators and the desires of the audience, how and why are American and British heroes so dramatically different from each other? Take the spy genre for example—unlike Jack, who you know will survive as long as 24's ratings stay strong, his counterparts, MI-5 officers on the popular British equivalent *Spooks*, are expendable. They go mad and lose their bearings (Tom), get shot and killed (Danny) or both (Adam). If American escapist fantasies are wish fulfillment visions of an American ideal, what are these flawed British ones? What do these heroes reflect about our collective national psyches?

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what it could and should be. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that one is in fact studying a movie or novel or video game. As such, the image is never just about journalism; it is addressing popular tastes, hopes, and fears. It also is the product of a particular medium produced in a particular time, place, and fashion for a particular audience.”

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[saltzman@usc.edu](mailto:saltzman@usc.edu)

To read the first issue of The IJPC Journal, go to: <http://ijpc.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal>. ★



## True Blood & The West Wing can no more “teach” us how to manage disruptions at the town hall than Grey's Anatomy can instruct us how to perform neurosurgery.

For a great roundup of research on learning from fiction, see “Exploring the Boundary between Fiction and Reality” (Prentice & Gerrig, 1999). *Spooks* and *24* are available on DVD or Netflix.

### References

- Gladwell, M. (2009, August 10). THE COURTHOUSE RING. Atticus Finch and the limits of Southern liberalism. *The New Yorker*.
- Prentice, D. A., & Gerrig, R. J. (1999). Exploring the Boundary between Fiction and Reality. In S. Chaiken & Y. Trope (Eds.), *Dual-process theories in social psychology* (pp. 529-546). New York: Guilford Press. ★

## Congrats!!!

Dr. Carol L. Adams-Means and Dr. Laura Smith have joined Huston-Tillotson University this fall as associate and assistant professors (respectively) of English and Communication Arts.

Mina Tsay & Maja Krakowiak are presenting two papers at the Entertainment = Emotions conference in Benasque, Spain. The conference runs from Nov, 15th-21st and is organized by M. T. Soto and Peter Vorderer.