

FST 376: AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960
SYLLABUS AND POLICIES

Screening and Lecture: Tuesday 12:30-3:45 pm (195 min) in KI 101
Discussion Section 1: Thursday 12:30-1:45 pm (75 min) in KI 104
Discussion Section 2: Thursday 2:00-3:15 pm (75 min) in KI 104

Professor Todd Berliner
Fall 2017

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the history and aesthetics of American cinema from the beginning of talkies until the break-up of the studio system, arguably the most influential, fertile, and entertaining period in world cinema.

We will conduct an “historical poetics” of American cinema, as we seek to understand the historical conditions that enabled American cinema to assume the form it had during the studio era. We will examine the Hollywood studio system, its narrative and stylistic practices, the role of film producers and directors, the star system, and the place genre holds in Hollywood filmmaking. We will study important American filmmakers, such as Frank Capra, John Ford, Howard Hawks, John Huston, and Alfred Hitchcock. We will examine the impact of events in the history of studio-era filmmaking, such as the advent of sound technologies, color and widescreen film processes, the Hays Production Code, the blacklist, and whatever else comes up.

We will not, however, cover the topics systematically. If, instead, we allow the particulars of particular movies to invite commentary, you are less likely than you might otherwise be to come away with pat “knowledge” of matters about which one can only pretend to understand completely. That way of operating will work fine, except that members of the class cannot know what they missed if they miss a class, and asking another student probably will not help: Those who attend the class in question are liable to have an understandable but invalid belief that “nothing happened.” Therefore, all members of the class must attend all of every class.

Throughout, we will study movies *as* movies—as experiences for spectators—and we will never stray far from our central question and the only question about cinema that I care much about: What is it about the movies people enjoy that makes people enjoy them?

CLASS MEETINGS, SCREENINGS, AND FILMS

Class meets twice each week: on Monday for film screenings and lecture and on Wednesday for discussion. You should plan to attend all of every class, even screenings of movies you have already seen, even if you rented the same movie the night before. Don’t ask me if it’s okay to come late or leave early; it isn’t.

Copies of the movies we are studying are available through Randall Library on DVD, Blu Ray, or streaming. Randall Library subscribes to two movie streaming services: [Kanopy](#) and [Swank](#).

You may not use electronics during class time; they’re distracting.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

I will calculate your final grades according to the following percentages:

1. Quizzes (best 9 scores) (30%)
2. Motion Picture Production Code Report (15%)
3. Final Paper (35%)
4. Class Participation (20%): Attendance and other class participation are essential. Your class participation grade is based primarily on attendance, punctuality, and preparedness for your individual conference with me, as well as, to a lesser degree, participation in discussion. More than four absences will cause you to fail class participation. Two tardies or early exits equals an absence.

Grade scale (minimums): A (93.3), A- (90), B+ (86.7), B (83.3), B- (80), C+ (76.7), C (73.3), C- (70), D+ (66.7), D (63.3), D- (60).

Readings and Quizzes

The course sometimes has a lot of reading. You'll want to read carefully and take notes on what you read. At the very beginning of at least ten class meetings, without warning, you will take a short quiz on the week's reading and lecture material. Quizzes are perfunctory, designed merely to make sure that you have done the reading for the week (although quizzes may incorporate material from previous weeks' readings), that you are understanding what you read, and that you are attending screenings and lectures. Quizzes cannot be made up or taken late, so arrive to class on time. I can sometimes arrange for you to take a quiz early. If you miss a quiz, you get a zero on it. But, no matter how many quizzes I give, I will count only your best nine scores.

Optional Reading Summaries (extra credit)

You may write a brief summary of the readings each week, paraphrasing (putting in your own words) the main points of each assigned readings so that I know you understand them. Summaries condense and distill the authors' main points: State the author's *points* (arguments/conclusions), not just the topics of article. *Write your summaries so that the authors themselves would agree with what you have written.* Write separate summaries for each reading. Each summary should be no longer than 1½ pages. I will add up to 30 percentage points to your week's quiz grade (even if the added points bring your score over 100%), depending on the strength of your summary and the clarity of your writing. A reading summary is entirely optional, and, if there is no quiz, you get no points for writing one. Summaries (hard copies) are due at the very beginning of the discussion section meeting.

Writing Assignments

The first writing assignment is to report on the correspondence between the Production Code Administration and the studios about a film of your choosing. During the second half of the semester, students will work on individual research projects. A separate handout (FST376assignments.pdf) has detailed instructions for the writing assignments, and the course schedule below indicates due dates.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course satisfies the Film History requirement in the Film Studies major and the University Studies Information Literacy requirement. In such courses, students learn to:

1. IL1. Develop an effective strategy to search for, identify, and retrieve information in order to fully address an information need. [Information Literacy; Inquiry; Critical Thinking]
 - Complete research assignments by identifying information needed, locating appropriate sources, and collating relevant material into evidence that supports satisfactory answers to questions in film history.
2. IL2. Analyze information in order to evaluate its currency, authority, accuracy, relevance, and purpose. [Information Literacy; Critical Thinking]
 - Conduct individual research projects using library and other resources that evaluate the reliability and accuracy of information in order to produce a historical or historiographic argument.
3. IL3. Synthesize and appropriately cite retrieved information in order to ensure information is utilized ethically and legally. [Global Citizenship; Information Literacy]
 - Collect data, documentation, and interpretative narratives regarding film history, and incorporate findings into research projects using proper citation and conscientious bibliographic practice.
4. IL4. Create a finished product (e.g. paper, presentation, data analysis, video, etc.) using retrieved information and reflect on the iterative processes used to find, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically and legally utilize information. [Critical Thinking; Thoughtful Expression; Information Literacy]
 - Write persuasive, cogent, and valid essays on topics in film history, informed and supported by critical, comprehensive, and responsible research methods.
 - Produce outlines, bibliographies, and/or oral presentations that demonstrate an understanding of the iterative processes required by scholarly research.

OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, AND CONTACTING ME

I will hold office hours on Thursdays 3:30-4:45 pm or by appointment on Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday in KI 106D.

My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office in King Hall. My office phone number is 962-3336. Email is the best way to reach me: berlinert@uncw.edu.

UNCW STUDENT ACADEMIC HONOR CODE

All students are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which says, "UNCW students are committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge."

Plagiarism is a form of academic corruption in which you cause or allow your reader to believe that another person's words, work or ideas are yours. If you plagiarize, I will give you an F in the course and report you to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. Always cite your sources, whether it is a book, a website, an article, another student, one of your other professors, or the source of any ideas that are not common knowledge and that didn't originate in your own brain.

Students in this course may not submit work that they have submitted or intend to submit for another course.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Writing and Research Resources

Randall library has a webpage devoted to film studies resources: <http://library.uncw.edu/subjects/film-studies>.

The Writing Center provides one-on-one consultations by trained writing tutors (962-7857, ulc@uncw.edu, <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/center.html>). You may make an appointment to see a tutor, drop in at the Writing Lab (DE 1003), or use their Online Writing & Learning (OWL) program that allows you to receive personal responses to your developing papers. Tuition and taxes pay for these services; you might as well use them.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should supply me with a letter from the Office of Disability Services (962-7555) that details any necessary class accommodations. If you require accommodation for test taking, please make sure I have the referral letter at least a week before a test or quiz.

Violence and Harassment

UNCW does not tolerate violent or harassing behavior. If you experience violence or harassment, contact the police at 911 (in cases of emergency) or UNCW CARE at 962-2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://www.uncw.edu/wsrc/crisis.html>.

REFERENCES FOR ELECTRONIC RESERVE READINGS

Readings may be downloaded from the Blackboard website for this course at <https://learn.uncw.edu/>. After logging into the course, click "Course Content." Contact TAC (962-4357) if you need help with Blackboard.

1. **Balio.exhibition.pdf**

Tino Balio, "Feeding the Maw of Exhibition," *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: Scribner, 1993) pp. 73-107.

2. **Balio.stars.pdf**

Tino Balio, "Selling Stars," *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: Scribner, 1993) pp. 142-177.

3. **cook.hitchcock.pdf**

David A. Cook, "Alfred Hitchcock," *A History of Narrative Film*, Third Edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 323-41.

4. **Crafton.1930-31.pdf**
Donald Crafton, "The Well-Tempered Sound Track, 1930-1931," *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 355-380.
5. **FST376assignments.pdf**
6. **FST376syllabus.pdf**
7. **Keating.technicolor.pdf**
Patrick Keating, "The Promises and Problems of Technicolor," in *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 201-221.
8. **Kerr.b-noir.pdf**
Paul Kerr, "Out of What Past? Notes on the B *film noir*" in Alain Silver and James Ursini, *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Edition, 1996) 107-27.
9. **Koppes.regulation.pdf**
Clayton R. Koppes, "Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration," in Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner, 1997) 262-281.
10. **Lev.early50s.pdf**
Peter Lev, "The American Film Industry in the Early 1950s," *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7-32.
11. **MLAStyleGuide2.pdf**
A reference guide for formatting your papers and bibliographies.
12. **Neve.HUAC.pdf**
Brian Neve, "HUAC, the Blacklist, and the Decline of Social Cinema" in Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 65-86.
13. **place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf**
J. A. Place and L. S. Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir" in Alain Silver and James Ursini, *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Edition, 1996) 65-76.
14. **Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf**
Stephen Prince, "Cruelty, Sadism, and the Horror Film" in *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003), 30-86.
15. **production.code.pdf**
"The Motion Picture Production Code" in Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) 593-597.
16. **Schatz.prewar.pdf**
Thomas Schatz, "Prewar Stars, Genres, and Production Trends," *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 79-127.
17. **SchatzWestern2.pdf**
Thomas Schatz, "The Western" in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80.
18. **Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf**
Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "The Hollywood Studio System, 1930-1945," *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) 213-238.
19. **Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf**
Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "American Cinema in the Postwar Era, 1945-1960," *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), pp. 325-352
20. **Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf**
Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "The Introduction of Sound," *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 193-200.

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SCHEDULE

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Fall 2017

Notes:

- Study the readings before the class meeting for which they are listed.
- Bring the week's readings with you to class on the days they are due.
- The films are listed in the following format: *Movie* (year, length, studio, director)

UNIT 1: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM, HORROR AT UNIVERSAL, AND THE TRANSITION TO TALKIES

- 1 Aug 17 Thu Introduction
Lecture: "Sunrise and German Expressionism in American Cinema"
- 2 22 Tue *Screening (Expressionism Double Feature): Sunrise* (1927, 97 min., Fox, F. W. Murnau) and *Frankenstein* (1931, 71 min., Universal, James Whale)
Lecture: "Sunrise and German Expressionism in American Cinema" (continued)
Reading: 1) FST376syllabus.pdf (this handout)
2) FST376assignments.pdf (p. 1-2)
- 23 Wed *Last day to add/drop*
- 24 Thu *Reading:* 1) production.code.pdf
2) Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf
- 3 29 Tue *Screening: City Lights* (1931, 87 min., UA/Charles Chaplin, Charles Chaplin).
Lecture: "City Lights and the Transition to Sound Cinema"
- 31 Thu *Reading:* 1) Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf
2) Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf
3) Crafton.1930-31.pdf (pp. 374-376 only)

UNIT 2: THE PRODUCER-UNIT SYSTEM, THE STAR SYSTEM, AND CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD STORYTELLING

- 4 Sep 5 Tue *Screening: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939, 130 min, Columbia, Frank Capra).
Lecture: "Classical Hollywood Narration"
- 7 Thu *Reading:* Balio.exhibition.pdf
- 5 12 Tue *Screening: The Philadelphia Story* (1940, 112 min, MGM, George Cuckor)
Lecture: "Classical Style and Continuity"
- 14 Thu *Reading:* 1) Balio.stars.pdf
2) FST376assignments.pdf (pp. 3-6)
- Due in office hours:* Students who want to write on their own paper topic must come to my office hours by today prepared to present their topic (including a written description) and obtain my approval.
- Due:* Sign up for a 25-minute conference with Professor Berliner to discuss your paper. Sign-up sheets are outside my office door (KI 106D). Come to your conference prepared to answer the five questions indicated in the Writing Assignments handout.
- 15 Fri *Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:* Motion Picture Production Code Report. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. "yourlastname_outline.doc").

UNIT 3: THE WESTERN AND HOLLYWOOD AESTHETICS

- 6 Sep 19 Tue **Screening:** *Stagecoach* (1939, 99 min., UA/Walter Wanger, John Ford).
Lecture: “The Hollywood Aesthetic”
21 Thu *Class Cancelled for Jewish Holiday*
Reading: Schatz.prewar.pdf (pp. 79-116 only)
Note: Because of the cancelled class, I will quiz you next week on this week’s lecture and reading.
- 7 26 Tue **Screening:** *Red River* (1948, 127 min. UA/Monterey, Howard Hawks).
Lecture: “Aesthetics of Hollywood Storytelling”
28 Thu **Reading:** Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf
Note: There will be two quizzes today because of the cancelled class last week.
- 8 Oct 3 Tue **Screening:** *Winchester ’73* (1950, 92 min. Universal, Anthony Mann)
Lecture: “Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part I: Clarity, Expressiveness, and Decoration”
5 Thu *Fall Break!*
- 9 9 Mon *Last day to withdraw with a W*
10 Tue **Screening:** *The Searchers* (1956, 119 min., Warner/C.V. Whitney, John Ford).
Lecture: “Complexity and Experimentation in The Western”
12 Thu **Reading:** schatz.western2.pdf

UNIT 4: CRIME FILMS, FILM REGULATION, AND TECHNICOLOR

- 10 Oct 17 Tue **Screening:** *Double Indemnity* (1944, 107 min., Paramount, Billy Wilder)
Lecture: “Gangsters, Private Eyes, Low Lives—*Film Noir*”
19 Thu **Reading:** Koppes.regulation.pdf
- 11 24 Tue **Screening:** *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945, 110 min, 20th Century Fox, John M. Stahl)
Lecture: “Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part II: Harmony and Dissonance”
26 Thu **Reading:** Keating.technicolor.pdf
- 12 31 Tue **Screening (B-Movie Double Feature):** *Detour* (1945, 68 min, PRC, Edgar G. Ulmer) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 80 min. Allied Artist/Walter Wanger, Don Siegel).
Nov 2 Thu **Reading:** 1) place.peterson.visualnoir.pdf
2) Kerr.b-noir.pdf
- 13 7 Tue **Screening:** *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, 112 min., MGM, John Huston).
Lecture: “Crime Film Aesthetics during the Period of the Production Code Administration”
9 Thu **Reading:** Lev.early50s.pdf

UNIT 5: BRANDO, DEAN, KAZAN AND HUAC

- 14 Nov 14 Tue **Screening:** *On the Waterfront* (1954, 108 min., Columbia Pictures, Elia Kazan)
Lecture: “How to Develop a Strong Thesis and Organize a Paper”
16 Thu **Reading:** Neve.HUAC.pdf
- 15 21 Tue **Screening:** *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, 111 min., Warner Bros., Nicholas Ray)
Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon: Abstract, Final Paper, and List of Works Cited. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. “yourlastname_essay.doc”).
23 Thu *Thanksgiving!*

UNIT 6: ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND MODERN HORROR

- 16 Nov 28 Tue **Screening:** *Psycho* (1960, 109 min, Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred Hitchcock)
30 Thu **Reading:** cook.hitchcock.pdf
Dec 8 Fri 3:00-6:00 pm in KI 101. Final Exam Time (a make-up meeting time in case of a class disruption)