

**Santa Barbara City College  
Film Studies Department**



**FS107 – Contemporary American Film (3.0 Units) > Online Course  
Spring 2012**

**Instructor:** Nico Maestu  
**Email:** filmst107@sbcc.edu  
**Phone:** 805.965.0581 ext. 2528

**Film Program Website:** <http://film.sbcc.edu>  
**Instructor Website:** <http://filmstudiesonline.com>  
**Office Hours:** Thurs: 12:00-1:30 & by appointment  
**Office:** ECOC1, #16

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

*Available at the SBCC Bookstore*

- Hammond, Michael and Linda Williams. Contemporary American Cinema. England: McGraw-Hill, 2006. ISBN# 9-780-335-218-318.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Study of the changes of the Hollywood studio system, alternative productions, and independent film since the 1960s. The course considers the decline of the studio system, the rise of American New Wave cinema, the history of the blockbuster, the parallel histories of independent and underground film, Black cinema and blaxploitation to the present, changing audiences, the effects of new technology, the presence of media conglomerates, women in U.S. cinema, and the increasing popularity of documentary films. Lectures, discussions, and readings will be supplemented by the screening and critical analysis of representative films.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze a film or films in relation to style, narrative, and genre using film terminology.
- Differentiate significant periods and movements within U.S. film history from the 1960s to the present.
- Apply stylistic film analyses to historical research of U.S. film history from the 1960s to the present.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Weekly Units:** Each week you will be required to read through specific units on the course website as you read the required pages and chapters from the textbook. You will need to read through the course webpage, as well as view the online clips and navigate through the external links.

**Responses:** For each weekly unit, you will be given a set of questions that you will need to respond to using the textbook, the class website, the external links, the online clips, and the film you watch that week. You will need to email these to the instructor by the specified date. Late submissions will lead to lower grades. You will receive a maximum of 10 points per response, for a total of 150 points: Orientation, Units 1-7 and 9-15. **Each**

**response should be approximately 500 words in length.** Reference the book, the films, specific scenes, and past units for comparison when necessary. **Include your response in the body of the email** – be sure to spell and grammar check all emails.

**Forums:** We also will be using the discussion Forums in Moodle for topic discussions. The Moodle shell for this class is available through Pipeline -- <http://pipeline.sbcc.edu/> When discussion forum posts are assigned, the grades will be included to the Weekly Response grade for the maximum of 10 points.

**Films:** You will be watching an eclectic selection of films this semester. You will need to watch one full-length film selected from a group of films for most of the units in this course. It is your responsibility to acquire the film. You can look at the Resource page on the course website to find places to rent the DVDs.

**Readings:** All readings must be completed by their assigned dates so as to be prepared to respond to the week's topics and to make thoughtful contributions in email responses. The readings cover many films and filmmakers; in order to discern which are crucial to the class and to the exams, it is important for you to take notes while you read the Weekly Units and while you watch the films. The reading schedule is available on the course website, part of each unit.

**Midterm and Final:** There will be a midterm and a final during this semester length online course. These exams will cover information from the weekly units, films, and readings. The majority of the information you will need to know for these exams is in the class textbook and will be covered in the weekly units. It is thus crucial for you to complete the assigned readings and navigate through all schedules weekly units so as to be successful in the class. Each at-home exam will consist of short essay questions, which will need to be answered in at least 300 words per question.

**Make-ups:** There will not be any make-ups for the exams. You must take the exam the week that it is scheduled.

**Paper:** You will need to write one paper (7-9 pgs.; at least 2,300 words) for this class. You will need to turn in: 1) a brief paragraph describing your topic; and, 2) a working thesis statement and a brief outline of your paper prior to the paper due dates, as outlined in the schedule. Papers must be typed and double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins and 12-point font. Paper topics will be distributed well in advance of the paper's due dates. Late papers will also not be accepted. **Copy and paste your paper within the body of the email – no attachments.**

Papers are evaluated in terms of their responsiveness to the assignment and to the material presented in class and in the readings, the logical coherence of their arguments, their quality of organization, their rhetorical sophistication, as well as their adherence to grammatical conventions. All papers should reference specific readings assigned for the class (MLA format). Outside research is highly recommended; you can research books and articles in the Library.

**Comments:** Approximately 30 Film Studies students are part of the Film Review Club at SBCC. The student film critics are writing about film on the following site: <http://filmreviews.sbcc.edu/> You will need to go to the site and write two comment (at least 100 words) on two of the reviews. Each comment is worth 10 points.

To do this:

- Go to <http://sbccfilmreviews.org>
- On the top of the page, click on Register.

- Use your First name and Last name for a Username: ex. for me it would Nico Maestu (include a space between your first and last name -- you need to follow this so that I know it's you, and I can give you credit).
- Provide your email address, your name, and a password.
- Log in with your Username and Password.
- Go to the review you want to write a comment about.
- At the bottom of the review is a space for you to write the comment.
- Click "Add your Comment" and you're done.
- Once I approve it, the comment will be on the site.
- Email me to let me know that you posted the two comments and for which films.

**Plagiarism Statement:** Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common knowledge) material without acknowledging the source. Types of plagiarism are: deliberately submitting someone else's work (including copying directly from a source without documentation, having someone else write a paper, cutting and pasting from the internet), and carelessly or inadequately citing. A student who plagiarizes at minimum will fail the assignment; beyond that plagiarized papers and exams will result in a failure for the course. You are not obligated to cite any sources for your film exercises; for your paper, you will need to use the MLA or Chicago format.

## GRADES

| Breakdown                 |            | Grade Scale / Points |         |
|---------------------------|------------|----------------------|---------|
| Midterm:                  | 100 points | A                    | 450-500 |
| Final:                    | 100 points | B                    | 400-449 |
| Paper topic:              | 10 points  | C                    | 350-399 |
| Paper research:           | 10 points  | D                    | 300-349 |
| Paper thesis and outline: | 10 points  | F                    | 0-299   |
| 2 comments on blog:       | 20 points  |                      |         |
| Paper:                    | 100 points |                      |         |
| Weekly responses:         | 150 points |                      |         |
| Total:                    | 500 points |                      |         |

## SCHEDULE:

Each week you will receive an email with the weekly schedule, the due dates, and the links to the specific Units. All films, film clips, and web links are available on the class website.

*Reading schedule is available on the course website, which you will be able to access on the first day of class.*

### Week 1: Mon. January 23 - Sun. January 29

- Introduction to course, website, and Flash videos.
- Complete Orientation Activities and email instructor as-soon-as-possible.

- Scheduling of video rentals (check Resources for online rentals, libraries, video stores, etc / films are also available at the Learning Resource Center at SBCC)
- Complete *Unit 1, 1960s: The Studio System: 1920s-1950s / The Decline / Television*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. January 29 midnight.

**Week 2: Mon. January 30 - Sun. February 5**

- **Sat. February 4: Last day to Add or Drop course**
- Complete *Unit 2, 1960s: New Audiences / Art Cinema / Studio Take-Overs / Theaters / Drive-ins*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. February 5 midnight.

**Week 3: Mon. February 6 - Sun. February 12**

- Complete *Unit 3, 1960s: Genres and Filmmakers / Ratings System / New Films, New Content*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. February 13 midnight.

**Week 4: Mon. February 13 - Sun. February 19**

- Complete *Unit 4, 1970s: New Decade for Film-Makers / Industry Slump: 1969-1971*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. February 19 midnight.

**Week 5: Mon. February 20 - Sun. February 26**

- Complete *Unit 5, 1970s: The Rise of the Blockbuster / Saturation / Seasonal Releases*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. February 26 midnight.

**Week 6: Mon. February 27 - Sun. March 4**

- Complete *Unit 6, 1970s: Ratings / Blaxploitation / Genres*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. March 4 midnight.

**Week 7: Mon. March 5 - Sun. March 11**

- **Paper topic (one paragraph)** due by Fri. March 9 midnight.
- Complete *Unit 7, 1970s: Vietnam / Cult Films / Documentaries / Home Video*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. March 11 midnight.

**Week 8: Mon. March 12 - Sun. March 19**

- Deadline to submit your two comments on <http://sbccfilmreviews.org> is Fri. March 16 at midnight.
- Complete *Unit 8 (Midterm Exam Questions)* email by Sun. March 19 midnight.

**Week 9: Mon. March 19 - Sun. March 25**

- **Fri. March 23: Last day to withdraw from course**

- **Paper update – (one paragraph about research, films, scenes, changes)** due by Fri. March 23 midnight.
- Complete *Unit 9, 1980s: Corporations and Formulas / High Concept / MTV / New Technologies*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. March 25 midnight.

**Spring Break > March 26 – Sat. March 31**

**Week 10: Mon. April 2 - Sun. April 8**

- **Thesis and outline for Paper** due by Fri. April 6 midnight.
- Complete *Unit 10, 1980s: Independent Cinema / Family Films*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. April 8 midnight.

**Week 11: Mon. April 9 - Sun. April 15**

- Complete *Unit 11, 1980s: Vietnam War Films / Genres / Neo Noir / Women in Films*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. April 15 midnight.

**Week 12: Mon. April 16 - Sun. April 22**

- **Paper due:** email paper by Fri. April 20 midnight > no attachments.
- Complete *Unit 12, 1990s: Spectacle and Blockbusters / Independents and others*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. April 22 midnight.

**Week 13: Mon. April 23 - Sun. April 29**

- Complete *Unit 13, 1990s: New Technologies / CGI / Neo-Noir / Filmmakers*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. April 29 midnight.

**Week 14: Mon. April 30 - Sun. May 6**

- Complete *Unit 14, 2000s: Mass International Entertainment / Digital Age / Music Video*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. May 6 midnight.

**Week 15: Mon. May 7 – Wed. May 13**

- Complete *Unit 15, 2000s: Recent Trends / Japanese & Hong Kong Remakes / "Splat Pack" / Specialty Divisions*
- Rent and watch film, email responses by Sun. May 13 midnight.

**Week 16: Mon. May 14 – Wed. May 16**

- Complete *Unit 16 (Final Exam Questions)* email by Wed. May 16 midnight.
- **Exams will NOT be accepted after the deadline.**

## Film Glossary

**DIEGESIS:** In a narrative film, the world of the film's story. The diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown onscreen.

**MISE-EN-SCENE:** (French, "putting into the scene") *What* is filmed, including all the elements that appear on the screen, such as the settings and props (decor), lighting, costumes, make-up, etc.; the arrangement of things and spaces in front of the camera.

**NARRATIVE FORM:** A type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to each other through a series of causally related events taking place in time and space (linear or non linear). Good examples of non-linear (*Pulp Fiction* or *Memento*).

**Plot:** In a narrative film, all the elements that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations.

**Story:** All the events that we see and hear, plus all those that we infer or assume to have occurred, arranged in their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations.

**Narration:** The process through which the *plot* conveys or withholds *story* information.

**FRAMING:** the spatial representation of figures in relation to the edges of the screen (the frame). Framing changes when the camera moves.

**Close-up:** People or objects have been filmed from a short distance. With a person, the head and shoulders would fill most of the screen.

**Extreme close-up:** A small object or body part fills most of the screen. With a person, for example, a head, face, or eye fills the screen.

**Medium shot:** People or objects have been filmed from a medium distance. With a standing person, he/she is seen from the waist up.

**Long shot:** People or objects have been filmed from a distance. A standing person's entire body would be seen or a large object would be in view (car, storefront, several people).

**Extreme long shot:** Humans are very small; crowds and landscapes can be seen.

**Establishing shot:** A shot at the beginning of a sequence, showing the spatial relations among important figures or objects and the setting in a scene.

**Long take:** A shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time period before the transition to the next shot.

**EDITING:** in a finished film, this is the set of techniques that govern the relations between shots.

**Shot:** A single continuous image that is not interrupted by a cut. The framing may change, due to camera movement or the movement of objects or characters, but this is a continuous take.

**Cut:** An instantaneous change from one shot or image to another.

**Montage:** Two or more images are juxtaposed, often creating meaning through their relation to one another that was not present in either one image by itself.

**Dissolve:** The slow replacement of one shot by another (the first shot is briefly visible under the second).

**Scene:** A segment of narrative film that takes place in one time and space or that uses crosscutting to show two or more simultaneous actions.

**Sequence:** A series of scenes or shots unified by a shared action or motif.

**Ellipsis:** The shortening of *plot* duration achieved by omitting intervals of *story* duration.

**Graphic match:** Two successive shots joined so as to create a strong similarity of compositional elements (ex: color, shape).

**Continuity editing:** A system of editing that maintains continuous narrative action, so that the editing goes unnoticed by the spectator. Continuity editing often involves the following editing methods:

**Crosscutting:** Editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action going on in different places, usually simultaneously.

**Shot/reverse shot:** Two or more shots edited together that alternate characters so as to maintain the illusion that they are looking at each other. This is typically used for conversation and often captures a part of the back of the head and shoulder of one of the characters.

**Eyeline match:** Shot A shows someone looking at something; shot B is what the person is looking at. If the person looks left, the following shot would imply that the looker is off-screen right. This often incorporates a **point-of-view shot:** the camera occupies a certain character's physical space, seeing what that character sees, often from the angle at which he or she is presumed to see it. Point-of-view shots create a subjective positioning of the character within the diegesis.

**CAMERA MOVEMENT:** the movement of the camera (not figures) during shooting.

**Pan:** A stationary camera pivots horizontally from right to left or left to right.

**Tilt:** A stationary camera pivots vertically up or down.

**Tracking shot:** The camera moves (or dollies) forward or backward on tracks.

**Zoom (in or out):** Movements of the lens (not the camera itself), producing change in size/distance of images.

**Crane shot:** a shot with a change in framing accomplished by having the camera above the ground and moving through the air in any direction.

**FOCUS:** the definition/clarity of the image in relation to the camera lens.

**Soft focus:** An intentional blurriness (often used for leading ladies' close-ups).

**Deep focus:** Several different planes in the image are in focus at the same time.

**Depth of field:** The distance within which objects are in focus.

**CAMERA ANGLE:** the position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows.

**High angle:** People or objects are filmed from above; viewer looks down at the action.

**Straight-on angle:** People or objects are filmed looking straight at them or the action.

**Low angle:** People or objects are filmed from below; viewer looks up at the action.

**Canted frame:** Horizon is tilted one direction or another, appears "crooked."

**SOUND/MUSIC:**

**Voice-over:** Unseen character or narrator speaks from a different time/place that is not within the time/place represented on screen (not in the fictional space and time).

**Voice-off:** Unseen character who is heard speaking and is within the same time/place as the people and objects seen on screen.

**Diegetic sound/music:** Sound and music that take place within the fictional world of the characters, where the characters can hear the sound.

**Non-diegetic sound/music:** Sound and music from outside the fictional world of the characters that they cannot hear. It is added on after the original footage is completed and is often used for emotional or dramatic purposes.

For a more extensive list of film terminology, please see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's Film Art and Timothy Corrigan's A Short Guide to Writing About Film.