

**FST 376 AMERICAN CINEMA 1927-1960**  
**SYLLABUS AND POLICIES**

*Screening and Lecture:* Monday 9:00 am – 12:15 pm (195 min) in KI 101  
*Discussion Section 1:* Wednesday 9:00 – 10:15 am (75 min) in KI 101  
*Discussion Section 2:* Wednesday 10:30 – 11:45 am (75 min) in KI 101

Professor Todd Berliner  
Spring 2021

**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 enjoyable 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 a period known as “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 some key filmmakers and genres of the era. We will examine the impact of events in the history of studio-era filmmaking, such as the advent of sound technologies, the Hays Production Code, the Office of War Information, the blacklist, color and widescreen film processes, and packaging. Throughout the course, 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 during lectures, see me before you do.

We will watch films in class. So that you can further study the films screened in class, copies are available through Randall Library on disc or streaming. Clicking on film titles in the schedule below will take you to a streaming version of the film, if available.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES**

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

1. Quizzes (3 dropped) (35%)
2. Motion Picture Production Code Report (15%)
3. Film History Project (35%)
4. Class Participation (15%)

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).

*Quizzes*

At the very beginning of each discussion section, 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 usually arrange for you to take a quiz early. If you miss a quiz, you get a zero on it, but I will drop your three lowest quiz 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 additional paragraphs summarize 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 50 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. Summaries are due at the very beginning of the discussion section meeting.

### *Writing Assignments*

The first writing assignment is to report on industry regulation of a single film released between 1927 and 1960. 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. The schedule below indicates due dates.

### *Class Participation*

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, you can still get an A in Class Participation, but, after that, missing class will lower your participation grade; 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.

### **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 will hold office hours on Zoom by appointment. I welcome you to make appointments with me to discuss the course by emailing me ([berlinert@uncw.edu](mailto:berlinert@uncw.edu)) with some timeslot options. My campus mailbox is located in the Film Studies Department office in King Hall. My office phone number is 910-962-3336.

### **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 allow your reader to believe that another person's words, work, or ideas are yours. I report plagiarism 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. Click [here](#) for information and a tutorial on recognizing plagiarism. The UNCW [Writing Center](#) can also help you spot and avoid plagiarism.

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 FST 376.

The [Writing Center](#) provides one-on-one consultations with writing tutors (962-7857, [ulc@uncw.edu](mailto: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 [Disability Resource Center](#) (910-962-7555) 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 violence or harassment. If you experience either, contact the police at 911 (in cases of emergency) or UNCW CARE at 910-962-2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation are located [here](#).

## HANDOUTS AND READINGS

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

### Handouts

1. **FST377syllabus.pdf**  
Syllabus, Course Policies, Course Schedule, and References for Electronic Readings.
2. **FST377writing.assignments.pdf**  
A handout describing all of the writing assignments for the semester.
3. **Sample Papers**  
Exemplary work by students in previous courses.

### Readings

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.

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### SCHEDULE

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*Discussion Section 1:* Wednesday 9:00 – 10:15 am (75 min) in KI 101

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#### 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 (1927-1932)

Topics: Prestige films, German Expressionism, Universal horror films, Motion Picture Production Code, Charlie Chaplin, sound transition.

1 Jan 20 Wed **Lecture:** “*Sunrise* and German Expressionism in American Cinema”

2 25 Mon **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)

27 Wed **Reading:** 1) production.code.pdf  
2) Prince.cruelty.horror.pdf

*Last day to add/drop*

3 Feb 1 Mon **Screening:** [City Lights](#) (1931, 87 min., United Artists, Charles Chaplin)

**Lecture:** “*City Lights* and the Transition to Sound Cinema (1927-1932)”

3 Wed **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, musicals, Hollywood and the music industry, the star system, guilds, Frank Capra, woman's films, Dorothy Arzner, Technicolor, Hollywood style.

4 Feb 8 Mon **Screening:** [Love Me Tonight](#) (1932, 89 min, Paramount, Rouben Mamoulian)

**Lecture:** “Early Hollywood Musicals and the American Music Industry”

10 Wed **Reading:** Balio.30s.exhibition.pdf

5 15 Mon **Screening:** [Mr. Smith Goes to Washington](#) (1939, 130 min, Columbia, Frank Capra)

16 Wed **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:** Motion Picture Production Code Report.

17 Wed **Reading:** 1) Balio.30s.stars.pdf  
2) FST376writing.assignments.pdf (pp. 3-7)

6 22 Mon **Screening:** [Dance, Girl, Dance](#) (1940, 90 min, RKO, Dorothy Arzner)

**Lectures:** “Dorothy Arzner and the Woman's Film”

“Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part I: Clarity, Expressiveness, and Decoration”

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

**Due:** Sign up on Canvas for a 25-minute Zoom conference with Professor Berliner to present your project. Prior to your conference, email me an MS Word attachment with written answers to the five questions indicated on the Writing Assignments handout; put your name at the top.

- 7 Mar 1 Mon [\*Leave Her to Heaven\*](#) (1945, 110 min, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, John M. Stahl)  
**Lecture:** “Aesthetics of Hollywood Style, Part II: Harmony and Dissonance”  
 2-4 *Prospectus Conferences*  
 3 Wed No reading—prepare for your conference. Quiz will cover material from Hollywood Style lectures.

### UNIT 3: THE WESTERN

- Topics: John Ford, Anthony Mann, hyphenates, John Wayne, James Stewart, the genre system, widescreen, Lew Wasserman, points & packaging, classical Hollywood continuity.
- 8 Mar 8 Mon **Screening:** [\*Stagecoach\*](#) (1939, 99 min., UA/Walter Wanger, John Ford)  
**Lecture:** “The Illusion of Continuity: Active Perception and Classical Hollywood Editing”  
 10 Wed **Reading:** Schatz.prewar.pdf (pp. 79-116 only)  
 Library Instruction Session with Lisa Coats.
- 9 15 Mon **Screening:** [\*Winchester '73\*](#) (1950, 92 min. Universal, Anthony Mann)  
**Lecture:** “Points and Packaging: Lew Wasserman and *Winchester '73*”  
 17 Wed **Reading:** Palmer.Stewart.pdf
- 10 22 Mon **Screening:** [\*The Searchers\*](#) (1956, 119 min., Warner/C.V. Whitney, John Ford)  
**Lecture:** “Complexity and Experimentation in the Western”  
 24 Wed **Reading:** schatz.western2.pdf

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

- Topics: Film noir, film regulation (PCA & OWI), Paramount Decision, television, B-movies, Poverty Row, HUAC, the blacklist, Ida Lupino, Alfred Hitchcock, modern horror, 3-D.
- 11 Mar 29 Mon **Screening:** [\*Double Indemnity\*](#) (1944, 107 min., Paramount, Billy Wilder)  
**Lecture:** “Gangsters, Private Eyes, Low Lives—*Film Noir*”  
 31 Wed **Reading:** Koppes.regulation.pdf
- 12 Apr 5 Mon **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 Wed **Reading:** Thompson.Bordwell.1945-1960.pdf
- 13 12 Mon **Noir Double Feature:** [\*Pickup on South Street\*](#) (1953, 80 min., 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Samuel Fuller) and [\*The Hitch-Hiker\*](#) (1953, 71 min., RKO/Filmakers Inc, Ida Lupino)  
**Lectures:** “The House Un-American Activities Committee and the Hollywood Blacklist”  
 “Ida Lupino”  
**Note:** Class today may run 15 minutes overtime; you may leave, if necessary, at 12:15 and watch the remainder of [\*The Hitch-Hiker\*](#) on your own.  
 14 Wed **Reading:** Neve.HUAC.pdf
- 14 19 Mon **Screening:** [\*The Asphalt Jungle\*](#) (1950, 112 min., MGM, John Huston)  
**Lecture:** “Crime Film Aesthetics during the Period of the Production Code Administration”  
 21 Wed **Reading:** Lev.early50s.pdf
- 15 26 Mon **Screening:** [\*Psycho\*](#) (1960, 109 min, Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred Hitchcock)  
**Lecture:** “Expect the Unexpected: *Psycho* and the Types of Planting and Payoff”  
 27 Tue **Due by email (MS Word attachment) by noon:** Film History Project.  
 28 Wed **Reading:** cook.hitchcock.pdf
- May 5 Wed 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. Final Exam period in KI 101 (no exam, just screening and discussion)  
**Screening:** *House of Wax* in 3-D! (1953, 88 min., Ryan Foy/Warner Bros, André De Toth)