

Trumping Up the Curriculum

New Class Uses 'Reality TV' as Teaching Tool

By Aaron Ragan-Fore

“You’re fired!”

The now-famous catchphrase of business mogul Donald Trump from the popular television series *The Apprentice* is echoing through American living rooms just as loudly as it is through the program’s boardroom. Now the slogan has been introduced in a new environment — the classroom.

Entertainment meets academia this spring in “Management Lessons from *The Apprentice*,” a two-credit undergraduate course. Lecturer Laura Schildkraut designed the class, which uses group discussion and viewings of program episodes to explore teamwork, leadership and management strategy.

Schildkraut and her co-instructor professor Tom Jones believe that *The Apprentice* offers a departure point for discussing the challenges inherent in business.

“I never watched reality television before,” Schildkraut says, “but I wanted to see how *The Apprentice* would portray the interviewing process. Watching the show, I kept thinking to myself, ‘I’d love to discuss this with students.’”

And apparently the students are ready to talk. Both sections of the class filled to capacity after just three days of registration. The popularity of the class can be summed up easily. “People are talking about it,” Jones explains. “It’s a link between popular culture and big business.”

It’s easy to see why a business student might enjoy *The Apprentice*. The series is a months-long game show, featuring young executives and entrepreneurs competing in business-related tasks. The prize is a management position in a Trump company with a hefty annual salary of \$250,000.

At the end of each episode, Donald Trump personally eliminates one contestant with an emphatic, “You’re fired!”

The class is patterned after the program. Students operate in teams to formulate business plans and are required to evaluate their peers. The syllabus even calls for

a question-and-answer teleconference with George Ross, a top Trump executive featured on the program. “We are teaching the MTV generation,” says Schildkraut of her unorthodox lesson plan. “We have a responsibility to incorporate various forms of media, and to present new teaching styles for students with new learning styles.”

Jones agrees with the approach.

“We want students to examine management issues in actual context, and in juxtaposition to each other,” he says. “The ethical issues are cast in bold relief on the television screen.”

There are some differences between the course curriculum and the program. In the classroom, no participants



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will strike it rich or find themselves eliminated, as it works on television.

Schildkraut says she’s often asked if *The Apprentice* represents an accurate portrayal of a modern business environment.

“Obviously there are some aspects of the show that are not realistic,” she responds. “You don’t go into every meeting with your boss carrying a suitcase, waiting to be fired. Some elements are realistic, like having a project handed to you that needs immediate attention, and working with a group of people that you may not like. Those lessons don’t change, and I think they’re valuable.”