

**HUM 325: Survey of Film and Culture**  
**“The” Canon: Films You’re Supposed to See**  
**Spring 2015, TR, 1:00pm – 2:15pm, Belknap, DA 303**

Instructor: L. Andrew Cooper (lacoop05@louisville.edu)  
Bingham 201A (502-852-8820), Humanities (502-852-6805)  
Office Hours: Wed. 2 – 4pm, and by appointment

## **Course Description**

*Enrollment in HUM 325 requires sophomore standing.*

U of L’s course catalog specifies that HUM 325 is “a study of films in their cultural and historical contexts.” This course starts with the idea that we are supposed to see certain films because they’re important, good, or good for us in some way. The films in this course appear again and again on “Best of” lists: they have virtually all made it into the film “canon,” which means authorities think people will study and cherish the films for years to come. Knowing about canonical films is useful for gaining a deeper understanding of film and film studies, but with cultures around the world producing films, and with people using digital technology to distribute new films every day, claims about “the” canon, a single collection that everyone should see, become increasingly problematic. The films in this course come from a very small number of cultures. Why these films and these cultures and not others? Who determines what is important, good, or good for us? What are the consequences of canon formation, which is necessarily exclusionary? As we learn about the important, good, or good-for-us films on this syllabus, we should be enriched in some way, but we should also think critically about what that enrichment entails.

## **Course Materials**

### *Required Text-film*

*The Story of Film: An Odyssey.* Dir. Mark Cousins. Chicago: Music Box Films, 2011. DVD. [On Netflix]

### *Films*

The films we watch and discuss in this course are readily available to rent, stream, or buy, and some of them might be available on reserve at the library. Although you are not required to purchase copies of the films, you may need repeat access for screen shots to include in papers and other assignments. I also recommend seeing the films in groups. Solo viewing has recently become more common, but film is still an intrinsically social art form, so seeing the films with others might enhance your appreciation.

### *Computer and Software*

You need a computer with word processing and presentation software, such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. You also need a media player capable of capturing still images from films, such as the VLC media player, which is available online to download for free. Digital editing software such as iMovie and Final Cut is useful but not required because you can access it at Ekstrom Library’s Digital Media Suite. You must also regularly check your U of L email and review materials on this class’s Blackboard site. Portable computing devices (e.g. laptops) are useful in class but not required.

### *Additional Materials*

Some assignments might call for additional materials, such as memory cards, at additional expense.

## Outcomes

The table below details the learning outcomes associated with this course. Emphases are not mutually exclusive. For example, virtually all outcomes relate directly or indirectly to critical thinking.

Emphasis	Outcomes
<p><b>Rhetoric</b>            Filmmakers and film critics use specific vocabulary and techniques to make meaning from sounds and images. Films also function as rhetorical interventions in cultural discourses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terms, technologies, and techniques associated with film’s historical developments.</li> <li>• Expose assumptions involved in canonization and the rhetoric that helps constitute films as important, good, or good for us.</li> <li>• Apply historical knowledge and rhetorical strategies to original arguments about the merits and significance of individual films.</li> <li>• Discuss how people with roles in film production—directors, writers, actors, producers, musicians, etc.—become rhetorical figures.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culture, History, and Genre</b>            Films reflect the diverse cultures that produce and receive them, and they relate to the history of film as a whole as well as the conventions of specific film genres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss and write about individual films as part of larger historical and cultural developments.</li> <li>• Interpret ways that films reflect upon and contribute to their historical and cultural contexts.</li> <li>• Analyze genres as historically and contextually contingent categories.</li> <li>• Argue about the meanings and consequences of canonization.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critical Thinking</b>            Understanding and interpreting films requires both attention to details (such as frames and shots) and attention to larger structures (such as sequences and diegesis).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze films through papers, presentations, and web pages.</li> <li>• Critique how specific factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to film texts contribute to their significance.</li> <li>• Evaluate both assigned and unassigned films for factors that contribute to films’ potential for canonization.</li> <li>• Synthesize perspectives and information through unified, historically-informed arguments.</li> </ul>

## Assignments

### Major Assignments (900 points total)

The outcomes in the table above refer to the following major assignments, which we will discuss in more detail during class:

1. **Judging the Benchmarks: What’s “Good”?** (2 reviews, 100 points each, 200 points total). At the beginning of the semester, sign up for two assigned films about which you will write reviews (about 750 words each). One review must be completed by Feb. 23. Each review should indicate why you think *other* people have elevated the film to “the” canon of great films, and relate those reasons to your own reasons judging it to be truly great or for judging it to be not quite as great as others seem to think. Use images and specific details from the films to illustrate your claims. Whether you’d raise or lower the film’s status will determine where you submit your review: on Blackboard, we will use a wiki tool to create one collection of reviews celebrating “the” canon and another collection challenging it.
2. **Quizzes (100 points).** Keep up with, study, and take notes on viewings and class discussions so you can answer questions on quizzes given on unannounced dates throughout the term. Quiz answers might involve multiple choices, short answers, or short essays.
3. **Reflections on History (200 points).** Write an essay (about 1500 words) in which you analyze two films, one assigned film and one unassigned film mentioned in the textbook. Each essay should relate the assigned film to a film (your choice) that you argue deserves similar canonical status but has been excluded for specific historical and cultural reasons you articulate (careful—many unassigned films already have similar status, so you need to establish that the film you

choose doesn't). Avoid ranting: essays should focus on analyzing details from the films as evidence. Specific topics will be suggested closer to the due date; you may create your own topic, but you need approval at least a week in advance.

4. **Reflection on Film (300 points total).** In a group of students, create your own 5- to 10-minute video that reflects on filmmaking and/or film spectatorship. Choose one of these approaches:
- *Video essay.* Your video uses onscreen and off-screen argument, narration, and annotation to analyze how a film has achieved specific historical and cultural significance. Emphasize your group's perspectives by pursuing a particular thesis: your goal is a distinct statement, not an overview that looks like a DVD special feature. Combine clips and stills with original footage.
  - *Parody.* Your video reworks elements from an assigned film for comedic effect. Parodies make fun, but they don't necessarily disdain: your video might end up showing how great the object of parody is, or it might hold it up for ridicule. Along with your video, each group member should submit a brief analysis of how the video reflects on historically and culturally significant aspects of filmmaking or film spectatorship.

This assignment involves the following components, due at different times:

- *Pitch and Rough Treatment (25 points, group grade).* Convince me that your group has an idea for the video that will successfully demonstrate learning outcomes. Summarize what you think might happen in your film (changing later is okay).
  - *Production Plan and Rough Script (75 points, group grade).* In the plan, describe who will do what, when, and how. Remember that editing and other activities typically done after filming can be extremely time-consuming. In the script, provide approximate narration and/or dialogue along with descriptions of what is happening on screen.
  - *Production Update (25 points, individual grade).* Update me about your own and other group members' contributions so far.
  - *Video and Evaluation (175 points, individual grade).* Provide a usable DVD for screening in class on the due date. Make sure credits provide details about who contributed what. For the evaluation, confidentially evaluate your own and other group members' total contributions. Credits and evaluations will help me to individualize grades on the video.
5. **Final Exam (100 points).** It's like a quiz, only longer and announced in advance.

### *Participation (100 points total)*

Participation in class discussions and activities is mandatory. Demonstrate your knowledge of the readings and films, and share your insights. Maintaining class decorum is part of participation: noisy cell phones, disrespectful behavior, and other intrusions lower productivity and, therefore, your grade. "Disrespectful behavior" includes harassment of any kind, directed either at peers or at the instructor. This course will foster discussions of sensitive issues such as gender, race, and sexuality. All viewpoints are welcome, but as individuals express themselves, they should avoid abusive or insulting language.

## **Course Policies**

### *Grading*

Each assignment has a point value. Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. The following list shows the letter grades linked to percentages of available points earned, with a description of the work:

- A (90-100), Exceeds expectations for argument, evidence, organization, and design
- B (80-89), Meets expectations, with notable merit in some of the categories listed above
- C (70-79), Meets expectations
- D (60-69), Meets most expectations, with some problems or omissions
- F (0-59), Meets few expectations, with significant problems or omissions

Failure to complete an assignment will result in 0 points. +/- grades are +/- 3 points from the center of the grade's range. For example, a 95 is an A, a 98 is an A+, and a 92 is an A-.

### *Attendance*

Attendance is required. If you must miss class, email me ahead of time. You have only two “freebie” days, classes you may miss without grade penalties. For other absences, you must have made a prior arrangement with me or have official documentation of an illness, injury, legal obligation, or university-sponsored activity or event that keeps you from class. I will deduct 25 points from your grade for each non-freebie, undocumented absence. Being late to class counts as at least a third of an absence, depending on how late you are. Showing up late is usually better than not showing up. *Missing more than 25% of our class meetings for any reason could result in automatic failure.*

### *Punctual Work*

Unless I approve a deadline extension in advance, which is unlikely but possible, I will not accept major assignments after the deadline. You are responsible for all information covered during every class meeting.

### *Academic Conduct*

Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty. For more information, see the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (Sections 5 and 6).

### *Using Laptop Computers and Other Digital Devices*

You may only use your laptop and other digital devices for class activities and note-taking. Using such devices during class for other activities—such as email, web-surfing, social media, or games—is rude and strictly prohibited. Inappropriate device use may result in grade penalties and/or expulsion from class.

### *Access*

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Stevenson Hall, Room 119, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

### *Religious Holy Days and Observances*

If your religious observances might require an adjustment in course work, please submit your request(s) to me in writing during the first two weeks of the semester.

### *Sexual Harassment*

The University of Louisville strives to maintain the campus free of all forms of illegal discrimination as a place of work and study for faculty, staff, and students. Sexual harassment is unacceptable, and unlawful conduct and will not be tolerated in the workplace and the educational environment. Unwelcome sexual

advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment, even when carried out through computers or other electronic communications systems. See the [Affirmative Action policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the U of L [Computer Account Usage Agreement](#).

### *Diversity*

The University of Louisville strives to foster and sustain an environment of inclusiveness that empowers us all to achieve our highest potential without fear of prejudice or bias. We commit ourselves to building an exemplary educational community that offers a nurturing and challenging intellectual climate, a respect for the spectrum of human diversity, and a genuine understanding of the many differences—including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, national origin or military status—that enrich a vibrant metropolitan research university. We expect every member of our academic family to embrace the underlying values of this vision and to demonstrate a strong commitment to attracting, retaining and supporting students, faculty and staff who reflect the diversity of our larger society.

### *The Fine Print*

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or for similar reasons. I exercise this right rarely, but I often provide more detailed information during class. This syllabus is your guide. Keep it. Know it. Love it.

## Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

NOTE: “SF” followed by numbers refers to episodes in *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*. Viewings should be completed *prior* to the class meetings for which they are indicated.

Week	Reading and Viewing Assignments	Due Dates
Thur., Jan. 8	“Actualities,” “A Trip to the Moon,” “The Great Train Robbery” (short films in class)	
Tue., Jan. 13	<i>Nosferatu</i> (Murnau, 1922); SF 1	
Thur., Jan. 15	SF 2 – 3	
Tue., Jan. 20	<i>Stagecoach</i> (Ford, 1939) SF 4	IN CLASS: Groups preview semester’s films, talk project
Thur., Jan. 22		
Tue., Jan. 27	<i>Citizen Kane</i> (Welles, 1941) SF 5	
Thur., Jan. 29		<i>Pitch...</i> [given during class]
Tue., Feb. 3	<i>Bicycle Thieves</i> (De Sica, 1948) SF 6	
Thur., Feb. 5		
Tue., Feb. 10	<i>Rashomon</i> (Kurosawa, 1950)	
Thur., Feb. 12		
Tue., Feb. 17	<i>Pather Panchali</i> (Ray, 1955)	
Thur., Feb. 19		<i>...and Rough Treatment</i>
Tue., Feb. 24	<i>Breathless</i> (Godard, 1960) SF 7	<b>One Review Completed</b>
Thur., Feb. 26		
Tue., Mar. 3	8 ½ (Fellini, 1963)	
Thur., Mar. 5	[you may choose to get ahead on viewing SF during these lighter weeks]	<i>Production Plan</i>
Tue., Mar. 10	<i>Persona</i> (Bergman, 1966)	
Thu., Mar. 12		
Tue., Mar. 17	<b>SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS</b>	
Thur., Mar. 19	<b>SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS</b>	
Tue., Mar. 24	<i>These Amazing Shadows</i> (Mariano and Norton, 2011)	<b>Reflections on History<sup>1</sup></b>
Thur., Mar. 26		
Tue., Mar. 31	<i>Annie Hall</i> (Allen, 1977) SF 8 – 9	<i>Production Update</i>
Thur., Apr. 2		
Tue., Apr. 7	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (Lee, 1989) SF 10 - 12	
Thur., Apr. 9		
Tue., Apr. 14	<i>White Material</i> (Denis, 2009) SF 13 - 15	
Thur., Apr. 16		
Tue., Apr. 21	VIDEOS SCREENED IN CLASS	<b>Video and Evaluation Both Reviews Completed</b>
<b>Fri., Apr. 24</b>	<b>EXAM: 2:30pm – 5:00pm</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Personally, I’d hate to have something due right after spring break, but some people prefer the additional time. If the after-break date perturbs you, treat March 12 as the due date.

**PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND RETURN THESE STATEMENTS TO DR. COOPER.**

**I affirm that I have read the entire syllabus and policy sheet for HUM 325 and understand the information and the responsibilities specified.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
print name

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

DIRECTIONS: Read carefully and check all that apply.

- I give my instructor, Dr. L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the work I do for this course as examples in this and other courses, as examples in presentations, and in print and electronic publications. I understand that permission is optional and will have no influence on my grade.
- I do NOT give my instructor, Dr. L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the work I do for this course as examples in this and other courses, as examples in presentations, and in print and electronic publications. I understand that permission is optional and will have no influence on my grade.

Please indicate whether you want to be acknowledged if your work is used:

- Please use my name in association with my work.
- Please use my work, but do NOT acknowledge me.

If your instructor decides to use your work, he may wish to contact you. Please provide your contact information below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
print name

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
email address

\_\_\_\_\_  
phone number

\_\_\_\_\_  
print permanent address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date