Film Theory & Criticism

COMM 4390 **Mon. – Fri. 9:20 – 11:30 am** **Cotton #201**
CRN: 33607

Summer I Semester – 2026

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Office Hours: Mon.- Fri., 8:30 am – 9:20 am (or by appointment), or Virtual (by appt)
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Required Texts:

— Various articles to be assigned by your instructor as needed. (Available online on Blackboard system)

Course Description:

This course will provide an overview of the major theoretical and critical approaches to the study of film, and introduce students to ideas and concepts related to film theory and analysis. This course will also introduce you to background/historical information about film history, and will help you apply this knowledge in understanding cinema as meaning-making cultural practice. Another major focus of the course is the emphasis on applying theories and concepts to one's own writing and intellectual interests. Students will be required to create their own film or movie criticisms in an effort to apply tools and concepts as well as to further understanding of film/cinema. The course will also focus on social, societal, cultural, structural and historical dimensions of film production, and therefore includes racial, ethnic, class, and gender lenses on film/cinema.

Course Objectives: In this course you should,

- Know and use appropriate film terminology.
- Understand and discuss major trends in film analysis, and develop a working vocabulary of terms and concepts that relate to film studies theory and criticism – in addition to communication/media studies.
- Have an understanding of film's role as technical artifacts, as cultural and ideological productions, as works of collaborative art, and as products usually of multinational corporations, and possibly, as agents of cultural change.
- Analyze films using different critical and theoretical approaches.
- Express (write) your own ideas about film in relation to dramatic quality, production values, and artistic merit, as well as in relation to various types of criticism.
- Become more reflexive and critical about cinema, and knowledgeable about films as mediated communication.

Course Policies & Details:

1. ATTENDANCE:

In accordance with the Dept. of Communication Attendance Policy, **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED** as a condition of successful completion of all courses in the department. **Second, after missing any class session, a student is responsible for finding out about assignments**, due dates, announcements, handouts, and so forth that were covered during the missed session, and for making up any missed work. The student is also responsible for obtaining class notes from a classmate (not the professor) for the session, and for learning material from that session for any relevant exams or quizzes.

Third, the equivalent of 1 week of absence from any course will reduce a student's course grade by percentage points on their eventual "Attendance & Participation" grade. However, absence from a combined total of 3 weeks of class meetings will result in automatic failure of the course. Thus, if the class meets once a week, 4 missed sessions means automatic failure. If a course meets twice a week, 8 missed sessions will result in failure of the course, and a combined total of 9 missed class sessions will result in automatic failure of a course that meets 3 times per week. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Fourth, absences for any reason, including illness, personal crises, athletics or other extra-curricular activities are included in this total. If a student is involved in any activity that might require that student to miss 3 or more weeks of a particular course, then that student should not enroll in the course. If a student is involved in any activity that might require that student to miss an exam or quiz, then that student should not enroll in the course.

Next, it is important to note that tardies (arriving late to class) will also be marked and counted, and a simple class rule is that excessive tardies/lates will result in the reduction of the student's final grade. More specifically, for "Attendance & Participation" purposes two tardies will be considered the same as one absence (for final grading). [*i.e.*, 2 tardies/lates = 1 absence]

Finally, students are required to keep track of their own absences, and therefore should not expect the instructor to regularly report absences or notify students in case of attendance issues or problems (unless as a courtesy by the instructor, determined by the instructor's discretion).

2. DATES/DEADLINES:

All assignments and exams/quizzes will be scheduled far in advance, and due dates for exams and assignments are announced in this syllabus. **Therefore, you must plan your work and personal schedule far in advance to accommodate these deadlines and policies**. Because the attendance policy dictates that you will (for the most part) be present in class, make-ups and late work are therefore largely irrelevant. Otherwise, for a few special cases at the discretion of your instructor, late work will be docked one letter grade for each day late (each calendar day, not each day of class).

3. EXAMS:

Make-up tests will not be given, except for emergencies. If a student misses an exam or quiz because of a documented emergency or situation, he/she will be required to fulfill an alternative assignment. Only in extreme circumstances will your instructor make arrangements with you to complete your coursework through alternative assignments.

4. ADA STATEMENT (Re: The *Americans with Disabilities Act*):

The University of Texas at El Paso seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Accommodations & Support Services (CASS) to make arrangements for accommodations in advance.

5. CASS POLICY (Center for Accommodations & Support Services):

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations & Support Services (CASS) at (915) 747.5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu. Or visit their office located in the UTEP Union – East, Room #106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass. CASS staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.

6. PHONES / ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

Cell phones or other personal electronic communication devices are NOT permitted during class, **so phones should be turned off AND put away during class**. Laptops for note-taking are permitted, only with (a.) instructor permission and (b.) as long as the student sits in the front rows of the classroom. [In other words, students cannot sit in the back rows when they are using laptops.]

7. 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 gives or attempts to give unfair advantage.

8. NOTE ON USAGE OF **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** (or, "AI")**:**

Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all work submitted in this course must be your own original work and completed in accordance with the **UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures Chapter 1 Section 1.2.3.** AI generated submissions that use ChatGPT, Grammarly, Chegg or other AI composition software is strictly prohibited, and will be treated as cheating and reported to the Dean of Students (with absolutely no exceptions).

9. COVID-19 PRECAUTION STATEMENT:

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are encouraged to report your results to covidaction@utep.edu, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support and help with communication with your professors. The Student Health Center is equipped to provide COVID-19 testing.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission wear face masks when indoors in groups of people. The best way that Miners can take care of Miners is to get the vaccine. If you still need the vaccine, it is widely available in the El Paso area, and will be available at no charge on campus during the first week of classes. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit epstrong.org.

10. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALES:

Assignments

* Attendance & Participation	20 %
Quiz #1:	20 %
Movie Reviews/Presentations: (2 total / 20% each)	40 %
Quiz #2:	20 %

***** Attendance & Participation Points Earned

0-1 absences = 90-100% for attendance grade
2-3 absences = 80-89% for attendance grade
4-5 absences = 70-79% for attendance grade
6-7 absences = automatic "D" for final grade
8 or more = automatic failure of course / "F" or "W"

NOTE:
2 Tardies = 1 Absence

Numeric Scale – Letter Grade Achieved

90 – 100 = **A** 80 – 89 = **B** 70 – 79 = **C** 60 – 69 = **D** below 60 = **F**

11. COURSE SCHEDULE:

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE – Summer 2026

Week	Date	Topic	Be ready to discuss:
1	M 6/ 8	a. Introductions, syllabus & course overview	(Get the books/ materials!)
		b. Critical Thinking Questions about Film c. Cinema/Film vs. Movies	Lecture / Discussion
	Tu 6/ 9	a. Basics Terms of Film Theory & Analysis - Film Language, Film Form, etc. - *Mise en scène*, etc.	Lecture / Discussion
		b. Movie Reviews - Thinking about the movie review - Details for the movie review presentations	Lecture / Discussion
	W 6/10	a. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1895-1918: A New Art Form]
		b. Movies and Stereotypes	* Limón: "Stereotyping…"
	Th 6/11	a. The Auteur Theory	* Goss: "The Auteur Theory"
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1918-1928: Triumph of Film]
	Fri 6/12	**Study Day: Prep time for Movie Review #1**	[due next week]
2	M 6/15	a. Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Film Music b. Narrative Music, Visuals & Meaning in Film	* Wingstedt/ Brandstrom/Berg
		c. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1918-32: Rebel Filmmakers]
	Tu 6/16	a. Genre Theory	* Benshoff: "Film/TV Genres"
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1930s: Great Movie Genres]
	W 6/17	**DUE: Movie Review #1**	**[in-class film reviews/ presentations]**
	Th 6/18	a. Feminist Film Criticism	* Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure…"
		b. *"Makers: Women in Hollywood"* (2014)	[documentary film]
	Fri 6/19	**QUIZ #1**	

3	M 6/22	a. Sonic Stereotypes/ Articulations of Music & Film	* Avant-Mier: "A Song for…"
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1953-1957: World Cinema]
	Tu 6/23	a. Horror Stylistics as Symbolism for Race	* Avant-Mier & Calafell
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1957-64: New, Modern Film]
	W 6/24	a. Cinema and Queer Theory - "(Broke) Back to the Mainstream"	* Benshoff: "Brokeback to…"
		b. Visual excerpts in film studies	
	Th 6/25	a. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1965-1969: New Waves]
		b. "The Hollywood War Machine"	* Boggs/Pollard: "Hollywood…"
	Fri 6/26	**Study Day: Prep time for Movie Review #2**	[due next week]
4	M 6/29	a. "We're No Longer Here/ Ya No Estoy Aquí"	* Avant-Mier: "We're No…"
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1967-79: New Am. Cinema]
	Tu 6/30	**DUE: Movie Review #2** **[in-class film reviews/ presentations]**	
	W 7/ 1	a. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1970s: Innovation in Culture]
		b. "New Hollywood, New Millennium"	* T. Schatz
	Th 7/ 2	a. "The Shape of 1999: Stylistics of U.S. Movies"	* B. Salt: "The Shape of…"
		b. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[1990s: First Days of Digital]
	Fri 7/ 3	a. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011)	[2000 Onwards]
		b. Film, Television, & the Postmodern	FTA (textbook), Ch. 9
	Mon 7/ 6	**QUIZ #2** (Final class day)	
	*** 7/ 9	GRADES DUE !	