

Course Syllabus – Spring 2026



Course	ISIS4V89.001.26S
Course Title	Special Topics in Interdisciplinary Studies - Film & Popular Culture
Professor	M. Lance Lusk, Ph.D.
Term	Spring 2026
Meetings	Mon. & Weds 10:00am – 11:15am, ML2 1.214

Professor's Contact Information

Office Phone 214-240-5778

Office Location HH 2.124 (Main IS hallway of the HH building)

Email Address Marc.Lusk@utdallas.edu

Office Hours Mon., Wed. 11:30am – 12:45pm and 2:30pm – 5:00pm
Teams/Virtual meetings have more availability. Please ask if you would like to set up a virtual meeting instead of in-person. Feel free to drop by without an appointment during in-person office hours.

Course Description

“The Reel Deal: Film and American Popular Culture”

This course will explore how film has been used to reflect, predict, and shape American popular culture. We will discuss everything from the “business” of motion pictures to the ways in which movies represent the ideas and values of Americans and those who live in the U.S.A. The course will cover a variety of movie genres, from classic films to modern blockbusters. Students will analyze how movies have molded, mirrored, and altered perceptions of race, relationships, gender, sense of self, and socio-economic class. We will also examine how the meaning of these films has changed over time by tracking how different audiences have embraced or rejected certain cinematic styles or messages. Through a variety of film screenings and discussions, the course will allow students to experience the influence of motion pictures on American popular culture.

*** The theme of this semester is exploring how film reveals how "the American" has been constantly redefined. We will watch essential movies that specifically tackle the tension between individual identity and the broader American society.**

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Students will gain an understanding of the history of film and its genres, and the central themes embedded within film and how they are reflected in American cultural history.
- 2) Students will develop working definitions for key terms in the study of film and popular culture, as well as an understanding of academic and critical disputes over the nature of film and popular culture and its place in American society.

3) Students will critically analyze the relationships between elements within film and of American popular culture and other facets of American life, including race, gender, and socio-economic class.

Required Texts & Materials: All materials will be made available by the instructor on eLearning. All assigned readings are **required** unless otherwise designated.

The films will primarily be screened in class or **assigned as homework** (especially for students who miss class screenings) and are **required** assignments for the course.

[NOTE: Some films may involve mature content, especially regarding violence, gore, sexual situations and nudity, racism, sexism, and intense images. These films were chosen for their literary/artistic/aesthetic value and potential for prompting discussion regarding course topics. The inclusion of these works does NOT necessarily indicate the professor's approval of the speech or practices contained therein. Please consult with the professor at the start of the class if you have any concerns.]

Materials posted to eLearning will be available to all students, as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. These materials may be downloaded but should not be reproduced or shared with those not enrolled in the course or uploaded to any other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these university requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Course Policies

Communication: The primary methods of communication this semester will be UT Dallas email and eLearning announcements. Ensure that emails sent by the instructor to the class list are not filtered into a junk or spam folder and check regularly for eLearning announcements. (If possible, adjust your settings to receive a notification when announcements are posted.) Generally, student messages will be answered within 48 working hours. If your question has not been addressed within this time frame, feel free to follow up. ***Do not worry; you are never bothering me!***

Class attendance: Class attendance is **mandatory** and will be **tracked**. This is a discussion-based course, so please note that your participation directly affects your learning and the learning of your peers. For their sake and your own, please come to class prepared, engaged, and ready to watch movies with your full attention and discuss.

*In this class, “participation” is not just speaking up during class discussions. It also includes **active engagement** (eyes on the instructor, looking at the movie screen on the board, or participating in group activities). Being distracted by your technology is **highly discouraged**. I will rarely say anything; however, I almost always notice and take a mental note of distracted or distracting non-participants.

***Please note:** More than **six absences equal an automatic failure**. In addition, every absence lowers part of the **participation grade (not your overall grade)** by a letter.

Try as best you can to attend **all** class meetings. This, of course, does not mean that you need to attend class when you are ill, utterly exhausted, or facing a crisis. Use your **best judgement** and try to find a balance between academic responsibilities and self-care.

If you miss a class session or two, you are **not** required to notify me of your absence (although you may do so). Check email and eLearning for updates and announcements; catch up on assigned work; get notes from a classmate; and contact me with any questions you might have about the material you missed.

Grading policy: I provide multiple opportunities for students to receive feedback on their performance throughout the course to give students a chance to see how they are doing and so that they can identify places they need to apply more effort or new strategies, seek help if they are struggling, and improve throughout the semester. My hope is that all students will develop the knowledge they need to do well in this course and that all students--even those who perform well early in the semester--will improve and develop greater knowledge and skills through practice on the assignments and discussions.

Note: In previous years, some students have told me that they had times during the course when they felt that they were not doing well and became uncertain about whether they belonged in this class or should change majors. I advised them to hang in there, and in the meantime to access the Writing Center, put in some extra effort on the readings, and/or join a study group. A number of these students contacted me later in the semester to tell me that, now that some time had passed and they had taken some positive steps, they did feel like they belonged in the class. For recommended resources available to help you succeed, please see the Academic Supports services of UTD.

Preferred Names: If your preferred name is not the same as the name that appears on the university provided roster for the course, please let me know so that I can use your preferred name.

Course Conduct: I am committed to creating a learning environment where a wide variety of perspectives are recognized and valued as a source of strength. I request that all students work with me to create a class culture based on open communication, mutual respect, and safety. As a class we will approach all discussions with respect and civility. Disagreements and debates in academic discourse are expected and welcome, but personal attacks are never OK, and will not be tolerated. I strive to ensure an open and welcoming classroom for all students. If I ever miss the mark, please do not hesitate to contact me. We are all learning together.

Caregiver Responsibilities Policy: I have great respect for students who are balancing their pursuit of education with the responsibilities of caring for children or other family members. If you run into challenges that require you to miss a class, or if your caregiving responsibilities are interfering with your ability to complete the work, please contact me. There may be some instances of flexibility we can offer to support your learning.

School-Life Conflict: Many students face obstacles to their education because of work or family obligations or unforeseen personal difficulties. If you are experiencing challenges throughout the term that are impacting your ability to succeed in this course, or in your undergraduate career more broadly, please reach out to me immediately so that we can work together to form a plan for success. If you are unable to attend my office hours, please email to set up a time that works for you or arrange a meeting by Teams/Zoom.

Academic Integrity: You can meet the expectations for this course. If you are concerned about how well you are doing, please come speak with me instead of considering academic misconduct. UTD expects students to comply fully with university policies on academic integrity. Students caught cheating usually receive a course grade of F. Additional penalties may include probation, suspension, or expulsion. All suspected cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Student Ethics.

Mental Health and Counseling Services: All of us need a support system, and many students benefit from the use of counseling services. The UT Dallas Student Counseling Center (SCC), located in Student Services Building (4th floor, [SSB 4.600](#)) works with students to identify and address issues related to personal growth, self-confidence, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, academic difficulties, and career indecision.

Deadlines & late work: I set deadlines, in large part, to motivate the timely completion of work and to help ensure that students do not fall seriously behind. While I reserve the right to refuse to accept late work submitted without prior consent, as well as the right to penalize late submissions, I am generally willing to work with students needing extensions. If you suspect you may need extra time to complete an assignment, **please communicate with me earlier, rather than later**, to discuss your options.

Course access & navigation / technical requirements: Course materials can be accessed using your UT Dallas NetID account on the eLearning website.

In addition to basic computer and Internet competence, success in this course requires familiarity with eLearning. You should be able to access announcements and the course calendar; find posted readings and assignment sheets from the course homepage; post to discussion boards; and submit assignments to eLearning.

Please review important technical requirements on the Getting Started with eLearning page, where the section addressing course access and navigation is particularly relevant. Additionally, the Student eLearning Tutorials page provides support for specific tools and functionalities.

UT Dallas provides eLearning technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The eLearning support center includes a toll-free telephone number for immediate assistance (1.866.588.3192); you can also access support via an email request or the online chat service.

Server unavailability / other technical difficulties: The university is committed to providing a reliable learning management system to all users. However, in the event of an unexpected server outage or unusual technical difficulty that prevents students from completing a time-sensitive assignment or activity, the instructor will provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and contact the online eLearning Helpdesk. The instructor and the Helpdesk will work with the student to resolve the issues as quickly as possible.

Class recordings: Meetings of this course will not be recorded. Students are expected to follow university policies regarding access to recorded materials and are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved a request to record.

Recordings provided by the instructor may not be published, reproduced, or shared, and may not be uploaded to any online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these requirements is a violation of the student code of conduct.

If the instructor or a UTD school, department, or office plans to make use of recordings outside of the instructional setting, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is permitted by law. Failure to comply with these requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Assessment & Grading Coursework (Grading Criteria):

1. Attendance, participation, daily work, and discussion Qs/Boards (20%)
2. Short Response Paper 1 (20%)
3. Short Response Paper 2 (25%)
4. Final Podcast or Video Project (35%)

Additional Resources & Policies

Academic support resources: The Academic Support Resources webpage lists resources that provide assistance and support to the UTD campus community. (See <https://provost.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies/#academic-support-resources>).

UTD syllabus policies & procedures: The university policies and procedures provided at the UT Dallas Syllabus Policies page constitutes an addendum to this syllabus.

Comet Creed: This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same: *“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”*

Assignments & Academic Calendar

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
1	1/21	Intros & Syllabus Talk	Discussion Board due Sunday, Jan. 25 (See eLearning)

2	1/26-1/28	Setting the Stage & Beginnings 1910s: <i>The Immigrant</i> (1917)	eLearning Reading *Weekly readings should be done BEFORE each Monday's class
3	2/2-2/4	Movie Discussion & How to Talk and Write about Film	eLearning Reading
4	2/9-2/11	1930s: <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939)	eLearning Reading Major Assignment #1 posted
5	2/16-2/18	1940s: <i>The Best Years of Our Lives</i> (1946)	eLearning Reading
6	2/23-2/25	1950s: <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> (1955)	eLearning Reading
7	3/2-3/4	1960s: <i>Easy Rider</i> (1969)	eLearning Reading Major Assignment #2 posted
8	3/9-3/11	1970s: <i>Taxi Driver</i> (1976)	eLearning Reading
9	3/16-3/22	SPRING BREAK	NONE
10	3/23-3/25	1970s (cont.): <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> (1975)	eLearning Reading Major Assignment #2 due 3/25
11	3/30-4/1	1980s: <i>Wall Street</i> (1987)	eLearning Reading
12	4/6-4/8	1980s (cont.): <i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989)	eLearning Reading
13	4/13-4/15	1990s: <i>Boyz n the Hood</i> (1991)	eLearning Reading
14	4/20-4/22	1990s (cont.): <i>The Truman Show</i> (1998)	eLearning Reading
15	4/27-4/29	2000s: <i>The Social Network</i> (2010)	Final Major Assignment posted
16	5/4-5/6	Conclusions (Last day of class)	Final Major Assignment due: May 10

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures	<p>The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.</p> <p>Please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies for these policies.</p>
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***The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor. If there are discrepancies eLearning is the most correct and up to date.**