

Course Syllabus for THTR 180

Cinema as Art and Communication.

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OFFICE HOURS: I have no office; therefore, no office hours. When in Fallon I am usually available the hour before class in the classroom or in a nearby area and will stay after class as long as possible if you need help.

Weather permitting I will attempt to visit each site at least once during the semester. I will announce these visits at least one week in advance and will arrive at that location at least an hour before class start time to allow for personal contact and class discussion.

All students may also Email questions, requests for assistance or notify me of a planned absence at any time. As long as the system is working (or I don't fry my computer) I will try to reply within 24 hours.

Please note that this document is a work in progress, and the instructor reserves the right to change it as class requirements dictate.

A syllabus is a "contract" between the student and the instructor. It describes what the instructor expects from the student so that he/she can learn the subject and earn an appropriate grade. It also describes what the student can expect from the instructor to give him/her the best possible opportunity to learn the subject. Additionally it contains information a student may need to know beyond the strictly academic needs of the course. What follows is our contract. Learn its contents as your grade and skill at the end of the term are based on what it contains.

Course Objectives.

In order for you to have a greater appreciation of what has been called the most influential artistic medium in the world, by the end of this course you will demonstrate your understanding of what Art and Communication elements in films are by evaluating the films shown in the class using definitions relating to each of the elements. These evaluations will be both oral (in class film critiques) and written (mid-term and final exams). The things you will need most are a critical thinking ability and the skill to clearly and logically express your opinions then support your thoughts with examples from the film you have watched in class. You will need to evaluate what you see then say to yourself, "Wow, how good (or bad) is this and why do I think that way?"

Course Content.

The class will trace the development of films and film making from the 19th century up to the present day. The first part of the class will concern itself with silent films while the films shown after the mid-term will all be "talkies." There will be some "classics" and some "unknowns" just because they emphasize the importance of a particular category under study – Art or Communication. Some films will be enjoyed by everyone and some will make you wonder why they are being shown.

Text.

There is no text for this class. A list of elements for both art and communication is available at the end of the syllabus and will be discussed during the first class meeting so that every class member will be working from the same basic understanding. Additional information about the films and or actors will be provided by the instructor on an as needed/available basis.

Attendance.

Attendance is mandatory. If you miss two class meetings for any reason your grade will automatically drop to a "B", missing three classes reduces it to a "C" and four absences reduces it to a "D". Five or more absences will result in a failing grade unless YOU officially withdraw from the course. In those cases the points you have otherwise earned become a secondary consideration for grading; for example, even if your final total score is 94 but you have 3 absences your final grade will be a "C."

Participation.

What makes this class vibrant and exciting is the participation by EVERY member of the class in the discussions that take place after each showing. As you will note in the Grading section, your participation is mandatory in order for you to earn a better than average grade. Perfect scores on the Midterm and Final exams will provide you with enough points to qualify you for an “C” but you are required to participate as often as possible in order to earn a “B” or an “A” grade.

Some guidelines on class discussion:

(The following three items directly relate to your responsibility in this class and are taken from the “Participating in Class Discussions: Six Basic Rules” portion of *America Now: Short Readings from Recent Periodicals*, Eighth Edition, Bedford/St. Martins, Boston * New York, by Robert Atwan, pp.9-11)

“Discussion is a learned activity. It requires a variety of essential academic skills: speaking, listening, thinking, and preparing. The following six basic rules are vital to healthy and productive discussion.

1. *Take an active speaking role.* Good discussion demands that everyone participates, not (as so often happens) just a vocal few. Many students remain detached from discussion because they are afraid to speak in a group. This fear is quite common – so common that psychological surveys show that speaking in front of a group is generally one of our worst fears. A leading communication consultant suggests that people choke up because they are more worried about how others will respond than about what they themselves have to say. It helps to remember that most people will be more interested in *what* you say than in how you say it. Once you get over the initial fear of speaking in public, your speech skills will improve with practice.
2. *Listen attentively.* No one who doesn't listen attentively can participate in group discussion. This may sound obvious, but just think of how many senseless arguments you've had because either you or the person with whom you were talking completely misunderstood what was said. A good listener not only hears what someone is saying but also understands *why* he or she is saying it. One of the most important things about listening is that it leads to one element that lively discussion depends on: good questions. When the interesting questions begin to emerge, you know good discussion has truly begun.
3. *Come prepared.* Discussion is no merely random conversation. It demands a certain degree of preparation and focus. To participate in class discussion, you must consider assigned topics beforehand and read whatever is required. Develop the habit of reading with pen in hand, underlining key points and jotting down questions, impressions, and ideas in your notebook. The notes you bring to class will be an invaluable aid in group discussion.

Disability Support Services.

If you have a disability for which you will need to request accommodations, please contact the Disability Support Services office (Bristlecone building, Room 103) at 445-3266 or 445-3275 as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Grading.

Grades will be based upon your participation in class and your ability to clearly demonstrate your understanding of how both Art and Communication elements contribute to or detract from a film. Whether or not you like a film will NOT be a factor in determining your grade. Not all of the films presented in this class will have universal appeal. You will earn 25 points for participation (1 pt. for signing up for the class + 1.5 pts./class for class participation, or 0 pts for no participation); in short, if you don't express your opinion you don't earn points. 25 points for the mid-term and 25/25 points for the final for a total of 100 possible points. When participating in class discussions please state your name to ensure you receive credit.

Grades.

Letter grades will be assigned as annotated in the Grades Table below.

A = 100-90 points B = 89-80 points C = 79-70 points D = 69-60 points F = 59 points or less

Participation/examinations.

The discussions we have in class and the examinations will follow the same format and are based on the film shown during that class meeting. When choosing an Art element, first, identify and make a statement about a specific element from the Art Category you wish to discuss. When discussing an element from the Communication Category first state The Message then the specific element from the Communication Category that was used to transmit that message to you.

Then answer the "WHY do you say/think that?" question that I will always ask.

Finally, give a specific supporting example from the film.

SIMPLIFIED GUIDELINES TO DISCUSSIONS:

FOR ART:

1. State one specific element as shown in the syllabus; for example, if you want to talk about the story line you must state that the element is the SCREENPLAY.
2. Give us your opinion of whether or not it was effective and then tell us why you have that opinion without giving us a scene yet.
3. Describe one specific scene that you feel supports your opinion.

FOR COMMUNICATION:

1. Using at least one complete sentence state a message you got during the film.
2. State one specific element as shown in the syllabus; for example, if you want to talk about two-way communication between two characters you must state that the element is INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.
3. Describe one specific scene that you feel supports your opinion.

Please note that I insist that the discussions be conducted in this manner. If you do not follow the guidelines listed above I will have you correct your progression.

NOTE: These guidelines are stated again on the examination form with very specific requirements noted for guidance when writing your answers.

Class discussions can be based on any element(s) of either category.

Midterm exams will be limited to a MAXIMUM of one page on ONE category written on the exam sheets provided for that purpose. If you write about both categories the one not face up when you turn in your exam will be “Xed out” and a point will be deducted from your score for failure to follow instructions.

Unless other arrangements have been made a minimum of two weeks in advance, the exam must be completed within the classroom on the day of the exam and within the time limits of the class schedule. A make up exam may be allowed but only for documented personal health or significant family problems that prevented notification and attendance. The exam must be taken at the Fallon Campus Library and completed prior to the next class meeting,

Final examinations will be limited to a MAXIMUM of one page for EACH category, covering BOTH categories and on the exam sheets provided for that purpose. Unless other arrangements have been made a minimum of two weeks in advance, **BOTH SIDES of the exam must be completed within the classroom on the day of the exam and within the time limits of the class schedule.**

For Fallon Students: A make up exam may be allowed but only for documented personal health or significant family problems that prevented notification and attendance – family vacation time does NOT constitute a significant family problem. The exam must be taken at the Fallon Campus Library and completed PRIOR TO THE LAST CLASS MEETING due to the date requirement of turning in semester grades,

You may write anything you think or feel but you must be focused, literate and legible. Overly simplistic answers are not acceptable from students in a college class. A clear and concise

presentation of your ideas is essential. If I have trouble reading or understanding what you have written, points will be deducted. Answers that are overly simplistic will lose points.

Any handouts, including the syllabus, you have available from the class sessions and any notes YOU have taken may be used for the exams.

You may complete the examination before the end of the film but you must view the entire film prior to turning in your examination and leaving the class. Leaving before the end of the film will result in a 5-point deduction from your midterm exam score or a 10-point deduction from your final exam score.

Failure to actively participate in class discussions will be noted and those points will not be available to add to your final score... hiding in a corner quiet as a mouse will not work in this class.

Academic Honesty.

The work that you do for this class must be your own. Failure to do so is academic dishonesty that will not be tolerated. I reserve the right to give students a grade of F in the course for academic dishonesty. See the WNC Academic Integrity Policy for more details.

IMPORTANT MAKE UP EXAMINATION NOTE: Make up examinations are given in the Fallon Campus Library through the cooperation of the librarian and staff. The student must complete the make up exam in the library and within the normal working hours of the library and you have a maximum of 2 hours and 45 minutes for the exam. The movie, examination form and instructions are to be picked up at the library circulation desk. (The same time rule applies to the Carson campus summer classes if a make up is required but the final exam must be completed before the last class of the term.)

For Carson Campus summer classes, the arrangements are made through the Carson Campus Library. Because of the limited amount of time and available resources the student must notify me no less than two weeks in advance of his/her need to take the make-up exam in order to ensure that the film and equipment are available. The **midterm** exam must be completed within one week of the scheduled exam date. The **final** exam must be completed **BEFORE** the last class meeting of the summer term (the scheduled date of the final exam.) The movie, examination form and instructions are to be picked up at the library circulation desk. The student must complete the make-up exam in the library and within the normal working hours of the library and you have a maximum of 2 hours and 45 minutes for the exam. Documented illness or injury that prevent early notification will be considered on a case-by-case basis but no examination will be allowed after the final class meeting. All other rules regarding the midterm and final examinations apply. There are no exceptions to these rules.

Student Behavior

Under most circumstances people are considerate of others. This becomes very important in the classroom environment because of the number of people trying to learn various subjects. In this context it is important to remember that disruptive behavior cannot be tolerated. Western

Nevada College has established a Student Behavior Policy with which every student and instructor should become familiar. Violation of this policy in my classes will result with the student(s) being told to leave the class and not return until he/she (they) can behave in a courteous and considerate manner; this includes students at remote sites.

Miscellaneous.

Snack food and beverages may be consumed in the classrooms but you must provide a means to ensure that you do not create a noise disturbance while you are eating and you must make sure you clean up after yourself. If you need to eat a complete meal please use the break areas in the lobbies or art gallery or outside patio in Fallon or an appropriate area at the extended classroom sites for eating areas.

You are encouraged to have a good time and enjoy these presentations while finding out WHY you either like or dislike the film.

You are encouraged, but not required, to do your own research into some of the films that will be shown. While a significant amount of "behind-the-scenes" material will be presented, there may be items of interest you find that the instructor does not present in class. I normally find that these discoveries improve the level of interest on the part of the students.

THE CLASSROOM IS A NO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION ZONE. While the following instructions use the term cell phone, the prohibition includes smart phones, "pads" and any other electronic device that is capable of communication using the internet or phone services. Unless you are a certified emergency worker (fire, medical or law enforcement) or a military member on watch and are REQUIRED to be immediately available by cell phone, your cell phone must be turned OFF prior to the start of the class session. This prohibition includes texting and the use of lap-top computers for any reason. Persons who are on emergency recall must let me know. Required cell phones must be set into the silent/courtesy/manner/vibration mode. Students who violate this rule will be told to leave the class and will be counted as absent even if the student forgot to turn off the device and it activates during the class, so be aware that I am serious about not having preventable outside distractions during class.

If you are attending the class in Fallon, for family emergencies have the caller contact Campus Security at 427-6212. Make sure the caller gives Security your name and classroom number. Students at the Carson Campus need to make their own arrangements consistent with their location.

Make yourselves comfortable and enjoy the show.

ART ELEMENTS.

Acting	Animation
Art Direction/Production Design	Cinematography
Costume Design	Directing
Hair Styles	Lighting
Makeup	Visual Effects
Music: Score, Song and Other Source	Sound: Editing and Special Effects
Writing: Original Screenplay	Writing: Adapted Screenplay

Art Definitions:

Acting.

The ability or inability of the cast member or cast members to make the characters believable. Does he/she or do they seem to be natural in their ability to relate to the story and to other characters? Remember that the style may be related to the era in which the film was made, the available technology or the kind of story being told. Realism is not necessary in order for the actor to appear natural (Spiderman or Dracula for example.)

Animation.

This category strictly relates to "cartoon-like" characters, not special effects. Animation may be flat (like old Bugs Bunny cartoons) or 3 dimensional (like Roger Rabbit or Shrek). It may be hand crafted on individual cells (the old way) or generated on computers. Again, the viewer must consider the era and technology available when evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the animation.

Art Direction/Production Design.

"Up until the 1960s The art director's primary function was to establish the look of the settings and décor while other "directors" took care of costumes, props, and other character related items. The production designer of today works directly with (and was probably hired by) the director to "visualize the script", and then coordinate all elements of design, including sets, costumes, props and color schemes." (Looking At Movies: An Introduction To Film, Richard Barsam, W.W.Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 2004, p. 147)

Cinematography.

How the camera is used to enhance or detract from the film's overall look and meaning. This includes the heights, angles, movement of the camera (s) and types of lenses used during the filming of the story. Early in the industry the camera was fixed with little flexibility. The ability to use computers (Star Wars, 1977, for example) and other mechanical devices allowed a wide range of movement to provide more than just the flat, static, up-close, medium distance or far-away views early films had. While The Blair Witch Project was done as if it was strictly amateurs using a home video camera in an attempt to enhance a realistic feeling, the constant movement and vibration of the camera became, in my opinion, distracting if not nauseating.

Costumes.

The clothing worn by the actors to reflect both the times and personality of the characters. Even within similar story lines and character types the costumes can differ to a great extent. In the film Oscar (a cops and robbers comedy starring Sylvester Stallone) the costumes reflected the type of clothing worn by people of that era. Dick Tracy (a cops and robbers comedy starring Warren Beatty) used the same basic style of clothing but the materials were all bright, primary colors to adhere to the comic strip/comic book look used by Chester Gould. An extreme example of the wrong kind of costuming would be all of the characters in Gladiator wearing tuxedos or formal gowns.

Direction.

The ability of the person in overall charge of the making of the film to coordinate all of the different departments and people and aspects of the film or with the production designer to present an enjoyable, believable (or at least rational) story. The opposite ends of this range would be Steven Spielberg (any of his films) and Ed Wood (Plan 9 from Outer Space).

Hair Styles.

From "period" films like The Three Musketeers to contemporary stories like Pleasantville, the hairstyles must fit the era. There are some things that would be obviously wrong – like long curly locks on the men in Pleasantville – or very subtle like the differences in women's hair styles at almost any time, but if they don't look right the viewer will notice.

Lighting.

Much of this depends on the available technology and the skill of the lighting director. How many times have you seen a night scene with sharp shadows where there shouldn't be any? Old westerns on the trail were infamous for showing these because the "night" scenes were shot during the day with a dark filter over the lens to simulate the darkness. Lighting is also used to enhance the appearance of the actor and his/her surroundings even in daytime. Reflectors to harden or soften the appearance of the subject are in constant use today because the sun cannot be depended upon to provide the "correct" lighting for the scene. Additionally, film has become significantly more sensitive so that it is possible to actually film in the dark with only a match, candle, torch or flashlight as the light source when necessary. Early studio films (late 1800s to early 1900s) depended on modifying sunlight coming in through glass roofs until the advent, development and widespread use of the electric light.

Makeup.

Subtle or obvious, makeup provides an outward indication of the personality or situation of the character. This includes emphasizing or de-emphasizing facial features, prosthetics (Steve Martin's nose in *Roxanne*), blood and guts, and facial hair.

Visual Special Effects.

From George Melies' film *La Voyage Dans La Lune* to *Jurassic Park* to *The Dark Knight*, special effects have been used to bring the impossible into the realm of the believable. Stop motion photography and "claymation" objects were first used to bring the illusion of movement to inanimate objects like dinosaurs in the silent film *The Lost World*. More recently computers have taken over that task and made the "monsters" more realistic as in the most recent *King Kong*. Other visual effects include car crashes, James Bond surviving being pushed out of an aircraft without a parachute, *Bonnie and Clyde* being shot, *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* operating off of an airborne aircraft carrier (a movie that is almost totally shot in front of a blue screen), and *Babe, the pig, talking*. The movie *F/X* does a good job of showing how some of the simpler stuff is done.

Music.

Music falls into several applications:

Score. The overall music design of the film. It may include character themes as in the *Star Wars* series or songs that become popular beyond the realm of the story.

Song. Quite often a particular musical offering is written for a film in addition to the film's score. While Michael Jackson wrote the score, Elvis Costello provided the song "Accidents Will Happen" for the film E.T. Neil Diamond offered to write the score but was turned down. He recorded and released "Turn On Your Heart Light" to prove he could have done a good job. "Moon River" from Breakfast at Tiffany's or "Maria" from Westside Story are examples of musical pieces that had their origin in a film score or Broadway play but are popular in their own right while still being associated with their particular original story.

Other Source. I need go no further than A Knight's Tale or any movie based in the 50s or 60s (like American Graffiti or Stephen King's Christine) for you to understand that outside sources of music are often used in films.

Sound.

While the clarity and quality of sound has improved greatly since its introduction directly onto the film strip in 1927, the areas of sound that you hear fall into one of two different applications.

Editing. These are the "normal" sounds you expect to hear in a particular context and how smoothly they coordinate with the action of the scene. Foley artists add much of what you hear in post-production, a process named after the man who developed it. For example the horse hoof sounds during a chase or race scene used to be added by a Foley artist using coconut shells and a box of sand or dirt. Footsteps of people on floors, stairs, on gravel, etc., are normally added later. Most background sounds, like traffic or aircraft or random noise, are added during post-production. Wind and weather, bird and animal, gunshot, sword fight and fist fight/slap sounds also fall into this category. More and more often these sounds are pre-recorded at the place the scene is to be shot and then added digitally. Often the dialog of a scene will be added later. Good sound editing will be as un-noticeable as what you hear every day and take for granted.

Special Effects. Sounds we have no idea about fit into this category. Which one of you can accurately say what a T-Rex sounded like? How about the sound of a futuristic car like in The Minority Report? In the 1939 radio show War of the Worlds, the opening of the Martian space ship hatch was made by opening a Mason jar in the hollow of a toilet bowl. Similarly, the laser pistol/rifle sound introduced in Star Wars was the result of a crescent wrench being struck against a steel power or telephone pole guy wire. The important thing is that they work and we accept them as being "normal" to the situation/character/scene.

Writing.

The story is the thing. Just like what we enjoy reading, there are various types of stories we prefer to others. It is the same with movies. Unlike books, however, film has two sources for its stories.

Original Screenplay. Someone has taken the time to devise a story that is to be taken directly from the screenplay and put onto celluloid or videotape or DVD. These will include scene openings and closings with directions as to what the camera and or character should be doing. ("The scene opens on a bleak, almost pure white, exterior view. The camera slowly pans from right to left, ultimately revealing a number of rounded huts almost completely covered by snow and ice. From the far left hut we see a lone man, heavily clothed in cold weather attire, slowly emerge and carefully look around as if hoping that someone has finally arrived from the outside world.")

Adapted Screenplay. This is a modification of a previous work. The film will give credit to the original source (book or play or article) and the author. Quite often the credit will include the phrase "based on... " to indicate that the movie and original source are not quite the same (Sometimes "loosely" should also be included.) If you have the chance read and watch The Runaway Jury, for example.

COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS.

Each film passes along one or more messages to the viewer. The messages may concern the film as a whole, be contained in a particular scene or relate to a single character. **Our interest is in what the messages are, what they concern (the film, a scene or a character) and how they were communicated to you.** The following formal communication elements are ways to communicate the messages:

Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Group	Mass
Intercultural	Public Speaking
Symbolism	Body Language (incl. facial expressions)
Paralanguage	

Communication Definitions:

Intrapersonal.

Communication intended only for one's self. These can be thoughts, mutterings, notes, diary entries, etc. These communications revealed to others, either intentionally or unintentionally, then become another type of communication.

Intercultural.

Communication between two or among several cultures. Obvious examples would be based on race, religion, ethnic background, education, social status, age, interests, etc. However, the most often occurring and least recognized intercultural communication is based on gender. This is the basis for more comedic and dramatic misinterpretations and situations than any other single area and probably any combination of those areas. Within any other area, gender communication problems exist.... even within close families they exist. Watch for them and see how they are used.

Interpersonal.

Two-way communication between two persons orally, in writing or by signals/signs of some sort.

Group.

Communication among three or more people. This includes periods of interpersonal communication to which the other members of the group are privy. This area is generally divided into Small Group (3–15 persons) and Large Group (16 or more persons) communication events. The numbers are arbitrary and can vary depending on which researcher is doing the study or observation. A business meeting, or jury normally fit into the Small Group category while Rotary Club or Senate meetings fall into the Large Group category.

Mass.

Any communication intended for huge numbers of people using artificial means. Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, movies, books, etc. are examples of this type of communication. Public speeches (see Hitler's filmed speeches to massed soldiers in the middle of the 20th century) are not included in this category because they are presented to thousands of people in person but because they were shown to the German people in propaganda films.

Public Speaking.

One person addressing a group, either large or small, with no oral and limited other response generally expected from the group itself. Political speeches and panic situations in my other class are good examples. After the speech any dialog that takes place between the speaker and the audience members becomes another type of communication. Even if the speaker is using a microphone this is still public speaking.

Symbolism.

Generally considered to be visual, these symbols include religious icons, national flags, static signs and personally delivered signals, like "peace" or "live long and prosper" or whatever. In

the film “A Married Virgin,” the housemaid character uses a cross to chase the “husband” out of the “wife’s” room while calling him a devil. They are sometimes used in film to connect events like the lightning bolt in Joe versus the Volcano.

Body Language.

The use of gestures, facial expressions, body posture, body movement and vocal expressiveness to convey the message. While these are generally used to enforce what is being said, effective use of body language can allow the viewer to interpret the inner thoughts and/or feelings of the person transmitting the message without any words being uttered. When done well, even body movements when the character’s back is turned toward the audience can effectively convey the message.

Paralanguage.

All types contextual considerations NOT produced by nor the result of the current, direct actions of the communicator. These include the arrangement of furniture, lighting, extraneous noise, odors, the type of area (inside or outside, classroom or living room, etc.) temperature, proximity to objects or other people, the type of objects or other people in the area, whether or not contact is being made between the people and/or objects, etc. While the ideas might be the same going from one environment to another, the way they are delivered and received are affected by these considerations. It may also include non-physical considerations such as the political correctness and legal relationships established or expected in the context of the communication event.

Note.

When commenting on a communication element, you must show how it relates to the relationship of the persons involved and/or the message of the scene and/or the message of the entire film. For example, to say that Robin Hood and Maid Marian’s interpersonal communication was good then state that they spoke to each other clearly then describe a scene when they were the only two people involved, is NOT a reasonable discussion or examination response. In order for something like that to be acceptable you will need to discuss how it demonstrated the relationship between the two and what that relationship was or how the scene conveyed a message the director wanted to send to the audience and what that message was. This same thinking must be applied to any communication element you choose to discuss or write about.

IMPORTANT NOTE.

The most difficult and important requirement of this course is that you are required to apply the knowledge you learn to films that you will be viewing at the time. There are no "static feedback" elements since I will not be looking for your ability to memorize facts and regurgitate them back without having to think. You are required to carefully consider your statements in light of the information you are given, your preferences, your experiences and your ability to express your own personal thoughts in a clear and concise manner as they relate to the film that has been shown that evening. I do not care what your opinion is and it does not matter what others think of your opinion. You must, however, be able to support your statements using the Art and Communication element information you learn in the class. In short, you must be able to clearly answer the question: "Why did you say that?"

It is always frustrating to not know what the instructor expects when it comes to class participation and examinations. For that reason examples of the examination forms can be found on the following two pages. These are for your information only and are to help you understand what the discussion and examination requirements are. Examination forms will be provided by me for each examination.

