

## FMST 85: FAN CULTURE Spring 2008

TTh 11:20-12:35, Science Center L32  
Screenings: T 7-10 p.m., Science Center 199  
(Note: some weeks do not have screenings)

Professor Bob Rehak  
*brehak1*, LPAC 204  
Hours: W 10-12 & 1-4

**Course blog: <http://fan-culture.swarthmore.edu>**

### Texts

(Books are on reserve at McCabe; please bring all current readings to class)

- *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, C. Lee Harrington [Eds], 2007)
- *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Henry Jenkins, 1992)
- Additional readings marked (X) distributed via course blog

### Overview

Since the emergence of mass media, audiences have been actively invested in making and sharing meanings based on the stories, narrative worlds, characters, and performers of popular culture. In reception and cultural studies from the 1970s through the early 1990s, the figure of the **fan** became increasingly central as a site for investigating complex questions of pleasure, power, agency, and identity. More recently, fans and fan culture have moved into the mainstream, playing an important – even organizing – role in the creation, marketing, and circulation of popular media.

With this in mind, the semester will be divided into two halves. In the first, we will examine historical fan studies, focusing on theory, debates, and research about fandom as a “scandalous” subculture. In the second, we will turn to a consideration of the contemporary mediascape, approaching fandom as a “superculture” that, in a certain sense, sets the agenda for contemporary media industries and culture.

The course format blends close readings and engaged discussions with screenings of television, feature films, and other materials. We will investigate media forms and practices less as texts “in themselves” than as units of social exchange, charged with personal and collective meanings, which dynamically shape the terrain of consumption and production, politics and entertainment, legal regulation, taste, and gender that constitutes our intensely lived experience of media.

Please note that you may encounter concepts and content in this course that challenge your standards of taste, quality, and political belief. I encourage you to voice your reactions and opinions, but always to do so in a courteous and respectful manner that acknowledges the diversity and value of difference. Our classroom is first and foremost a community, dedicated to the free expression of ideas and productive, supportive conversation. Remember: in fandom, one person’s laughing matter may be another’s deeply cherished passion!

Assignments

30%	Blog activity	<i>Throughout semester</i>
15%	Response paper 1 on <i>Textual Poachers</i>	<i>Feb 28</i>
15%	Response paper 2 on <i>Fandom</i>	<i>April 22</i>
10%	Fan artifact presentation & blog writeup	<i>Once during semester</i>
20%	Final research colloquium & paper	<i>Week 14</i>
10%	In-class participation	<i>Throughout semester</i>

Blogging

A central component of FMST 85 will be your contributions to, and interaction with, the course blog. Through the blog we will explore ideas, raise questions, and continue conversations that don't fit neatly into our class meetings. Our blog is also a space to share links to relevant and interesting content, including websites, images, videos, music, and podcasts.

**Blog address:** <http://fan-culture.swarthmore.edu>

**Username:** your email/network username (e.g. *brehak1*)

**Default password:** *filmblog* (can be changed by following the My Profile link in the Dashboard)

Each week, I will prompt you by posting a question or idea to respond to. However, you are expected to go beyond those prompts in contributing to our collective conversation. Rather than assigning a set quota for online participation, I will assess your performance based on how thoughtfully and significantly you contribute to the blog's "health" throughout the term:

➤ **Excellent**

Sustained, consistent, and plentiful contributions that strike a solid balance between new posts and responses to others' postings. Substantive, relevant, and creative contributions rooted in course content and addressing a range of approaches and materials. Specific and well-articulated connections to readings, topics, and discussions. Honest scrutiny of your own ideas and beliefs. Generous and friendly tone toward others (including the authors we're reading), making room for everyone to express themselves. As semester goes on, identification and discussion of overarching themes, drawing out both subtle linkages and grand themes that unify our study of fandom.

➤ **Acceptable**

Regular participation in discussions and occasional original posts, or focus on one to the exclusion of the other. Some relevance to course topics and conversations. Tendency toward brief or breezy posts. Emphasis on personal opinion and judgments of value with occasional reference to others' ideas. Repetition of previously made points, or of what others are saying. Moderate to little sketching of connections and identification of ongoing themes. Some evidence of evolution in thinking by the end.

➤ **Poor**

Infrequent, sporadic, or half-hearted participation. Careless or unclear writing. Lack of relevance to course topics. Misconstrual or distortion of others' positions. Personal attacks.

I will give a tutorial in class on January 24 to familiarize you further with the blog. For more technical assistance, you can contact Liz Evans (eevans1) or the Help Desk, or consult the WordPress documentation at <http://mu.wordpress.org/docs/>.

### More information

I will give out detailed information, including grading criteria, on other assignments as they approach.

### CALENDAR

**Note: This schedule may change; check blog for latest updates**  
**TP = Textual Poachers; F = Fandom; X = readings available on blog**

Week 1 (Jan 22 & 24): Course introduction	
<b>Tues</b> Course overview, introductions	<b>Thurs</b> Blog workshop, generate questions for term Read: Introduction (TP) Blog for weekend: Post fanifesto
Week 2 (Jan 29 & 31): Framing Fan Studies and Texts	
<b>Tues</b> Read: Each others' fanifestos, Introduction (F) Screen: <i>Love and Death on Long Island</i> (Richard Kwietniowski, 1997), 94 min.	<b>Thurs</b> Active Texts and Cult Objects Read: Fish (X), Hall (X), Eco (X)
Week 3 (Feb 5 & 7): Reception, Celebrity, and Gender: The Historical Fan	
<b>Tues</b> Reception & Cultural Studies Read: Fiske (X), Dyer (X), Hebdidge (X) Screen: <i>Nurse Betty</i> (Neil LaBute, 2000), 110 min.	<b>Thurs</b> Gendering Fandom Read: Radway (X), Bacon-Smith (X)
Week 4 (Feb 12 & 14): Textual Poachers I	
<b>Tues</b> Read: Ch. 1 (TP) Screen: <i>Amok Time</i> (Joseph Pevney, 1967), 50 min.; <i>Trekkies</i> (Roger Nygard, 1997), 86 min.	<b>Thurs</b> Read: Ch. 2 (TP)
Week 5 (Feb 19 & 21): Textual Poachers II	
<b>Tues</b> Read: Ch. 3-4 (TP) Screen: Episodes of <i>Twin Peaks</i> , <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> , <i>The X-Files</i>	<b>Thurs</b> Read: Ch. 5 (TP)
Week 6 (Feb 26 & 28): Textual Poachers III	
<b>Tues</b> Read: Ch. 6 (TP) Screen: Selection of slash videos	<b>Thurs</b> Read: Ch. 7 (TP) Due: Response paper 1

Week 7 (Mar 4 & 6): Fandom from Cult to Convergence	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Guest speaker: Julie Levin Russo, Brown U. Read: Jenkins on Convergence Culture (X) Special presentation by Julie Levin Russo, 7 p.m., Science Center 199	<i>No class meeting</i>
<b>Spring Break</b>	
Week 8 (Mar 18 & 20): Fandom as Superculture	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Read: Afterword (F) Screen: <i>Star Trek: New Voyages</i> (2004), 40 min.; <i>Galaxy Quest</i> (Dean Parisot, 1999), 102 min.	Read: Anderson (X), Gladwell (X), Tushnet (F)
Week 9 (Mar 25 & 27): Subcreation, Franchises, and New Configurations of Taste	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Subcreation Read: Tolkien (X), Thompson (X) Screen: <i>Ringers: Lord of the Fans</i> (Carlene Cordova, 2005), 97 min.	High & Low Culture; Academics Read: Pearson (F), Tulloch (F), Hills (F), McKee (F)
Week 10 (Apr 1 & 3): Television and Serial Culture	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Read: TBA Screen: Episodes of <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> , <i>American Idol</i>	Read: TBA
Week 11 (Apr 8 & 10): New Fan Texts and Contexts	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Music Read: Scodari (F), Cavicchi (F), McCourt & Burkart (F)	Sports Read: McBride & Bird (F), Gosling (F), Theodoropoulou (F)
Week 12 (Apr 15 & 17): Local and Global Fandom	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Read: Longhurst et al (F), Couldry (F), Brooker (F) Screen: <i>Otaku no video</i> (Takeshi Mori, 1991), 100 min.	Read: Harrington & Bielby (F), Punathambekar (F), Chin (F), Ciecko & Lee (F)
Week 13 (Apr 22 & 24): Mutations of Celebrity	
<b>Tues</b>	<b>Thurs</b>
Due: Response paper 2 Read: Sconce (F), Click (F)	<i>No class meeting</i>
Week 14 (Apr 29 & May 1): Colloquium & Course Wrapup	

*Note: There is no final exam in this class.*