

**Westminster College**  
**FS 342: Film Genres—Directors' Edition**  
**Spring 2012**  
**Course Syllabus**



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### **INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS**

Jeremy Byman, writing on Fred Zinnemann and Carl Foreman's *High Noon*, describes the Western in the following terms:

All Westerns have gunfights and riders on horseback; they are set in small, dusty towns west of the Mississippi; and the stories take place between the Civil War and the closing of the frontier at the end of the nineteenth century. There are similar stories set in colonial times, and there are stories set in contemporary times that resonate in the same way, but they are not "Westerns" as we normally think of them.

The Western, and just about any other film genre we can name, can be reduced to such simplicities, but, as Byman goes on to explain, it is *never* that simple. Film, and film genre, like the people responsible for creating and critiquing them, are so diverse as to defy such easy categorization. This course examines the concept of genre in several different ways. First, we will explore several selected genres through screenings and discussion of examples of those genres to see how they demonstrate the characteristics of the categories which they allegedly typify. We will do this to introduce ourselves to the basic concepts related to the study of genre. Second, we will examine how a group of four specific filmmakers approach different genres, and through this we will see how flexible the concept of genre is, and learn a little about auteur theory along the way.

The films for this course have been selected based on the following criteria:

- That they are in some way representative of a genre or that genre's evolution, that they signify something about the difficulties of defining genre, and that they are emblematic of the overall work of the four filmmakers chosen for this course: Ridley Scott, James Cameron, Michael Mann and Steven Spielberg.
- That they will not be regularly required for other courses in the Film Studies Curriculum at Westminster, or not have been used recently as part of ongoing film series.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Marita Sturken. *Thelma and Louise* (BFI Modern Classics). British Film Institute, 2008. ISBN: 9780851708096.

- David M. Lubin. *Titanic* (BFI Modern Classics). British Film Institute, 2008. ISBN: 9780851707600.
- Nick James. *Heat* (BFI Modern Classics). British Film Institute, 2008. ISBN: 9780851709383.
- Antonia Quirke. *Jaws* (BFI Modern Classics). British Film Institute, 2008. ISBN: 9780851709291.
- Louis Giannetti. *Understanding Movies* (any edition will do). This text will be used as reference for presentations and papers. Most recent edition (13<sup>th</sup>): Pearson, 2013, 2013. ISBN: 9780205856169.
- other readings as assigned by the instructor—please see Course Calendar below, and the list of readings included at the end of the syllabus.

## **COURSE OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT**

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- demonstrate an ability to define and apply the critical and technical language associated with film studies, including genre studies (in particular those that refer to the genres studied in class) and auteur theory, as well as other important analytical tools, such as classic narrative form and non-narrative forms, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound, and modes of screen reality.
- demonstrate their critical thinking and analytical skills appropriate to the discipline of film studies.
- demonstrate their ability to employ research skills, including the use of appropriate print and electronic sources in the discipline.
- demonstrate their public presentation and listening skills.
- demonstrate their ability to articulate, through close reading and writing, their own worldviews. They will be able to explain and respond thoughtfully to the social, ideological, and esthetic values implied in film texts through their close readings and reflections.

These outcomes will be assessed, as appropriate, through class activities and assignments that include discussion, presentations, written assignments (in the form of both critical papers and research projects, quizzes, and a mid-term exam). Please see the course requirements below for more detailed information.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be required to do the following:

- 1) Attend every class period. Constant discussion is required in the development of critical thinking, and therefore any student who misses more than 3 class periods will be deducted one full grade for each absence beyond the third—from A to B, B to C, etc.
- 2) Come to class prepared. The discussion mentioned above cannot occur if students have not viewed the films and done the reading. Readings will be monitored through occasional quizzes and regular discussion.
- 3) Participate **actively** in discussion. Nonparticipation will be considered cause for significant grade reduction, no matter how good a student's written work may be.
- 4) Give three presentations—two during the course and one during the final period (please see presentation guidelines below, following the Course Calendar).
- 5) Write two response papers to films, plus one final paper (please see description of writing assignments below, following the Course Calendar).
- 6) Take a mid-term exam.
- 7) Maintain an open mind. Cinema is a complex art form, and (most of the time) a complex business. We always need to examine films in their contexts (ie, a period when

gender roles were not defined as they are today), and as artistic artifacts (so that we may see what achievement they represent). **There always exists the possibility that some material may be objectionable in some way to some students—there is no intention on the part of the instructor to offend; the goal is to develop a greater understanding of what is out there, and in order to do so we may have to suffer through some unpleasant moments.** In addition to respecting the medium and its artists, the students will need to respect each other, maintaining an environment for meaningful intellectual dialogue.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Westminster College’s policy on academic integrity will be rigorously enforced in this class. Please refer to the Student Handbook and the College Catalog for details of the policy. If you are not certain as to what constitutes an infraction of this policy, such as cheating or plagiarism, do not hesitate to consult the instructor (BEFORE YOU TURN IN ANY WORK ABOUT WHICH YOU MAY HAVE DOUBTS). The policy as it applies to this course will be as follows: **If you commit an act of plagiarism or are caught cheating in any way on any assignment (or commit any other violation of the College policy), you will fail the course and be reported to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.**

### ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Westminster College actively strives for the full inclusion of all our students. Students with disabilities who require access solutions for environmental or curricular barriers should contact Faith Craig, Director of Disability Support Services, located in 209 Thompson-Clark Hall. phone: 724-946-7192 e-mail: [shawcj@westminster.edu](mailto:shawcj@westminster.edu)

### CELL PHONES

Cell phones are not allowed in my classroom. They must be turned OFF and put away. If I see your cell phone once class has begun, you will be marked absent for the day, no questions asked.

### GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation	15%
Papers	30% (15% each)
Presentations	15% (7.5% each)
Mid-Term	15%
Final Project	25% (20% paper, 5% presentation)

### LETTERS AND NUMBERS

A	93-100	B+	88-89	C+	78-79	D+	68-69	F	0-59
A-	90-92	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	63-67		
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62		

### COURSE CALENDAR

#### PART 1: RIDLEY SCOTT WEEK 1

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 8/25	Course introduction	
W 8/27	Screening: <i>Alien</i> (1979, 117 m.)	
F 8/29	Presentations and discussion	

**WEEK 2**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 9/1	Presentations and discussion	Article: Hantke
M 9/1	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Blade Runner</i> (1982, 117 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 9/3	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Thelma and Louise</i> (1991, 130 m.)	
F 9/5	Presentations and discussion	Article: Gravett

**WEEK 3**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 9/8	Presentations and discussion	Sturken, <i>Thelma and Louise</i>
M 9/8	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Kingdom of Heaven</i> (2005, 194 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 9/10	<b>Screening:</b> <i>A Good Year</i> (2006, 117 m.)	
F 9/12	Presentations and discussion	Article: Schlimm

**PART 2: JAMES CAMERON**

**WEEK 4**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 9/15	Presentations and discussion	
W 9/17	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The Terminator</i> (1984, 107 m.)	
F 9/19	Presentations and discussion	

**WEEK 5**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 9/22	Presentations and discussion	Article: Palumbo
W 9/24	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Aliens</i> (1986, 137 m.)	
F 9/26	Presentations and discussion	Paper 1 due

**WEEK 6**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 9/29	Presentations and discussion	Article: Caldwell
M 9/29	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The Abyss</i> (1989, 170 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 10/1	<b>Screening:</b> <i>True Lies</i> (1994, 141 m.)	
F 10/3	Presentations and discussion	

**Part 3: MICHAEL MANN**

**WEEK 7**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 10/6	Presentations and discussion	
M 10/6	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Titanic</i> (1997, 194 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 10/8	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Manhunter</i> (1986, 124 m.)	
F 10/10	Presentations and discussion	Lubin, <i>Titanic</i>

**WEEK 8**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 10/13	Presentations and discussion	Article: Phillips
W 10/15	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Last of the Mohicans</i> (1992, 119 m.)	
F 10/17	Presentations and discussion	Article: Brantlinger

**WEEK 9**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 10/20	Presentations and discussion	Midterm exam due
M 10/20	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Heat</i> (1995, 170 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 10/22	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Ali</i> (2001, 157 m.)	
F 10/24	Presentations and discussion	James, <i>Heat</i>

**WEEK 10**

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 10/27	FALL BREAK—NO CLASS	
W 10/29	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Miami Vice</i> (2006, 140 m.)	
F 10/31	Presentations and discussion	Article: Lobato

## Part 4: STEVEN SPIELBERG

### WEEK 11

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 11/3	Presentations and discussion	Paper 2 due
W 11/5	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Jaws</i> (1975, 124 m.)	
F 11/7	Presentations and discussion	Quirke, <i>Jaws</i>

### WEEK 12

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 11/10	Presentations and discussion	
M 11/10	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</i> (1977, 137 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 11/12	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i> (1981, 115 m.)	
F 11/14	Presentations and discussion	Article: Engel

### WEEK 13

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 11/17	Presentations and discussion	
M 11/17	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (1998, 169 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 11/19	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Jurassic Park</i> (1993, 127 m.)	
F 11/21	Presentations and discussion	Article: Toplin

### WEEK 14

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 11/24	Presentations and discussion	
W 11/26	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS	
F 11/28	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS	

### WEEK 15

Date	Activity	Other Info
M 12/1	Presentations and discussion	
M 12/1	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Lincoln</i> (2012, 150 m.)	TC 210, 8pm
W 12/3	Presentations and discussion (No screening)	
F 12/5	Presentations and discussion	Final paper due

**FINAL PERIOD: Wednesday, 10 December, 2014, 8:00am-10:30am**

### ARTICLE LIST

**Alien:** Hantke, Steffen. "In the Belly of the Mechanical Beast: Technological Environments in the *Alien* Films." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 36.3 (2003): 518-546.

**Blade Runner:** Gravett, Sharon L. "The Sacred and the Profane: Examining the Religious Subtext of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*." *Literature Film Quarterly* 26.1 (1998): 38-45.

**Kingdom of Heaven:** Schlimm, M R. "The Necessity of Permanent Criticism: a Postcolonial Critique of Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*." *Journal of Media and Religion* 9.3 (2010): 129-149.

**The Terminator:** Palumbo, Donald. "The Monomyth in James Cameron's *The Terminator*: Sarah As Monomythic Heroine." *Journal of Popular Culture* 41.3 (2008): 413-427.

**Aliens:** Caldwell, Thomas. "*Aliens*: Mothers, Monsters and Marines." *Screen Education* (2010): 125-130.

**Manhunter:** Phillips, K R. "Redeeming the Visual: Aesthetic Questions in Michael Mann's *Manhunter*." *Literature Film Quarterly* 31 (2003): 10-16.

**Last of the Mohicans:** Brantlinger, Patrick. "Forgetting Genocide: Or, the Last of the Last of the Mohicans." *Cultural Studies* 12.1 (1998): 15-30. \*\*\* This article is available on our course page in My Westminster, as well as the R drive—do not look for it on the library page—you won't find it there!

*Ali*: Doyle, Kegan. "Muhammad Goes to Hollywood: Michael Mann's *Ali* As Biopic." *Journal of Popular Culture* 39.3 (2006): 383-406.

*Miami Vice*: Lobato, Ramon. "Crimes against Urbanity: the Concrete Soul of Michael Mann." *Continuum* 22.3 (2008): 341-352.

*Close Encounters*: Engel, Charlene. "Language and the Music of the Spheres: Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*." *Literature Film Quarterly* 24.4 (1996): 376-382.

*Saving Private Ryan*: Toplin, Robert B. "Hollywood's D-Day from the Perspective of the 1960s and the 1990s: *The Longest Day* and *Saving Private Ryan*." *Film & History: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 36.2 (2006): 25-29.

*Lincoln*: Bush, H.K. "What Historians Think About Spielberg's *Lincoln*." *Cineaste* 38.2 (2013): 13-19.

## PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

Each student will be required to give two presentations during the course of the semester (not including the final presentation). The two types of presentations to be given are as follows.

**Analytical presentation.** The student will apply some aspect of technical analysis (such as cinematography, editing, mise-en-scène, sound design, etc.), as described by Giannetti, to the film they are assigned to present. Thus, a student may give a presentation on James Horner's score for *Aliens*, or the contrasting acting styles of DeNiro and Schwarzenegger (?) in their respective films and genres, or art direction in *Blade Runner*, to cite just a few of the infinite possibilities. The student will be graded on both his/her comprehension of the concepts, as well as his/her application of those concepts to the film in question.

**Reading presentation.** The student will present his/her interpretation of reading material assigned for the course and/or other material written in reference to the film in question. Thus, a student may discuss Ebert's ideas on Ridley Scott, or compare and contrast someone else's views on *Jaws* with those of Quirke, etc. The student will be graded on both his/her expression of the views of the critics, as well as his/her application of those views to the film in question.

## PAPER GUIDELINES

**Paper 1:** Choose one of the films presented and discussed during the first part of the course. Using a standard definition (which can be found in many different places—ask for help if necessary) of that film's ostensible genre, describe how the film does and does not adhere to the conventions of that genre. Please pay special attention to the techniques (ie, cinematography, mise en scène, sound design, etc.) used by the filmmakers to underline (or undermine) these conventions. 3-5 pages.

**Paper 2:** Choose one the directors from the course to this point (Scott, Cameron, Mann), and describe how they work in different genres. An ideal way to do this would be to compare two films and their respective relationships to the genres of which they are examples. Is the director more (or less) successful in one film or genre than another? As in the first paper, pay special attention to different techniques used to create their artistic vision. 3-5 pages.

**Final Paper:** The final paper for the course will be a genre-based analysis of a film of the student's choosing (with instructor permission if it is not one of the films included in the course) that will incorporate appropriate secondary sources beyond the regular course texts (although the course texts are still acceptable as sources). Otherwise, many of the parameters of the assignment remain the same as those of the first two papers: students should again address adherence (or nonadherence) to genre standards, as well as techniques used by the filmmakers in the creation of their films. 5-7 pages.