ENGLISH 353: Introduction to Film

Classes: MW 4:00-5:15, Bishop 105

Screenings: Tues. 6-8:30, Bishop 101

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## OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

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

* Recognize and analyze choices made in film design and production;
* Understand and describe films using language specific to the medium/industry;
* Situate individual films (considering style, genre, etc.) in relation to cinematic history;
* Demonstrate understanding of cinematic works in both writing and oral presentation.

To achieve these goals, we will screen and discuss works from the silent era through the present, including international, independent, and avant-garde filmmakers. We cannot achieve—and will not even attempt—a complete survey, but students should gain a broader sense of the influences and options available to filmmakers.

## REQUIRED FOR COURSE

* Willingness to analyze films actively rather than watching passively for entertainment
* Regular access to internet
* Reasonable degree of tolerance for potent language and images as well as controversial material

**PLEASE NOTE:** No textbooks are required for this class, because textbooks for “introduction to Film”—especially the best ones—are quite expensive, and much of the information provided in these books is readily available online. Keywords and contextual/historical information will be provided in lecture, so if you listen and take notes well, you should be fine; these will be supplemented with specific online websites. If you learn better with a textbook, however, you should be able to find a used copy of *Looking at Movies, Film Art: An Introduction,* or *Film Experience* online. You may also consider the much cheaper (and accordingly much less well illustrated) *Film Studies: An Introduction*. To be clear, **no** textbook can *substitute* for lecture: there is considerable disagreement about the meaning of some of these terms, so if you don’t pay attention, you won’t know how we’re approaching them for the purposes of our class.

## CLASSROOM CONDUCT

* While in class (including screenings) you are required to attend to and participate in lecture and discussion; you are **NOT** allowed to engage in texting or web surfing, private conversation, reading materials unrelated to class, “packing up” your belongings before class ends, or other distracting behaviors.
* In lecture/discussion classes, you may take notes on a computer. In screenings, you must use pen(cil) and paper.
* Inappropriate use of an electronic device will result in temporary loss of that device. (If you require access to your phone due to some kind of emergency, speak to the professor before class.)
* You are expected to uphold the University Creed (<http://www.olemiss.edu/info/creed.html>), particularly its clauses on civility, integrity, academic honesty, and academic freedom. You are encouraged to express your opinions about course materials—which can be disturbing—but remember that other members of the class share this right. Discussions—whether in-person or online—should be conducted both candidly and in a manner that demonstrates respect for every participant.
* It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individual basis, reasonable classroom accommodations to students who have verified disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact me to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. If you would like further information about the resources available from Student Disability Services, please contact them at 234 Martindale or 915-7128.
* The University of Mississippi does not allow food and drink in classrooms.
* This syllabus will be followed as closely as possible, but changes may occur if the need arises. You should be on Blackboard at least once a week for course assignments, so be alert to announcements!
* Policies stated on the syllabus are binding, and your continued enrollment in the course indicates your acceptance of these policies.

## GRADING

* Attendance is required. A total of more than three absences will lower your **final** grade by .4 (on a 4-pt. scale; e.g., from “B+” to “B”) for each class missed. Accordingly, **after a sufficient number of absences, your final grade will be reduced to 0.** Repeated tardiness or early departure will be recorded as absence. This policy does not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences: you are strongly advised to reserve your allotted absences for occasions when you need them. Please note that you are responsible for keeping track of your absences. Students who need to miss class for university-sponsored events or who experience a substantial health crisis must contact the professor as soon as reasonably possible upon learning of the situation.
* Presenting another’s work as your own is dishonorable and **will, if detected, result in a zero** **for the assignment AND a lowered grade for the course**. See section on “Citation and Plagiarism” below.
* This course follows the university’s +/- grading scale, wherein A=4, 3.7=A-, 3.3=B+, B=3, etc. The university does not recognize A+s, D+s or D-s, but we may use those designations on individual assignments.
* Percentage/letter conversions work as follows:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A+ = 97 073---> following letter equivalents:sis, t next week, the opposite is true. You would be wise to get started on 🡪100 | B+ = 87 🡪 90 | C+ = 77 🡪 80 | D+ = 67 🡪 70 |
| A = 93 🡪 97 | B = 83 🡪 87 | C = 73 🡪 77 | D = 63 🡪 67 |
| A- = 90 🡪 93 | B- = 80 🡪 83 | C- = 70 🡪 73 | D- = 60 🡪 63 |

* Grading rubrics for every kind of assignment—even quiz essays—will be posted on Blackboard on the “Information” page.
* Your course grade will be determined by a weighted average:
* Blackboard weekly exercises: 35%
* Participation (including screening notes): 10%
* Review exam: 10%
* Final exam: 15%
* Final project:
  + - Proposal: 5%
    - Presentation: 10%
    - Report: 15%

## CITATION AND PLAGIARISM

* Plagiarism involves representing someone else’s work as your own, whether through direct quotation or paraphrase. If you copy *either the ideas or the words* of a classmate, friend, book, or webpage—without citing that classmate, friend, book, or webpage—then you have plagiarized. Please be aware that the penalties for plagiarism are **worse** than for failing to submit an assignment, which simply earns a 0 (for 0 work done). Plagiarized assignments also earn a 0 (for 0 *honest* work done), but, in addition, other aspects of the student’s grade (participation, weekly worksets, or the final average, depending on the assignment and the extent of plagiarism) will be lowered, in order to reflect the serious infraction of academic integrity committed. Finally, all cases of plagiarism will be reported to the university’s Academic Discipline Committee. There will be no “redo” option.
* Please note that websites that aggregate reviews or other information about films often include identical prose: some bloggers may copy information from each other, but many of these are also simply copying statements put out by a studio’s marketing department—i.e., information that was *designed* to be copied. As a university student, you do not have that option: you are not only providing information about the film, but also demonstrating your skill and integrity in writing and research. Accordingly, you must *always* cite your sources, **and** you must *always* either paraphrase—that is, change the words used—or use quotation marks to indicate use of another’s prose.
* Citing your sources transforms the act of consulting others’ work: where plagiarism constitutes a failure of academic integrity, research constitutes an academic virtue! To use research productively, identify where you found the quote or idea, and then explain why you find it useful, interesting, confusing, or incorrect. At this point, you are obviously not stealing someone’s work, but rather engaging in intellectual conversation with it—an honorable and even impressive activity, one important goal of collegiate education.
* When citing sources in an essay, discussion forum or presentation, feel free simply to note the title or web address in parentheses at the end of a sentence. When citing external sources for a freestanding essay on Blackboard or in your final report, feel free either to use [MLA style](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/) (works cited plus parenthetical citation at the end of sentences that refer to the source) or endnotes (typical of [Chicago style](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)). Many websites provide helpful tips on formatting citations: Purdue’s *OWL* <<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>> is especially good.
* For a description of plagiarism and of the procedures involved in Academic Discipline, see university policy: <https://secure4.olemiss.edu/umpolicyopen/ShowDetails.jsp?istatPara=1&policyObjidPara=10817696>.

## BLACKBOARD EXERCISES

Almost every week, you will have a quiz, discussion forum, or short essay on Blackboard. With one exception, these are due on **Monday before class,** but you are *always welcome to submit your work earlier*! Each exercise will be worth a number of points specified online—usually about 8-12; your overall percentage on these exercises constitutes just over 1/3 of your grade. The goals here are:

* to ascertain your understanding of the concepts covered in that week’s reading and discussion,
* to provide you an opportunity to reflect on the film and share your interpretation,
* to enable you to teach each other through reading and sharing perspectives from diverse materials,
* to practice your analytic and writing skills, and
* to allow you to earn credit throughout the semester, so that your average doesn’t depend so heavily on your final exam.

**Quizzes** consist of multiple-choice and short-essay questions. For these, you may, of course, refer to your notes, lecture slides posted on Blackboard (which do not purport to be self-explanatory) and even materials you find online.

In a **forum**, you will **first** be asked to summarize a scholar’s perspective on a film or a particular issue and to share the ways in which you found it helpful or interesting. Summary is not as simple as it sounds: be careful to select both the author’s main points and the points that are most relevant to your interests, and be sure to convey them in ways your readers can understand. (You are welcome to quote, but sometimes a sentence out of context makes little sense to a reader, and you want your postings to be reader-friendly.) For **second section of the first two forums,** you’ll be required to read the posting of one of your classmates who wrote on a *different* scholar, and respond by saying:

* whether—and in what ways—that approach sounds similar to or different from the scholar you read and summarized;
* which of these two approaches sounds most compelling and why (or, if equally so, why).

**Short essays** are rather like a cross between the essay questions you will find on quizzes and initial forum postings: you will be asked a specific question, but you will also be given a choice of readings, one of which must be cited in your answer. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers: the goal is to demonstrate both analysis of the film (or a scene of the film) and engagement with a scholarly source, all in pursuit of a thoughtful response to an open-ended question. Here, as on quizzes and forums, you will be graded on style and grammar as well as analysis (though the latter is weighted more heavily). You aren’t required to use a particular format (with an introduction and conclusion, for instance), but clarity and professionalism (which includes citation of sources) are vital.

The rules above concerning citation and plagiarism apply to all of these assignments. In fact, one purpose of the forums and short essays (either free-standing or on quizzes) is to enable you to practice scholarly/public dialogue—quoting from and paraphrasing others’ work (both critics and your classmates) and then expressing your own supplementary or contrasting argument. You need to cite your sources clearly, not only to demonstrate your integrity but also so that readers can understand your position!

## PARTICIPATION

* In a class of this size, you have opportunities to participate in large-group discussion, but there are too many of you for me to demand extensive participation from everyone. So, for the most part, participation in those discussions constitutes its own reward, providing you the opportunity to resolve any questions you have or especially to be sure we address issues you care about. And you should speak up at least occasionally to those purposes!
* We will engage in occasional small-group discussions so that you can hear more thoroughly what your classmates think about these films: you always should come to class prepared to share your own opinions and questions.
* Because the goal of this class is to engage actively with films, as opposed to viewing them passively, I will provide you a handout with questions for each screening: fill it out and hand it to me before you leave. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers here: watching actively counts as a kind of participation, and you will get credit for providing thoughtful comments.
* After the first week, we will devote much of each Wednesday class to analysis of the film screened the night before. Be prepared to talk about how the film demonstrates concepts we have discussed already. How does it use various visual, aural, editing or performance techniques to create meaning or stimulate emotion?
* Obvious signs of disengagement with class activities—texting, reading other materials, etc.—will severely damage this portion of your average.

## EXAMS

Exams consist of a scene analysis and, in the case of the final, multiple choice questions (of the kind you will often see on quizzes) as well. For the scene analysis, you will provide a detailed description of the scene using appropriate terminology for its diverse technical features and interpreting their significance. Scenes will be shown at least twice during administration of the review exam. For the final, you may replay the scene at will, but you will need to complete the exam in three hours or less. You may use notes during your exams.

## FINAL PROJECT: PROPOSAL, PRESENTATION AND REPORT

For your final project, you will collaborate with a team of your choosing to propose a different film for my next offering of this course. **Please note that you cannot use films currently on the syllabus OR on the “Students’ Choice” list.** Groups should consist of 3-4 classmates. You are welcome to meet with me at any stage of this process; also, **groups are encouraged to meet with me**. I understand that “group work” presents distinct challenges, but you will navigate those for the rest of your life; meanwhile—not least because film is a collaborative medium—this course is well-suited to such projects. You will have the opportunity to indicate your contributions to each group project, but an impressive presentation and report will require successful cooperation on the part of every member. Please note, too, that each stage of this assignment will be crucially helpful in preparing the final report: save all your notes!

Choosing a film/group:

* Your film may be taken from any period or genre (excluding pornography); it must, however, be available in English or with English subtitles.
* You will find it easiest and most productive to select your group based on shared interests. Stay alert to the references that your peers make in class and in conversation! You may obviously create your group in person, but you can also use the “Groups” feature on our Blackboard site to develop a sense of who cares about what. If one of you creates a group labeled “thrillers,” for instance, and 6-7 students enroll, you can divide into groups devoted to two separate films. You could also use the discussion forum on Blackboard to generate ideas for a group.
* Please note that the size of the project depends on the number of group members: 9 minute presentations for groups of 3 vs. 12 minutes for groups of 4; 12 page reports for groups of 3 vs. 16 for groups of 4. Basically, larger groups can—and must—examine more aspects of the film under discussion.
* Here’s the fact: students who are proactive in organizing groups *always* do better on this than those who are left scrambling to find collaborators at the last minute. There may be some self-selection involved: proactive organizers may simply be more engaged in this class. Nonetheless, take note: if you want to do well, organize early.

Proposal:

* Your proposals must be submitted by April 1st. (Seriously!) They should include the following information:
* Names of group members
* Film chosen, along with release date and other technical information (director, studio, nation of origin, language and aspect ratio)
* Description (approximately 300 words) including genre and/or historical movement (if relevant), plot summary (for narrative films), subject/visual matter (for documentary or experimental films), or other important descriptive details.
* Reasons for choosing this film (200-300 words): what attracts group members to it? What aspect or potential of film will it enable future students to better understand?
* Aspects of film to be covered in presentation and report, along with reasons for focusing on these aspects (approximately 150 words). See below for possible choices; note that all reports must include research.
* Each of you should submit a copy of your group’s proposal on Blackboard, indicating your specific contributions to the document. (Did you draft or edit the description? Which conceptual contributions were yours? On what sections of the final report will you focus your energies?) You may show your particular involvement through added notes, “comments” or footnotes on the document, and/or textual highlighting.
* Proposals will be graded according to thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and clarity.

Presentation:

* On Monday and Tuesday, May 25th and 26th, each group will make one 9-12 minute presentation in which you:
* Introduce the film, including production information (director and studio or producer, year of release, major actors, nation of origin), genre and historical movement if relevant, and a brief description/summary of the film and initial responses to its release. (Did critics like it? Was it a blockbuster? Did it become a “cult film”?)
* Explain why it would constitute a productive contribution to the course. (You might consider any of the following questions: What does it introduce that is currently lacking? Would it be the only film of its kind on the syllabus? Why is this type of film useful to study? Would it showcase some aspect of film we aren’t currently viewing—or at least not in the way presented here? Does it represent a distinctive historical or aesthetic achievement?)
* Screen one brief scene (no more than 2 minutes) and explain how it demonstrates the film’s style, including particular attention to aspects of the film that would be important for students in this course.
* You are advised to divide the labor in this project, but any of the above sections of the presentation can be combined and/or shared among group participants.
* You are advised to use presentation software, and you will find the actual process of presenting more seamless if you can embed the clip to be shown and analyzed *in that presentation.* Such embedding can be achieved in recent versions of PowerPoint (2010 and later), Prezi, and possibly others. You can “rip” a clip—albeit not always precisely—by using the “record” function in VLC media player (free, open-source, downloadable, and available on many university computers). For other options, contact the IT Helpdesk.
* Presentations will be graded according to clarity, vigor, and thoughtfulness. Please note that the first two of these, especially, can be enhanced by careful design and organization of the material to be presented.
* Timing matters. A successful presentation requires 9-12 minutes (depending on group size), but groups should not take longer than that. Once you extend your allotted time by thirty seconds, you will be required to end immediately.
* Each of you **must** submit a brief statement on Blackboard describing your individual contribution to your group’s presentation. Files that contain video are usually too large to upload; you are advised to upload that file on Google Drive or Box—or to create it on Prezi—and include that link in your statement on Blackboard.
* You are required to attend the entirety of your presentation session, but you may skip the other session. This means, obviously, that groups presenting Monday can skip the Tuesday night session, which is much longer. Groups can volunteer to present on Monday: that option is first-come/first-served.

Report:

* By 5 pm on May 9, each of you must submit one copy of your group report, including documentation of your individual contributions.
* The report should consist of 12-16 pages (4 pages for each group member) in which you:

1. Describe critical and historical responses to the film. Include quotations from reviews and statistics from historical sources to demonstrate how critics and audiences more broadly responded to its initial release. What aspects of the film stirred the most controversy and/or debate? If the film has been important in the history of film scholarship, you should also include some of that material.
2. Establish and support your arguments for including this film in the course. Distinguish between diverse kinds of arguments:
   * Those that concern the structure of the course and the need for this particular kind of film. Such arguments will depend mainly on reasoning and your understanding of the course, but, to the extent that you argue the film represents something currently absent, that may require a bit of research.
   * Those that focus on technical qualities of—or rely on close analysis of—the film. (You might argue, for instance, that the film demonstrates some aspect of audiovisual design or editing in a particularly illuminating way, or that future students will respond to the way the film presents some aspect of plot or characterization.) These will constitute the bulk of your report, but they lend themselves to a productive division of labor: rather than having one student elucidate all aspects of one scene, sections of the report should be organized by *claims*—distinct *reasons* as to why the film should be chosen. Accordingly, individual students might effectively focus on individual claims/report sections. Note that research can be helpful for these arguments too, particularly concerning technical aspects of the film.

* You should find it helpful to organize your report in sections. However, you should also include an introduction and conclusion which clarifies the importance of each section and the overall argument.
* Attend closely to the need for research, which will play a significant role in distinguishing excellent from middling and even failing reports. Plagiarism, in particular, could fail every member of the group: don’t do it, and don’t let your teammates do it. (Note that reports will be analyzed through SafeAssign on Blackboard.) Keep in mind that no benefit can be gained from plagiarism—even if you aren’t caught—because one crucial method for demonstrating the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of your labor is to cite your sources.
* Among our university library’s [databases](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/files/dbases/alphabetical.html), the *International Index to the Performing Arts* is the most useful for film scholarship: it includes numerous full-text pieces including reviews, scholarly analyses, and interviews with persons involved in production (especially directors, editors and cinematographers). Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Project Muse should also prove helpful.
* Some popular internet sites usefully aggregate helpful scholarly information. For recent films, especially, you can find numerous reviews at [Rotten Tomatoes](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/); focus on reviews that appeared in newspapers or magazines. [Box Office Mojo](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/) and [IMDb](http://www.imdb.com/) also provide useful information regarding production and circulation.
* Reports will require a “Works Cited” list: you can find formatting information at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/06/> . You must format these entries correctly: that’s an important aspect of contemporary literacy. If you’d like some guidance about how to do that (automated programs can prove ineffective), please set up a meeting with the professor or TA.
* Reports must be typed and double-spaced. You may document your particular involvement through typed notes or written notes; you may also include textual highlighting.

## EXTRA CREDIT

For extra credit, you may submit one report on one film-related event.

* The report must be typed, double-spaced, and include at least 500 words (about 1.5 double-spaced pages). It must be submitted by April 25th. Email it to both [lduck@olemiss.edu](mailto:lduck@olemiss.edu) and [jfergus2@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:jfergus2@go.olemiss.edu). You can receive a maximum of 15 points added to your total number (as opposed to percentage) of points on Blackboard assignments; in other words, it would help to make up for a badly botched quiz or forum. If, however, you have aced your Blackboard assignments and need to make up points on an exam, this could help a bit in that regard as well, as all these sections of your score will ultimately be averaged according to the weights outlined above.
* A report on a new theatrical release does not count! Instead, you would need to attend a screening as part of the Oxford Film Festival (or another festival) or university programming; alternatively, you could attend a scholarly or professional lecture, workshop, or panel. The goal here is either to listen to some analysis of the film industry or its products OR to view a film less “mainstream” than those showing at the Malco.
* Your report should both describe and assess the film or event and assess it. What were its strengths? What insights did you gain from attending? How could the film or event have been improved?

## SCHEDULE

For screenings, allot the full length of the film + 10 minutes; for shorter films, we will finish before 8:30.

**M, 1/25** LECTURE: Introduction: *Mise-en-scène* + Cinematography 1

**T, 1/26** SCREENING:*The Night of the Hunter* (dir. Charles Naughton, 1955): 93 minutes

**W, 1/27** DISCUSSION

**M, 2/1** LECTURE: *Mise-en-scène* + Cinematography 2

**Due on Blackboard before class: Quiz 1, Introduction, and Survey**

**T, 2/2** SCREENING:*Rashomon* (dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1950): 88 minutes

**W, 2/3** DISCUSSION

**M, 2/8** LECTURE:Cinematography 3/Genre 1

**Quiz 2 due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 2/9** SCREENING:*The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956): 119 minutes

**W, 2/10** DISCUSSION

Your choice of readings from *The Searchers* portfolio (available via Blackboard)

**M, 2/15** LECTURE:Genre 2

**Forum 1 due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 2/16 STUDENTS’ CHOICE/TBA AFTER VOTE** (see form on Blackboard)

**W, 2/17** DISCUSSION

**M, 2/22** LECTURE:Editing 1

**Forum 1B due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 2/23** SCREENING:*Vertigo* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1958): 128 minutes

**W, 2/24** DISCUSSION

Your choice of readings from theportfolio on *Vertigo* (available via Blackboard)

**F, 2/26 Forum 2 due on Blackboard by “end of day” (that is, before a reasonable wake-up on Saturday)**

**M, 2/29** LECTURE:Editing 2

**Forum 2B due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 3/1** SCREENING: *City of God* (dir. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002): 130 minutes

**W, 3/2** DISCUSSION

**M, 3/7** LECTURE:Sound 1

**Quiz 3 (on Blackboard) due**

**T, 3/8** SCREENING:*Singin’ in the Rain* (dir. Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952): 103 minutes

**W, 3/9** DISCUSSION

**3/14-3/18 ENJOY SPRING BREAK!**

**M, 3/21** REVIEW

**T, 3/22** SCREENING: *Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1941): 119 minutes

**W, 3/23** DISCUSSION

**M, 3/28 REVIEW EXAM**

**T, 3/29** SCREENING: **JOSH-WADE’S CHOICE**

**W, 3/30** DISCUSSION

**F, 4/1 FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE**

**M, 4/4** LECTURE: Style, Spectacle, and Society

**T, 4/5 STUDENTS’ CHOICE/TBA AFTER VOTE** (see form on Blackboard)

**W, 4/6** DISCUSSION

Your choice of readings from this week’s portfolio on Blackboard.

**M, 4/11** LECTURE: Screens, Stories, and the Real World

**Short essay 1 due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 4/12** SCREENING:*Stories We Tell* (dir. Sarah Polley, 2013): 109 minutes

**W, 4/13** DISCUSSION

Your choice of readings from this week’s portfolio on Blackboard.

**M, 4/18** LECTURE: Race and Cinematic Representation

**Short essay 2 due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 4/19**  SCREENING: *Do the Right Thing* (dir. Spike Lee, 1989): 120 minutes

Your choice of readings from this week’s portfolio on Blackboard.

**W, 4/20** DISCUSSION

**M, 4/25** WORKSHOP: Presentations, papers, and film analysis

**Short essay 3 due on Blackboard before class**

**T, 4/26** SCREENING: **STUDENTS’ CHOICE/TBA AFTER VOTE** (see form on Blackboard)

**W, 4/27** DISCUSSION

**M, 5/2 PRESENTATIONS**

**T, 5/3 PRESENTATIONS**

**W, 5/4 FINAL REVIEW**

**M, 5/9 REPORTS DUE ON BLACKBOARD BY 5 pm!**

**F, 5/13 FINAL EXAM DUE ON BLACKBOARD BY 7 pm!** (I am petitioning the dean for an online exam for this class. If that is approved, the exam will be available by Monday morning: allot 3 hours for taking it. Here, as ever, plagiarism constitutes ground for failure. External sources, if cited, are welcome—but you’ll need to work fast if you go that route.)