

HOLLYWOOD CINEMA IN THE STUDIO ERA

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

For much of the last century, cinema, as an art form and cultural institution, was virtually synonymous with a particular form and institution of film practice: the popular American cinema, or what we call “Hollywood movies.” Beginning in the mid-1910s, the American film industry relocated its production facilities to southern California and quickly developed into an enormous mass cultural industry whose products dominated the globe economically, aesthetically, culturally, and ideologically. This course will trace the industrial, economic, and aesthetic consolidation of the studio system from the mid-teens until the end of the 1940s, at which point the system began to disintegrate. Additionally, we will seek to situate Hollywood cinema in its social and historical contexts within the United States through the end of the Second World War.

This course is designed not to merely provide a chronicle of these developments but to acquaint students with the methodological frameworks necessary to understand popular film practice as an art form, as an economic force, as a cultural institution, as a system of representation and communication, and as the early twentieth century's most ubiquitous form of commercialized leisure. Therefore, while the course proceeds (more or less) chronologically, it is also structured to engage the aesthetic, economic, ideological, and technological components of the studio system and the critical approaches that have been brought to bear on popular American film's various dimensions. This course will expose you to this range of historical methods and, through assignments, encourage you to engage with, distinguish, apply, and critically analyze these methods.

Prerequisites: [add]

Course Objectives / Learning Outcomes: The course requirements—readings and screenings—as well as its methods of evaluation, the Assignments below, are designed to accomplish several learning objectives. Upon successful completion of this course, you will possess:

- *Knowledge* – By attending lectures, completing readings, watching screenings, students will leave the course knowing major movements and trends in studio-era American film, including its aesthetic, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Additionally, students will learn how to find published primary sources relevant to the study of popular media.
- *Understanding* – Through in-class discussion of assigned films and written assignments, students will be able to recognize salient narrative and stylistic features of Hollywood films and differentiate among historical projects that view films as aesthetic objects, industrial products, and cultural artifacts.
- *Thinking* – Through written assignments, students will have the opportunity to develop the ability to deploy primary-source research skills and apply their understanding of particular methods of studying popular cinema to key films.
- *Metacognitive/ “Learning to Learn”* – Through the sequence of course units and final assessments, students will be able to evaluate the differences among and validity of approaches to the studio system specifically and American cinema more broadly.

Expectations & Time Commitment: To excel in this course, and in line with state and federal standards for 3-credit courses, you should expect to spend about 6-8 hours per week working outside of class. This will include reading 50-60 pages/week (3-4 hrs.), sometimes watching a screening or completing one of five short research/writing assignments (3-4 hrs.). Since there are no major papers, there will be no “heavy” (e.g. 12, 16, 18 hr.) weeks.

Assignments & Evaluation

1.) Quizzes: 3-question quizzes, administered weekly (more or less)

Semi-weekly quizzes, covering the assigned readings and screenings, will be administered [TBA]. The three lowest quiz scores (including 0s, should you miss class or arrive late/ leave early) will be dropped, and your highest score will be counted twice. Together, the counted quizzes will account for 20% of your grade.

2.) Discussion Forum Research Posts: 500-750 words each (approx. 2-3 pgs.)

By Week 2 of classes, you will be assigned a group and a film that you will focus on for the entirety of the semester. You will complete several small research projects and writing assignments pertaining to this film, and you will post the artifact you find, along with a short essay discussing the artifact in relation to your film and the assigned readings, to the Discussion Forum. In class, we will discuss artifacts like those you'll be finding and analyzing for your film: tutorials will involve using online databases to locate relevant items and classroom activities will involve you. You will be expected to read and respond to at least two of your group member's artifacts and assignments, and then to respond to some of the feedback you receive. This component of the assignment is worth 40% of its grade.

3.) Comparative Reading: Take-home, due TBA in Finals period (15%)

This assignment sums up the research you have been conducting throughout term in the forum posts. This assignment requires you to submit an annotated bibliography of at least 3 scholarly sources (articles, book chapters) on your assigned film by the end of term (wk.15), and, by the end of the exam period, an essay of about 4-6 pages that compares the approaches taken by and arguments of two scholars and incorporates discussion / reflection of the work you've done in your forum posts.

4.) Final Exam: Take-home, due TBA in Finals period (15%)

This final exam will include several short essay questions. It is, obviously, open book / notes.

Grade Breakdown	<u>due</u>	<u>detail</u>	<u>value</u>
Quizzes	semi-weekly	Lowest three scores drop	20%
Forum Post #1	wk.03	Review of your Film	10%
Forum Post #2	wk.05	CHC Aesthetics	10%
Forum Post #3	wk.08	Industrial Artifacts	10%
Forum Post #4	wk.11	Production or Code Artifacts	10%
Forum Post #5	wk.14	Social Institutions Artifacts	10%
Comparative Reading	finals wk.	Reception History Artifacts	15%
Take-home Final Exam	finals wk.	See above	15%

Abbreviated Course Schedule

The following schedule is intended to provide a topical overview, which should enable to see how the above assignments work within the progression of the course:

UNIT 1	HWD... as Aesthetic System	UNIT3	HWD... as/among Social Institutions
wk02	Classical Narrative / Narration	wk09	Reform / Censorship / PCA
wk03	Classical Style & Boundaries	wk10	Politics / Education / Museums
wk04	Classical Style & Tech Change	wk11	WW2 / War Effort / Gov't Collab
UNIT2	HWD... as Industrial System	UNIT4	HWD... as Cultural Force
wk05	Business of Entertainment	wk12	Audiences & Exhibition [rural/urban]
wk06	Genres, Cycles, Prod. Categories	wk13	Gender and Representation
wk07	The Star System	wk14	Race & Representation [HUAC]
wk08	Auteurs, Geniuses of Sys, Workers		