

# 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.

## Companion Website:

[www.tcf.ua.edu/classes/Jbutler/T440/s06](http://www.tcf.ua.edu/classes/Jbutler/T440/s06)

## Easy-to-Print Syllabus:

[Click here](#) for a syllabus that's formatted for printing. It's in PDF format, which requires the free [Adobe Reader](#).

Comments: [jbutler@ua.edu](mailto:jbutler@ua.edu)

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### Course Objectives:

The student will learn 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

jbutler (at) ua.edu  
[www.tcf.ua.edu/jbutler](http://www.tcf.ua.edu/jbutler)

### 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. Also, Diana Hacker, author of *Research and Documentation in the Electronic Age*, provides a Website with numerous tips on [documenting sources](#).

#### **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 of exam week, 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](http://us.imdb.com) . See links below to credits for films used in class.)

4. Two open book, open note exams--worth 6 points each. No early exams will be given.

5. Participation in the [discussion groups](#) and an online project is worth three points.

#### Additional Requirements for Graduate Students

Beyond the requirements for undergraduates, grad students must lead an undergraduate discussion group (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 on the TCF Grades Website, if you have given us written permission to do so. Grades are available **only through this link**. Grades are *not* posted on the UA testing services Website.














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
1/11	<i>Introduction to the Course</i> <a href="#">Ordinary People</a> (Redford, 1980; 124 min.) 	
1/16	 <b>No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</b> Why not read King's " <a href="#">I Have a Dream</a> " or " <a href="#">Letter from the Birmingham Jail</a> " today?	
1/18	<i>Film Analysis: Narrative Form</i> <a href="#">Out of the Past</a> (Tourneur, 1947) 	Bordwell/Thompson (chs. 2, 3)
1/23	<i>Film Analysis: Classical Style</i> 	Bordwell/Thompson (chs. 6, 7) 
1/25	<i>Film Analysis: Editing</i>  <a href="#">Ball of Fire</a> (Hawks, 1941)	Bordwell/Thompson (ch. 8) 
1/30	<i>Film Analysis: Sound</i> 	Bordwell/Thompson (ch. 9) 

2/1	<p><b>11:00: Discussion and *Analytical Exercise Due*</b></p>  <p><b>7:00: The Concept of Genre</b>  <a href="#">The Maltese Falcon</a> (Huston, 1941)    <a href="#">The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari</a> (excerpt, Wiene, 1920)   <a href="#">Le Jour se Lève</a> (excerpt, Carné, 1939; Gorgas VCR 84-24) </p>	
2/6	Discussion	Kitses (6-27), Buscombe (33-45), Collins (157-163)
2/8	<p>Film Noir as Genre </p> <p><a href="#">The Grifters</a> (Frears, 1990) </p>	
2/13	Discussion	Silver & Ursini (17-26, 37-52, 53-64, 65-76)
2/15	<p><a href="#">To Have and Have Not</a> (Hawks, 1944)  <a href="#">Only Angels Have Wings</a> (Hawks, 1939)  <b>*Assignment One Due* (see <a href="#">Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips</a>)</b></p>	
2/20	<p>The Concept of Authorship </p> <p>Discussion</p>	Caughie (9-16, 22-67)
2/22	<p>Howard Hawks as Auteur </p> <p><a href="#">Red River</a> (Hawks, 1948; 133 min.)</p>	
2/27	Discussion	Sarris (on Hawks, 52-56), Caughie (138-151), Hillier & Wollen (26-31, 32-34, 68-71, 83-86, 111-119)
3/1	<p>Noir &amp; Sexuality: Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation  <b>*Assignment Two Due* (see <a href="#">Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips</a>)</b>  <a href="#">Double Indemnity</a> (Wilder, 1944)</p>	
3/6	Discussion 	Place (47-68), Dyer (52-72)
3/8	<p>The Concept of Star </p> <p><a href="#">Dark Victory</a> (excerpt, Goulding, 1939)  <a href="#">The Petrified Forest</a> (Mayo, 1936) </p>	
3/13	Discussion 	Dyer ( <i>Stars</i> , 106-50; recommended: 88-105)
3/15	<p>Humphrey Bogart as Star </p> <p><a href="#">The African Queen</a> (Huston, 1951)  </p>	
3/20-24	<b>Spring Break</b>	
3/27	Discussion	Sklar (104-120, 165-176, 227-251)
3/29	<p>Domestic Melodrama as Genre </p> <p><b>*Assignment Three Due* (see <a href="#">Notes on Writing Film Analyses for tips</a>)</b>  <a href="#">Imitation of Life</a> (Stahl, 1934)    <b>Recommended:</b> <a href="#">Far From Heaven</a> (Haynes, 2002),  2:00 Phifer 216</p>	

4/3	<b>** Midterm Exam **</b> Covers film noir, Howard Hawks, and Humphrey Bogart	
4/5	<i>Domestic Melodrama Since World War II</i>  <a href="#">Terms of Endearment</a> (Brooks, 1983; 132 min.) 	Haskell (153-188)
4/10	<i>Discussion</i>	Gledhill (5-39), Elsaesser (43-69)
4/12	<i>Melodrama Variations: TV Soap Opera</i>  <b>* Research Paper Topics Due *</b> <i>Backstage Wife/As the World Turns</i> (CBS, 1956-) 	
4/17	<i>Discussion</i>   	Butler ("Apparatus," 53-70), Butler ("Actors," 75-91)
4/19	<i>Douglas Sirk as Auteur</i>   <a href="#">Imitation of Life</a> (Sirk, 1959) 	
4/24	<i>Discussion</i>	Sarris (on Sirk, 109-110), Fischer (3-28, 268-272); recommended: Doherty ( <a href="#">online</a> )
4/26	<i>Lana Turner as Star</i>  <a href="#">The Bad and the Beautiful</a> (Minnelli, 1952) 	
5/1	<i>Discussion</i> 	Dyer (30-52) [Also in Fischer (186-206)]
TBA	<b>Recommended:</b> Student Video Festival, Bama Theatre, 7:00 p.m., free.	
5/3	<i>Discussion: Course Summary</i> <a href="#">Mildred Pierce</a> (Curtiz, 1945)	
5/8 Mon.	<b>** Final Paper Due **</b> <b>4:45 p.m., my mailbox, TCF Office</b>	
5/10 Wed.	<b>** Final Exam **</b> <b>8:00- 10:30 a.m.</b> Covers melodrama, Douglas Sirk, and Lana Turner	

## 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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Comments: [jbutler@ua.edu](mailto:jbutler@ua.edu)

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