

History Goes Hollywood
Honors 3020 DHA
Fall 2004: TR 1:30
RBW 214

Instructor

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Hours: T 11:45-1:30 and R 9:00-10:30
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Course Description

This course explores the history and theory of four major film genres: the Western, screwball comedy, *film noir*, and Alfred Hitchcock (a genre unto himself). For each genre, we will screen and discuss a few classics. Genre films are usually described as “formulaic” – a pejorative term, suggesting that they are predictable and conventional to the point of being dull. They are indeed formulaic, but this is precisely what makes them interesting. The films of a given genre stage and restage the same themes and conflicts, but each time they introduce a new variation on the theme and/or a new resolution to the conflict. In fact, genre films are rarely predictable, beyond the initial conventions of setting, plot, and characters. Film genres are like myths; they are stories we tell over and over again, stories which both reflect and shape our perception of the world.

Textbook

We will be reading *Film: An Introduction* (3rd edition), by William Phillips, available in the USU Bookstore. I will also assign supplemental readings, which I will distribute to you in class.

Films

Each week you will watch one or more assigned films. You may watch the films at your convenience in the SciTech Library; DVD copies are on reserve for this class. You may also, of course, rent the film from a local video store and watch it at home: all of the films in this course are widely available. In any case, be sure to view the film *before* we start discussing it in class.

Film Content

In class, we will be viewing clips from some R-rated films: these clips may contain some profanity, mild violence, and brief nudity. These clips are required viewing: please take this into consideration in deciding whether you wish to enroll in this course.

Exams

There are two in-class tests and one final exam in this course. The tests will ask objective (multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, definitions, etc.) questions about *Film: An Introduction*. The final exam will ask essay questions about the genres and films we've discussed. The tests are each worth 10% of your course grade; the final exam is worth 20%.

Essays

Over the course of the term, you will gradually write a long (8-10 pp.) critical research paper on one or two films. This paper, to be submitted at the end of the term, is worth 30% of your course grade. You will also write three short (2-3 page) papers, on a Western, a romantic comedy, and a *film noir*. Each short paper is worth 10% of your course grade. Details for these assignments will be forthcoming.

Class Participation

Your final grade will be adjusted one-third of a grade upward or downward (or not at all) based upon your class participation over the course of the term. Asking thoughtful questions and offering intelligent observations will improve your final grade; multiple absences, missed deadlines, or nodding off in class will harm your grade. Attendance alone—however perfect—is not enough; come to class with ideas to share and questions to ask.

Deadlines

The final essay will not be accepted late; the short essays will be penalized one full grade (B to C) for each day late. The tests and exams cannot be taken at any other time, except in the case of a medical emergency.

Attendance

Please be sure to sign the roll sheet each day; if you come to class late and miss the sheet, then be sure to sign it at the end of class, otherwise you risk being marked absent. Please do not disrupt the discussion by arriving late; frequently doing so will affect your grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the presentation of the words or ideas of other people as your own. This is an academic crime which will result in a failing grade for the course and possible further disciplinary action by the University (see the College of HASS statement below). If you have questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it by properly citing sources, please do talk with me before submitting your essays.

Plagiarism includes knowingly "representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one's own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials" (Code of Policies and Procedures for Students, Article V, Section 3A.1). The

penalties for plagiarism are severe. They include “#1) warning or reprimand and #2) grade adjustment” (see: Article VI, Section 1A): Other penalties may also be imposed at the Dean’s discretion. These include probation, suspension, expulsion, withholding of transcripts, denial or revocation of degrees, referral to psychological counseling, and other appropriate disciplinary actions.

Disability Accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities act states: “Reasonable accommodation will be provided for all persons with disabilities in order to ensure equal participation within the program.” If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of examinations, etc., must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in alternative format, large print, audio, diskette, or Braille.

Honors 3020 DHA: Discussion Schedule

Westerns

- Aug 31-Sep 2: *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)
Phillips, chapter 5: "Sources for the Fictional Film"
- Sep 7-9: *Stagecoach* (1939)
Phillips, chapter 6: "Aspects of the Fictional Film"
- Sep 14-16: *Red River* (1948)
Phillips, chapter 7: "Types of Fictional Films"
- Sep 21-23: *High Noon* (1952)
Phillips, chapter 9: "Understanding Films through Contexts"
- Sep 28-30: *The Searchers* (1956)
Phillips, chapter 10: "Thinking about Films"

Romantic Comedy

- Oct 5: Test on Phillips, chapters 5-7, 9-10
Oct 7: *It Happened One Night* (1934)
- Oct 12-14: *His Girl Friday* (1940) and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)
Phillips, chapter 1: "Mise en Scène"
- Oct 19-21: *Some Like It Hot* (1959)
Phillips, chapter 2: "Cinematography"

Film Noir

- Oct 26-28: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)
Phillips, chapter 3: "Editing"
- Nov 2-4: *Double Indemnity* (1944)
Phillips, chapter 4: "Sound"
- Nov 9: Test on Phillips, chapters 1-4
Nov 11: *The Third Man* (1949)
- Nov 16-18: *Touch of Evil* (1958)

Hitchcock

- Nov 23: *Rear Window* (1954)
- Nov 30-Dec 2: *Vertigo* (1958)
- Dec 7-9: *Psycho* (1960)