

## Middlesex Community College

### COM 154 - Film Study & Appreciation

ON-LINE via Blackboard Learn

CRN # 1049 - 3 credits

Spring 2017

John Shafer, Professor

Office Hours: Mon./Wed./Fri. 1-3 PM, or by appointment

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## SYLLABUS

### Course Description & General Objective:

This course is an introduction to the art, history, influence, and meaning of film. Students will learn about significant genres and styles of film, influential films and directors, film language and technique. The overall objective of this course is to gain an appreciation of film as an art form and the way in which it reflects society and life in a meaningful way. Students should come to appreciate that film is more than just entertainment, it serves as the primary vehicle through which our society tells its stories, conveys our values, probes cultural and philosophical questions, and seeks understanding and deeper meaning. The course will attempt to introduce students to a representative selection of some of the most important and influential films in history, highlighting significant periods, genres, and filmmakers. Selected films will be viewed and analyzed weekly.

### Specific Learning Objectives:

- To gain an appreciation of film as an art form and the way in which it reflects society and life.
- To better understand film technique, such as writing, drama, cinematography, sound, editing, acting.
- To learn how the study of film can increase an understanding of one's own culture and history as well as other foreign cultures.
- To learn relevant factual information about important genres, films, and filmmakers.
- To understand the identifying characteristics of distinctive periods, genres, filmmakers, and film styles.
- To learn relevant film terminology.
- To learn relevant historical events and their relation to films from the past.
- To improve writing ability and critical analysis capabilities in the process of analyzing films.

### Prerequisite: placement in, or eligible for, English 101

As this course requires writing, students should have either completed or placed in **ENG 101 - Composition** (college-level writing) or completed necessary prerequisite courses for it.

### Graduation Credit and Transfer Information:

This course fulfills Aesthetic Dimensions, Communication, Humanities, and Liberal Arts electives at MxCC, as well as fulfilling the "D" (Diversity) requirement. It should transfer to accredited four-year institutions and fulfill the same types of general education requirements. It also fulfills Fine Arts electives at many institutions.

### Film Viewings:

Films will be assigned for regular viewing each week (see Calendar). Students are responsible for seeing all assigned films (films should be discussed in the Discussion Forum). Most assigned feature films are available through on-line film services such as **Netflix**, **Amazon.com**, **Google Play**, or **Apple's iTunes Store** for a nominal fee of \$2-4 each. A few early films will be available in the Media Gallery on Blackboard. DVD's of films are also available for check-out from MxCC's library at the reserve desk under the course number, COM154, or other local libraries (especially Middletown's).

### Other Course Resources:

There is no text required for this course, as extensive information on film exists on-line. However, there will be assigned article readings each week. Assigned articles will be available on Blackboard. Additional resources will be available through Blackboard, including PowerPoints, text materials, and notes on each film. Links to other web sites will also be available. For this course, **Wikipedia** is an acceptable and even recommended resource. **Filmsite.org** is also recommended.

## **Grade Breakdown & Course Requirements:**

- Discussion Participation / Film & Article Responses (12 @ 5% each) 60%
- (3) Quizzes @ 10% each 30%
- Film Recommendation (due April 3) 10%

### **(3) Quizzes (10% each = 30%) Due Dates: March 6, April 17, May 15**

There will be three quizzes during the course that will test you on relevant factual information, film analysis techniques, filmmakers, filmic terms, genres, and important historical developments of film as well as your understanding of key aspects of the films viewed. Quizzes will be based on information covered in class through PowerPoint presentations as well as recommended resources. Quizzes will be available for designated periods in the “Quizzes” assessment tool. Additional guidelines will be provided through course announcements.

### **Discussion Forum Participation / Film & Article Responses - WEEKLY**

**(12 times @ 5% each = 60%)**

You are required to participate in the on-line discussion forum on Blackboard **every week** (with two exceptions – see note below). This includes writing a response to the assigned film and article for the week and is both an equivalent to class discussion and a form of written expression. It is an essential part of this class.

You are required to contribute a minimum of (3) posts per discussion forum, per week, which typically covers one feature film (except the first two forums). You must make at least one substantial original post on the assigned feature film and article for each discussion; and you should respond to at least two student posts (not necessarily for each film). Original posts should run at least a couple paragraphs in length and will receive credit based on their depth, insight, and relevance. Original posts are your responses to the film and ideas expressed in the assigned articles, which are usually analytical in nature. Your original responses should not be reviews of the films where you say if you liked the film or not or what’s wrong with it, and they should not be plot summaries. Response posts need only be one paragraph but should still say something relevant and meaningful, not just “I like your post.” If a post is either totally irrelevant or otherwise inappropriate you will not receive credit for it. Posts are graded cumulatively for each discussion.

**IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION:** While you are required to participate in **(12)** Discussion Forums, there will actually be **(14)**. This means you may miss participating in **(2)** Discussion Forums without penalty, by your choice, during the semester. If you do participate in all the Discussion Forums, then your two lowest grades will be dropped.

**Additional guidelines and samples for the Discussion Forum will be provided separately.**

### **Film Recommendation (10%) Due: April 3**

The last film to be shown in class will be nominated and selected by students. As part of the selection process, each student is asked to recommend one film and provide written background information and justification for why the film should be shown. Recommended films should adhere to the general objectives of the class. I will also review the recommendations and determine which films best meet the class criteria. There will then be an on-line voting process for the class to select the final film. Specific guidelines will be provided separately.

## **Blackboard - Course Web Site**

This on-line course is administered through Blackboard Learn. To access Blackboard go to: <http://my.comnet.edu/> . If you’ve never logged on to MyCommnet before, follow the link above the LOGIN box “Example Faculty/Staff NetID click here” for login directions. After logging in, look for the Blackboard link in the upper right corner of the screen. If you have problems logging on or using Blackboard, call on-line tech support at 860-343-5756.

### Grading Concerns:

Grades are posted on the web site under “My Grades.” Once multiple grades are entered, there will be a “Final Grade-to-Date” column that shows you what your current course grade is. Please check your graded work carefully. Though I take great care to be accurate, occasionally a mistake is made. If you have any questions about the grade you received on an assignment or your final grade for the course, please ask me about it. If a mistake is discovered, I will change your grade appropriately.

### Grade Scale for Converting Percentages to Letter Grades:

Grades Scored Between	Will Equal	Grades Entered as	Will Calculate as
97% and 100%	A+	A+	98.5%
93% and less than 97%	A	A	95%
90% and less than 93%	A-	A-	91.5%
87% and less than 90%	B+	B+	88.5%
83% and less than 87%	B	B	85%
80% and less than 83%	B-	B-	81.5%
77% and less than 80%	C+	C+	78.5%
73% and less than 77%	C	C	75%
70% and less than 73%	C-	C-	71.5%
67% and less than 70%	D+	D+	68.5%
63% and less than 67%	D	D	65%
60% and less than 63%	D-	D-	61.5%
0% and less than 60%	F	F	55%

NOTE: Although this scale includes an A+ grade category, please be aware that the college itself does NOT include an A+ grade category, so A+ grades will convert to A on your college transcript. But, you get the personal satisfaction of knowing you earned an A+, and it can benefit your total grade average in the course to have an A+ category. Also, any grades below 55% (including missed assignments) will automatically be converted to 55% as the numerical value for “F” for final grade calculations.

### Withdrawals and Incomplete Grades:

#### Spring 2017 Withdrawal Deadline: **MONDAY, APRIL 17**

If for some reason you are unable to complete the course and do not wish to receive a grade, you may withdraw from the course and receive a “W” by picking up a withdrawal form from the records office before the deadline above and/or sending me an email requesting to withdraw. Otherwise, I will assign a grade based on the work you have completed, including an “F” if there is little or no work. A grade of “W” does not affect your grade point average. If you have completed a substantial amount of work but are unable to finish before the end of the semester due to unavoidable circumstances, I am usually willing to give an incomplete grade, which will give you an additional half-semester to complete the work. Incomplete grades require a form to be filled out and signed by both of us.

**College Policies** -- Information on important college policies for students (listed below) is available on the college web site at: <http://mxcc.edu/catalog/syllabus-policies>

- Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism And Cheating)
- Accessibility & Disability Services
- Attendance Expectations
- Audio Recordings In The Classroom
- E-Mail Accounts For Students
- Grade Appeal Process (Review Of Academic Standing)
- Non-Discrimination Policies / Non-Discrimination Statement
- Religious Accommodation Statement
- School Cancellations Due To Weather Or Emergency Situations
- Student Code Of Conduct
- Withdrawing From Class

## CALENDAR

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic, Film &amp; Reading Assignment</b>
JAN 23	Course Intro / realizing the potential of film / film short: <b>Passengers</b>
30	<b>Early Cinema Shorts</b> / the birth of cinema / Edison, Melies, Porter, Griffith, Pickford Read: "The History of Film: The Pre-20's" by Tim Dirks, Filmsite.org
FEB 6	<b>CITY LIGHTS</b> , 1931, Charlie Chaplin, 87 min, -- Chaplin: the silent master of romantic tragi-comedy and social critique Read: <i>City Lights</i> – Review by Roger Ebert
13	<b>CITIZEN KANE</b> , 1941, Orson Welles, 120 min. – film aesthetics, power & politics Selections from the documentary, <i>THE BATTLE FOR CITIZEN KANE</i> Read: <i>Citizen Kane</i> – Magill Movie Guide Review
20	<b>THE BICYCLE THIEF</b> , 1948, Vittorio DeSica, 93 min - Italian Neo-Realism Read: "Historical Origins of Italian Neorealism" by Peter Bondinalla, Film Reference.com / <i>The Bicycle Thief</i> – Notes & Commentary compiled by John Shafer
27	<b>SINGIN' IN THE RAIN</b> , 1952, Gene Kelly / Stanley Donen, 103 min. -- classic Hollywood studio films; musical comedy and Silent-to-Sound history Read: "The Hollywood Musical & <i>Singin' In the Rain</i> " - Introduction by TD Cook
MAR 6	<b>REAR WINDOW</b> , 1954, Alfred Hitchcock, 115 min. - master of suspense & narrative Read: <i>Rear Window</i> – Magill Movie Guide Review [Quiz 1]
13	[Spring Break]
20	<b>DR. STRANGELOVE</b> , Kubrick, 1964 – Absurdist black comedy & political satire. Read: TBA
27	<b>DO THE RIGHT THING</b> , 1989, Spike Lee, 120 min - film and race in America Read: <i>Letter From A Birmingham Jail</i> - by Dr. Martin Luther King <i>After the Bombing Speech</i> - by Malcolm X
APR 3	<b>GROUNDHOG DAY</b> , 1993, Ramis / Read: "What Nietzsche Could Teach You: Eternal Return In <i>Groundhog Day</i> " by James Spence [Film Recommendation Due]
10	<b>THE TRUMAN SHOW</b> , 1998, Weir / Read: "Deceit and Doubt: The Search For Truth in <i>The Truman Show</i> " by Kimberly Blessing
17	<b>O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU</b> , 2000, Coen Brothers Read: "Homer Meets the Coen Brothers" - Analysis by Margaret Toscano [Quiz 2]
24	<b>HERO</b> , 2002, Zhang Yimou, 99 min. – China, the 5 <sup>th</sup> Generation and the Cultural Revolution Read: <i>Hero</i> – Film Analysis by Jia-xuan Zhang
MAY 1	<b>BOYHOOD</b> , 2014, Richard Linklater, 165 min. -- approaches to film naturalism; Reading: TBA
8	Student Selected Film (TBA)
15	[Final Quiz Due]