MDST 3115 Professor William G. Little

Spring 2017 Wilson Hall 204 454 New Cabell Hall

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**Breaking Bad:**

**Once Upon A Time With the Pests**

This course entails rigorous study of a groundbreaking, complex television show. Among other things, it offers an opportunity to examine competing versions of the American Dream, one based on self-oriented pursuit of material success and class privilege (symbolized, in part, by the suburban “White” House) and one based on other-directed dedication to democratic ideals of universal rights and social justice (symbolized, in ironic fashion, by the inflatable Statue of Liberty wired to the roof of lawyer Saul Goodman’s office). *Breaking Bad* dramatizes a culture dedicated to the self-oriented Dream. This Dream promotes the idea of redemption through prosperity, the property of whiteness, and the virtues of (technological) speed. Students are encouraged to analyze, slowly, how the show critiques this version of the Dream. They attend to the show’s portrayals of race and class relations, as well as to its depiction of a capitalist system (typified by Walter White’s meth empire and Gus Fring’s fast food/drug business) characterized by standardization and ruthless efficiency. In addition, the course requires students to consider the show as a set of nuanced portraits of individuals who are *bugged* in various ways. The bugs range from specific features of modern experience (e.g. social alienation; advanced capitalism; erosion of privacy; drug epidemics; The War on Drugs) to more general experiences (e.g., personal disappointment; trauma; illness; intimations of mortality; the desire to get away with things; the desire to be remembered). Critical study of the show entails careful synthesis and application of readings drawn from a number of disciplines (e.g., cultural studies, philosophy, religious studies, history, psychoanalysis) and patient, creative close reading of the visual text.