

FILM 2332.003 – Understanding Film

I. Instructor Information

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

Class Meeting: Friday 10:00am – 12:45pm; FN 2.104

Email: brecken.wellborn@utdallas.edu

Office: JO 5.608C

Office Hours: Friday 1:00-3:00pm; Additional times available by appointment

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

This class also counts toward the fulfillment of UTD's minor in Film Studies (18 credit hours) or major in Visual and Performing Arts with a film studies concentration. For more information: <https://catalog.utdallas.edu/2023/undergraduate/programs/aht/minors>

IV. Required Texts

Reading:

- **Pramaggiore, Maria and Tom Wallis. *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 4th ed., Laurence King Publishing, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1786275776**
 - Available **for free** as an eBook through the library
- Additional required readings will be uploaded to e-Learning

Screening:

- **Subscription to Max (formerly HBO Max)**
- 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. All screenings will come from Max.

Please Note: 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 [sexuality, nudity, violence, gore, etc.]). **Enrollment in this course requires watching all assigned films.**

V. Course Basics

Structure: Each week 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 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 three 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.

VI. University Policies

Campus Policy: 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>

AI Addendum: The use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) software, including but not limited to ChatGPT, in this course is prohibited and will be considered a violation of the Code of Conduct as a form of academic dishonesty. You cannot use AI to write a first or final draft of your papers/journals, brainstorm ideas, or for any other purpose. Turnitin has a reliable AI-detection scanner that will flag any AI-generated assignments. The only AI software approved for use in this course is Grammarly, exclusively to be used for the revision of grammar and spelling. (GrammarlyGo is not acceptable.) Per the

Code of Conduct, I must report instances of alleged academic dishonesty directly to the Dean of Students.

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 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 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 and/or the use of AI (see above), will not be tolerated, and will result in a report being sent to the Dean of Students. 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. Reach out to me if you need to discuss an extension.

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!

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. Grades will be visible on eLearning as percentage points. The numerical breakdown of grade equivalents is as follows:

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade
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:

Assignment	Percentage of Grade
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	(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. All written assignments should be completed in Century Gothic font, 11-pt, with standard margins. 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 fifteen 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 that they would like to write about. Students must complete journals for 10 weeks of the semester (out of 13 offered journals). Students will answer an 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 and 250 words.**

Short Paper - Film Feature: The film feature is a short paper that draws from the skills you build writing your film journal. The film feature must be **between 600 and 750 words**. You will select one film from the syllabus that you did not write about for a film journal. You

will receive two prompts that relate to our course materials. You will select one of the two prompts. 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 film analysis assignment is a term paper that 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 five prompts from which to choose. Each prompt requires you to analyze one or two films from outside the syllabus in depth. This paper must be **between 1,000 and 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 worksheet. I will provide feedback on your proposal to help shape 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 and 5 bonus questions. Students may use any materials from the course to complete their exams but may not work with their peers.

Optional Extra Credit: There are three ways to earn extra credit in this course. The primary extra credit assignment is to write an additional film feature paper (up to 3%). Additionally, students can submit an additional film journal at the end of the semester (up to 1%) and/or volunteer as our weekly note taker (0.5% each time; up to 1% total). Each of these options will be discussed in class in more depth.

IX. Course Calendar

Note on Updates: 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 either to ensure the effectiveness of the course and the success of the students, or due to streaming licensing changes. All changes will be announced in class and as an announcement on eLearning, and an updated course calendar will be uploaded to eLearning.

Note on Screening Changes: In a perfect world, streaming licenses would never change, and Max's library would be consistent throughout the entirety of the course. However, sometimes our assigned screenings change. If you go to Max to watch one of the required films and do not see it, please contact me immediately. I will announce any screening changes via an eLearning announcement and upload an updated syllabus to eLearning.

Calendar Key: Each week's number, class meeting date, and associated material is listed below.

Reading Key: All readings may be completed before or after lecture, depending on what works best for each student.

Screening Key: We will always discuss the previous week's films at the start of the next class. For example, the Week 2 screenings will be discussed at the start of the Week 3 class meeting.

Week 1: January 19

Lecture: Course Introduction

- Syllabus Overview
- Course Mechanics

Reading: Course Syllabus

Screenings: ---

Assignment: Introductory Survey [In-Class]

Week 2: January 26

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

- Film Studies
- Textual Analysis
- Writing About Film

Workshop: Writing Your First Film Journal

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 1: “Introduction,” pp. 14-19.

Screenings: *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006) [110 min]
Barbie (Greta Gerwig, 2023) [115 min]

Assignment: Week 2 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 2 Film Journal due Thursday, February 1 by 11:59pm

Week 3: February 2

Lecture: What Does a Film Have to Say?

- Modes of Production
- Meaning – Expressive, Referential, Theme, Politics

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

Screenings: *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) [126 min]
Parasite (Bong Joon-ho, 2019) [132 min]

Assignment: Week 3 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 3 Film Journal due Thursday, February 8 by 11:59pm

Week 4: February 9

Lecture: How Are Films Organized?

- Character
- Narrative Form

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

Screenings: *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) [111 min]
I, Tonya (Craig Gillespie, 2017) [120 min]

Assignment: Week 4 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 4 Film Journal due Thursday, February 15 by 11:59pm

Week 5: February 16

Lecture: What Makes a Film Visually Interesting?

- Mise en Scène

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

Screenings: *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, 1948) [135 min]
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Peter Jackson, 2001) [179 min]

Assignment: Week 5 Film Journal
 Introduce Short Paper - Film Feature

Deadline: Week 5 Film Journal due Thursday, February 22 by 11:59pm

Week 6: February 23

Lecture: What Is the Role of the Camera?

- Cinematography
- Special/Visual Effects

Workshop: Revising the Film Feature

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 6: "Cinematography," pp. 162-203.

Screenings: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) [149 min]
Ex Machina (Alex Garland, 2015) [109 min]

Assignment: Week 6 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 6 Film Journal due Thursday, February 29 by 11:59pm
Short Paper - Film Feature due Thursday, February 29 by 11:59pm

Week 7: March 1

Lecture: What Gives a Film Its Rhythm?

- Editing
- Sound Design

Workshop: First Exam Review

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

Screenings: *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1952) [103 min]
In the Heights (Jon M. Chu, 2021) [143 min]

Assignment: Week 7 Film Journal
First Exam opens Sunday, March 3 at 12:01am

Deadline: Week 7 Film Journal due Thursday, March 7 by 11:59pm
First Exam due Thursday, March 7 by 11:59pm

Week 8: March 8

Lecture(s): What Do We Expect from Film?

- Authorship
- Genre

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

Screenings: *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) [96 min]
The Conjuring (James Wan, 2013) [112 min]

Assignment: Week 8 Film Journal
Introduce Film Analysis Assignment & Proposal

Deadline: Week 8 Film Journal due Thursday, March 21 by 11:59pm

Week 9: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**Week 10: March 22**

Lecture: How Do We Interact with Cinema?

- Fandom
- Multiplicities
- Postmodernism
- Star Studies

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

Screenings: *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives* (Tom McLoughlin, 1986) [88 min]
Scream 4 (Wes Craven, 2011) [111 min]

Assignment: Week 10 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 10 Film Journal due Thursday, March 28 by 11:59pm

Week 11: March 29

Lecture: What Is the Difference Between “Visibility” and “Representation”?

- Identity
- Representation

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10: “Film and Ideology,” pp. 318-333, 343-349.

Screenings: *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembene, 1966) [60 min]
Beauty Shop (Bille Woodruff, 2005) [105 min]

Assignment: Week 11 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 11 Film Journal due Thursday, April 4 by 11:59pm

Week 12: April 5

Lecture: How Does Cinema Construct Gender?

- Feminisms
- Gender
- Psychoanalysis

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10: “Film and Ideology,” pp. 333-340.

Screenings: *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1985) [91 min]
Legally Blonde (Robert Luketic, 2001) [96 min]

Assignment: Week 12 Film Journal
 Introduce Extra Credit Film Feature

Deadline: Film Analysis Proposal due Sunday, April 7 by 11:59pm
Week 12 Film Journal due Thursday, April 11 by 11:59pm

Week 13: April 12

Lecture: How Can Cinema be Queer(ed)?

- Camp
- Sexuality [Identity]
- Sexuality [Practice]

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 10: "Film and Ideology," pp. 340-343.

Screenings: *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990) [78 min]
Batman & Robin (Joel Schumacher, 1997) [125 min]

Assignment: Week 13 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 13 Film Journal due Thursday, April 18 by 11:59pm

Week 14: April 19

Lecture: How Do Non-Fiction Films Represent Reality?

- Documentary
- Experimental/Avant-Garde

Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 9: "Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary and Avant-Garde Films," pp. 301-315.

Screenings: *Grey Gardens* (David & Albert Maysles, Ellen Hovde and Muffie Meyer, 1975) [95 min]
Little Richard: I Am Everything (Lisa Cortés, 2023) [102 min]

Assignment: Week 14 Film Journal

Deadline: Week 14 Film Journal due Thursday, April 25 by 11:59pm
Extra Credit Film Feature optionally due Thursday, April 25 by 11:59pm

Week 15: April 26

Lecture: What Is Beyond Hollywood?

- Global/Transnational Cinema
- International Waves/Movements

Guest: Dr. Amal Shafek (she/her), Instructor of Transnational and World Cinema

Workshop: Film Analysis Assignment Draft Revision

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) [90 min]
The Battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) [122 min]

Assignment: Week 15 Film Journal

Deadline: Film Analysis Assignment due Sunday, April 28 by 11:59pm

Week 15 Film Journal due Thursday, May 2 by 11:59pm**Week 16: May 3**

- Lecture:** **What Is the Future of Film?**
- 21st Century Hollywood
 - New Media
 - Television & Streaming

Workshop: Second Exam Review

*Screenings: *Shazam!* (David Sandberg, 2019) [132 min]
Dune (Denis Villeneuve, 2021) [156 min]

Assignment: Extra Credit Film Journal

Deadline: **Extra Credit Film Journal optionally due Saturday, May 4 by 11:59pm**

*Note: Due to the academic calendar, we will not have a dedicated discussion for these. They will be covered on the exam.

Second Exam

Opens: **Sunday, May 5 at 12:01am**
Deadline: **Thursday, May 9 by 11:59pm**