

SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY COMM 1325: INTRO TO FILM STUDIES

Fall 2024
Via Blackboard
Delivered asynchronously

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Walk-in Office Hours:
12-1:45pm M/W @ and 2-3pm T/TH @
Mocap Soundstage. Or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Movies – good ones, anyway – are about more than the story on the surface. A well-directed movie has *subtext* - ideas embedded in images, patterns, compositions, sounds, and thematic constructions. This class is about learning to recognize these elements and their use. In this class, the goal is to learn to “read” a film in the same way one might understand the allegory in a well-written piece of literature.

The films selected for this semester are a tiny fraction of the outstanding output of these directors – and dozens more (both directors and films) were contenders. The selection of each film was made using the following criteria:

- 1) Does the film have theme beyond the entertainment value of the story? (in other words, is this film about “something more?”)
- 2) Is the film recognized within the canon of film criticism as defining in its particular genre?
- 3) Does the film have a particular strength or element suited to a lecture topic in this class?

Reading a film is an acquired skill, and it takes some time and effort to develop your “cinema muscles.” Some of the titles we’re screening may be films you’ve already seen. Some may be completely new. In either case, I think you’ll see films in a whole new way by the end of this class. I hope you do.

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Student Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to meet one or more of the program learning outcomes applied to all Communication majors.

At the end of this course:

- 1: Students will be able to analyze communication content for argument, including identification of major elements, such as claim, warrants, and data.

2: Students will be able to effectively construct messages appropriate to audience, purpose, and context; including electronic media technologies.

3: Students will be able to apply Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts to the analysis of communication situations.

REQUIRED TEXT

Understanding Movies; Louis Gianetti

ISBN-10: 0205856160 | ISBN-13: 978-0205856169 | Edition: 13th

Available at the Sul Ross Bookstore or on Amazon

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- 1) **USE OF AI in your responses is NOT PERMITTED.** This is a course in learning to think critically about films. Outsourcing your thinking to a machine is not learning. In this course, BEING CONFUSED OR EVEN FLAT-OUT WRONG IS OKAY! That's how you learn. You will NOT be penalized for confusion or mistakes.

But you WILL be penalized for using AI. If I even *suspect* AI use, I will reject your response and enter a grade of 0. The only way to earn that credit back will be an oral exam via telephone, with a reduction of one letter grade for the assignment.

In summary, just use your brain. You may enjoy it.

- 2) Your positive attitude is the difference between success and failure in art, life, and this class.
- 3) As this class is asynchronous, you are responsible for your time. This course moves quickly and requires some dedicated time. If you fall behind, catching up will be difficult.
- 4) **LATE PAPERS (Midterm and Final) WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.** Once the deadline has passed, it's over. If you have a deadline conflict, communicate in advance. **NO MERCY** on this one.
- 5) Screenings are MANDATORY. Whether you've already seen the movie or not, watching is NOT optional. Much the same way you have to read the book to succeed in a literature class, you must see the movie to participate in the class discussion.
- 6) As a mass entertainment, movies are meant to be seen with an audience on a large screen. WATCH ON THE LARGEST SCREEN YOU CAN. Laptop / table

screens are the minimum. DO NOT WATCH ON A PHONE. You'll miss lots of important details.

- 7) Watch with others, if you can. An audience reaction changes your perception of the experience.

PREREQUISITES

None.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this class, students will:

- Demonstrate a working vocabulary of terminology of film criticism
- Articulate the component elements of cinema
- Evaluate and critique cinematic works from the standpoints of both art and craft.
- Synthesize the elements of cinema critique into an individuated point-of-view in written form in response to the themes and ideas of the film.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

- 1) Weekly written analyses on assigned reading and screenings
- 2) Mid-Term Paper
- 3) Mandatory viewing of each movie
- 4) Full participation in class discussion / critique on Blackboard
- 5) Final Paper

Materials Required:

None

CLASS DATES: Assignments and Deadlines

Note that these dates and the details of each class are subject to change at the instructor's discretion, as class progress warrants.

Week	Date	Film	Reading
1	8/24	Introduction. What is Cinema Studies?	Gianetti, Chpt 1
		Assignment: Read syllabus, textbook assignment, and introductory documents.	
2	8/31	<i>Working Girl</i> Dir. Mike Nichols, 1988. 1h53m	Gianetti, Chpt 2

		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
3	9/7	<i>Fail Safe</i> Dir. Sidney Lumet. 1964. 1h52m	Gianetti, Chpt 3
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
4	9/14	<i>When We Were Kings</i> , Dir. Leon Gast, 1974/1996. 1h28m	Gianetti, Chpt 4
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
5	9/21	<i>US</i> , Dir. Jordan Peele, 2019. 1h56m	Gianetti, Chpt 5
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
6	9/28	<i>Lost in Translation</i> , Dir. Sofia Coppola, 2003. 1h42m	Gianetti, Chpt 7
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
7	10/5	<i>Cool Hand Luke</i> Dir. Stuart Rosenberg, 1967. 2h7m	Gianetti, Chpt 8
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard. MIDTERM PAPER ASSIGNED	
8	10/12	<i>The Big Short</i> , Dir. Adam McKay, 2015. 2h10m	
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard. MIDTERM PAPER DUE 11:59pm 10/14. LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.	
9	10/19	<i>Blade Runner (the final cut)</i> , Dir. Ridley Scott, 1982/2007. 1h57m	Gianetti, Chpt 11
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
10	10/26	<i>Seven Samurai</i> , Dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1954. 3h27m	

		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
11	11/2	<i>North by Northwest</i> , Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1959. 2h16m	
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
12	11/9	<i>The Lives of Others</i> Dir. Florian Von Donnersmarck, 2006. 2h17m	
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
13	11/16	<i>Lawrence of Arabia</i> , Dir. David Lean, 1962. 3h38m	
		Assignment: Read background. Watch movie. Respond to analysis prompts in Blackboard.	
14	11/23	<i>THANKSGIVING BREAK</i>	
15	11/30	FINAL PAPER DRAFT DUE	
16	12/7	FINAL PAPER DUE 12/7 by 11:59pm LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.	

GRADING

Assignments are valued as follows:

1) Weekly quizzes on assigned reading and screening	50%
2) Mid-Term Paper	15%
3) Full participation in class discussion / critique	10%
4) Final Paper	25%

Grading Criteria:

A = Exceptional. Demonstrates mastery of material beyond expectation. Professional quality of work. Highest level of scholarship.

B = Above average. Demonstrates mastery of material. Work is of better-than-expected quality, but not quite professional. High level of scholarship.

C = Average. Demonstrates proficiency with material. Work is of amateur quality. Ordinary level of scholarship.

D = Below Average. Less than proficient with material. Work shows errors, careless mistakes, or is just plain wrong. Poor scholarship

F – Failure. Material incomplete. Work grossly negligent or incomplete. No evidence of scholarship present.

LATE WORK

Deadlines are an inescapable part of responsible adult life. I do not accept late work.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class will start promptly. Please be on time.

NOTE: After six (6) unexcused absences, you will be dropped from the course with a grade of “F.”

The following is the Absence Policy, from the Sul Ross State University Course Catalogue:

Regular class attendance is important to the attainment of the educational objectives of the University. Each instructor will keep class attendance records, and the instructor's policy on class attendance will be explained at the beginning of the semester or term.

The instructors will drop a student from a course when the student has a total of nine absences. A student will be dropped for excessive absences in remedial courses after nine absences.

An absence is defined as non-attendance in fifty minutes of class; for example, non-attendance in a one and one-half hour class will constitute one and one-half absences and non-attendance in a three-hour class will constitute three absences. An absence because of participation in an official University activity is considered to be an authorized absence.

ELETRONIC DEVICES

Please turn off all cell phones upon entering class. If you ignore this rule, you will be asked to leave. Absolutely no cell phones/texting permitted during screenings.

ADA COMPLIANCE STATEMENT: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request. Please contact the Counseling and Accessibility Services Office, Ferguson Hall (Suite 112) at 432.837.8203; mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832. Students should then contact the instructor as soon as possible to initiate the recommended accommodations.