

From Cronkite to Comedy

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Last year a poll identified Jon Stewart of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" as "the most trusted newsman in America," a mantle once held by news legend, Walter Cronkite. While that may seem to be a disconnect for some, a Tulane communication class is looking to explain why Stewart's brand of social and political satire is both relevant and popular.



"In this multichannel era, there will always be an audience for [satirical programs], which deploy rebellious humor to ridicule dominant media and political discourses," says Mauro Porto, assistant professor of communication. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Mauro Porto, assistant professor of [communication](#), is taking a long look at both "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" in a course titled "Satire TV and the Public Sphere."

[Porto](#) says these shows are not just entertainment, but serve as a forum where power brokers can be taken to task.

"These shows are some of the most important spaces in the post-network era, where

alternative political discourses and viewpoints thrive," Porto says. "They create a sense of accountability both for powerful political actors and for dominant media organizations."

"The Daily Show," for example, goes back and compares statements of politicians, pundits and mainstream media providers to check for consistency in their positions ? something Porto says mainstream news organizations typically do not do.

"'The Colbert Report' and 'The Daily Show' deploy parody and satire to question dominant political discourses," he says. "Because of these and other reasons, they have become an important part of the public sphere, the realm of social life in which public opinion is formed."

Porto also takes a critical look at some of the shortcomings of satire TV. The seminar discusses some limitations of the genre, including the tendency to rely on stereotypes when representing foreign countries and cultures.

Porto says that, despite such flaws, satirical programming is here to stay.

"In this multichannel era, there will always be an audience for these shows, which deploy rebellious humor to ridicule dominant media and political discourses. We should take satire television seriously."