

Self-Evaluation for Jason Mittell's Full Professor Review, Spring 2013

I am pleased to submit my dossier for review to Full Professor this spring. I believe that my record in teaching, scholarship, and professional service warrants promotion. My CV lists all of my accomplishments and efforts, but I will spotlight and contextualize some of these achievements here.

Given the focus of my time and energy over the past five years since receiving tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, it is appropriate to start with my professional service. I have been chair of the Film & Media Culture Department during four of my five years as Associate Professor, with the one "off year" coinciding with my sabbatical. Much of my energy has focused on leading the department through a number of significant transformations: transitioning from a program to department, moving into the Axinn Center and equipping our production facilities, welcoming 4 new faculty and 1 new staff member, conducting 2 faculty reviews, instituting mandatory senior work and the new teaching load, overseeing a growth in student enrollments, as well as managing the day-to-day business of a complicated, multifaceted department. The department has had a remarkably good run in recent years, standing out as a leader in liberal arts programs in film & media studies, and I am proud to have dedicated much of my energy to helping facilitate that success. Additionally, a portion of my appointment is in American Studies, so I have tried to be active in programmatic governance by participating in faculty searches, reviews, and curricular decisions; however the nature of my obligation to Film & Media mandates a limited engagement with American Studies daily business.

On top of my departmental service, I have been highly involved in a number of college-wide projects. I was an active member of the Website Makeover Taskforce for two years, representing faculty in the redesign and changeover process, as well as hands-on implementation for many academic pages. At the same time, I was a member of the Faculty LIS Advisory Committee for two years, the Banner / Web Prioritization Committee for one, and was recently appointed to the Online Pedagogy working group, all highlighting my longstanding engagement with technology and library issues at Middlebury. As chair of an arts department, I serve on the Committee on the Arts, and since returning from leave, have been a member of the Academic Judicial Board. I have also taken the initiative to start two working groups this year: a faculty/staff collaboration to form a Digital Scholarship Hub to spotlight and support innovative forms of research, and a small group of department chairs to launch an effort to reform Middlebury's faculty review procedures. Adding in my various editorial responsibilities and participation in committees for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, I believe my service efforts have

been quite extensive and successful.

Alongside my service efforts, I have worked to be a dedicated and innovative teacher at Middlebury. Given that my area of expertise is contemporary media, my courses are constantly updated to address new media technologies, industrial developments, and programming innovations, as well as adjusting to feedback from students and new pedagogical techniques and technologies. My course Television & American Culture is a yearly offering that is always being updated, and has directly fed into two book projects detailed below. Theories of Popular Culture and Media Technology & Cultural Change have been in my rotation since my first year at Middlebury, but they look radically different today than their earlier incarnations.

Over the past five years, I have added four new courses to my repertoire. Storytelling in Film & Media builds on my research in narrative theory, and serves as a bridge within our curriculum between film and other media, as well as modeling how to incorporate creative video assignments into a critical studies course. Urban America & Serial Television: Watching *The Wire* was one of the first courses in the country dedicated to the landmark series, and has served as a model for other faculty's course design, as well as getting positive press in venues like *Slate*, NPR, and *The Baltimore Sun*. Sustainable Television: Producing Environmental Video established a bridge between Film & Media and Environmental Studies in conjunction with ES's new concentration in Film & Media, and worked to apply students' video production skills to tackling a crucial contemporary issue. And the Senior Tutorial that I am running this spring structures the new required senior work for FMMC majors, incorporating peer feedback and collaboration into our independent project process. Throughout my various classes, I strive to cross boundaries between production and critical studies, rethink the use of course presentations and schedules, and engage students via technology and innovative course materials.

My teaching and research cross-pollinate each other in numerous ways, and hopefully lead to greater effectiveness in both realms. This connection is most direct with my book *Television and American Culture*, which emerged out of the structure and content of my Middlebury course of the same name. While it is designed as a teaching textbook, it also offers specific disciplinary and methodological arguments by mapping a distinctive approach to the field of television studies by integrating industrial, regulatory, textual, reception, and technological analysis, framed by detailed case studies applying theoretical ideas. I have been gratified by the book's broad adoption and praise from faculty and students (including a positive book review in *Cinema Journal*), and hope to update and revise it in coming years. My experience teaching this course also inspired the co-edited anthology *How to Watch Television* forthcoming from NYU Press in August, offering model works of television analysis to undergraduates to emulate in their own writing. The book

assembles 40 short essays, each analyzing a specific television program through a particular theoretical lens, but written for introductory students with approachable prose. I have included the co-written introduction and my contributing essay on children's program *Phineas & Ferb* in my dossier.

My other major research project has also been fed by my teaching, with my course Storytelling in Film & Media serving as a workshop for many ideas I am exploring concerning narrative theory in my ongoing book project, *Complex Television: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. This project has been developing for many years, examining contemporary serialized television as a site of narrative experimentation within the contexts of shifts in television technologies, industrial norms, and viewing practices. I have published a great deal of this material in journal articles and book chapters over the past seven years, and it is culminating in my book under contract with NYU Press. This project also led to me being awarded a fellowship to spend the 2011-12 year at the Lichtenberg-Kolleg in Göttingen, Germany, collaborating with a German research unit focused on popular seriality, and presenting pieces of the book broadly around Europe.

While the book still has two chapters to be written, it is also already “published” in a way. I have been serially publishing drafts of each chapter when complete to MediaCommons Press since March 2012 as part of an experiment with open “peer-to-peer review,” where anyone can read the book and offer comments. The site has received over 30,000 page views, over 260 comments from more than 40 different commenters (both academic and non-academic), has been cited in academic essays as well as *The New Yorker*, and has been taught in at least four courses and included on one doctoral student's preliminary examinations. Thus calling the book “forthcoming” is somewhat misleading, as it is already broadly circulating amongst both academics and the general public—although I do plan on completing the manuscript and submitting the revised book for traditional publication this coming summer, while allowing the online version to persist indefinitely. I am excited to be working on scholarship that breaks new ground both in content and the format of publishing, and hope to continue to be a leader in developing new modes of scholarly communication and publication.

Looking forward, I intend to continue to publish on a range of topics about American television, with a strong commitment to digital formats such as online open-access journals, pre-publication open review, and posting drafts to my blog. Such online scholarship allows my work to circulate more broadly and in a timely manner, as well as helping to shift the norms of scholarly publication that I believe to be in crisis. I have become intrigued by Digital Humanities, and am looking for ways to create more collaborative projects centered around digital methods and modes of dissemination, coupled with developing Middlebury's visibility in the realm of digital scholarship. I plan

to expand my teaching in this area as well, offering a new course on Digital Media Literacy and one on Video Games as Art, Culture & Medium for the 2013-14 academic year. I am excited to continue to develop as a scholar, teacher, and member of the college community, hopefully at the rank of Full Professor.