**Film Theory and Criticism | FILM 4390 | CRN: 23953 | Spring 2023**

Friday, 9:00-11:50 am | Miners Hall 201

Instructor: Greg Beam

Email: gbeam@utep.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30-2:30 pm | Worrell Hall 114

*For the first two weeks of the semester (Jan. 17-27), I will be holding office hours by appointment only.*
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course aims to help the student view, discuss, and write about films with greater acuity, insight, and depth, and to construct creative contributions to the field of cinema and media studies. We will investigate the nature of film as an art form, a medium of communication, and a social phenomenon; explore the role of the scholar and critic in the film world and society at large; and apply a variety of theoretical frameworks and critical methodologies to our discussion of the medium. These explorations will culminate in the creation of a variety of projects meant to meaningfully engage with and add value to the contemporary critical landscape.

As FILM 1390, Introduction to the Art of the Motion Picture, is a prerequisite for this course, students should already possess knowledge of a number of basic terms and concepts related to film composition, production, viewership, and history.

If you need a refresher on any of the terms that are referred to in our discussion or the reading, take a look at the reference text listed in the Readings section below (Moving Pictures). I would also recommend that you Google any terms you do not know—or run them through ChapGPT. There are numerous websites and informational videos (some of them quite good) devoted to elucidating various subjects in film.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
• To build a deeper and more specific understanding of the formal elements of film, and to be able to identify, articulate, and evaluate the use of those elements in a variety of genres and styles.
• To investigate the philosophical dimensions and implications of film, including the ethics of filmmaking, the ontology of the cinema, and how the creation of film reflects and influences the human pursuit of knowledge.
• To examine the ideological aspects of audio-visual media and film’s role in society.
• To practice viewing films from a variety of critical perspectives.
• To develop deep critical thinking and communication skills, both written and spoken, relating to the arts in general and film in particular.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
• Understanding of the formal elements of cinema, cinematic genres and modes, narrative theory, the philosophical and cultural dimensions of film, and other theoretical outlooks, demonstrated through a thoughtful response to the assigned reading.
• The knowledge and fluency to critique a film upon viewing, delivering clearly phrased responses to questions and prompts about the film.
• The ability to develop a significant thesis relating to the study of film and to support this thesis from a clear critical perspective, demonstrated through a well-researched and precisely argued written essay, video essay, blog, or other media project.

MATERIALS
Readings

Required

Several articles for the first few weeks are provided in the “Readings” folder on Blackboard. After that, readings will be selected on a rolling basis based on students’ interests and may vary from student to student.

Recommended

If you would like to bone up on your technical knowledge of film technique and terminology (e.g. shot types, composition, focus, lens types, elements of mise-en-scène, sound design, narrative techniques), I recommend this open-access—i.e. free—introductory textbook: Moving Pictures: An Introduction to Cinema, available at this link: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/movingpictures/?fbclid=IwAR30Pymmf2XvAsjA4a3c7TiYRNntfXJdbpsYeDCa9hVLdyj2goE7MLA

The link is also provided in the “Readings” folder on Blackboard.

Viewings

Our viewings will also be selected on a rolling basis. I will attempt to license any films we select through Swank Digital Media, a service provided by the university library; I will post links to all available titles in the Viewings folder on Blackboard.
ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Your final grade will be tabulated on a simple scale of 0-100%.

A: 90-100%
B: 80-89.9%
C: 70-79.9%
D: 60-69.9%
F: 0-59.9%

10% - Reading Response
10% - Presentation
20% - Project One
40% - Project Two
20% - Contribution to the Team(s)

All assignments are due at the end of the day (11:59 pm) on the due date unless otherwise indicated. If you think you may need extra time for an assignment, please request an extension before the due date. It’s far easier to make arrangements in advance than to make them after the fact. Extension requests are unlikely to be granted for the study guides, as answers will be posted the afternoon following the due date.

If you have any kind of situation—scheduling, personal, medical—that may make it difficult for you to meet any of the deadlines or course requirements, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss possible accommodations.

READING RESPONSE
Early in the semester, you will submit a brief written response (around 500-1000 words) to the reading assignments. While you do not need to structure your response as a formal essay, you should demonstrate substantial original thought, asking and answering probing questions about the topics covered, investigating and/or critiquing the authors’ ideas, or presenting alternative opinions. Your response should go well beyond a report or summary of the readings.

You will also be asked to provide feedback on at least one response written by a classmate.

PRESENTATION
Early in the semester, you will be assigned to a group, which will collectively research a major topic in film theory or a field of film theory or criticism. Your group will report its findings to the class as a whole.
PROJECTS
The bulk of the coursework for the semester will be the ideation, development, and delivery of two projects that involve a significant amount of research, theoretical inquiry, creative exploration, or criticism on a topic relevant to the study of film. This could take a number of forms:

- An essay intended for publication in a scholarly journal (meeting provided publication guidelines).
- A video essay posted online (e.g. to YouTube or Vimeo).
- A blog, featuring one or more significant theoretical reflections on major topics in film.
- A fully produced podcast, published online, featuring significant theoretical reflections on major topics in film.
- A creative project, such as a short film, that serves as a practical application of theoretical principles in film (with accompanying explanation).

Regardless of the medium you choose for your project, it should be well-researched, carefully planned, and meticulously crafted. Projects will be assessed according to professional standards within the chosen medium. That is to say, a written essay will be evaluated in terms of how well it might qualify for publication in a journal, a podcast will be evaluated in comparison to professional podcasts on similar topics, etc.

Each project will go through three phases: 1.) Proposal; 2.) Draft; 3.) Final Product. While only the final product will be graded, the proposal and draft are required, and a project won’t be accepted unless they are completed.

Expectations relating to specific media will be discussed as needed, and a detailed grading rubric will be provided.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE TEAM(S)
For each round of projects, students will be placed on teams, assigned in accordance with the topics they are investigating (e.g. a group of students all investigating the legacy of the Motion Picture Production Code) and/or the format in which they plan to work (e.g. a group of students all working on podcasts). Each student’s expected contribution goes well beyond completing their own project. They are expected to attend all class sessions, be in regular communication with their teammates outside of class, brainstorm ideas with their team, and provide feedback on their teammates’ ideas and drafts.
The course will be structured in such a way that flying solo isn’t really an option. Everyone needs to be working together, which means that everyone must be present and prepared at every step of the way.

**COMMUNICATION**

You must have an active UTEP email address and check it regularly. You should also have regular access to Blackboard. These will be my primary means of communicating with you outside of class. Any announcements that pertain to the whole class will be sent via Blackboard and email. If I need to reach you individually, I will do so via email.

Please note that I will not respond to emails sent from personal email accounts. If you want to contact me, use your UTEP email address.

If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the Help Desk as they are trained specifically in assisting with the technological needs of students.

**CLASS RECORDINGS**

I may make audio recordings of class lectures, presentations, and discussions. These are meant to enable students to have access to class lectures, group discussions, and so on in the event they miss a meeting due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. Our use of such technology is governed by the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and UTEP’s acceptable-use policy. I will not share the recordings of your class activities outside of course participants, which include your fellow students, teaching assistants, or graduate assistants, and any guest faculty or community-based learning partners with whom we may engage during a class session. **You may not share recordings outside of this course.**

**SUBJECT MATTER**

Some of the films and readings used in this course touch on mature subject matters, including violence, abuse, and sexual activity. There will be explicit language and images in some of the films. I will do my best to give you a heads-up about any troubling material that may come up.

If you have concerns about viewing or discussing specific subjects, please see me to discuss possible accommodations. I expect all discussions, both in and out of class, to be conducted in a respectful and sensitive manner.
ATTENDANCE
Attendance at all class sessions is expected. However, if you are sick, please do not come to class. Let me know in advance, and we will make accommodations.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Any incident of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of zero on the assignment and possible disciplinary action. Please check the UTEP Student Handbook for more information on academic dishonesty, and if you’re in doubt about whether your use of a source is acceptable, don’t hesitate to check with me.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT
The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP provides students who require them with accommodations and support services to help them pursue their academic, graduation, and career goals. If you are dealing with any kind of mental, physical, emotional, or sensory disability you are encouraged to contact them for a confidential consultation. For more information, visit https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/ or consult the Student Handbook.
# COURSE SCHEDULE FOR FILM THEORY AND CRITICISM (Subject to Change)

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<tr>
<th>Class Meeting</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Viewing (very much subject to change)</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| **Week 1: First Impressions - Exploring the material (and immaterial) aspects of film**  
Friday, Jan. 20 | “Meaning in Movies,” Melissa Lenos & Michael Ryan | TBA                                   |                                                  |
| **Week 2: Group Meetings**  
Friday, Jan. 27 - meeting times to be determined | “Basic Concepts,” Siegfried Kracauer  
“On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema,” Christian Metz | TBA                                   |                                                  |
| **Week 3: First Impressions (cont’d)**  
Friday, Feb. 3 | “Now You See It” (Daniel Yon) | TBA                                   | Reading Response due Sunday, Feb. 5, by end of day |
| **Week 4: Schools of Theory**  
Friday, Feb. 10 | – | TBA                                   | In-class Presentations on Group Topics |
| **Week 5: Assignment of Teams, Prep for Project 1**  
Friday, Feb. 17 | Based on project topics | TBA                                   | Project 1 Proposal due Thursday, Feb. 23, by 8pm |
| **Week 6: Cinematic Meaning/Work on Project 1**  
Friday, Feb. 24 | Based on project topics | TBA                                   | Project 1 Draft due Sunday, Mar. 5, by end of day |
| **Week 7: Cinematic Meaning/Work on Project 1**  
Friday, Mar. 3 | Based on project topics | TBA                                   |                                                  |
| **Week 8: Cinematic Meaning/Work on Project 1**  
Friday, Mar. 10 | Based on project topics | TBA                                   |                                                  |
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>Based on project topics</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Week 9:</td>
<td>Presentation of Projects</td>
<td>Project 1 due Thursday, Mar. 23, by end of day - results to be shared in class</td>
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<td>Friday, Mar.</td>
<td>Project 1 due Thursday, Mar. 23, by end of day - results to be shared in class</td>
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<td>Week 10:</td>
<td>Assignment of Teams for Project 2</td>
<td>Project 2 Proposal due Sunday, Apr. 13</td>
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<td>Friday, Mar.</td>
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<td>Week 11:</td>
<td>Telling Stories/Work on Project 2</td>
<td>Project 2 Proposal due Sunday, Apr. 13</td>
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<td>Friday, Apr.</td>
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<td>Week 12:</td>
<td>Telling Stories/Work on Project 2</td>
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<td>Finals Week Presentation of Results</td>
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<td>Project 2 Due at 12pm on Thursday, May 11 - Results to be shared in class during final exam period</td>
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