Class details

CORE-UA9750002 Expressive Culture: Film
Spring 2015
Mondays, 1pm–4pm
Location to be confirmed.

Instructor Details

Office Hour: by appointment between noon and 1 pm on Mondays.
Location to be confirmed

Class Description

This course will introduce students to the formal study of film while exploring the changing popular vision of American politics that is seen in films about Washington, D.C. From the populism of the Depression era films of Frank Capra to post-WWII paranoia, the cynical films of the post-Watergate era and more recent depictions of media-constructed realities, students will explore the way that film reflects and shapes our understanding of contemporary and historical American political culture. At the same time, students will learn how it is that filmmakers create meaning through the building blocks of editing and cinematography and the manipulation of audience expectations of genres, stars, and “Hollywood endings.”

Desired Outcomes

Students will learn the basic vocabulary of film form and be able to use it to analyze the structure of a film.

Students will learn different approaches to analyzing the meanings and values of a film and will apply those approaches in their own writing.
reflect and shape public and personal understandings of news and political events.

Students will develop an awareness of the importance of cultural contexts as they examine similar and different depictions of American politics on film during different social eras over the last 80 years.

**Assessment Components**

Class Participation: (Including Weekly @ 1 page Film Responses): 20%

Scene Analysis (2 – 3 pages/Due Week 6): 10%

Critical Paper (4 – 5 pages/Due Week 9): 20%

Final Paper (10 – 12 pages/Due Exam Week): 50%

(Abstract of Final Paper 1 Page/Due Week 12) 5% deduction if not submitted.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.
Grade conversion

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-80</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s
final course grade.

If students have more than one unexcused absence they will be penalized by deducting 50% of the class participation grade (e.g.: If the class participation grade is 20% of the final grade, the final participation grade would be reduced by 50%. 80%--> 40%)

If students have more than two unexcused absences they will fail the course.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

### Late Submission of Work

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.
Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism Policy

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity

### Required Text(s)


The primary text will be supplemented additional online essays and articles each week about specific films, directors, and analytic approaches.

Students will also be required to view weekly films outside of class.

### Class Schedule (individual class content may shift as the course develops.)

#### Session 1 – [Feb 2]

**Cultural Myth and the Language of Film**

Outside Viewing: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) Frank Capra

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 1 “Introduction,” Ch. 2 “An Approach to Film Analysis” (pp. 3 – 32).

In Class: Discussion of how film creates meaning, what we study when we study film, the way media fictions create political realities; includes clips from “Gabriel Over the White House.”

1 page film response due by Sunday [Feb 8] at 10 pm.

#### Session 2 – [Feb 9]

**Narrative and DC Politics**


Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 3 “Writing About Film” (pp. 33 – 58), Ch. 4 “Narrative Form” (pp. 59 – 86)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of Narrative Conventions, Genre and Types in Film, and how those shape stories and create political and cultural meaning; includes clips from various films including *Memento* and *Pulp Fiction*.
President’s Day – No Class [Feb 16]

Session 3 – [Feb 23]

Mise-en-Scene and DC Politics

Outside Viewing: *Seven Days in May* (1964) John Frankenheimer

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 5 “Mise en Scene,” Ch. 6 “Cinematography” (pp. 87 – 184)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of how editing and the shot create meaning in film and ways these techniques enhance or undermine story and theme, with emphasis on “realism;” includes clips from various films.

1 page film response due by Sunday [Mar 1] at 10 pm

Session 4 – [Mar 2]

Editing and the Surveillance State

Outside Viewing: *Enemy of the State* (1998) Tony Scott

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 7 “Editing” (pp. 191 – 232)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of different ways that suspense and paranoia are created using film techniques, Changes in our definitions of correct pacing and suspension of disbelief; includes clips from *The Conversation.*

1 page film response due by Sunday [Mar 8] at 10 pm

Session 5 – [Mar 9]
The Documentary and Non-Fiction Film


Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 9 “Alternatives to Narrative Fiction Film: Documentary” (pp. 279 – 292, 184 – 190)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.


1 page film response due by Sunday [Mar 15] at 10 pm

Session 6 – [Mar 16]

The False Documentary (and the French New Wave)


Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, 11 “Film and Ideology” (pp. 331 – 354)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of the use of fake realism, the French New Wave theories of disrupting the illusion of reality, the way that the form of documentary truth is used to enhance fictional film, and “reality” shows; includes clips from *K Street*.

Scene Analysis Due in Class [Mar 16]

Spring Break – No Class [Mar 23]

Session 7 – [Mar 30]

The Security State and British Humor

Outside Viewing: *In the Loop* (2009) Armando Iannucci

Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of British views of politics and sense of acerbic satire, Negative depictions of
politicians in American media; includes clips from *Veep* and *Bulworth*.

1 page film response due by Sunday [Apr 5] at 10 pm

Session 8 – [Apr 6]
Stars and Consultants

Outside Viewing: *Wag the Dog* (1997) Barry Levinson

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 12 “Film Stardom as a Cultural Phenomenon” (pp. 355 – 372)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of the roles of consultants in constructing political images and the idea of the star in American film, the way casting creates meaning.

1 page film response due by Sunday [Apr 12] at 10 pm

Session 9 – [Apr 13]
Lobbyists and Broad Comedy


Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of the nature of truth in image in American society, the way that plays out in politics and in film; includes clips from *The Loved One*.

Critical Paper Due in Class [Apr 15]

Session 10 – [Apr 20]
Biographical Film and Film Authorship


Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 14 “Film Authorship” (pp. 397 – 414)
Biography in Film” (pp. 158 – 189), Robert Rosenstone, “The Historical Film as Real History” (online)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of how feature film depicts history, the nature of the biographical film; includes clip from Secret Honor, other recent historical films.

1 page film response due by Sunday [Apr 26] at 10 pm

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**Session 11 – [Apr 27]**

**Genre Film, the Gaze and the Security State**


Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (online)

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 13 “Genre” (pp. 373 – 396) Thomas Schatz, “Hollywood Genres” (online)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Discussion of the idea of the “male gaze” and the way film trains us to take visual pleasure from looking and identification, issues of power and powerlessness in film and US citizenship; includes clips from various films.

1 page film response due by Sunday [May 3] at 10 pm

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**Session 12 – [May 4]**

**Genre Film, the Gaze and the Security State (Part 2)**

Outside Viewing: Burn After Reading (2008) Coen Brothers

Abstract Due for Final Paper in Class.

Basic Readings: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 13 “Genre” (pp. 373 – 396) Thomas Schatz, “Hollywood Genres” (online) Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (online)

In Class: Discussion of various class themes in the context of using and undermining audience In

In Class: Discussion of use of stylized performance and audience expectations of genre, narrative
and stars to create disruptive experience; includes clips from *Raising Arizona* and *Oceans 11*.

**Session 13 – [Friday, May 8 make-up section]**

**Longform Film – Politics and Power on Television**


Basic Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 15 “Cinema as Industry: Economics & Technology (pp. 415 – 430)

In Class: Discussion of cynicism, updated Shakespeare, and television as the new movies, includes clips from *The West Wing*, *Scandal*, and *Newsroom*.

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

1 page film response due by Sunday [May 10] at 10 pm

**Session 14 – [May 11]**

**Mr Smith Redux**


Basic Reading: Pramaggiore & Wallis, Ch. 15 “Cinema as Industry: Economics & Technology (pp. 415 – 430)

Additional Readings posted in Resources at NYUClasses page.

In Class: Summary discussion of relevant course material, and whether Mr. Smith is still relevant in American culture; includes clips from relevant films. Possible presentation of final paper research.

**Session 15 – [May 18 -- FINAL EXAM WEEK]**

Final paper is due 5 pm May 18 by email

**Classroom Etiquette**

You are expected to participate in discussions, otherwise it gets boring listening to the prof
lecture. You may use electronics in class in relation to the class. No texting or web-surfing unless in support of class discussion. You may bring food and drink to class as long as you clean up after yourselves.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

Students are expected to view one film at one of the DC Film Festivals and write that week’s Film Response paper about the viewed film. More information about possible film festivals will be distributed in class and posted on the NYUClasses page.

**Your Instructor**