

# film genre: the horror film

**Course #:** FILM 120  
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**Office Hours:** By email or Appointment  
**Semester:** Spring 2020  
**Day & time:** Thursdays, 6p - 8:50p  
**Building:** Bldg. #100, Room #142

## course description

The goal of this course is a close examination of the popular horror film. We will focus on the different ways horror is represented, its social and cultural significance, and the reasons why horror films are so appealing to a mass audience. Throughout the semester we will be examining seminal theories of horror, as well as charting the historical evolution of the genre. The course will be divided into four sections: the first will cover the early period of physical monsters; the second will examine psychological monsters, slashers and body films; the third will consider post-9/11 horror; and the fourth will look to contemporary horror films as reflections of American anxieties.

## student learning outcomes

- ~ Understand the horror genre's relationship to popular culture, and its role in fostering ideology, and images of gender and ethnicity.
- ~ Demonstrate an understanding of the major theories related to the analysis and criticism of horror films, through written analysis of specific texts screened in class.
- ~ Explain and examine the codes, conventions, myths, and transformations of the horror genre in general, and its subgenres in particular.
- ~ Compare and contrast the different types of horror films, and the eras in which they become popular.
- ~ Recall the historical evolution of the horror film.

## 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. 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 the Turnitin.com application (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 work until you have received a final grade for this class.

## texts and materials

- 1) Additional readings and materials can be accessed through Canvas.
- 2) All films screened in class, as well as any excerpt screened during the lectures.

*Please remember that if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or any of the course materials that I am readily available to help answer them. I can be reached through the email address above, the course website, or by placing a note for me in my box in the department office.*

## schedule

~ *External Monsters & the Other* ~

### week #1 ~ (Jan. 23<sup>th</sup>) ~ introduction to the horror film

Lecture: Intro to Course | Syllabi | Questions  
Screening: *American Nightmare*, dir. Adam Simon (2000)

**week #2 ~ (Jan. 30<sup>th</sup>) ~ repression and the other**

Reading: "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," by Robin Wood  
Screening: *Frankenstein*, dir. James Whale (1931)

**week #3 ~ (Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>) ~ modernism and early gothic horror**

Reading: "What is American Gothic," by Allan Lloyd Smith  
Screening: *Nosferatu*, dir. F.W. Murnau (1922)

**week #4 ~ (Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>) ~ postwar horror comedies**

Reading: "Horror Films," by William K. Everson  
Screening: *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein*, dir. Charles Barton (1948)

~ *Internal Monsters & Slashers* ~

**week #5 ~ (Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>) ~ the psychological monster**

Reading: "*Psycho*," by Robin Wood  
Screening: *Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1960)

**week #6 ~ (Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>) ~ the postmodern horror film**

Reading: "Recreational Terror," by Isabel Cristina Pinedo  
Screening: *Dawn of the Dead*, dir. George A. Romero (1978)

\*\* *Short-answer assignment due* \*\*

**week #7 ~ (Mar. 5<sup>th</sup>) ~ the nuclear family in crisis**

Reading: "Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange," by Vivian Sobchack  
Screening: *The Shining*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (1980)

**week #8 ~ (Mar. 12<sup>th</sup>) ~ slasher horror**

Reading: "Her Body, Himself," by Carol Clover  
Screening: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, dir. Tobe Hooper (1974)

**week #9 ~ (Mar. 19<sup>th</sup>) ~ body genre films**

Reading: "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," by Linda Williams  
Screening: *Dead Alive*, dir. Peter Jackson (1992)

~ *Post-9/11 Horror & Torture* ~

**week #10 ~ (Mar. 26<sup>th</sup>) ~ torture porn horror**

Reading: "Torture Porn: When Good Times Go Bad," by Scott Collura  
Screening: *Hostel*, dir. Eli Roth (2005)

**week #11 ~ (Apr. 2<sup>nd</sup>) ~ post-9/11 monstrosities**

Reading: "A Violation of Balance: Foreignness in Post-9/11 Horror Films," by Adam Wadenius  
Screening: *Cloverfield*, dir. Matt Reeves (2008)

**week #12 ~ (Apr. 9<sup>th</sup>) ~ no class**

*\*\* Spring break \*\**

**week #13 ~ (Apr. 16<sup>th</sup>) ~ the new French Extremity**

Reading: "Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body," by Tim Palmer  
Screening: *Martyrs*, dir. Pascal Laugier (2008)

*~ Contemporary Horror & Culture ~*

**week #14 ~ (Apr. 23<sup>rd</sup>) ~ representing race in horror films**

Reading: "Foreword" and "Introduction: Studying Blacks in Horror," by Robin R. Means Coleman  
Screening: *Get Out*, dir. Jordan Peele (2017)

**week #15 ~ (Apr. 30<sup>th</sup>) ~ the monstrous feminine**

Reading: "Imaginary/Symbolic," by Susan Hayward  
"Introduction," and "Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection," by Barbara Creed  
Screening: *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*, dir. Tom Six (2009)

*\*\* Sequence analysis assignment due \*\**

**week #16 ~ (May 7<sup>th</sup>) ~ the semiotic and the symbolic**

Screening: *The Babadook*, dir. Jennifer Kent (2014)

**week #17 ~ (May 14<sup>th</sup>) ~ deconstructing the queer monster**

Reading: "The Monster and the Homosexual," by Harry M. Benshoff  
Screening: *Låt den rätte komma in*, dir. Tomas Alfredson (2008)

**week #18 ~ (May 21<sup>st</sup>) ~ daymare horror**

Screening: *Midsommar*, dir. Ari Aster (2019)

**week #19 ~ (May 28<sup>th</sup>) ~ final class session**

*\*\* Essay assignment due \*\**

*\*\* Film notebooks due for review \*\**