COMM-1305_001 and COMM-1305_101 Film and Culture

Fall 2012
M 2-4:45pm & W 2-3:15pm
Bay Hall Rm. 205

Professor David Gurney
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Office Hours: T 12:30pm-1:30pm, W 10am-Noon, R 9am-11am & by appointment

Course Description:
This course provides an introduction to the study of film aesthetics, history, and criticism. It introduces an aesthetic vocabulary that students will use to analyze components of film form, such as mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and genre. The course approaches films as texts that indicate cultural attitudes and norms of their time and that can be understood through textual analysis. A number of critical methodologies are introduced to study cinema’s role in American culture, including issues of race, class, and gender. The course seeks to enhance the students’ understanding of film from a historical perspective, contextualizing film within the history of cinema technology and the movie industry.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
• Understand the vocabulary of film aesthetics.
• Understand various historical and cultural contexts of films.
• Apply critical approaches to the study of films.
• Analyze film form and content in historical and cultural context.
• Analyze film form and content using the vocabulary of film aesthetics.

Required Materials:
» Netflix subscription (www.netflix.com): Most films screened for this class are available to stream instantly on Netflix, so the subscription will be helpful in reviewing the films and when analyzing them. The only exceptions are

Optional Materials:

Course Policies:
» Attendance is required – both physically and mentally. Unexcused absences will have a direct effect on your final grade for this course, with each one equaling a five-point deduction (out of a possible total of 100 points). Attendance will be taken starting exactly at 2:00 p.m. Arrivals after that time will be considered late. Late arrivals and departures prior to the finish of the class period will count as half-absences, meaning that two of either type will be counted as a full absence.
» You are allowed two fully excused absences throughout the semester. These are to be employed at your discretion but should be used to cover illness, religious holiday observance, or most any other event or circumstance that causes you to miss class. Only extreme hardship with back-up documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) will allow for consideration of any additional absences being excused. Classes missed due to university-approved activities (athletic teams, student government, etc.) will also be considered excused. For those absences, please make me aware, and, in addition, I will need official TAMUCC documentation. If appropriate, you may arrange to make up quizzes or exams missed due to excused absences, but it will be your responsibility to get any information from a missed class lecture from one of your classmates.
All absences not fitting into the excused categories described immediately above, will be considered unexcused. Any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up.

Late work will be penalized by ten points (all assignments will be on 100-point scales) for each day it is late.

While in class, please make sure your cell phone is off and stowed away, even during screenings.

A note on competing media: Laptops are permitted for note taking purposes during lecture only, but please do not abuse this privilege. While you may personally feel capable of multitasking during class while still paying attention to lecture and discussion, your surrounding classmates will more likely find your in-class extracurricular activities distracting, so please, for the sake of your peers, respect this restriction. No laptop use will be permitted during screenings.

A note on film content: Various films shown in this course contain strong language, nudity, sexual situations, violence, controversial subjects, and complex philosophical ideas that might be disturbing to you. I will try to highlight any potentially disturbing material before screenings and if you feel that you will be unable to view a specific film, please speak to be about arranging for an alternative screening for the week.

Please remember to check your Islander email account regularly during the week and monitor the course Blackboard site for any course updates.

If you would like to discuss any course readings, lectures, screenings, or assignments outside of class, you should feel free to contact me via email or by arranging to visit me during my office hours. If you need to schedule a time to meet outside of office hours, please let me know.

All writing for this course must be composed using a standard, 12-point font size, and with standard 1” margins.

Academic Integrity:
University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in a failing grade (F) for the assignment, at the very least, or a report to the Chair of the Department of Communication and Theatre, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and the Office of Student Affairs.

For the purposes of citation, please follow Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Guide. For quick reference, see: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Dropping a Class:
I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the class be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. November 2, 2012, is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

Classroom/Professional Behavior:
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.
**Academic Advising:**
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 361.825.3466.

**Notice to Students with Disabilities**
Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible. Please have your accommodation letter from Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi Disability Services (DS) Office with you when you come see me. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Disability Services Office (located in 116 Corpus Christi Hall) at 361.825.5816.

**Grade Appeal Process:**
As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Grade Scale:**
A  90-100
B  80-89
C  70-79
D  60-69
F  59 and below

**Grade Distribution:**  
» Attention & Participation (10%): Each student is expected to be attentive toward lecture and willing to participate in class discussion when appropriate. This grade will reflect how well you accomplish these goals.  
**Reminder: Attendance is required. It is assumed that you will be present for all class meetings and screenings unless you have a valid excuse. Unexcused absences will have a direct effect on your FINAL GRADE (not only the Attention & Participation component) for this course, with each one equaling a five-point deduction (out of a possible total of 100 points).**  
» In-Class Quizzes (15%): Periodically (and at the professor's discretion) throughout the term, quizzes will be given at the beginning of class pertaining to readings and/or films that you are responsible for having read and/or watched before our class meeting.  
» Film Journals (20%): Following select screenings and readings, you will be asked to write short reflections on films based on specific prompts. These will be submitted at various points throughout the semester and evaluated.  
» Midterm Exam (25%): A midterm exam covering all topics discussed in the first half of the semester will be given in-class on Wednesday, October 17.  
» Final Exam (30%): A final exam covering topics discussed throughout the semester (with particular emphasis on the second half) will be given on Monday, December 10.
Course Schedule:
Required readings and homework screenings are to be completed prior to the class meeting under which they are listed. The optional readings contain supplemental information that will be introduced in lecture. All are available in the optional book FA. This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1 (August 22) – Introduction, Course Outline, Screening
Introductions, Review of Syllabus, Preliminary Discussion
In-Class Screening: The Match Factory Girl (dir. Aki Kaurismaki, 1990, 68 min.)

Week 2 (August 27 & 29) – Foundations of Studying Film
Required Reading: EC, Introduction
Homework Screening: Death Race 2000 (dir. Paul Bartel, 1975, 79 min.)
In-Class Screening: Death Race (dir. Paul W.S. Anderson, 2008, 105 min.)

Week 3 (September 5) – Film as Language: Cinematography & Sound
Film Journal Entry 1 must be submitted through Blackboard before class on September 5.
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 1 (pp. 50-69)
Optional Reading: FA, Chapters 4, 5, and 7
Homework Screening: Punch-Drunk Love (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 2002, 95 min.)

Week 4 (September 10 & 12) – Film as Language: Semiotics & Editing
Required Readings: EC, Chapter 1 (pp. 29-50)
Optional Readings: FA, Chapter 6
In-Class Screening: The Big Lebowski (dir. Joel Coen, 1998, 117 min.)

Week 5 (September 17 & 19) – Forms of Cinematic Engagement and the Avant-Garde Film
Film Journal Entry 2 must be submitted through Blackboard before class on September 17.
Required Readings: EC, Chapter 2
Optional Readings: FA, Chapter 10

Week 6 (September 24 & 26) – Documentary Film
Required Readings: EC, Chapter 3
Optional Readings: FA, Chapter 10
Homework Screening: Exit through the Gift Shop (dir. Banksy, 2010, 87 min.)
In-Class Screening: Winnebago Man (dir. Ben Steinbauer, 2009, 85 min.)

Week 7 (October 1 & 3) – Storytelling and Narrative Fiction Film
Film Journal Entry 2 must be submitted through Blackboard before class on October 1.
Required Readings: EC, Chapter 4
In-Class Screening: Cold Weather (dir. Aaron Katz, 2011, 96 min.)

Week 8 (October 8 & 10) – Fundamental Film Styles
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 5
Homework Screening: Persona (dir. Ingmar Bergman, 1967, 83 min.)
In-Class Screening: Being John Malkovich (dir. Spike Jonze, 1999, 112 min.)
Week 9 (October 15 & 17) – Midterm Exam
Monday, October 15 will be a review session.
The Midterm Exam will be given in class on Wednesday, October 17.

Week 10 (October 22 & 24) – Institutional and National Contexts
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 6
In-Class Screening: Detour (dir. Edgar Ulmer, 1945, 67 min.)

Week 11 (October 29 & 31) – Genre Films
Film Journal Entry 3 must be submitted through Blackboard before class on October 29.
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 7
Optional Reading: FA, Chapter 9
In-Class Screening: RoboCop (dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1987, 103 min.)

Week 12 (November 5 & 7) – Ideology
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 8
Homework Screening: Hoop Dreams (dir. Steve James, 1994, 171 min.)
In-Class Screening: Dirty Harry (dir. Don Siegel, 1971, 102 min.)

Week 13 (November 12 & 14) – Race and Ethnicity in Film
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 9
Homework Screening: Far from Heaven (dir. Todd Haynes, 2002, 107 min.)
In-Class Screening: Lone Star (dir. John Sayles, 1996, 134 min.)

Week 14 (November 19 & 21) – Gender and Masculinity
Film Journal Entry 4 must be submitted through Blackboard before class on November 19.
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 10
In-Class Screening: Drive (dir. Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011, 93 min.)

Week 15 (November 26 & 29) – Feminism and Film
Required Reading: EC, Chapter 11
In-Class Screening: Winter’s Bone (dir. Debra Granik, 2010, 100 min.)

Week 16 (Monday, December 3) – Final Exam Review Session
The Final Exam will be given on Monday, December 10 from 1:45pm-4:15pm.