Introduction to Film Studies

One way of understanding better what a film is trying to say is to know how it is saying it.

--André Bazin

In the Preface to Understanding Movies, Louis Giannetti writes that “cineliteracy is long overdue in American education.” Between television and movies, we spend a lot of time watching moving images, but, as Giannetti points out, we tend to watch them “uncritically, passively, allowing them to wash over us, rarely analyzing how they work on us, how they shape our values.” This course is a first step in understanding not only what movies communicate but also how movies communicate.

Our goals here include:
- becoming more active, intelligent readers of the film text;
- understanding the complex, intricate relationship between content and form in movies;
- interpreting the messages that both reflect our culture and shape our behaviors;
- and analyzing why we respond to these moving images the way we do.

All films are a synthesis of a series of language systems which include photography, mise en scène, movement, editing, sound, acting, sets and costumes, narrative structure, writing, ideology, and theory. This semester, we will explore each of these language systems and learn how to synthesize them in order to analyze how any movie works as a complex aesthetic entity. Through lecture, reading, discussion, and screening of films, you will become more informed and sophisticated observers of the cinema.

Required texts:
Written—Understanding Movies, Giannetti, 13th ed.
Films— Anni Hall
Bowling for Columbine
Citizen Kane
A Hard Day’s Night
Kung Fu Hustle
The Maltese Falcon
Memento
Raging Bull
A Raisin in the Sun
A Room with a View

LOTS of clips from various films
Required work:
Your participation is essential for the success of this course, so come to class having completed the reading (and perhaps viewing) assignments, ready for thoughtful discussion.
Short quizzes will be given on a regular basis, covering readings, lectures, discussions, and viewings. You will also take a midterm exam. In addition to short writing assignments and in-depth discussions about the films we watch, you will also work in teams to write a paper that synthesizes some of the cinematic language systems used in a 3-5 minute clip from an approved film of your choice. Your team will then present its analysis during the final period.

Grading:
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Misc. assignments</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
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“The Golden Rules”:

- Westminster students are expected to attend all classes, unless specifically excused for some exceptional reason.

- Cell phones must be turned off and put away before I begin class.

- If you must miss a film screening, you are responsible for finding a copy of the movie and watching it before the next class period. I cannot lend my copies to students for personal viewing.

- All assignments must be completed on time in order to pass this course.

- There are no make-ups on quizzes or exams, unless you have been excused by me from that class, in advance.

- Turning in someone else’s work as your own, whether it is a published text or a roommate’s research paper, constitutes plagiarism and will be punished according to the rules laid out in the Student Handbook.
**Tentative Reading/Film Schedule:**

**Week 1**
8/29-8/31  Intro to course
**Week 2**
9/5-9/7  Ch. 1 (Photography)  *Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Huston*
**Week 3**
9/12-9/14  Ch. 2 (Mise en Scène)  *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), *Chow*
**Week 4**
9/19-9/21  Ch. 3 (Movement)  *Memento* (2000), *Nolan*
**Week 5**
9/26-9/28  Ch. 4 (Editing)  *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), *Lester*
**Week 6**
10/3-10/5  Ch. 5 (Sound)  *Raging Bull*, (1980), *Scorsese*
**Week 7**
10/10-10/12  Ch. 6 (Acting)  *Raisin in the Sun*, (1961), *Petrie*
**Week 8**
10/17-10/19  Project conferences  Midterm exam
**Week 9**
10/26  Fall Break
**Week 10**
10/31-11/2  Ch. 8 (Story)  *A Room with a View*, (1985), *Ivory*
**Week 11**
11/7-11/9  Ch. 9 (Writing)  *Bowling for Columbine*, (2002), *Moore*
**Week 12**
11/14-11/16  Ch. 10 (Ideology)  *Annie Hall*, (1977), *Allen*
**Week 13**
11/21  Ch. 11 (Criticism)  Thanksgiving break
Week 14
11/28-11/30  *Citizen Kane*, (1941), Welles

Week 15  Last day of classes
12/5-12/7

Finals Week  Final project presentations

*All dates are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.*