

MCOM 2351-02 Fall 2017 M 5-8pm Smith-Hutson Business Bldg rm 128 (Mafrige Audito.)  
Dr. Grant Wiedenfeld, Mass Communication Department, Sam Houston State U.  
Office Hours M 3-4pm or by appt. Email: [grant.wiedenfeld@shsu.edu](mailto:grant.wiedenfeld@shsu.edu)

## **FILM HISTORY AND CRITICISM**

### **Syllabus**

#### **Course Description**

This course uses the film medium to integrate cinematic history and criticism. Production elements such as lighting, sound and character development, as well as genres, themes and narrative pattern will be analyzed. Emphasis is placed on writing critically about the film. The course is organized into three units that introduce an active approach to appreciating the medium, investigate its main elements in depth, and survey its historical development and industrial organization. We will watch and discuss films from different periods and cultures, encouraging students to develop their own capacities, knowledge, and taste as viewers.

#### **Course Objectives**

1. Critical Thinking – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to think creatively about film, inquire into the unknown, analyze content and synthesize ideas.
2. Communication – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to effectively develop, interpret and express ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
3. Social Responsibility – Students will be able to demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities.
4. Team work – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to consider different points of view and work effectively with others to support a joint purpose of film appreciation.

#### **Required Materials**

Barsam, Richard, and Dave Monahan. *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Norton, 2016. ISBN 978-0-393-26519-4. Ebook <https://digital.wwnorton.com/movies5>

#### **Coursework**

Students are expected to read in preparation for class, where we will watch and discuss films in depth. Directly after class students will complete online forum posts that respond to specific questions. The main assignments are two two-page papers, a final exam, and a group project “dossier” that involves a critical study of a film by a collaborative group. Attendance is required, with one absence maximum excused. Work submitted after a deadline will be marked down, and may not be accepted.

## Grading

15% Attendance  
25% Forum Posts  
25% Assignments  
25% Dossier  
10% Final Exam

## Units & Weekly Schedule

(subject to change)

### Unit 1: Film Form and Meaning

Unit 1 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Appreciate film form through active looking, and observe its invisibility to passive watchers
2. Explain how shared belief systems contribute to meaning, and demonstrate through analysis
3. Define cinematic language and perceive patterns that convey meaning
4. Define narrative, documentary, and experimental modes
5. Recognize major genres in Hollywood cinema and their key elements

### Week 1            August 28            Looking at Movies

Read syllabus and B&M (Barsam & Monahan) chapter 1

To be screened in class: *The Godfather* (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1972)

Assignment.w1 due Friday 9/1 midnight

### Week 2            September 11            Principles of Film Form

For Monday read B&M chapter 2

To be screened in class: *In the Mood for Love* (Dir. Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong, 2000)

Post.w2 due Monday midnight

### Week 3            September 18            Types of Movies

For Monday read B&M chapter 3

To be screened in class: *Singin' in the Rain* (Drs. Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952)

Post.w3 due Monday midnight

### Unit 2: Elements of Film Form

Unit 2 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Differentiate uses of the term narrative: as mode, story content, and dramatic structure
2. Analyze the character types and dramatic structure of a narrative film
3. Distinguish between story and plot, and differentiate diegetic from non-diegetic elements
4. Define mise-en-scène according to its various production trades

5. Identify basic cinematographic properties: stock, lighting, lenses
6. Analyze fundamental elements of a shot: proximity, angle, movement, speed, and duration
7. Explain the relationship of acting to sound and cinematography with a historical perspective
8. Analyze continuity and discontinuity editing through different transition types
9. Distinguish between the four major types of film sound, and recognize their associated trades

Week 4            September 25            Narrative, part 1

For Monday read B&M chapter 4, pp. 121-135

To be screened in class: *Boyz in the Hood* (Dir. John Singleton, USA, 1991)

Post.w4 due Monday midnight

Week 5            October 2            Narrative, part 2

For Monday read B&M chapter 4, pp. 136-161

To be screened in class: *Rashomon* (Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1950)

Assignment.w5 due Friday 10/6 midnight

Week 6            October 9            Mise-en-Scène

For Monday read B&M chapter 5

To be screened in class: *Rushmore* (Dir. Wes Anderson, USA, 1998)

Post.w6 due Monday midnight

Week 7            October 16            Cinematography, part 1

For Monday read B&M chapter 6, pp. 211-232

To be screened in class: *Citizen Kane* (Dir. Orson Welles, USA, 1942)

Post.w7 due Monday midnight

Week 8            October 23            Cinematography, part 2

For Monday read B&M chapter 6, pp. 233-270

To be screened in class: *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Dir. Agnes Varda, France, 1962)

Post.w8 due Monday midnight

Week 9            October 30            Acting

For Monday read B&M chapter 7

To be screened in class: *Moonlight* (Dir. Barry Jenkins, USA, 2016)

Post.w9 due Monday midnight

Week 10      November 6      Editing

For Monday read B&M chapter 8

To be screened in class: *When We Were Kings* (Dir. Leon Gast, USA, 1996)

Post.w10 due Monday midnight

Week 11      November 13      Sound

For Monday read B&M chapter 9

To be screened in class: *M* (Dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931)

Post.w11 due Monday midnight

Early deadline for Dossier, Monday 11/13, for extra credit

Unit 3: Film History and Industry

Unit 3 Objectives. Students should be able to:

1. Distinguish historical periods and identify their major movements by culture and esthetic
2. Differentiate celluloid and digital technologies by defining their basic elements
3. Explain how a movie is produced, distributed globally, and exhibited through multiple media

Week 12      November 20      Film History

For Monday read B&M chapter 10

To be screened in class: *Sherlock, Jr.* (Dir. Buster Keaton, USA, 1924)

Post.w12 due Monday midnight

Dossier due Monday 11/20 beginning of class

Week 13      November 27      How Movies Are Made

For Monday read B&M chapter 11

To be screened in class: *Star Wars: A New Hope* (Dir. George Lucas, USA, 1977)

Post.w13 due Monday midnight

Exam.Final (online) due Friday 12/1 midnight

**Academic Dishonesty**

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic

work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see [Dean of Student's Office](#).

Copying and Pasting is a form of plagiarism. All writing for this class must be your original composition, quoting and citing other sources when used.

### **Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy:**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: [www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf](http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf)

### **Students with Disabilities Policy**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu)). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>