

Linfield College, Portland Campus  
Division of Continuing Education: Adult Degree Program

**Communications 328: Introduction to Film**  
Winter 2003

Instructor: Nancy Breaux, Ph.D.

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I will always be available 30 - 45 minutes just prior to class; or by appt.

Course Dates and Times: Jan. 9, 10, 16, 17, 23, 24, 31

Friday classes: 6:00 - 9:30

Saturday classes: 9:00 - 5:00 (with a lunch break)

REQUIRED TEXTS REQUIRED TEXTS: Belton, J. (1994). *American Cinema/American Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. All films assigned and screened in class are also considered to be required texts in this class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: As an art form, an industry, and a system of representation and communication, American film is a complicated and influential element of American culture. This course will explore how Hollywood films work technically, artistically and culturally to reinforce and challenge America's national self-image.

We will begin with a profile of classical Hollywood cinema as a unique economic, industrial, aesthetic and cultural institution. We will explore the conventions of Hollywood narrative structure, the roles played by the studio system and the star system, and film genres in the creation of a body of work that functions not only as entertainment but as a portrait of the relationship between an American national identity and an industrialized mass culture that has slowly evolved over the past century. 3 credits.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: This course is designed to increase understanding of how the various elements of cinema production create meaningful experiences for an audience. This course will provide an overview of the historical developments of film, formal issues and technical considerations which have defined the art form of cinema. In the process of learning this material you are also encouraged to broaden your perspective as a film viewer, become more interrogating in your understanding of how movies create meaning, and deepen your appreciation for the diversity of experiences the cinema offers. Your goal will be to learn and effectively use vocabulary to discuss films, to become familiar with the basic issues of film as an evolutionary art form, to develop analytical skills in order to be able to ask meaningful questions not only about individual films but also about the various functions of cinema as cultural currency.

This course will be devoted largely to screening movies by directors who have made important contributions to the achievement of cinema. Great film classics will be viewed and discussed - films that are benchmarks of cinematic style, dramatic meaning, and poetic feeling. These films and filmmakers continue to advance the art of moviemaking and influence world cinema even today. We will learn from the masters about the expressive visual language of movies, how to see (or "read") film images, and how to arrive at meaning

in film. We will move on to close viewings – including shot-by-shot analyses – of important innovators, focusing on their various contributions and concerns, providing for an understanding of and appreciation for the art of film.

- ⌚ To gain a working knowledge of American film history, from the silent cinema to the present day;
- ⌚ To develop your cinematic literacy – to teach you to recognize and use the basic technical and critical vocabulary of motion pictures;
- ⌚ To understand how the technology of the cinema relates to film art;
- ⌚ To see and understand the place of Hollywood film in American popular culture;
- ⌚ To grasp a fundamental understanding of the economics of the film industry;
- ⌚ To understand the role of genre in American film history, and recognize how some of the most popular genres express American social and cultural tensions;
- ⌚ To develop a more sophisticated conception of “realism” as it relates to motion pictures;
- ⌚ To question your own role as a passive spectator, and increase your ability to watch films actively and critically.

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- ⌚ Attendance: Students are expected to attend all of every class meeting except for unusual and unavoidable circumstances. Your absence diminishes the classroom experience for the rest of the students, and missing even a single class will cause you to miss a substantial portion of course content. **If you are ill and unable to attend class I expect you to notify me prior to class and describe your plan for making up missed materials.** The approval of absences and the assignment of make-up work are entirely at my discretion. No make-up exams will be given except in the most extenuating circumstances.
- ⌚ Participation: You are expected to have completed the assigned readings before the class period for which it is scheduled, and be prepared to discuss this in class. The informed and active involvement of each student in class discussion is essential for a course of this kind. One’s physical presence in the classroom, while necessary, does not constitute participation.
- ⌚ Writing: This course includes a strong writing component. For nearly every film we screen I will require you to complete a 2-3 page reaction paper to be submitted the following class period. Additionally, I will also require you to produce two papers on current films viewed outside the class. This assignment will not be graded conventionally but is intended as an opportunity to express freely your own ideas and reactions, to gauge your own progress toward the course’s goals, and to allow an evaluation-free space for communication with me. In addition to a take-home midterm and a final exam to be written in class, you will also be required to write three 3-5 page Conflict Analysis Papers.
- ⌚ Late Work: Any assignment turned in late will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day of tardiness (from a B to a B- on day 1, B- to C+ on day 2, etc.) All assignments are due at the beginning of class. If you are remiss in turning in an assignment within the appropriate time limit, you will receive 0 points for that assignment.
- ⌚ Incompletes: A grade of Incomplete (I) is given only in emergency situations. The student must request an Incomplete in writing and must obtain permission. All uncompleted work must be completed within the time limits I set.
- ⌚ Academic honesty: Cheating and plagiarism (to use the words, images, or ideas of another as your own) will not be tolerated. Any student found to be engaging in either

of these activities at any point in the course will receive a failing grade for the course and may be subject to further college sanctions.

- ⌚ Assistance: If you find that you are having problems with the class – the papers, keeping up with reading, etc., please let me know. I am available and willing to help you, but I have to know about the problem while it is relevant and well before the end of the course.

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| GRADING: Reaction Papers (2 @ 15 pts each) | 25% |
| Quizzes (3 @ 20 pts each)                  | 35% |
| Final Exam                                 | 40% |

Grading Scale: I grade on a flat 10-point scale:

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|--------------|-----|
| 90-100       | = A |
| 80-89        | = B |
| 70-79        | = C |
| 60-69        | = D |
| 59 and below | = F |

I consider the following criteria in evaluating written work:

1. Major areas covered: (as appropriate) formal attributes of the film, narrative, directoral, technical, studio/industry considerations, social context, legacy
2. Appropriate support: the use of examples, comparisons, etc.
3. Composition and grammar: ideas are well organized and clearly developed, a thesis statement is evident and persuasively argued, appropriate grammatics and vocabulary are utilized
4. Professional presentation: essay is turned in in a timely fashion, is neatly and professionally presented
5. Documentation: I do not require research on any of these written assignments, but if you do refer to other works **you must appropriately cite any and all sources used.**

## COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

### Section I: The Hollywood Institution

Jan. 9 Topics: Introduction to the class, Hollywood as an institution – the studio system

Read: Chapters 1 and 4

Screen: *To Have and Have Not* ( Hawks)

Jan. 10 Topic: **Quiz #1**

The conventions of classical Hollywood style

Read: Chapter 3

Screen: *His Girl Friday* (Hawks), *Shadow of a Doubt* (Hitchcock)

Topics: Narrative structure and the star system

Read: Chapters 2 and 5

Screen: *Philadelphia Story* (Cukor)

