

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **History of American Cinema: Film Appreciation**

#### **Course Description**

TA 120. History of American Cinema: Film Appreciation. 3 hours credit. This course will enable the student to develop a broad appreciation, insight and analytical understanding of motion pictures as one of the dominant art forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The student will be introduced to the history, vocabulary, principles, techniques and influences on the cinematic arts.

#### **Course Relevance**

Our society is becoming increasingly more dependent on moving visual media (TV, film, video, computers, and digital media) for both communication and entertainment. The advances in and accessibility to this media has created a huge "visual culture." As participants in this culture, we are now subjected to "visual coding" along with "social coding." An understanding of the history of these visual codes is important in order to critically evaluate visual material for its visual as well as its narrative content. The ability to critically evaluate the visual can increase aesthetic enjoyment of any viewing activity.

#### **Required Materials**

The instructor will provide handouts over relevant topics.

#### **Supplemental Materials**

Cook, David A. (1996). *A history of narrative film* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Scranton, PA: WW Norton and Co.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

The intention is for the student to be able to

1. Critically analyze representative sequences from any given film in the context of the film as a whole
2. Define standard film terminology
3. Define and discuss, within their historical context, formal and narrative elements of the classical Hollywood style

#### **Primary Learning PACT Skills that will be DEVELOPED and/or documented in this course**

Through the student's involvement in this course, he/she will develop his/her ability in the following primary PACT skill areas:

1. Critical Thinking
  - The student will analyze a variety of film sequences according to style and/or genre throughout the history of film.

2. Aesthetic Response
  - The student will evaluate the formal elements of film and apply language appropriate to the subject
3. Historical Interpretation
  - The student will evaluate the social, technological, and economic influences on the film industry

Secondary skills (developed but not documented):

Reading  
 Writing  
 Historical Interpretation

### **Major Summative Assessment Task(s)**

These learning outcomes and the primary Learning PACT skills will be demonstrated by

1. Completion of a written assignment analyzing three critical films in the history of American cinema. The paper will consider genre, historical milieu and formal cinematic elements.

### **Course Content**

- I. Themes – Key recurring concepts that run throughout this course:
  - A. Language
  - B. Historical context
- II. Issues – Key areas of conflict that must be understood in order to achieve the intended outcome:
  - A. The real world versus the film world
  - B. Censorship
- III. Concepts – Key concepts that must be understood to address the issues:
  - A. Historical context
  - B. Changes in film technology
  - C. The influence of the individual (director/producer/star)
- IV. Skills/Competencies – Actions that are essential to achieve the course outcomes:
  - A. Critical analysis
  - B. Writing skills
  - C. Collaborative skills
  - D. Aesthetics

### **Learning Units**

- I. The origins of film, 1888-1903
  - A. Invention and development
    1. Edison
    2. Dickson
    3. The French
  - B. From theatre to projected cinema
  - C. The development of the narrative
    1. Melies

- 2. Porter
- II. Film language
  - A. Cinematography
  - B. Editing
- III. The drive for increased film length and inter-frame narrative, 1904-1916
  - A. Early features
  - B. De Mille
    - 1. The Squaw Man
    - 2. The Virginian
  - C. Griffith
    - 1. The Clansman
    - 2. Intolerance
- IV. Expansion and Hollywood, the age of the silent film, 1917-1926
  - A. Creation of the studio system
  - B. Creation of the star system
    - 1. Fairbanks
    - 2. Chaplin
    - 3. Lloyd
    - 4. Keaton
    - 5. Chaney
- V. The conversion to sound, 1927-1931
  - A. Competing technologies
    - 1. Don Juan
    - 2. The Jazz Singer
    - 3. Noah's Ark
    - 4. The Unholy Three
    - 5. All Quiet on the Western Front
    - 6. Hell's Angels
  - B. Experimentation with wide-screen processes (70 mm)
    - 1. The Big Trail
    - 2. The Bat Whispers
  - C. Multiple language films
- VI. The American sound film, 1931-1939
  - A. The production code
  - B. The structure of the studio system
    - 1. Production chief
    - 2. Producer
  - C. Close examination of Hollywood films of 1939
- VII. American Cinema in the 1940's, 1940-1949
  - A. The coming of Orson Welles

- B. The impact of World War II
- C. The dissolution of the old studio system
- D. The ascendancy of the director as the key visionary
- E. Social relevance
- F. The beginnings of “Film Noir”

VIII. Chapterplays – weekly serials at the cinema

- A. Popularity
- B. Structure and style
- C. Studio units
  1. Republic
  2. Columbia

IX. Animated cartoons

- A. Development
- B. Structure and style
- C. Expansion
  1. Disney
  2. Fleischers

D. Feature-Length animated cartoons

X. Competition from television, 1950-1959

- A. New technologies
- B. The expansion of the epic film
- C. The agent and the contract system
- D. “Film Noir” at its peak

XI. The end of the studio system and the rise of independent production, 1960-1969

- A. Social relevance at its peak
  1. Psycho
  2. John Frankenheimer’s Conspiracy Trilogy (The Manchurian Candidate, Seven Days in May, and Seconds)
  3. Fail Safe
  4. In the Heat of the Night
  5. In Cold Blood
- B. Epic productions out-of-scale
- C. Acquisition of old studios by large corporations

XII. The rise of mass consumer American cinema, 1970-1979

- A. The easing corporate influence on productions
- B. Development of the “multiplex”
- C. Development of mass openings films
- D. The mass consumer film
- E. The necessity and expectations of the “blockbuster” film
  1. Superman
  2. Star Trek: The Motion Picture

**Learning Activities**

Teaching/learning activities designed to assist the student in achieving course objectives include: lectures, class discussions, viewing films (DVD, videotape, and/or videodiscs), tests, and written and oral critical responses to viewing and research assignments.

**Grade Determination**

The student's level of achievement in this course will be based on completion of assessment tasks, class participation and other activities as determined by the instructor.