

## **Introduction:**

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Fall 2012 English Department Senior Thesis Colloquium. The students presenting today have been working on their theses for a full year -- in ENG 480 and ENG 481, a two-semester thesis capstone course.

In the first semester students studied a branch of literary analysis known as cultural theory, or cultural studies. Each presentation you will hear today draws on cultural studies as its theoretical foundation, and if you are here at noon you will see a short video created by Kate Marshall for her midterm last Spring that provides a very nice overview of cultural theory. Which is great because it means I can keep this introduction short. (Feel free to read the introduction to the Spring 2012 Colloquium if you are reading this speech and would like more background.)

I will just say for now that cultural studies has been around for 30 years – changing the way literary scholars understand how to study texts as well as the way we understand the meaning of popular culture itself.

When they chose their topics for research, I asked each student to pick something that was extremely popular because they would learn while studying culture theory that for a text to be popular it almost always engages a set of conflicting cultural ideologies.

Over the course of two semesters the students here today learned how to dissect their favorite popular movies & television shows to discover the existence of -- and the tensions between -- these ideologies.

I wish I could share with you all those amazing moments when each of them had an epiphany . . . sometimes during our weekly conferees, but often I would receive e-mails full of exclamation points. The ideas they are presenting today are original and insightful and could not have been crafted in one week or one month or one semester. As an educator, I love the fact that in this media-infused landscape of 30-second sound bytes and 15 seconds of fame, RWU English majors are spending a full year analyzing what is in many cases a movie that lasted less than two hours

Their analyses uncover cultural ideologies that reveal something essential about our culture. And they allowed the texts themselves to guide their analysis rather than forcing a pre-determined conclusion. That process can be extremely frustrating. But it is also full of surprises. As Emily Rand said to me during one conference, "I never expected to be writing about politics in *Forrest Gump*. I don't even like talking about politics." But her thesis reveals ideological contradictions in our own culture and in the nature of politics itself. Likewise what you will learn about Facebook, anime, Disney, fairy tales, the representation of LGBTQQ culture in media, the *Hunger Games*, *Toy Story*, *Dawson's Creek*, *In Time*, and *Once Upon a Time*, *The Office* and *Juno* ... might surprise you.

Students often say that studying critical theory changes the way they watch television and movies completely. I have watch our students make this transition from consuming

culture—to analyzing and critiquing it.

There will be a ten minute question and answer session at the end of each panel. Each paper will last approx 10-12 minutes. Feel free to enter or leave between presentations.

The first presentation is Kate Torres reading a selection of her thesis entitled "From Apocalyptic Realism to Utopian Idealism: Illuminating Studio Ghibli's Transnational Resonance."

Please silence your cell phones and open your minds.