

ENGL 2173: Introduction to Film

Dr. Scott O'Neil

Course Times: MW, 11:00-12:20

Course Location: Witherspoon 126

Office Hours: T/R 12:30-2:30 and by appointment

Office Location: Witherspoon Hall 146 (and via WebEx Teams)

E-mail: soneil@atu.edu

Description and Objectives

This course is officially listed as: "A study of film as an art form with particular attention given to genres, stylistic technique and film's relation to popular culture." It is that, but also more. We are living in a moment of cinematic transition, as movie theaters are beginning to give way to home projectors, streaming services, and telephone screens. Big studios are beginning to make way for independent productions, original streaming content, and *YouTube* films. "Film" is in flux. And in this class, we will explore that in all its messy glory. In order to do that effectively, we must first establish a shared foundation. As such, we will be focusing on genre, technique, and popular culture. We will also work to construct a basic film vocabulary and an understanding of major events in film history. We will work on the various ways that a person can analyze films, gaining practice nearly every class meeting. By the end of the semester, the goal is that you will all be able to engage in serious discussion about cinema without resorting to overly basic, Siskel and Eberterian mode of thumb raising.

Required Texts:

- *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Fifth Edition), by Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White.
- *Turning Points in Film History* by Andrew J. Rausch.

All other texts and some secondary readings will be available through our course Blackboard page or (in the case of several videos) linked to our class page on my professional website:

<https://www.therenaivalist.com/film.html>

PW: RobertArmin

Assignments and Grading

Your final grade in the course will be calculated as follows:

- 20% -- Participation/Preparedness (including Blackboard Dynamic Notes)
- 15% -- Short Responses (3 total)
- 25% -- Midterm
- 10% -- Final Project narrative (3-5 pages)
- 25% -- Final Project
- 5% -- Final Project "Wow Factor"

Reading and Participation/Preparedness

The reading for each day is listed below on the syllabus next to the appropriate dates; please read, annotate, and think about the reading before the start of class. I would encourage you to bring notes or thoughts with you to facilitate discussion. Usually, the films listed are films that I will be showing/discussing in class. I will let you know if there are any films you need to watch *before* class.

In order for us to have fruitful class discussions, all students are expected to come to class willing and eager to engage with each other and the course material. Continued failure to do so may affect your final grade in the course. Good discussion can come in many forms, but everyone should be prepared to ask anything (without hand-raising) and anyone can answer. Classroom discussions often can have one focus—the professor—but I want us to be a community of multiple voices and conversations, so that we can all learn from each other.

You will also keep a running “dynamic notes” thread in the discussion board throughout the semester. This should take the form of an ongoing thread in the Discussion Board forum on our Blackboard page. Start a discussion with your name in the title, and add responses to that thread throughout the semester, reacting to the texts that we read.

Short Responses

Review, Classic Characteristic, and Revisiting Childhood

Short responses should be at least one full page in length (typed/double spaced, NO header—just your name, then *one* space, and write to the end of the page) and no more than two full pages in length. There are three prompts for short responses: Film Review, Analysis of a “classic,” and Childhood Re-visited. I do not care which order you complete them in, but you must complete all three by the end of the semester. Short responses are due in the 5th, 10th, and 15th week of the semester (see course calendar).

Midterm

The Midterm will be largely focused on the vocabulary and the film history components of the course. Homage will also be the topic for an essay question.

Final Project and Final Project Narrative

Instead of a final paper or a final exam, we will be completing a multi-part final project. The goal of this project is to plan a three-day film festival comprised of a total of five films. Your festival needs to be organized in some way—a website, a program, etc. You will be creating:

- Opening remarks, in which you “define” your film festival.
- An introduction for a screening of one of your films.
- A review of one of your films.
- A 5-minute expert commentary track for one of your films.
- A “Wow Factor” (more on this in class).

Your project will also include a final project narrative, which is a 2- to 3-page (double spaced) document that you will hand in with your project. In the narrative, you have to space to *explain* your festival. In creative writing, a good tip is always “show it, don’t just tell us about it.” In the project, you “show it.” In the FPN, you tell us about it. Think about it like a museum exhibit, where your project is the item on display and the FPN is the placard that explains the important details about it. Why did you choose the films you chose? What ties those films together? Why is there a need for that kind of film festival? What kind of reaction were you hoping to get from the audience of your Introduction? Etc. This is also an ideal place to explain your Wow Factor.

Policies

Contacting Your Instructor

I will be delighted to discuss your suggestions, ideas, and concerns about this course with you. You should feel free to drop by during my office hours, particularly if you enjoy coffee/tea. If those times are inconvenient, please reach out via WebEx Teams. As a *last* resort, you can also email me (WebEx goes directly to my phone, so it is far less likely to be buried in the gaggle of emails I receive on a daily basis). I’m happy to make other arrangements. Please e-mail me in advance if you need to cancel an appointment.

Written Work

All writing assignments should be typed and double spaced with one-inch margins. Please use 12-point Times New Roman font. All writing will be handed in electronically via Blackboard; **All assignments must be in .pdf, .doc or .docx format, or I will not be able to open them.**

Please note! This syllabus constitutes a contract for this class. I will follow all of the policies I have set out in the syllabus. If you are still enrolled in this class by the end of the add/drop period, I will assume you have agreed to these terms and conditions.

Course Schedule

Week 1

M 1/11 and W 1/13: Intro to the course. Exploring the conflation of film, media, and moment. Effectively summarizing the introduction and first two chapters of Corrigan/White. *Transformers: The Movie*. Trailer for *My Girl*.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 1-3 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 2

M 1/18: NO CLASS, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

W 1/20: No pre-class reading. How to analyze film (using several clips from *Macbeth*).

Asynchronous: Because half of the group won't have an in-person class meeting this week, the asynchronous lesson will be the equivalent of what they would have had in that lesson. As such, Monday folks, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website. Wednesday folks, you have the asynchronous lesson "off" this week.

Week 3

M 1/25 and W 1/27: Please read Chapter 3, "Mise-en-Scene: Exploring a Material World" in the Corrigan/White text. *Prisoner of Azkaban, Edward Scissorhands, Stranger Things, Lois & Clark.*

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 4-7 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 4

M 2/1 and W 2/3: Please read Chapter 4, "Cinematography: Framing What We See" in the Corrigan/White text. *Homage (Kurosawa and The Godfather), Camera gaze (Citizen Kane), lighting (Batman vs. Superman), Concept (Rear Window, The 'Burbs).*

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 8-11 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 5

M 2/8 and W 2/10: Please read Chapter 5, "Editing: Relating Images" in the Corrigan/White text. *Raging Bull, Spider-Man (2002), Gladiator, The Matrix.*

Short Response #1 is due.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 12-14 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 6

M 2/15 and W 2/17: Please read Chapter 6, “Film Sound: Listening to the Cinema” in the Corrigan/White text. *King Kong* (1933), *Funny Girl* (1968), more TBD.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 15-17 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 7

M 2/22 and W 2/24: Please read Chapter 7, “Narrative Films: Telling Stories” in the Corrigan/White text (I will also discuss elements from chapter 9, but you do not need to read that chapter beforehand).
Memento, *The Sixth Sense*, *Titanic*, *A League of their Own*.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 18-20 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 8

M 3/1 and W 3/3: Please read Chapter 8, “Documentary Films: Representing the Real” in the Corrigan/White text. Ken Burns, *Avatar: Legend of Korra*, Mockumentaries.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 21-23 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 9

M 3/8 and W 3/10: Please read Chapter 10, “Movie Genres: Conventions, Formulas, and Audience Expectations” in the Corrigan/White book. Westerns: *Shane*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, *The Searchers*, *Red Dead Redemption*.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 24-26 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 10

M 3/15 and W 3/17: No new reading. We will continue our discussion of genre. Mixed/blended genres: *Logan*, *The New Mutants*, *Boyhood*, Musical episodes, “Very Special episodes.”

Short Response #2 is due.

Asynchronous: Please read chapters 27-29 in *Turning Points in Film History* by Rausch. When you have finished reading, please view the recorded, asynchronous lecture on our course website (link and password are on Blackboard).

Week 11

3/22—3/29 Spring Break

Week 12

M 3/29 and W 3/31: Midterm Exam

Asynchronous: Model of the final project: Component one—creating a clear plan, selecting your films and your format.

Week 13

M 4/5 and W 4/7: Please read parts of Chapters 11 and 12 (sections TBD). Audiences and tone.
The Critic

Asynchronous: Model of the final project: Component two—Opening remarks/defining your festival.

Week 14

M 4/12 and W 4/14: In-class workshop time on your final projects.

Asynchronous: Model of the final project: Component three—5 minute “commentary track.”

4/16: Last day to drop courses with a “W” or change from credit to audit.

Week 15

M 4/19 and W 4/21: In-class workshop time on your final projects.

Short Response #3 is due.

Asynchronous: Model of the final project: Project narrative and “Wow Factor.”

4/26: Reading Day

4/26—4/30: End of Course Examinations