

FST 376 AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960
SYLLABUS AND POLICIES

Screening and Lecture: Tuesday 4:00-7:15 pm (195 min) in KI 101
Discussion Section 1: Thursday 4:00-5:15 pm (75 min) in KI 104
Discussion Section 2: Thursday 5:30-6:45 pm (75 min) in KI 104

Professor Todd Berliner
Fall 2019

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, probably the most influential and entertaining period in world cinema.

We will conduct an “historical poetics” of American cinema, as we seek to understand the historical conditions that shaped American cinema during the studio era. We will examine the Hollywood studio system, its narrative and stylistic practices, the role of producers, the star system, and genre filmmaking. We will study important American filmmakers, such as Frank Capra, John Ford, Howard Hawks, John Huston, and Alfred Hitchcock. We will study key film cycles and genres of the era, including the Western, the musical, and film noir. 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.

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 AND SCREENINGS

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 miss class, arrive late, or leave early; it isn't.

If you come in late on a screening day, write me a note saying so, so that I mark you late rather than absent. You may not use electronics during class time; they're distracting. If you have a special reason for wanting to use electronics, see me before you do.

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

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

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

1. Quizzes (best 10 scores) (30%)
2. Motion Picture Production Code Report (15%)
3. Film History Project (35%)
4. Class Participation (20%): Class participation is essential. It is based primarily on attendance, punctuality, and preparedness for your individual conference with me, as well as, to a lesser degree, participation in discussion. If you miss one class meeting, no problem, but, after that, missing class is going to lower your Class Participation grade, and, more than five absences will cause you to fail class participation. Two tardies or early exits equals one absence, provided you attend most of the meeting.

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

At the very beginning of at least eleven 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, 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 ten 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 chapter or article so that I know you understand them. Summaries distill the authors' *points* (arguments/conclusions), not just the topics of article. Your first paragraph summarizes the author's main point, and each additional paragraph summarizes one of the author's chief supporting points. *Write your summaries so that the authors themselves would agree with your summary.* 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 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 from the period of the class. During the second half of the semester, students will work on individual film history research projects. A separate handout (FST376writing.assignments.pdf) has detailed instructions for the writing assignments, and the 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:

- IL1. 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.
- IL2. 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.
- IL3. Collect data, documentation, and interpretative narratives regarding film history, and incorporate findings into research projects using proper citation and conscientious bibliographic practice.
- IL4 (1). Write persuasive, cogent, and valid essays on topics in film history, informed and supported by critical, comprehensive, and responsible research methods.
- IL4 (2). 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 hold office hours on Tuesdays 12-1:15 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 one causes or allows the reader to believe that another person's words, work, or ideas are one's own. 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

Click [here](#) to go to Randall's webpage for this course.

[The Writing Center](#) provides one-on-one consultations by trained writing tutors (962-7857, ulc@uncw.edu). 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 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 [The Woman's Studies Resource Center](#).

REFERENCES FOR ELECTRONIC RESERVE READINGS

Readings may be downloaded from the Canvas website for this course. Contact TAC (962-4357) if you need help with Canvas.

1. Balio.30s.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.30s.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. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Palmer.Stewart.pdf

Tim Palmer, "Star, Interrupted: The Reinvention of James Stewart," in Kylo-Patrick Hart (ed.), *Film and Television Stardom* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 43-57.

9. 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.

10. production.code.pdf

“The Motion Picture Production Code” in Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) 593-597.

11. 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.

12. SchatzWestern2.pdf

Thomas Schatz, “The Western” in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 45-80.

13. 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.

14. 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

15. Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, “The Introduction of Sound,” *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 193-200.

FST 376: AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960

SCHEDULE

Screening and Lecture: Tuesday 4:00-7:15 pm (195 min) in KI 101

Professor Todd Berliner

Discussion Section 1: Thursday 4:00-5:15 pm (75 min) in KI 104

Fall 2019

Discussion Section 2: Thursday 5:30-6:45 pm (75 min) in KI 104

Notes:

- Study the readings before the class meetings for which they are listed, and bring them to class when they're due.
- Screenings occur during class. Films are listed as follows: *Movie* (year, length, production company, director).

UNIT 1: TRANSITION TO SOUND CINEMA (1927-1931)

Topics: Prestige films, German Expressionism, Universal horror films, the Motion Picture Production Code, Charlie Chaplin, and the introduction of sound.

1 Aug 22 Thu Introduction

Lecture: "Sunrise and German Expressionism in American Cinema"

2 27 Tue **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) FST376writing.assignments.pdf (p. 1-2)

28 Wed *Last day to add/drop*

29 Thu **Reading:** 1) production.code.pdf
2) Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf

3 Sep 3 Tue **Screening:** *City Lights* (1931, 87 min., United Artists, Charles Chaplin)

Lecture: "City Lights and the Transition to Sound Cinema"

5 Thu **Reading:** 1) Thompson.Bordwell.Sound.pdf
2) Crafton.1930-31.pdf (pp. 374-376 only)

UNIT 2: THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM (1930-1945)

Topics: Film exhibition, vertical integration, the producer-unit system, early Hollywood musicals and the music industry, the star system, guilds, Frank Capra, Technicolor, classical Hollywood style.

4 Sep 10 Tue **Screening:** *Love Me Tonight* (1932, 89 min, Paramount, Rouben Mamoulian)

Lecture: "Early Hollywood Musical and the American Music Industry"

12 Thu **Reading:** Balio.30s.exhibition.pdf

5 17 Tue **Screening:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939, 130 min, Columbia, Frank Capra)

Lecture: "Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part I: Clarity, Expressiveness, and Decoration"

18 Wed **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by 11:59 pm:** Motion Picture Production Code Report. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. "yourlastname_outline.docx").

19 Thu **Reading:** 1) Balio.30s.stars.pdf
2) FST376writing.assignments.pdf (pp. 3-6)

6 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"

Due: Sign up for a 25-minute conference with Professor Berliner this week to present your project. Sign-up sheets are outside my office door (KI 106D). Come to your conference with written answers (2 hard copies) to the five questions indicated in the Writing Assignments handout.

26 Thu **Reading:** 1) Thompson.Bordwell.1930-1945.pdf
2) Sample Prospectus on Canvas

UNIT 3: THE WESTERN

Topics: John Ford, Howard Hawks, Anthony Mann, hyphenates, John Wayne, James Stewart, the genre system, widescreen, Lew Wasserman, points & packaging, classical Hollywood continuity.

7 Oct 1 Tue **Screening:** *Stagecoach* (1939, 99 min., UA/Walter Wanger, John Ford)
Lecture: “The Illusion of Continuity: Active Perception and Classical Hollywood Editing”
3 Thu **Reading:** Schatz.prewar.pdf (pp. 79-116 only)

8 Oct 8 Tue **Screening:** *Red River* (1948, 127 min. UA/Monterey, Howard Hawks)
Presentation: Librarian Lisa Coats
10 Thu *Fall Break!*

9 15 Tue **Screening:** *Winchester '73* (1950, 92 min. Universal, Anthony Mann)
Lecture: “Points and Packaging: Lew Wasserman and *Winchester '73*”
17 Thu **Reading:** Palmer.Stewart.pdf

10 22 Tue **Screening:** *The Searchers* (1956, 119 min., Warner/C.V. Whitney, John Ford)
Lecture: “Experimentation in the Western”
24 Thu **Reading:** schatz.western2.pdf

UNIT 4: WWII AND THE DECLINE OF THE STUDIO SYSTEM (1941-1960)

Topics: Film noir, Poverty Row, film regulation (PCA & OWI), Paramount Decision, television, B-movies, HUAC, the blacklist, 3-D, Hitchcock, and modern horror.

11 Oct 29 Tue **Screening:** *Double Indemnity* (1944, 107 min., Paramount, Billy Wilder)
Lecture: “Gangsters, Private Eyes, Low Lifes—*Film Noir*”
31 Thu **Reading:** Koppes.regulation.pdf

12 Nov 5 Tue **Noir Double Feature:** *Detour* (1945, 68 min, PRC, Edgar G. Ulmer) and *T-Men* (1947, 92 min., Edward Small Productions/Bryan Foy Productions, Anthony Mann)
7 Thu **Reading:** Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf

13 12 Tue **Noir Double Feature:** *Pickup on South Street* (1953, 80 min., 20th Century Fox, Samuel Fuller) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953, 71 min., RKO/Filmmakers Inc, Ida Lupino)
Lecture: “The House Un-American Activities Committee and the Hollywood Blacklist”
Note: Class today may run 15 minutes overtime; you may leave at 7:15 if you must and watch the remainder of [The Hitch-Hiker](#) on [Kanopy](#).
14 Thu **Reading:** Neve.HUAC.pdf

14 19 Tue **Screening:** *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, 112 min., MGM, John Huston)
Lecture: “Crime Film Aesthetics during the Period of the Production Code Administration”
21 Thu **Reading:** Lev.early50s.pdf

15 26 Tue **Screening:** *Psycho* (1960, 109 min, Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred Hitchcock)
Lecture: “Expect the Unexpected: *Psycho* and the Types of Planting and Payoff”
28 Thu *Thanksgiving*

16 Dec 2 Mon **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by 11:59pm:** Film History Project. The title of your attachment should start with your last name (e.g. yourlastname_essay.docx).

3 Tue **Screening:** *Dial M for Murder* in 3-D! (1954, 105 min., Warner Bros, Alfred Hitchcock)
Reading: cook.hitchcock.pdf

10 Thu 7:00-10:00 pm in KI 101. Final Exam period (make-up day)