

introduction to film studies

Course #: FMS 300 ~ 14549
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Office Hours: 12:00p - 1:00p, #A500
Semester: Spring 2020
Day & time: Tu/Th, 10:30a - 11:50a
Building: Main Campus Library #111

course description

This course is an introduction to the system of film, and its various forms, styles, and genres. We will be studying a wide variety of films (canonic Hollywood films, documentaries, shorts, animation, art and experimental films) as a way to further an understanding of the visual, aural, and narrative conventions by which motion pictures address social and aesthetic experience. Through the class lectures, readings, and screenings, we will explore the multiple functions of film, conventional and alternative ways of reading a film text, and will develop the critical tools necessary for thinking and writing about film as both an art form, and as a medium that reflects popular culture.

student learning outcomes

- ~ Demonstrate an understanding of the fundamentals of film as a performing/visual art form.
- ~ Identify, explain, and understand contemporary film theories and use these theories to analyze, interpret, and criticize motion pictures.
- ~ Recognize, discuss and examine the nature of culture, class, gender, and ethnicity in Hollywood mythologies and oppositional films.
- ~ Explain and examine the codes and the conventions of film genre, myth, narrative, and rhetoric.
- ~ Identify and explain the various formal and stylistic elements involved in the filmmaking process.
- ~ Articulate the core concepts of narrative storytelling and character development in popular film forms (Hollywood, independent, documentary, and avant-garde filmmaking).
- ~ Identify the various genres and styles of films that have evolved over the course of film history.

course requirements

Class Lectures: You are responsible for attending the class lecture each session. Please email me if you know you cannot make it to section on a given day. I will forgive up to three absences during the semester, so long as you email me ahead of time. I encourage you to use your personal computer, iPad, or other learning tool during class time if you are using it appropriately (viewing class slides, taking notes), however, be sure to turn off any noisemaking functions on those and any other electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, etc. Please keep the brightness levels on all LED screens at low intensity. There is no food allowed in class at any time (drinks are okay). Copies of all the lectures are available for download and review on Canvas. If you require any additional accommodations such as a note taker, testing services, captions, or special chairs/desks, please speak with me personally, or provide the proper authorization letter from the Disability Support Office (DSPS).

Readings: It is incumbent upon you to be prepared, and you should come to class each session having read the reading assignment posted on the schedule. We will be spending as much time discussing the readings as the films, and a firm understanding of them will benefit your overall understanding/interpretation of the film texts.

Discussion: You are encouraged to be actively involved in the class discussions, as your participation is key to your success in this course. My goal is to aid in the development of your analytical/critical skills, and I expect everyone to maintain an open mind, and take a creative approach to the material. Be respectful of your fellow classmates when addressing and critiquing conflicting viewpoints.

assessments and grading

There are **460** total points available in the course, and your overall grade will be determined by your performance on the following assessments:

Screenings and Participation (80 pts.)	A = 460 - 413
Film Notes (80 pts.)	B = 412 - 367
Short-answer Assignment (100 pts.)	C = 366 - 321
Sequence Analysis (100 pts.)	D = 320 - 275
Film Analysis Essay (100 pts.)	F = 274 - 0

Film Notes & Participation: Your attendance is expected at each of the film screenings, and missing or leaving the film screenings early will result in a lowered participation grade (I will forgive up to *two* absences if you email me ahead of time). You are required to take notes on each of the discussion clips screened in class. This is a good habit to practice when watching and analyzing films, as it will help you to remember important narrative and stylistic elements to be used as supportive examples in your writing. Notes will be checked on the final session of the semester, and must be submitted in one of two ways:

- 1) as an electronic document (word, pdf, text, pages, etc.)
- 2) as a packet of individual sheets of paper, assembled and stapled together

Do not turn in any three-ring binders or spiral/binded notebooks with your notes in them, as they will not be accepted.

Short Answer, Sequence Analysis, and Final Essay Assignments: There are three writing assignments this semester, each due by the time class starts on the assigned date. Late assignments will be accepted for up to one week, and will incur a 10-point penalty (except for the final paper). No late assignments will be accepted after one week. There will be no opportunity for re-writes after grading, as good writing skills are a must in this course. Please submit your work to me through Canvas (discussed in further detail in the *Assignments* section). You are required to visit the course page on Canvas to view the assignment questions and clips, as there are additional writing and formatting guidelines for you to review.

**** NOTE **** *Plagiarism and other issues concerning academic integrity will not be tolerated, and are grounds for an automatic failure in the course. Acknowledge all reading and research sources with appropriate footnotes and bibliography.* Keep all copies of your quizzes and notes until you have received a final grade for this class.

texts and materials

- 1) Engaging Cinema, by Bill Nichols. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- 2) All films/clips screened during lectures.
- 3) Course pages at canvas.losrios.edu.

schedule

~ *Film Form & Aesthetics* ~

week #1 ~ (Jan. 21st & 23rd) ~ why do we study films?

Discussion: Intro to course | Syllabus | Questions

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Introduction" and "Ch. 12 - Writing and Speaking About Film"

Screening: *Hearts of Darkness*, dirs. Elena Coppola, George Hickenlooper, Fax Bahr (1991)

week #2 ~ (Jan. 28th & 30th) ~ film language and editing

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 29-50

Discussion: *Whiplash*, dir. Damien Chazelle (2014), *Bringing Up Baby*, dir. Howard Hawks (1938)

Bronyenosyets Potyomkin, dir. Sergei Eisenstein (1925), *Stachka*, dir. Sergei Eisenstein (1925)

week #3 ~ (Feb. 4th & 6th) ~ cinematography and the image

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 50-59

Discussion: *Citizen Kane*, dir. Orson Welles (1941), *Three Kings*, dir. David O. Russell (1999)
Psycho, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1960), *Boogie Nights*, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson (1997),
Touch of Evil, dir. Orson Welles (1958), *Sabotage*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1936)

week #4 ~ (Feb. 11th & 13th) ~ the elements of mise-en-scène

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 60-66

"Ch. 5 - Three Fundamental Styles," pgs. 176-187

Discussion: *Wo hu cang long*, dir. Ang Lee (2000), *City Lights*, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1931)
Screening: *Safety Last!*, dir. Fred C. Newmeyer and Sam Taylor (1923)

week #5 ~ (Feb. 18th & 20th) ~ sound and sound design

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 1 - Film as a Language," pgs. 64-66

Discussion: *American Psycho*, dir. Mary Harron (2000), *M*, dir. Fritz Lang (1931)

Screening: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, dir. John Cameron Mitchell (2001)

~ Narrative, Genre, & Style ~

week #6 ~ (Feb. 25th & 27th) ~ ideology and cinema

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 8 - Ideology and the Cinema"

Discussion: *Blue Velvet*, dir. David Lynch (1986), *The Babadook*, dir. Jennifer Kent (2014)

Screening: *The Little Mermaid*, dir. John Musker & Ron Clements (1989)

week #7 ~ (Mar. 3rd & 5th) ~ film narrative and Hollywood formalism

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 4 - Narrative Fiction Film," pgs. 136-147 and pgs. 160-172

"Ch. 6 - The Institutional and National Contexts," pgs. 232-237

Discussion: *Magnolia*, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson (1999), *Baby Driver*, dir. Edgar Wright (2017)
The Great Train Robbery, dir. Edwin Porter (1903), *The Maltese Falcon*, dir. John Huston
(1941)

** Short-answer assignment due **

week #8 ~ (Mar. 10th & 12th) ~ classical Hollywood narrative and art-cinema

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 4 - Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film," pgs. 147-160

Discussion: *Back to the Future*, dir. Robert Zemeckis (1985), *Velvet Goldmine*, dir. Todd Haynes (1998),
Vivre sa vie, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (1962)

week #9 ~ (Mar. 17th & 19th) ~ avant-garde cinema

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 2 - Forms of Cinematic Engagement and the Avant-Garde Film"

Discussion: *Un chien Andalou* dir. Luis Buñuel (1929), *Meshes of the Afternoon*, dirs. Maya Deren,
Alexander Hamid (1943), *Ballet mécanique* dir. Fernand Léger (1924), *Waking Life*, dir.
Richard Linklater (2001)

week #10 ~ (Mar. 24th & 26th) ~ film genre: science fiction

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 7 - Genre Films"

Screening: *Children of Men*, dir. Alfonso Cuarón (2006)

week #11 ~ (Mar. 31st & Apr. 2nd) ~ documentary film

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 3 - Documentary Film"

Discussion: *Regen*, dir. Joris Ivens (1929), *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, dir. Frank Capra (1942)
High School, dir. Frederick Wiseman (1968), *Roger & Me*, dir. Michael Moore (1989)
Las Hurdes, dir. Luis Buñuel (1933), *I Am A Sex Addict*, dir. Caveh Zahedi (2005)

week #12 ~ (Apr. 7th & 9th) ~ no class

** *Spring break* **

~ *Representing Culture in Film* ~

week #13 ~ (Apr. 14th & 16th) ~ race and Otherness

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 9 – Race and Ethnicity in Film"

Discussion: *I, Robot*, dir. Alex Proyas (2004), *Mi familia*, dir. Gregory Nava (1995)
Screening: *Middle Sexes*, dir. Antony Thomas (2005)

week #14 ~ (Apr. 21st & 23rd) ~ film analysis

Screening: *Do the Right Thing*, dir. Spike Lee (1989)

** *Sequence analysis assignment due* **

week #15 ~ (Apr. 28th & 30th) ~ sex and gender in film

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 10 - Gender and Masculinity," pgs. 359-388
"Ch. 11 - Feminism and Film," pgs. 395-422

Discussion: *Die Hard*, dir. John McTiernan (1988), *Moonlight*, dir. Barry Jenkins (2016), *Stella Dallas*
dir. King Vidor (1937), *Little Miss Sunshine*, dir. Valerie Faris, Jonathan Dayton (2006)

week #16 ~ (May 5th & 7th) ~ Other sexualities in film

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 10 - Gender and Masculinity," pgs. 388-394
"Ch. 11 - Feminism and Film," pgs. 422-431

Discussion: *Rush Hour 2*, dir. Brett Ratner (2001), *Milk*, dir. Gus Van Sant (2008)

Screening: *Tongues Untied*, dir. Marlon Riggs (1989)

week #17 ~ (May 12th & 14th) ~ world cinema

Reading: Engaging Cinema, "Ch. 6 - The Institutional and National Contexts," pgs. 209-231

Discussion: *11'09"01 September 11* (2002) ~ "God, Construction, Deconstruction" dir. Samira
Makhmalbaf, "Mexico" dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, "India" dir. Mira Nair

** *No class on Thursday the 14th for the start of finals week* **

week #18 ~ (May 19th) ~ final class session

** *Essay assignment due* ** *Film notebooks due for review* **

** *Final class session meets from 10:15a to 12:15p* **