

TCF 440/540 Seminar in American Cinema

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Catalog Course Description:

Study of selected topics in United States film. Writing proficiency is required for a passing grade in this course. (See [The University of Alabama Undergraduate Catalog](#).)

Prerequisites:

TCF112 or permission of the instructor.

Course Number, and Number of Credit Hours:

TCF440-001 or TCF 540-001, 3 credit hours.

Comments/queries: jbutler@ua.edu

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TCF 440/540 Seminar in American Cinema

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Course Objectives:

TCF 440/540 will familiarize the student with the three major critical methods applied to the American cinema: genre study, the auteur "theory," and the star "system." We will begin with the film noir, director Howard Hawks and actor Humphrey Bogart, and then, during the second half of the semester, turn our attention to the melodrama, director Douglas Sirk, and actress Lana Turner.

Our focus will shift back and forth from the primary texts (the films themselves) to the writings on them. The latter will eventually lead us into considerations of feminism, Marxism, structuralism and semiotics.

Instructor:

Jeremy Butler
Office: 430C Phifer
Office hours: M 3-5, W 4-5, & by appt. 348-6350

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Course Assignments:

The student's grade will depend upon four separate components:

1. An analytical exercise based on the principles discussed in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art*. Worth 10 points.
2. Three directed papers--assigned over the course of the first two months. These four-page (1200 word minimum) papers will respond to questions handed out in class and will deal with specific topics covered during a particular week. Questions will be handed out on a Wednesday and will be due the following week (see below for dates). At least one of these papers will be graded and returned before midterm. Each paper is worth 16 points for a total of 48 points.

Please see the handout, [Notes on Writing Film Analyses](#), for tips on preparing these papers.

These papers must be word processed and will be graded on the basis of conceptual rigor and fluency of writing style (i.e., grammar, spelling, etc.). Writing proficiency is required for a passing grade in this course. You are not expected to do extra research for these papers, but any references to sources other than yourself must be properly footnoted--see Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, fifth edition (NY: Modern Language Association, 1999) or a similar style book. This includes references to Websites and the course readings. To quote or paraphrase without citation constitutes academic misconduct.

The paper grading will include suggestions for improving your writing. Students who are concerned about their writing style are urged to come in during office hours to discuss their work in more detail. In addition, style guides will be available in the instructor's office--as well as in the reference room of the main library.

3. One ten-page (3000 word minimum) research paper. This paper will take one film and analyze it in the context of its genre, director, or major star--using the principles learned in class. The film chosen may not be a film noir or a melodrama, directed by Howard Hawks or Douglas Sirk, or star Humphrey Bogart or Lana Turner. This paper is worth 30 points and will be due Monday, May 3rd, 4:45 p.m., in my mailbox in the TCF Office, 484 Phifer Hall.

As with the directed papers, this project must be word-processed and will be graded based on conceptual rigor and fluency of writing style. This paper should involve outside research. Any use of outside sources must be properly footnoted. A bibliography and a filmography (that is, the credits for the film analyzed) must be provided. (One online source for credits is the Internet Movie Database: us.imdb.com . See links below to credits for films used in class.)

Search IMDb for:

Movie Person

[More search options](#)

Powered by www.IMDb.com

4. An open book, open note final exam--worth 12 points. The final exam period is Thursday, May 6th, 8:00-10:30 a.m. No early exams will be given.

Additional Requirements for Graduate Students

Beyond the requirements for undergraduates, the grad student must lead one discussion (worth 3 points). The directed papers should be five pages (1500 words) instead of four (worth 15 points), and the final paper should be 13 pages instead of 10.

Screenings & Credits:

All films will be shown on videotape/DVD in class. There will be no other class screenings of the programs, but copies of most films will be placed on reserve in the CIS Reading Room. Also, local video stores do carry a few of the titles, and two or three of them are available in the audio-visual section of the Gorgas Library.

Credits are available from the [Internet Movie Database](#). Follow the links below to find credits.





Grading

















Grades will be posted online.

Grading scale:

A+	97-100	C+	77-79	F	59 and below
A	93-96	C	73-76		
A-	90-92	C-	70-72		
B+	87-89	D+	67-69		
B	83-86	D	63-66		
B-	80-82	D-	60-62		

Course Calendar (subject to changes announced in class):

Date	Topic/Screening	Readings
1/7	Introduction to the Course Ordinary People (Redford, 1980; 124 min.)	
1/12	Film Analysis: Narrative Form	Bordwell/Thompson (chs. 2, 3)
1/14	Film Analysis: Classical Style  The Lady from Shanghai (Welles, 1947)	Bordwell/Thompson (chs. 6, 7)
1/19	 No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Why not read King's " I Have a Dream " or " Letter from the Birmingham Jail " today?	
1/21	Film Analysis: Editing  Ball of Fire (Hawks, 1941)	Bordwell/Thompson (ch. 8)
1/26	Film Analysis: Sound	Bordwell/Thompson (ch. 9)
1/28	11:00: Discussion and *Analytical Exercise Due* 7:00: The Concept of Genre The Maltese Falcon (Huston, 1941) The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (excerpt, Wiene, 1920) Le Jour se Lève (excerpt, Carné, 1939; Gorgas VCR 84-24)	
2/2	Discussion	Kitses (6-27), Buscombe (33-45), Collins (157-163)
2/4	Film Noir as Genre  The Grifters (Frears, 1991)	
2/9	Discussion	Silver & Ursini (17-26, 37-52, 53-64, 65-76)

2/11	The Concept of Authorship  Only Angels Have Wings (Hawks , 1939) *Assignment One Due* (see Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips)	
2/16	Discussion	Caughie (9-16, 22-67)
2/18	Howard Hawks as Auteur Red River (Hawks , 1948; 133 min.)	
2/23	Discussion	Sarris (on Hawks, 52-56), Caughie (138-151), Hillier & Wollen (26-31, 32-34, 68-71, 83-86, 111-119)
2/25	Noir & Sexuality: Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation *Assignment Two Due* (see Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips) Double Indemnity (Wilder , 1944)	
3/1	Discussion	Place (47-68), Spicer (84-104), Dyer (52-72)
3/3	The Concept of Star  Dark Victory (Goulding , 1939)	
3/8	Discussion 	Dyer (Stars, 106-50; recommended: 88-105)
3/10	Humphrey Bogart as Star The African Queen (Huston, 1951)	
3/15	Discussion	Sklar (104-120, 165-176, 227-251)
3/17	Domestic Melodrama as Genre  *Assignment Three Due* (see Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips) Imitation of Life (Stahl , 1934)  	
3/22	Discussion	Haskell (153-188)
3/24	Domestic Melodrama Since World War II  Terms of Endearment (Brooks , 1983; 132 min.)	
3/26-4/2	Spring Break	
4/5	Discussion	Gledhill (5-39), Elsaesser (43-69)
4/7	Melodrama Variations: TV Soap Opera  *Research Paper Topics Due* Backstage Wife/ As the World Turns (CBS, 1956-) 	
4/12	Discussion   	Butler ("Apparatus," 53-70), Butler ("Actors," 75-91)
4/14	Douglas Sirk as Auteur  Imitation of Life (Sirk , 1959) 	
4/19	Discussion	Sarris (on Sirk, 109-110), Fischer (3-28, 268-272); recommended: Doherty (online)
4/21	Lana Turner as Star  The Bad and the Beautiful (Minnelli , 1952) 	
4/26	Discussion	Dyer (30-52) [Also in Fischer (186-206)]
4/28	Discussion: Course Summary Mildred Pierce (Curtiz , 1945)	

5/3	Monday, 4:45 p.m., TCF Office, 484 Phifer Hall ** Research Paper Due** (see Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips)	
5/6	Thursday, May 6th, 8:00-10:30 a.m. ** FINAL EXAM**	

Texts/Resources

Available at Local Bookstores



1. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Seventh Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003). Additional resources are available on its [companion Website](#).
2. John Caughie, ed., *Theories of Authorship* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
3. Richard Dyer, *Stars*, Second Edition, Supplementary Chapter by Paul McDonald (London: British Film Institute, 1998).
4. Recommended, not required: Lucy Fischer, ed., *Imitation of Life: Douglas Sirk, Director* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

Available at Supe Store

In order of assignment.

1. Jim Kitses, *Horizons West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) 6-27.
2. Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," *Screen*, 11.2 (1970): 33-45.
3. Richard Collins, "Genre: A Reply to Ed Buscombe," *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 157-163.
4. Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight, 1996).
5. Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973) 52-56, 109-110.
6. Jim Hillier and Peter Wollen, eds., *Howard Hawks American Artist* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).
7. Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1998) 47-68.
8. Richard Dyer, "Homosexuality and Film Noir," *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 52-72.
9. Robert Sklar, *City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
10. Molly Haskell, "The Woman's Film," in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Penguin, 1974) 153-188.
11. Christine Gledhill, "The Melodrama Field: An Investigation," *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987) 5-39.
12. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987) 43-69.
13. Jeremy G. Butler, "Notes on the Soap Opera Apparatus: Televisual Style and AS THE WORLD TURNS," *Cinema Journal*, 25.3 (1986): 53-70.
14. Jeremy G. Butler, "'I'm Not a Doctor, But I Play One on TV': Characters, Actors, and Acting in Television Soap Opera," *Cinema Journal* 30.4 (1991): 75-91.
15. Lucy Fischer, "Three-Way Mirror: Imitation of Life," *Imitation of Life: Douglas Sirk, Director* ed. Lucy Fischer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press) 3-28.
16. Paul Willemen, "Distanciation and Douglas Sirk," *Imitation of Life: Douglas Sirk, Director*, 268-272.
17. Recommended, not required: Thomas Doherty, "Douglas Sirk: Magnificent Obsession," *The Chronicle Review*, 49, no. 12 (November 15, 2002), p. B16. [Available online](#).
18. Richard Dyer, "Four Films of Lana Turner," *Movie* 25: 30-52.

Note: The above listings follow the guidelines for footnotes specified in Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, fifth edition (NY: Modern Language Association, 1999). Citations in a

bibliography use a slightly different format. You must use the MLA or another recognized style guide when creating citations in your papers. For the MLA guidelines for Web or other online citations, [click here](#).

Attendance Policy:

Each absence beyond four for the semester will result in one point being deducted from your final total. (Up to five points may be deducted.)

Cell-Phone Policy:



Cell phones must be turned off during classtime. Students who leave class to take a phone call will be counted absent for that day.

Disabilities Accommodation Policy:

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services, 348-4285. Thereafter, you are invited to schedule appointments to see me during my office hours to discuss accommodations and other special needs.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

All acts of dishonesty in any work constitute academic misconduct. The Code of Academic Conduct and Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedures will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

GPA Requirements:

The College of Communication & Information Sciences requires that all students enrolled in upper division courses (300/400 level) have a 2.0 GPA overall. Students who do not have the 2.0 GPA may be administratively disenrolled on the first day of class.

College of Communication & Information Sciences majors must earn a "C" or better in all required and elective courses in their major. A "C" or better is required in all external courses required by the major whether they serve as a prerequisite to a major course or are simply required by the major. This means a "C" of any kind.

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