

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

- A. Division: Humanities
Department: Art
Course Title: History of American Cinema
Course I.D.: ART 110
Units: 3
Lecture: 3 Hours
Laboratory: None
Prerequisite: None
- B. Catalog Description: Covers the history and cultural influences of the American Cinema, including the origins of the motion picture, the rise and dominance of Hollywood, the decline of the Studio Era, and the emergence of the independent film. Topics include the historical context of the motion picture industry and its relevance to the contemporary viewer, the aesthetics of film, the director, and the studio system.
- C. Schedule Description: Covers the history and cultural influences of the American Cinema, including the origins of the motion picture, the rise and dominance of Hollywood, the decline of the Studio Era, and the emergence of the independent film.

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:

Upon completion of the course, the student should be able to:

- A. Identify major American cinematic works from the 19th century to the present
- B. Compare and contrast the styles and themes portrayed in a variety of films
- C. Evaluate and critique movies based on concepts discussed
- D. Distinguish between patterns and themes presented through study of film genres in history of cinema
- E. Critically respond to films from an historical as well as aesthetic perspective

IV. CONTENT:

- A. Film language and use of cinematic terms
1. Mise en scene
 - a) The frame
 - b) Lighting
 - c) Camera angle and composition
 - d) The long take
 - e) Editing
 - f) Use of music
 2. Story Structure
 - a) What makes a good story
 - b) Major Transitions (conflict, climax, resolution)
 3. Point of view and use of metaphor.
 4. Genre
 - a) Film noir
 - b) The western
 - c) Romantic comedy
 - d) Science fiction
 - e) Combat
- B. The role of the Director
1. Director as author
 2. Director as technician
 3. The use of the cinema to convey meaning.

4. The captive audience and the dynamics of drama.
- C. Overview of film history from its inception to contemporary times
 1. The silent era, from short film to the feature
 - a) Muybridge
 - b) Edison
 - c) Porter
 - d) Chaplin
 - e) Griffith
 - f) Cinematic terms: mise en scene
 2. The rise of the studio era
 - a) Hollywood
 - b) The Jazz Singer and sound
 - c) Capra
 - d) Wilder
 - e) John Huston
 - f) Cinematic Terms: long shot, long take, continuity, and the multiple camera shoot
 3. The Decline of the Studio
 - a) The rise of the independent
 - b) Hitchcock
 - c) Welles
 - d) Kazan
 - e) Censorship code
 - f) HUAC and the blacklist
 - g) Cinematic terms: Deep focus, the long take, dynamics of suspense
 4. From socially conscious to self conscious, perspective in the cinema: Nicholas Ray, Cassavetes, Roman Polanski.
 5. TV director and cinema, film school generation, independent film versus studio system: Scorsese, Coppola
- D. Understanding film structure (editing/storyline)
 1. Continuity and the shooting process
 2. Stages of production (pre-production, production, post-production)
 3. Vertical Integration: (production, distribution, exhibition)
- E. Basic understanding of film production
 1. Why Los Angeles become Hollywood
 2. Classic Hollywood style and the formula story
 3. The star system
 4. The business of art
- F. The studio system
 1. Talent imported / emigrated. (the director, acting talent)
 2. Influence of style, culture and aesthetics.
 3. The Impact of European culture and cinema on the American born director.
- G. Film genre
- H. The classical Hollywood style
- I. European influence on the American cinema

V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. Lectures
- B. Group discussion
- C. Critical analysis of videotapes and film clips

VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Write a 1-2 page paper based on a given topic. Example: Select and view a film from the list on the assignment sheet. Discuss the term "mise en scene" using the cinematic terms provided and discussed. The object of this exercise is to introduce the student to critical writing, to become familiar with terms used in writing about the

cinema, and to recognize the relative importance of the term "mise en scene" to the understanding of a director's work.

- B. Bi-weekly written assignments. In one page, briefly discuss one of the following:
1. Questions in relation to the reading material. Example: A significant aspect of the studio era was how a studio shaped and maintained its image. Discuss the unique characteristics of the five major studios and how this helped promote and market its films.
 2. Material found through researching links on the World Wide Web. Example: Go National Digital Library and research the photographs of E. Muybridge
<http://memory.coc>
 3. A specific social or significant event that impacted the motion picture industry and shaped the content of its output. Example: read the article posted on the course web page of Elia Kazan and the HUAC. How did the McCarthy era affect the Hollywood Film Industry?
- C. Write a 5-7 page paper: Choose a prominent American director from the assignment list. View two of their films. The paper must include a simple thesis statement, specific examples cited from films to support your thesis and a knowledge and use of cinematic terms. Discuss in detail one (or more) of the following:
1. How does the director develop the narrative (storyline)? What are the major transitions (conflict, climax, resolution)?
 2. How does the director develop his characters? What transitions do his main characters go through? Are there types of characters this director utilizes to tell the story? What point of view does the director portray?
 3. The director's use of style. There are many ways to approach a director's use of style. Aspects to consider are genre, editing or mise en scene. How are metaphor and symbol used?
 4. What position or statement is the director trying to promote on such general theses as:
 - a) The human condition
 - b) "Man's" relation to his fellow "man"
 - c) How are women portrayed? How is the issue of sex portrayed?
 - d) Philosophical, sociological, or ontological questions, such as:
 - i. What is man/woman's relationship to God?
 - ii. What responsibility does an individual have toward society?
 - iii. How does society shape, mold, develop or corrupt the individual?
 5. How is the director's personal philosophy reflected in the films? This requires some biographical research.
 6. The impact upon social and political trends at the time the film made.
 7. The historical significance of the work.
- D. Students are to view a total of 5 films over the semester. Each film is in relation to a written assignment. Each assignment has a number of choices, ranging from classic to contemporary work. All of the films are popular and can easily be found in a large local rental store (Hollywood Rental or Blockbuster). List of choices for the first assignment:
1. *The Informer* (1935), John Ford
 2. *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Orson Welles
 3. *Meet John Doe* (1941), Frank Capra
 4. *On the Waterfront* (1954), Elia Kazan
 5. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Nicholas Ray
 6. *Matewan* (1987), John Sayles
 7. *JFK* (1991), Oliver Stone

VII. EVALUATION(S):

- A. Methods of Evaluation
1. Students are evaluated on their ability to apply course concepts
 2. Sample test questions: What film elements reflect the Classical

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3. Quizzes to test comprehension of reading material and topics posted on course web page

B. Frequency of evaluation

1. 2 written papers

2. 1 midterm exam

3. 1 final exam

VIII. TYPICAL TEXT(S):

Belton, John. American Cinema / American Culture (1st ed), McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994.

(Although this book has not been revised since its initial copyright, it is an authoritative text and articulately covers the historical perspective addressed in this course.

Gianetti, Louis. Understanding Movies, Prentice Hall, 2001

Mast, Gerald. A Short History of the Movies, Longman, 2002

Balio, Tino. The American Film Industry, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985

This text is concise, economical, and covers historical material presented in class.

IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

Students must be willing and capable of renting and viewing videos/films outside of class at their own expense.