

MCOM 285.01 – FILM GENRES
SUNY Oneonta, Department of Communication & Media
Spring 2018

Class Meetings: Tuesday 5:30–8:00 PM, Fitzelle Hall 205

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Bottomley

Office: IRC B-9

Office Hours: Tuesday 4:00–5:30 PM, Thursday 1:00–2:30 PM, or by appointment

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Course Description

From the Undergraduate Catalog: “A study of representative examples of such film genres as the Western, comedy, gangster, social comment, musical, and science fiction. Content centers on the nature of their appeal and popularity, their relationship to the contemporary social scene and relative quality of individual films.” *Prerequisites: SoS or 3 s.h. THTR. or MCOM.*

When ordinary people talk about movies, one of the first things they discuss is genre – whether they realize it or not. Genre provides viewers with a set of expectations for cinematic texts. These classifications begin by defining texts broadly as funny or serious, scary or violent, conventional or experimental, and then move into more specific formal and textual traits. But what do these terms mean? How are genres determined, and why? Who defines them? How are they useful to audiences and/or the media industries? Exactly what expectations do they set up for viewers? Do they limit our range of interpretations? Are the designations stable? Why do they persist in a contemporary age of widespread genre hybridity? To answer these questions (and many more) this course will introduce you to film theory and criticism that examines the concept of genre. Focusing on Hollywood (i.e. American) cinema and other English-language narrative feature films, we will explore several distinct film genres such as the Western, horror, science fiction, the musical, film noir, melodrama, and different types of comedy (slapstick, romantic). To examine these genres we will study the theories of prominent film scholars and watch popular theatrically-distributed films to help us explore the different iterations of genre.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

- Interpret film and media texts with awareness of their basic orientation in the world
- Identify and understand the different theories, methodologies, and scholarly approaches to film genre analysis
- Understand the history of genre within the U.S. film industries and how genre functions economically and culturally as an industry practice
- Construct original oral and written arguments that evaluate the aesthetics, discourses, and ideologies of film texts using the evidence and tools of critical cultural analysis
- Use film examples to interrogate cultural patterns and assumptions about genre
- Participate in, and contribute to, the classroom dialogue with peers
- Use short writing assignments to question, clarify, and synthesize the class readings, screenings, and discussions

Required Materials

There is one required textbook for this course. It can be purchased on campus at Damascene Book Cellar or through online retailers such as Amazon for approximately \$45 brand new. Please bring this book with you to class each day:

Lester Friedman, David Desser, Sarah Kozloff, Martha P. Nochimson, and Stephen Prince, *An Introduction to Film Genres*, 1st edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

In addition, you must watch all of the assigned movies. You are responsible for finding 1.5 to 3 hours sometime during the week to watch the films on your own. It will be clearly evident through the journal, the classroom engagement activities, and the exams if you are not watching the assigned movies or reading along. In addition to watching the films closely and in their entirety, you should actively take notes either during or immediately after the viewing. You do not need to purchase DVD/Blu-ray or digital copies of the movies – they will be provided for streaming online via the Office 365 Stream app connected to your SUNY Oneonta user account.

Online Materials

The *myOneonta* Blackboard site contains the course page that you will use to check class news, upload electronic copies of most assignments, and track your grades. As much as possible, this is a paperless course. Films are available through Office 365 Stream.

Attendance

Class attendance is expected. Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of this course on the whole, as well as your own personal achievement in it. A good grade is difficult to achieve without regular attendance, since much of the material is based on an understanding of the lectures. Any class materials or notes are your responsibility, and as the instructor I am not obligated to provide lecture notes, video/slideshow presentations, or any other materials to you regardless of the reason for class absence. You are also responsible for everything that happens in class, including any announcements and exam or assignment overviews presented in the classroom. Ignorance of announced examination, assignment, and/or schedule changes will not be accepted as an excuse for incomplete work in this course.

Excessive absence will ultimately result in inferior academic achievement, including but not limited to an inability to fulfill the requirement of class participation. Students with excessive absences cannot earn full-credit on the Class Engagement portion of the course grade. Flagrant non-attendance – meaning missing 25% or more of the scheduled class meetings – will automatically receive a grade of zero (0) points on Class Engagement (grade letter “E”). **There are only 14 scheduled class meetings for this course, meaning absence from 3.5 or more classes equates to flagrant non-attendance.** Late arrival or early departure from a class meeting also qualifies as non-attendance. You must be on time for the start of each class period and leave no sooner than when you are dismissed. Coming to class after I finish attendance or leaving before I dismiss the class is an infraction; 3 such infractions equals 1 full absence. For these reasons, you are encouraged to speak with me promptly regarding any scheduling questions or concerns you may have about the course.

Excused absences are, of course, exempt from the above policies on excessive absence and flagrant non-attendance. As per the College Handbook policies, religious holidays, official university activities (field trips, intercollegiate athletics, etc.), serious illness or injury, jury duty, military leave, and the like are considered legitimate excused absences. **Absences are only excused with proper documentation.** For illnesses, this means providing documented authorization from a medical professional within one week of the absence. For all other absences, notify me in writing beforehand (via email); do not miss class and expect that your absence will be excused retroactively. Realize that giving me an excuse doesn't automatically mean the absence is excused; I will confirm whether the absence is accepted as excused. You will never be excused for work, including media production or schoolwork for another course.

Grading

Grades in this course are calculated on a 1,000-point scale. The breakdown is as follows:

<u>Grade Letter</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	930-1,000	93-100%
A-	900-929	90-92%
B+	870-899	87-89%
B	830-869	83-86%
B-	800-829	80-82%
C+	770-799	77-79%
C	730-769	73-76%
C-	700-729	70-72%
D+	670-699	67-69%
D	630-669	63-66%
D-	600-629	60-62%
E	0-599	59% and below

Your final grade in this course will be determined according to the following scale:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Percentage of Final Grade</u>
Class Engagement	150	15%
Screening & Reading Journal	200	20%
Research Paper/Project	200	20%
First Exam	150	15%
Second Exam	150	15%
Final Exam	150	15%

Each assignment will be evaluated based on the specific criteria outlined below and in the individual assignment sheets. Generally speaking, the letter grades translate as follows:

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work
B+/B	Average or above-average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	Needs improvement on ideas, argument, and follow-through
C & below	Fulfills only the bare minimum requirements and/or shows a rudimentary or incomplete understanding of the material

Assignments & Exams

Class Engagement (15%): Routinely throughout the semester, you will be called upon to participate in a variety of classroom activities. Sometimes these will be very short writing activities that'll prompt you to reflect on the day's lesson. Other times these will be cooperative learning exercises that'll invite you to work in teams to analyze a reading or clip. Occasionally these may be more traditional quizzes that'll assess your comprehension of key ideas and concepts from the class. In every case, your participation in these activities will produce something tangible that'll be collected and counted toward your Class Engagement assignment for the semester. Each item will be graded on a scale of check ("satisfactory"/B), check-minus ("unsatisfactory"/C), check-plus ("excellent"/A). Assignments with a check or check-plus grade will receive full credit. The exact number of these assignments will be determined over the course of the semester. However, you should expect a minimum of one of these Class Engagement activities per class meeting. Additional forms of Class Engagement include participating in classroom discussions and listening attentively. As noted above in the Attendance Policy, it is your academic achievement that is the basis for this grade, and thus you need to be both physically present in class and a truly active participant in the lesson in order to get credit for these Class Engagement assignments. Therefore, it's in your best interest to attend class regularly and always arrive prepared to participate constructively. There are no make-ups for missed assignments.

Screening & Reading Journal (20%): You are required to maintain an online journal via Blackboard in which you document your observations on the relation between the films screened in class and the topics covered in the assigned readings. For each week (i.e., each film and reading pairing), you are expected to write an entry of 400 words minimum (approximately one typewritten page in Word). These are meant to be brief, informal essays – they are essentially a refined version of your class notes. Nevertheless, the writing should be polished (full sentences, proper grammar, clearly organized, etc.) and the entries should not merely summarize the movie's plot nor recite analysis from the textbook and lectures. Rather, for each entry, your aim should be to synthesize one or two main points from the textbook and come up with at least one original, critical insight about the film. Feedback will not be given on each individual journal entry; they will be spot-checked every few weeks and assigned a point value (each one of the 8 graded entries being worth up to 25-points). There are 10 possible films you can write about, and your 8 highest scores will be counted toward the final assignment grade (i.e. the 2 lowest scores drop). Journals are due every Friday before midnight (11:59 PM).

Research Project (20%): Your choice of a written essay (5-7 pages), video essay (5+ minutes long), or other type of innovative multimedia project that presents a critical analysis of the use of genre in the marketing of a contemporary feature-length fiction film. You will select a film and research its casting, trailers, posters, advertisements, promotional campaigns, trade press reporting, and other "paratexts" to show how genre is used within the film industry and popular culture both to stabilize motion picture production and to make film texts legible to audiences. A fuller explanation of the assignment will be provided closer to the deadline.

First and Second Exams (15% each): There will be two take-home exams given during the regular semester. These will be multiple-choice exams administered online through Blackboard. They will be open book and open note tests; however, the exam sessions will be timed and you will only be permitted one attempt to answer each question. They will both be non-cumulative:

the First Exam emphasizing films and topics from Weeks 1-6 and the Second Exam emphasizing material from Weeks 7-12. Additional details to follow.

Final Exam (15%): During final exam week, there will be a cumulative exam covering material from across the entire semester. This will be a written exam featuring multiple essay questions. You will be given the examination questions in advance, and you will also be allowed to bring a crib sheet into the examination period containing notes for the test. Additional instructions and grading criteria will be provided at a later date.

Academic Dishonesty and Misconduct

According to SUNY Oneonta's Code of Student Conduct: "the term 'cheating' includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the College faculty or staff. The term 'plagiarism' includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. 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."

Academic dishonesty in this course will be addressed quickly and severely. If I find you responsible for misconduct, you will receive zero (0) points (grade letter "E") on the assignment and potentially an "E" for the entire course. A report of the incident will also be made to the Office of Community Standards and the Department of Communication & Media. For more information, refer to the College's Code of Student Conduct:

<http://www.oneonta.edu/communitystandards/documents/code.pdf>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability or any circumstance that may impact your ability to perform in this course, please speak with me privately as soon as possible. Disclosure of a disability is always voluntary. However, in order to receive official academic services such as testing accommodations, you are required to provide documentation of a disability to the Office of Accessibility Resources (607-436-2137). Students with pertinent documentation will be provided the necessary accommodations as determined by Accessibility Resources.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

If there is an emergency in Fizzle Hall during class time, the prolonged evacuation site (ES) is the IRC Lobby. In the case of an evacuation, be sure to assist persons with disabilities, including visually impaired persons, people with hearing limitations, people using crutches/canes/walkers, or anyone else who has difficulty leaving the building on their own. Other general evacuation procedures are outlined at:

<http://www.oneonta.edu/security/documents/EmergencyEvacuationProcedures.pdf>

Course Schedule

This schedule is a guide and it is subject to change. **All readings and films must be watched before the listed Tuesday (T) class meeting.** Unless announced otherwise, Screening & Reading Journal entries and Exams are due on Friday (F) before midnight (Friday 11:59 PM).

Week 1: Coming Attractions

T, January 23: First Class Meeting

Week 2: Opening Scene / Action

T, January 30: Understanding Film Genres

Read: "Introduction," pp. 1-31

Watch: *Die Hard* (1988, dir. John McTiernan)

F, February 2: Screening & Reading Journal #1 Due

Week 3: Slapstick Comedy

T, February 6: Slapstick Comedy

Read: "Slapstick Comedy," pp. 32-79

Watch: *Zoolander* (2001, dir. Ben Stiller)

F, February 9: Screening & Reading Journal #2 Due

Week 4: Melodrama

T, February 13: Melodrama

Read: "Melodrama," pp. 80-119

Watch: *The Notebook* (2004, dir. Nick Cassavetes)

F, February 16: Screening & Reading Journal #3 Due

Week 5: Western

T, February 20: Western

Read: "The Western," pp. 242-277

Watch: *3:10 to Yuma* (2007, dir. James Mangold)

F, February 23: Screening & Reading Journal #4 Due

Week 6: Musical

T, February 27: Musical

Read: "The Musical," pp. 200-241

Watch: *La La Land* (2016, dir. Damien Chazelle)

F, March 2: **First Exam Due**

Week 7: Spring Break

T, March 6: No Class

Week 8: Film Noir

T, March 13: Film Noir

Read: "Film Noir," pp. 484-519

Watch: *Memento* (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan)

F, March 16: Screening & Reading Journal #5 Due

Week 9: Gangster

T, March 20: Gangster

Read: "The Gangster Movie," pp. 406-445

Watch: *GoodFellas* (1990, dir. Martin Scorsese)

F, March 23: Screening & Reading Journal #6 Due

Week 10: Romantic Comedy and Fantasy

T, March 27: Romantic Comedy and Fantasy

Read: "Romantic Comedy," pp. 120-159 + "The Fantasy Film," pp. 160-199

Watch: *Groundhog Day* (1993, dir. Harold Ramis)

F, March 30: Screening & Reading Journal #7 Due

Week 11: Thriller

T, April 3: Thriller

Read: "The Thriller," pp. 520-560

Watch: *Zodiac* (2007, dir. David Fincher)

F, April 6: Screening & Reading Journal #8 Due

Week 12: Horror

T, April 10: Horror

Read: "The Horror Film," pp. 368-405

Watch: *IT* (2017, dir. Andrés Muschietti)

F, April 13: **Second Exam Due**

Week 13: Science Fiction

T, April 17: Science Fiction

Read: "Science Fiction," pp. 324-367

Watch: *Ex Machina* (2015, dir. Alex Garland)

F, April 20: Screening & Reading Journal #9 Due

Week 14: Social Problem

T, April 24: Social Problem

Read: "The Social-Problem Film," pp. 446-483

Watch: *Spotlight* (2015, dir. Tom McCarthy)

F, April 27: **Research Project Due**

Week 15: War

T, May 1: War

Read: "The Combat Movie," pp. 278-323

Watch: *Fury* (2014, dir. David Ayer)

W, May 2: Screening & Reading Journal #10 Due

Final Exam

T, May 8, 5:30–8:00 PM (regular classroom location: Fitzelle Hall 205)