

# Independent Film

Fall, 2018 | Wednesday, 6:00-8:50 PM | FILM 4340



**Course: Independent Film**

**Professor: Greg Beam**

**Film 4340 | Fall, 2018 | Wednesday, 6:00-8:50 PM**

## COURSE INFORMATION

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Independent Film | FILM 4340-02 | CRN: 19074 | Fall, 2018

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Miners Hall, Room 201

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Wednesday, 6:00-8:50pm

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Instructor: Greg Beam

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Email: [gbeam@utep.edu](mailto:gbeam@utep.edu)

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 12:00-2:00pm, location TBA

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the category of independent film from multiple perspectives, covering the history, philosophy, artistry, and influence of independent film. With close viewings of an array of important films—beginning with the European New Wave and focusing on major developments in the contemporary American independent-film movement—this course will introduce students to the mindsets and methodologies of some of the cinema’s most acclaimed and influential independent artists. We will take a close look at the culture and aesthetics of independent versus studio (i.e. Hollywood) films, the realities of independent film production, the rise of indie films as a major phenomenon in the history of film, and the contribution of indies to the cinema’s identity as both an art form and a popular medium.

The course will be structured around viewing clips and complete films meant to illuminate a variety of topics related to film in general and relevant to independent film in particular. While there is plenty to be said about independent films throughout the existence of the medium and across the world, our viewings will largely revolve around the wave of independent films that rose at the end of the 20th Century. Some attention will be given to tracing the roots of that movement to the European New Wave of the mid-20th Century and the New Hollywood filmmakers of the 1970s.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To define and scrutinize the term independent film along multiple vectors—social, aesthetic, and economic.
- To understand how independent cinema fits into the history of film.
- To assess the artistic and cultural significance of independent films.
- To develop a more refined perspective on visual media in general through a focused and critical viewing of seminal independent films.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this semester, students should be able to:

- 1.) Discriminate, materially and aesthetically, between independent and studio films.
- 2.) Identify key figures in the American independent cinema.
- 3.) Write a publishable article that reflects or interrogates the notion of ‘independence’ in cinema.

## MATERIALS

The primary ‘texts’ for the course will be the films and excerpts themselves. I will supplement our viewings with essays, articles, and reviews related to each week’s viewing, a number of which are already listed in the course schedule. Readings will be posted in the ‘Readings’ folder on Blackboard, often in the form of links to online content.

I also expect you to make a regular habit of viewing films outside of class. To make sure that you have access to a sufficient number of independent films, please register for an account at Kanopy.com, which is available for free with your UTEP library credentials. Kanopy has an array of foreign, arthouse, and documentary films that may be difficult to find through popular channels. It is an invaluable resource. You should also pay a visit to the media center on the first floor of the library. They have a respectable collection of DVDs available for checkout.

I highly recommend Peter Siskind’s pair of books about New Hollywood and the American independent film movement: *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* and *Down and Dirty Pictures*. I have put *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* on reserve at the library. You can purchase them on Amazon; they are also available as audiobooks from [audible.com](http://audible.com). While these are not required reading, they are very informative and entertaining, and even browsing some of the chapters might give you some good ideas for your papers.

Geoff King takes a more methodical and academic approach to the main topics of this course in his book *American Independent Cinema*, which I also recommend. (In fact, you should have already read the introduction for the first class session.)

## DISABILITY STATEMENT

The Center for Students with Disabilities at EPCC provides students with disabilities accommodations and support services to help them pursue their academic, graduation, and career goals. If you are dealing with a mental, physical, emotional, or sensory disability—whether permanent or temporary—you are encouraged to contact them for a confidential consultation. For more information, visit <http://www.UTEP.edu/CSD/Pages/default.aspx> or see pages 5-12 of the Student Handbook.

## SUBJECT MATTER

Some of the films and readings used in this course touch on mature subject matters, including violence, abuse, sexual activity, and verbal obscenity. Consequently, much of the

discussion in class will involve references to adult subject matter and language. I will do my best to give you a heads up about any troubling material that may appear in our weekly viewings, and I will endeavor to address difficult subjects with an appropriate degree of sensitivity.

If you have concerns about viewing or discussing specific subjects, please see me to discuss possible accommodations. I expect all discussions—including any that may occur outside of class—to be conducted in a respectful and professional manner.

## **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

The use of cell phones/smart phones/tablets is forbidden. Take handwritten notes. If you need to have access to your phone for a specific reason, please discuss this with me before class. Seriously, phones and computers distract me. Don't make me ask you to put them away—it will be super uncomfortable for everyone involved.

## **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**

The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence, and students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, submitting work for credit that is attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act that give or attempts to give unfair advantage.

# **ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING**

### **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (10% of final grade)**

Please attend and be fully present at all class sessions (see electronic device policy). Be ready to discuss any readings/viewings that have been assigned for that week and to apply the information and concepts we have covered in class. Along with multiple absences, persistent tardiness, early departures, or clear evidence of distraction will have a significant impact on your grade.

### **PAPER 1 (30% of final grade)**

Your first paper, due Wednesday, October 17, will address one of the films we have viewed in class and discuss it in light of one or more of the assigned readings. Specific

prompts will be given in advance of the due date. Check in the Assignments folder on Blackboard for updated information on the requirements for the paper.

You will be graded on the conceptual strength of your thesis, the strength of the content offered in support of that thesis, the arrangement and rhetorical effectiveness of your argument, and the quality of your writing. Check the Assignments folder on Blackboard for a complete rubric.

**Submit your essay through the Assignments folder on Blackboard by 5:00pm on Wednesday, October 17.**

PAPER 2 (30% of final grade)

Your second paper, due Wednesday, December 4, should discuss an independent film or films that we have not viewed in class. The goal here is to produce an article that would be publishable in an academic journal or mainstream periodical. You should make an original claim about the work you are examining, relating to its artistic attributes and merit, its cultural or historical significance, or its connection to (or departure from) contemporaneous trends in filmmaking.

You will be graded on the conceptual strength of your thesis, the strength of the content offered in support of that thesis, the arrangement and rhetorical effectiveness of your argument, and the quality of your writing. Check the Assignments folder on Blackboard for a complete rubric.

**Submit your essay through the Assignments folder on Blackboard by 5:00pm on Wednesday, December 5.**

FINAL PRESENTATION (25% of final grade)

In groups of three, you will prepare a 10-20 minute presentation on an independent filmmaker of your choosing, discussing the artist's background and career. You should give serious attention to what characterizes their style as a filmmaker, using specific examples from their work. Please make use of audio-visual aids, potentially including descriptive slides, along with samples of the filmmaker's work. Do not, however, simply read the text you have written in the slides or pull up a 10-20 minute video and press play.

You will be graded on the strength of your presentation's content, the format of the presentation, clarity of delivery, and demonstrated familiarity with the topic beyond the information contained in the presentation itself. Check the Assignments folder on Blackboard for a complete rubric.

**Presentations will be given during the final exam period on Wednesday, December 12, 7:00-9:45pm**

GRADING	
ASSIGNMENTS	POSSIBLE POINTS
Attendance/Participation:	15
Paper #1:	30
Paper #2:	30
Final Presentation:	25
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100</b>

**GRADING SCALE:**

F = 0-59 points

D = 60-69 points

C = 70-79 points

B = 80-89 points

A = 90-100 points

## COURSE SCHEDULE FOR DOCUMENTARY CINEMA (Subject to Change)

Class Meeting	Reading & Outside Viewing	Class Viewing	Assignments
<b>Week 1: What Is Independent Film?</b> Wednesday, Aug. 29	The Hollywood Production Code; Truffaut, "A certain tendency in French cinema"; King, "Introduction"	<i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> ; <i>Easy Rider</i> ; <i>Opening Night</i>	
<b>Week 2: The Beginnings of a Movement (How Hollywood lost its death grip on the American film industry.)</b> Wednesday, Sept. 5	Kael, "Bonnie and Clyde"; Bordwell, "Objectivity, Subjectivity, and Authority"	TBA	
<b>Week 3: A Fork in the Road (Drama on the 1989 festival circuit, and new ideas about the production and distribution of 'independent' film.)</b> Wednesday, Sept. 12	White, "Do the Right Thing"; James, "A Dance of Sex and Love, Through a Glass Darkly"	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> ; <i>sex, lies, and videotape</i>	
<b>Week 4: A Fork in the Road, cont'd</b> Wednesday, Sept. 19	TBA	TBA	
<b>Week 5: Going It Alone (How working with no outside help led to some of the most innovative, influential, and straight-up weird movies ever made.)</b> Wednesday, Sept. 26	Rodriguez, "10 Minute Film School (The First and Original)"; Rodriguez, "The Idea"	<i>El Mariachi</i> ; <i>Killer of Sheep</i> ; <i>Pi</i> ; <i>Primer</i> ; <i>Eraserhead</i> ; <i>Clerks</i>	
<b>Week 6: Going It Alone, cont'd</b> Wednesday, Oct. 3	Lynch, selections from <i>Catching the Big Fish</i>	TBA	

Class Meeting	Reading & Outside Viewing	Class Viewing	Assignments
<b>Week 7: Episodes (Breaking out of the Hollywood narrative formula.) Wednesday, Oct. 10</b>	Film Threat, “White Night: An Interview with Jim Jarmusch”; Nolan, “Memento Mori”; Nolan, “18-Minute analysis...”	<i>Night on Earth; Four Rooms; Pulp Fiction; Memento; I’m Not There; Last Exit to Brooklyn; Poison; Boyhood, Waking Life</i>	
<b>Week 8: Episodes, cont’d Wednesday, Oct. 17</b>	TBA	TBA	<b>First paper due Wednesday, Oct. 17, by 5pm</b>
<b>Week 9: Genre Games (Zombies and slashers and androids—oh, my! Indie renovation of dusty old genres.) Wednesday, Oct. 23</b>	“Genre and Critical Methodology”	<i>Halloween; Friday the 13th; Dawn of the Dead; Carnival of Souls; The Evil Dead; Dawn of the Dead; The Blair Witch Project; Blood Simple; Winter’s Bone; Safe; Dead Man; Terminator; Ex Machina</i>	
<b>Week 10: Genre Games, cont’d Wednesday, Oct. 30</b>	TBA	TBA	
<b>Week 11: Getting Personal (A tortured mind, a small town in New Mexico, and a living room in Queens—how indie filmmakers give an intimate view of their subjects... and themselves) Wednesday, Nov. 6</b>	TBA	<i>Clean, Shaven; Before Sunrise, Sling Blade; Bleak Moments; The Squid and the Whale; Gas, Food, Lodging; The Watermelon Woman</i>	
<b>Week 12: Getting Personal, cont’d Wednesday, Nov. 13</b>	TBA	TBA	
<b>Week 13: Tough Stuff (Exploding taboos and dueling with the ratings bureau.) Wednesday, Nov. 20</b>	TBA	<i>Pink Flamingoes; Happiness; Kids, The Crying Game; Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer; Aftermath; Antichrist</i>	
<b>Week 14: Tough Stuff, cont’d Wednesday, Nov. 27</b>	TBA	TBA	

Class Meeting	Reading & Outside Viewing	Class Viewing	Assignments
<b>Week 15: A New Century (The current state of the independent film industry.)</b> <b>Wednesday, Dec. 5</b>	TBA	<i>Synecdoche, New York; Tangerine; American Honey; Upstream Color; Saturday Church; Beach Rats; Pariah</i>	<b>Second Paper Due</b> <b>Wednesday, Dec. 4,</b> <b>by 5pm</b>
<b>Finals Week: Presentations</b> <b>Final: Wednesday, Dec. 12,</b> <b>7:00-9:45pm</b>			<b>*PRESENTATION</b> <b>OF FINAL</b> <b>PROJECTS</b> <b>DURING EXAM</b> <b>PERIOD*</b>