

FILM 2332.003 – Understanding Film

I. Instructor Information

Instructor: Brecken Hunter Wellborn, MA (he/him)

Class Meeting: Friday 10:00am – 12:45pm; AH2 1.204

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Office: JO 5.608C

Office Hours: Thursday 2:00-3:00pm; Friday 1:00-2:00pm

II. Course Description

This course explores the history and stylistic elements of cinema as a mass medium and an art form. The course analyzes visual language and film style, cinematic codes, and the ways that films can embody or criticize popular ideas and attitudes. Emphasis is on film analysis, film in relation to the other arts and mass media, films as artifacts, and understanding the ways that films are put together and how they function expressively. This course thus introduces students to the various formal elements of cinematic language and to the practice of film analysis, allowing students to critically think about film in terms of ideology, culture, and politics.

III. Student Learning Objectives

In addition to being a prerequisite for upper-level film studies courses, this course serves as a creative arts core credit. This category of courses focuses on the appreciation and analysis of creative artifacts and works of the human imagination. Creative arts courses seek to expand students' abilities to critically think, communicate, collaborate, and develop social responsibility. In this course, students will achieve their creative arts requirement as they:

- Reevaluate what it means to "watch movies"
- Identify the various formal elements of film
- Develop a vocabulary for discussing and writing about cinema
- Understand how film operates within historical and cultural contexts
- Learn to analyze film and develop arguments about cinematic texts

IV. Required Texts

Reading:

- **Pramaggiore, Maria and Tom Wallis. *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 4th ed., Laurence King Publishing, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1786275776**
- Additional required readings will be uploaded to e-Learning

Screening:

- **HBO Max subscription/access**
- The films assigned in this course are just as vital for your learning as the required readings are. You are responsible for watching all assigned films before the class meeting in which they are discussed. The majority of the screenings will come from HBO Max (the required streaming service for this course); additional

screenings will require using Kanopy (free to UTD students), online rentals, or free trial subscriptions/access to other streaming services

- The content and/or form of some screenings for this course may be considered difficult or challenging for certain viewers (subject matter may be mature and/or controversial). In addition, this course requires conversations related to race, gender, sexuality, and other identity-based frameworks. Enrollment in this course requires watching all assigned films.

V. Course Basics

Structure: Each week of this course is organized around a guiding question that the lecture and assigned materials will help us to answer. By the end of the semester, once we can answer each guiding question, we can confidently say we “understand” film. After the course introduction, each class meeting will feature two components: a discussion of the assigned screenings and their relation to the course and a lecture. As evidenced by the course calendar, this is a screening and writing-intensive course.

eLearning: Lecture slides, additional readings, and assignment templates will be uploaded to eLearning. Students will complete exams and submit papers through eLearning (which runs them through Turnitin). This means that you are required to always have access to all online materials throughout the semester.

Instructor Communication: It is my mission to ensure that each one of you gets out of this class what you put into it. Communication is the key to successfully managing a classroom. There are four primary ways to communicate with me in this course:

1. Lecture: ask questions during our discussion and raise your hand if you're confused during the lecture—don't let me confuse you more if you don't understand. In addition, I'll answer questions directly after lecture.
2. Office Hours: Come visit me in office hours! Seriously, if you don't, I will get lonely. Just send me an email to schedule a time for a chat or drop by the scheduled times. We can also meet through a scheduled meeting on Teams!
3. Email: email me any questions you might have, or if you just want to chat about the course. I will be checking my email every day, but that does not mean I am available all day, every day. Please allow me 24 hours to respond.
4. Teams: please feel free to send me a message via Teams chat and I will get back to you in the same response window as email. Please do not be fooled by the “availability” icons on Teams—they are liars. Please do not call me via Teams audio.

VI. University Policies

It is expected that students are aware of and understand these policies. All relevant course-wide university policies can be found here: <https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

VII. Assessment

Philosophy of Grading: This class serves as your primary introduction to the various elements of understanding film, which means we have a lot to cover in a short amount of time. You will never get more out of a course than what you're willing to put into it. I want to see the effort and energy that you're putting into this course so you can gain

real value you from it and use that for your future career and academic goals. Some of you will naturally take to certain topics more than others, but no matter the topic, I want to see you apply what we learn through the lectures and readings in our discussions and assignments. If you are ever unsure of what is being asked of you for an assignment or discussion, please let me know before the due date. I know sometimes students feel embarrassed to ask questions but believe me when I say that I am here to help you!

Deadlines: All assignments are **due by 11:59pm on the due date** listed on the course calendar at the end of this syllabus. Usually, this refers to a Thursday or Sunday night. All assignment instructions can be found within eLearning and will also be discussed in detail in class. Each assignment is designed to help you expand your understanding of film.

Submitting Assignments: All written assignments must be submitted as **.doc, .docx, or .pdf** file formats. No other file types are acceptable because I won't be able to open them! Please keep a copy of your Turnitin receipt for each submitted paper (sent via email).

Academic Integrity: Any of the various forms of academic dishonesty, as outlined in UTD policy (<https://conduct.utdallas.edu/integrity/>), including but not limited to plagiarism, will not be tolerated, and will result in a failing grade. If an assignment is considered "open materials" that does not include your peers—all work submitted must be unique.

Late Work: Late work is not accepted without discussing with me in advance. If you are in danger of missing a deadline, reach out to me.

Feedback: On each course assignment, I will provide feedback to help you understand both the grade you received and how to improve for the future. For the sake of time, this feedback will be relatively brief. If you would ever like more in-depth feedback on your assignments, I am happy to discuss in detail in office hours!

Extra Credit: There is a predetermined extra credit assignment available to all students. For this reason, additional extra credit is not offered, unless determined by the instructor.

Grading Breakdown: Grades will be figured out of a total of **100%**. All grades will be posted to eLearning, and I recommend keeping a personal running total of your grades throughout the semester. I do not round grades because extra credit is offered. The numerical breakdown of grade equivalents is as follows:

A+	100-97
A	96-94
A-	93-90
B+	89-87
B	86-84
B-	83-80
C+	79-77

C	76-74
C-	73-70
D+	69-67
D	66-64
D-	63-60
F	59-0

Grading Distribution: Details about each assignment can be found in the assignment guide of this syllabus. Percentages are allocated across the assignments as follows:

Attendance & Participation	15%
Film Journal	20% (2% x 10 entries)
Short Paper	10%
Film Analysis Assignment	25%
First Exam	15%
Second Exam	15%
Extra Credit Film Review	(up to) 5%

VIII. Assignment Guide

Basics: All assignments will be discussed in detail in class. For each written assignment, I will post a template document students should use to format their work. I am a big fan of consistency and also my eyeballs, so standardizing formatting helps me help you. All written assignments should be completed in Century Gothic font, 11-pt, with standard margins (What?! Not Times New Roman?! We will discuss in class). All written assignments should feature the author's last name and page number in the upper-right corner. All sources must be properly cited in MLA format. Assignments will be collaboratively workshopped during class meetings.

Attendance & Participation: Students are required to attend each class meeting to receive full credit for this assessment category. There are fourteen class meetings this semester, but all students get one "free" unexcused absence. It is expected that students participate during discussion.

Film Journal: Throughout the semester, we will be watching **two films per week**. The film journal serves as a collection of your responses to the weekly screenings. Each week, students will select **one** of the two assigned screenings for which they would like to write about. Students must complete journals for 10 weeks of the semester. I will provide a prompt for each screening. Students will then answer the assigned prompt that corresponds with their chosen screening. Each response should feature a thesis statement that answers the prompt and evidence from the film to support their claim. **Each response must be between 200-250 words.** Amnesty deadlines are offered for the film journals.

Short Paper [Film Review]: The film review is a short paper that draws from the skills you build writing your film journal. The film review must be **between 500-750 words**. You will select one film of your choice that is **not on our syllabus** to write about. You will receive two prompts that relate to our course materials. You will select one of the two prompts

to write about. Like your journal, it is expected that this paper will have a thesis statement and supporting evidence. Research is not required for this paper—I just want to know what you've absorbed from our learning journey.

Film Analysis Assignment: The term paper requires students to apply the skills and knowledge they've gained from this course in a way that resonates with their own passions and interests. For this paper, students will be given three open-ended prompts from which to choose. Each prompt requires you to analyze three films from outside the syllabus. This paper must be **between 1,000-1,500 words**. Like your journals and review, this paper should have a thesis statement and evidence to support your claim. Research is required to support any claims that necessitate it. Well before your film analysis is due, you will submit a proposal, following a formatted outline. In this proposal you should address what your project seeks to do, what films you will be discussing, and why this project holds significance. I will provide feedback on your proposal to help mold your project before you move forward.

First & Second Exam: Students will complete an open materials first exam and second exam outside of class on eLearning. These exams are multiple choice and serve to assess your knowledge of the concepts, vocabulary, readings, and films from the course. Each exam will be 75 questions, with each question valued at two points. Bonus questions for extra credit will be offered. Students may use any materials from the course to complete their exams but may not work with their peers.

Extra Credit Film Review: Students may optionally submit an additional film review for extra credit points. The same instructions apply for the extra credit film review.

IX. Course Calendar

Instructor's Note: The due dates, topics, readings, and any other elements of the below course calendar are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. I will, of course, try to keep all course changes to a minimum, but sometimes changes are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the course and the success of the students. All changes will be announced in class and an updated course calendar will be uploaded, as well, with all changes in **pink bold**.

Calendar Key: Each week's number, class meeting date, and associated material is listed below. All readings may be completed before or after lecture, depending on what works best for each student. All screenings are to be completed **after** the lecture to which they are assigned—that way you can apply the lecture to your screening. Included with each screening is a suggested way to watch the film. Films are listed by release date.

Week 1: August 26

Lecture: **Course Introduction**

- Syllabus Overview
- Course Mechanics

Reading: Course Syllabus

Screenings: ---

Assignment: Introductory Survey [In-Class]

Week 2: September 2

Lecture: What Does It Mean to “Watch” Movies?

- Film Analysis
- Ideology
- Writing About Film

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 2: “An Approach to Film Analysis,” pp. 20-51

Screenings: *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939); HBO Max
A Nightmare on Elm Street (Wes Craven, 1984); HBO Max

Assignment: Film Journal: *The Wizard of Oz* or *Elm Street*

Week 3: September 9

Discussion: Oz & Elm Street

Lecture: How Do We Define a Film?

- Narrative Film
- Documentary
- Experimental Film
- Animation

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 9: “Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary and Avant-garde Films,” pp. 284-315

Screenings: *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990); Kanopy
The Queen of Versailles (Lauren Greenfield, 2012); Kanopy

Assignment: Film Journal: *Paris Is Burning* or *The Queen of Versailles*

Week 4: September 16

Discussion: Paris Is Burning & The Queen of Versailles

Lecture: What is the Basis for a Film?

- Character
- Narrative Form

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 4: “Narrative Form,” pp. 76-101

Screenings: *Rashômon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950); Kanopy

Kajillionaire (Miranda July, 2020); HBO Max

Assignment: Film Journal: *Rashômon* or *Kajillionaire*

Deadline: Film Journal: Weeks 2 & 3 due Sunday, September 18 by 11:59pm – eLearning

Week 5: September 23 [Class ends at 11:45am – Prof. Brecken is on a Teach-In panel]

Discussion: *[Pushed one week due to Teach-In]*

Lecture: **What Makes a Film Visually Interesting?**

- Mise en Scène

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 5: "Mise en Scène," pp. 102-143

Screenings: *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980); HBO Max
Nine (Rob Marshall, 2009); Online Rental

Assignment: Film Journal: *The Shining* or *Nine*
Introduce Film Review

Week 6: September 30

Discussion: *Rashômon & Kajillionaire*
The Shining & Nine

Lecture: **What is the Role of the Camera?**

- Cinematography

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 6: "Cinematography," pp. 144-203

Screenings: *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941); HBO Max
Tangerine (Sean Baker, 2015); Kanopy

Assignment: Film Journal: *Citizen Kane* or *Tangerine*
Introduce Film Analysis and Proposal

Week 7: October 7

Discussion: *Citizen Kane & Tangerine*

Lecture: **How Is a Film Put Together?**

- Editing

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 7: "Editing," pp. 204-239

Screenings: *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925); HBO Max

Chicago (Rob Marshall, 2002); HBO Max

Assignment: Film Journal: *Battleship Potemkin* or *Chicago*

Deadline: Film Review due Sunday, October 9 by 11:59pm – eLearning

Week 8: October 14

Discussion: *Battleship Potemkin* & *Chicago*

Lecture: How Does a Film Come to Life?

- Sound Design
- Visual Effects

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 8: "Sound," pp. 240-283

Screenings: *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993); HBO Max
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Chris Columbus, 2001); HBO Max

Assignment: Film Journal: *Jurassic Park* or *Harry Potter*
 First Exam opens Sunday, October 16

Deadline: Film Journal – Weeks 4-7 due Sunday, October 16 by 11:59pm – eLearning
First Exam due Thursday, October 20 by 11:59pm – eLearning

Week 9: October 21

Discussion: *Jurassic Park* & *Harry Potter*

Lecture: What Do We Expect from Film?

- Genre
- Adaptation
- Authorship

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 13: "Genre," pp. 386-411

Screenings: *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, 1992); HBO Max
Scream (Wes Craven, 1996); Online Rental

Assignment: Film Journal: *Batman Returns* or *Scream*

Deadline: Film Analysis Proposal due Sunday, October 23 by 11:59pm – eLearning

Week 10: October 28

Discussion: *Batman Returns* & *Scream*

Lecture: How Do We Interact with Cinema?

- Star Studies
- Reception & Fandom
- Postmodernism
- Multiplicities

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 12: "Film Stardom as a Cultural Phenomenon," pp. 370-385

Screenings: *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998); HBO Max
Scream 4 (Wes Craven, 2011); Online Rental

Assignment: Film Journal: *The Truman Show* or *Scream 4*

Week 11: November 4

Discussion: *The Truman Show & Scream 4*

Lecture: **What is (and What's Beyond) Representation? [1]**

- Identity
- Representation
- Race
- Class

Reading: eLearning - Bogle, Donald, "Black Beginnings: From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *The Birth of a Nation*," from *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*

Screenings: *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembène, 1966); Kanopy
Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, 1989); Kanopy

Assignment: Film Journal: *Black Girl* or *Tongues Untied*
Introduce Extra Credit Film Review

Deadline: **Film Journal – Weeks 8-10 due Sunday, November 6 by 11:59pm – eLearning**

Week 12: November 11

Discussion: *Black Girl & Tongues Untied*

Lecture: **What is (and What's Beyond) Representation? [2]**

- Gender
- Sexuality

Reading: eLearning – McCabe, Janet, "Introduction," from *Feminist Film Studies: Writing the Woman into Cinema*

Screenings: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (Michael Patrick King, 2008); HBO Max
Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle (McG, 2003); HBO Max

Assignment: Film Journal: *Sex and the City* or *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*

Deadline: Extra Credit Film Review optionally due Sunday, November 13 by 11:59pm - eLearning

Week 13: November 18

Discussion: *Sex and the City & Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*

Lecture: What is Beyond Hollywood?

- Global Cinema
- International Waves & Movements

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 11: "Social Context and Film Style: National, International, and Transnational Cinema," pp. 350-369

Screenings: *Cléo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962); Kanopy
The Battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966); Kanopy

Assignment: Film Journal: *Cléo* or *Battle of Algiers*

Deadline: Film Analysis Term Paper due Sunday, November 20 by 11:59pm - eLearning

Week 14: December 2

Discussion: *Cléo & Battle of Algiers*

Lecture: What is the Future of Film?

- 21st Century Hollywood
- New Media
- Television & Streaming

Reading: ---

Screenings: *The Incredible Hulk* (Louis Leterrier, 2008); HBO Max
Euphoria: Season 1, Episodes 1 & 2 ("Pilot" and "Stuntin' Like My Daddy")
 (Sam Levinson, 2019); HBO Max

Deadline: Film Journal – Weeks 11-13 due Sunday, December 4 by 11:59pm – eLearning

Second Exam

Opens: Monday, December 5 at 12:00pm

Deadline: Monday, December 12 by 11:59pm – eLearning