

# ENGL 0037 - AMERICAN FILM MASTERPIECES

## Catalog Description

Prerequisite: Eligibility for ENGL 1A

Hours: 54 lecture

Description: Development of a critical appreciation of the motion picture as art and literature. Emphasis on American films. (CSU, UC-with unit limitation)

## Course Student Learning Outcomes

- CSLO #1: Identify, interpret, and analyze different genres, types, periods, and critical responses for cultural, social, political, and critical contexts as well as theme, and style in cinematic form across time, thematic periods, and various filmmakers.
- CSLO #2: Identify, analyze, and evaluate research in film studies in both primary and secondary sources and apply to analytical writing.
- CSLO #3: Identify, analyze, and evaluate research in American film studies in both primary and secondary sources and apply in clear and effective in-class and/or outside of class analytical discussion and writing.

## Effective Term

Fall 2018

## Course Type

Credit - Degree-applicable

## Contact Hours

54

## Outside of Class Hours

108

## Total Student Learning Hours

162

## Course Objectives

1. identify, interpret and analyze American films in cultural, social, political, and critical contexts;
2. identify and analyze differences and similarities between different genres, types, and periods of American film;
3. interpret, analyze, and evaluate primary and secondary sources in American film;
4. analyze the relationships between culture and cinematic form and function of American films;
5. identify, interpret, and apply knowledge of cinematic techniques to the analysis of individual American films;
6. identify, interpret, and apply knowledge of cinematic techniques to the analysis of individual American actors, directors, cinematographers and screenwriters;
7. synthesize and generalize about themes and styles of American films across time, across thematic periods, and across films by various American filmmakers;

8. describe modern critical response to American films in the 20th century;
9. conduct independent research in American film studies;
10. communicate analyses, interpretations and critiques of single American films or several American films by the same filmmaker, or to several closely related American films in class discussion and in required essays and exams.

## General Education Information

- Approved College Associate Degree GE Applicability
  - AA/AS - Literature & Language
- CSU GE Applicability (Recommended-requires CSU approval)
  - CSUGE - C1 Arts
  - CSUGE - C2 Humanities
- Cal-GETC Applicability (Recommended - Requires External Approval)
- IGETC Applicability (Recommended-requires CSU/UC approval)
  - IGETC - 3B Humanities

## Articulation Information

- CSU Transferable
- UC Transferable

## Methods of Evaluation

- Classroom Discussions
  - Example: After students view Sam Mendes' "American Beauty" in class. Afterwards, compositional elements of the film are discussed. Students might choose to focus on the effect of cinematography on the narrative, or the effect of the actor's performances on the overall theme, or the impact of the score on the emotional characterization of the film. Discussion will be evaluated based upon a standard discussion rubric.
- Essay Examinations
  - Example: Students will define the difference between a long shot and a medium shot and apply the definition to a scene from "2001: A Space Odyssey."
- Objective Examinations
  - Example: A multiple-choice test consisting of questions identifying types of shots and angles using pictures from recent course films. Students are evaluated based on an answer key.
- Projects
  - Example: Students select three films from an auteur and create a comparative triptych display that shares stylistic elements of the individual films, hallmarks of the auteur's approach, and contemporary critical responses to the auteur and the films. Students are scored using a rubric as well as peer evaluations.
- Reports
  - Example: Students use "classic film trading cards" distributed in class to provide short reports providing information on the film, including era, genre, studio, artists, and achievements. These reports are offered as bullet-pointed "fact sheets" to accompany the films on a class bulletin board.

## Repeatable

No

## Methods of Instruction

- Lecture/Discussion

Lecture:

1. Instructor uses Prezi to isolate five key tableaux from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Students write in their journals about mise-en-scene, specifically character placement within the frame. In small groups, students discuss their findings. Large group discusses differences between what groups noticed.
2. Background information on Western films and the genre of Westerns, including media clips from *The Great Train Robbery* and *The Searchers* leads to group brainstorming on the genre: Students try and list stock characters, iconic settings, and standard elements of the Western storyline. Students share answers while instructor collects answers on the whiteboard.
3. Students participate in a silent "chalk talk" during which they move between a number of different guided questions on butcher paper. The discussion questions highlight stylistic elements in Charles Laughton's film "Night of the Hunter." Students are required to be silent during the activity, letting their pens do the talking. After the "chalk talks" are completed, pictures of the posters are posted on Canvas to help students develop original thesis statements for an upcoming essay.
4. Students make film posters advertising a chosen Golden Age film for a modern audience. Design of poster, tag-line, critical reviews should indicate familiarity with current cultural issues and concerns that the chosen film should connect to.

## Typical Out of Class Assignments

### Reading Assignments

1. Read the essay by Neal Gabler on "Losing Our Narrative—and Ourselves" and the essay by David Thomson on "A Time for Movies to Matter Again, If They Can" and be prepared to discuss in class. 2. Read the essay by David Robinson and James Agee on the cinema of Charlie Chaplin and the cinema of Buster Keaton. Be prepared for a discussion comparing and contrasting the essay's.

### Writing, Problem Solving or Performance

1. After watching the American silent film masterpiece (*SUNRISE*) write a critique of the film. I do not want a plot synopsis of the film. I want comments on the direction, camera placement, camera movement, composition, lighting, the use of color or black and white cinematography, editing, and interpretation of the screenplay. Be as critical and analytical as possible. 2. Keep a journal of the American film masterpieces that you see outside of class and submit this journal at mid term and final examination time. Comment on the direction and acting in the films. Compare and contrast themes of the films. Discuss the directorial concept and the use of narrative in each film. Be as critical and analytical as possible. 3. Choose one of the films we've watched this semester. Using ProQuest or Roger Ebert's film review website ([www.rogerebert.suntimes.com](http://www.rogerebert.suntimes.com)), write a response to a criticism of the film and the film itself. Your criticism should include the following: -A brief summary of the film -A brief summary of the criticism you've chosen -A brief argument about the film based on the criticism -Your response to the film 4. Write an analysis of a film from the semester. Please include a proper introduction, a thesis, and thoughtful organization and coherence. The strength of your paper must reside in its thesis. You must create an original argument about the film – no summaries. An original argument means that you critique the film for its "message" or central idea. Also, in order to make your argument, your analysis must focus on specific film terminology (consider what you studied for your midterm). You must include this terminology as part of your analysis. For example, you could

focus solely on camera movement and positioning, using several scenes as examples of this (medium-shots, establishing shots, etc.). Or, you could focus on editing techniques, music, or any other film technique as they apply to an analysis of the film.

## Other (Term projects, research papers, portfolios, etc.)

### Required Materials

- Understanding Movies
  - Author: Louis Giannetti
  - Publisher: Pearson
  - Publication Date: 2013
  - Text Edition: 13th
  - Classic Textbook?:
  - OER Link:
  - OER:
- Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film
  - Author: Richard Barsam
  - Publisher: Norton
  - Publication Date: 2015
  - Text Edition: 5th
  - Classic Textbook?:
  - OER Link:
  - OER:
- Film Art: An Introduction
  - Author: David Bordwell & Kristen Thompson
  - Publisher: McGraw - Hill Higher Education
  - Publication Date: 2016
  - Text Edition: 11th
  - Classic Textbook?:
  - OER Link:
  - OER:
- A Short Guide to Writing About Film
  - Author: Timothy Corrigan
  - Publisher: Pearson
  - Publication Date: 2014
  - Text Edition: 9th
  - Classic Textbook?:
  - OER Link:
  - OER:
- Film Studies: An Introduction
  - Author: Ed Sikov
  - Publisher: Columbia University Press
  - Publication Date: 2009
  - Text Edition:
  - Classic Textbook?:
  - OER Link:
  - OER:

**Other materials and-or supplies required of students that contribute to the cost of the course.**

Subscription to a streaming service (eg: Netflix, Amazon) in order to view films.