

# INTRODUCTION TO FILM

English 225 – Christopher P. Jacobs

## Basic Syllabus

**FOUR SECTIONS** (Tuesdays & Wednesdays *or* Tuesdays & Thursdays)

**Tuesdays 2 pm** – “Lab” film screenings and discussion (NOTE: some movies *will* run past 4 pm!) in M-300

(Tuesdays at 4 pm – special extra film screenings of films assigned for students to see on their own)

**Wednesdays at 2 pm or 3 pm or 4 pm** – or **Thursdays at 2 pm** -- lecture-discussion in M-116

### REQUIRED TEXT:

Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan, *Looking at Movies Fourth Edition* (cited as LAM)

-package includes two DVDs and small book *Writing About Movies*

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**ONE PRE-TEST.** This will be given the first or second week of class. It will not count towards the final grade. Sort of like a final exam in reverse, it will include material about film technology, film history, and filmmaking theory that should be common knowledge by the time the semester is over. It may even include questions that will be on the regular tests. The overall class scores on this test will help determine the direction of lectures throughout the semester, allowing concepts most students already understand to be touched upon only briefly in order to include more advanced material.

**WEEKLY MOVIE BLOG** (32 points). Students will receive at least one point each for 16 weekly “reaction papers” equivalent to a half-page to one-page (200 to 500 words) in length, discussing the films shown in Tuesday’s class session or assigned for outside viewing. These should *not* be merely a synopsis, but should reflect some thought about the film(s) and how they might relate to concepts we are covering in class that week. They may, however, be written informally, as they will not be graded (but still should be in coherent, grammatical English). Each movie reaction posted to the class movie blog will automatically earn one point. Up to an extra point per reaction will be awarded in quarter-point increments for making thoughtful observations and/or especially perceptive analysis rather than just summarizing the plot or giving vague subjective opinions. Posts with no grammatical or spelling errors may earn up to an additional half-point extra-credit bonus (giving up to 2.5 points possible per paper in rare cases). NOTE: After posting your reaction, you should read at least four or five other student reactions and then *post a comment on at least two or three* other students’ reactions.

Reaction papers should be posted in the class movie blog by the lecture-discussion session after the screening, and **must be posted no later than the following week to receive full credit**. The second or third week after the film, they may still be posted for half-credit, and four to six-week late blog reactions may get one-fourth credit, but reactions will not receive any credit if posted later than that. (These reactions are to get you in the habit of thinking critically about films immediately after seeing them, and to practice organizing those thoughts verbally in a coherent form while the film is fresh in your memory. They should also help you think of comments and questions you can bring up in class discussion periods or post to other student reactions in the blog. It can be worthwhile to compose your reaction in MS-Word first, keeping copies on your computer as a sort of personal journal record of your changing approach to looking at films. It can be instructive to recognize in your later reactions how your analytical observations and critical thinking skills have developed since earlier in the semester.)

**THREE REGULAR TESTS** (120 points). These will be given on normal lecture/discussion days. Each will be worth 40 points, made up of multiple-choice and true-false questions. The third exam will also include some essay questions. ***Students who miss a test for any reason must arrange a make-up exam*** through your instructor. All makeup exams will consist entirely of essay questions. Tests will cover a variety of material from the readings, the lectures, discussions (classroom and/or online), and the films. [Notes for study](#) that you can use as a Study Guide are available on-line, based upon the readings and lectures. HINT--Students who miss film screenings should make them up by renting them on video as soon as possible before the test, BUT be aware that *some titles may not be carried by local stores or be available for internet on-line viewing!*

**SEMESTER PROJECT** (120 points). Students will be expected to apply concepts covered in class to specific films they have seen in one or more writing assignments. **NOTE: This is a college-level class and papers must be in standard formal written English, typed double-space -- grading *will* be based upon their grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word choice, as well as their content.** Students are encouraged to use the UND Writing Center for assistance, if necessary.

Each student may choose from three different options (*although you must first consult with your instructor if you wish to do option 2 or 3*):

**Option 1** is to write *three* 3-page (roughly 900 to 1500-word) formal *analytical papers*, each worth 40 points (as much as a test). The first is to be a narrative analysis, due about five weeks into the semester. The second, analyzing a film's mise en scene and/or genre, is due about mid-semester. The third, exploring the camerawork and editing in one scene, is due shortly before the last test. Details on each topic, helpful hints, due dates, and specific films for you to watch outside of class for each assignment are listed in "Blackboard."

**NOTE: Option 1 is recommended for most students.**

**Options 2 or 3 require instructor approval before starting.**

**Option 2** is to complete *one* 10-page (3000 to 5000-word) *research paper* worth 120 points (as much as all three tests), due the same time the last paper of Option 1 would be due, with progress reports due when the first and second papers would have been due. This term paper requires you *either* to

(A) view and discuss the work of a single major director (chosen from the list posted in Blackboard) *or*

(B) do an in-depth study of one major film and critical reaction to it since it was first made

(list of film choices is available in Blackboard).

More details and some helpful hints are described in Blackboard. Note that either research topic will require *substantial time* for locating and viewing films, non-internet research, and outside readings, as well as an additional page listing sources consulted. **NOTE: This option is recommended mainly for English majors, history majors, avid cineastes, and ambitious film students who may later wish to pursue advanced film studies elsewhere.**

**NOTE: Options 2 or 3 require instructor approval before starting.**

**Option 3** is to write a short *screenplay* by the date the first paper in option one is due (worth 40 points), and then produce, direct, and edit it by the end of the semester (completed movie worth 80 points). This will require a *major time commitment*, co-operative friends, and access to adequate equipment. If you get your script written by the first paper deadline, but later find you can't get the movie produced or finished, you'll need to do the other two analytical papers from Option 1 as a substitute for the movie. **Recommended for students who have already had some experience shooting and editing video.** More details, requirements, and movie-making recommendations available through Blackboard and online articles/publications you can download.

**NOTE: Options 2 or 3 require instructor approval before starting them!**

**NOTE: Grading for the papers will be based upon both understanding of the material *and* quality of writing** (this is, after all, an English Department class!). For more details and topic information consult your instructor and/or click on the appropriate link below. The “Writing About Movies” book included with your text (at least it's included if you bought the book new instead of used), and [information on line](#) give suggestions on what might be included and what should *not* be included in a film critique. Basic outlines that may be useful for some assignments are available on-line for general [approaches to criticism](#) and [some specific points for analysis](#). The on-line reading discussing [film theory, analysis, and interpretation](#) may give you some ideas that will help you decide upon your topic and how you will approach it, whether you're writing a lengthy in-depth paper, a short analysis dealing with narrative or cinematic techniques, a brief review, or a capsule reaction. You will have to limit your topic(s) considerably for any film discussion under five pages.

Be sure to *ask your instructor* if you have any questions on what to write or how to write it. You may wish to consult with the UND Writing Center after completing your first draft for tips on grammar, punctuation, and overall structure.

**ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPATION.** Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions, both classroom and on line discussions. All are encouraged to ask questions on the material. (This means, if you don't understand or aren't sure about something, ASK ABOUT IT!! If you have a differing interpretation or opinion on a film, share it with the class! Discuss! Debate! Blog! Comment! Etc.) From time to time, a very brief writing assignment may be given in class, usually worth two to five points. NOTE: since all four sections have the same instructor, if you can't make it to your scheduled lecture-discussion section for some reason, you may attend one of the others instead.

**Students are expected to watch all the films scheduled and assigned for class.** Every film shown is available on DVD and many are on Blu-ray, but class titles may not be carried by any local stores if you miss one (i.e., you may need to use a service like Netflix, Amazon, eBay, or on-line streaming to find them, and some may be difficult to locate). While your weekly reaction papers to each film are worth only two points each, you should understand they *are* counted in your grade, and choosing not to turn in any of them could lower your final grade by as much as two letter grades! As a group they're the equivalent of one 24-point paper, approximately 10% of the final grade).

**Extra Credit** may be earned by attending and writing additional 2-point reaction papers on films scheduled at various special local screenings or campus film series (e.g., the Writers Conference, the “Global Visions” film series, Language Department film series, and certain other showings). Ask your instructor for details and what films might be eligible.

**GRADING.** Grades will be based on adequate completion of the assignments and tests (calculated on a total of **272 points** as 100% for the tests, semester project, and weekly reaction papers over the course of the semester), using the following standard (and very generous) percentage scale:

<b>90 - 100%</b>	<b>= A</b>
<b>80 - 89%</b>	<b>= B</b>
<b>70 - 79%</b>	<b>= C</b>
<b>60 - 69%</b>	<b>= D</b>
<b>59% and below</b>	<b>= F</b>