


Talking About Movies

An Honors Thesis

By

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Abstract

As the Ball State Telecommunications Course Curriculum has changed, the number of Film Studies courses offered has dwindled. Katie Day and Jeff Laub, both pursuing Film Studies minors, decided to combat this reduction in courses by teaching a film studies colloquium of their own, Honors 390H, *Talking About Movies*. Their goal was to form a discussion-based course where students would learn beginning analytical skills through lecture and class conversation. Since the class was going to be targeted at those unfamiliar with viewing films critically, the accepted students were originally limited to non-TCOM students. The instructors worked in conjunction with Dr. Patrick Collier, a professor of English who teaches a Film as Literature class. The instructors also drew upon their past film classes for inspiration in the structuring and execution of their course.

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Talking About Movies: An Introduction for First-time Film Instructors

Even for the most experienced teacher, an introductory film course can offer unique challenges and obstacles. While many traditional pedagogical techniques are applicable to such a course, special considerations must be taken when crafting a course focused on the unique medium of film. Both students and the instructor may have preconceived notions about film as a subject matter and as a text, which must be overcome in order fully realize the potential of the class. The authors of this paper, being both first-time instructors as well as first-time film professors, had to overcome all of the pedagogical challenges that first-time instructors will face. The authors' purpose in this paper is to relate lessons they learned from their experience in planning and executing their introductory colloquium on film analysis: Honors 390H – *Talking About Movies*. From these lessons, the authors will offer techniques and recommendations for other instructors who are faced with the challenge of teaching an introductory film course.

One of the first challenges facing a beginning film instructor is the selection of a specific film focus for the class. A “film class” is as broad a description as a “written literature class.” There are many avenues that an instructor can take as a specific course focus. The most obvious and perhaps best focus for an introductory film class is that of a general film as literature course, where the students are taught specific films in the same manner that written works would be taught in a literature class. The focus of a film as literature class would be the development of the students' visual literacy through “detailed ‘reading’ of visual images; in addition, students evolve a working critical vocabulary while writing about film” (Chipman 1). This working vocabulary would address such concepts as camera angles, genre, cinematography, use of color, and overall

production value. However, an introductory film class should not be constrained to just visual readings and technical vocabulary; in order for students to gain a full appreciation of film, emphasis must also be given to “the historical and cultural contexts, production, and creative expression, audience response, and aesthetic values” (Considine and Baker 12). This broad overview of the various elements of film provides the building blocks for film appreciation.

There are other focuses that a film class could take. The focus could still be analytical but with a specific slant, such as the study of film through genres or traditional film theory. The course could be an overall history of film and the way cinema has evolved over time both stylistically and technologically. A historical approach could focus on a particular concept, like the history of film censorship. The class could have a non-film focus that uses film as the primary text, such as an American History through Film class. This type of focus allows students to see the close correlation between films and external societal factors, and how they both feed off of and influence the other. All of these approaches are valid and can be taught at a level that novice film students will understand, however, for the purposes of this, the authors’ focus will be on the introductory film as literature class. This was the structure of *Talking About Movies*, and this structure provides the best overview of the many facets of film and allows for a logical starting point for film analysis.

With this film as literature focus in mind, the crafting of the syllabus and the course structure may begin. In an introductory film class, it is important to limit the scope of what is going to be addressed. Since film is as broad as literature, there are innumerable topics that merit attention. However, if the instructor goes with too many

topics of discussion, the students will not sufficiently grasp the significance of the subjects and will be unable to apply them to worthwhile film analysis. When allotting class time for specific film subjects, some concepts may be more accessible to students than others. Students may learn the varying shot types with just a few examples, while more abstract concepts like realism vs. formalism may take multiple class sessions for the students to even grasp a basic understanding of the concept. Complex topics such as realism vs. formalism are best saved for later in the course, after the students have had a chance to grasp some of the basic concepts. In addition, instructors should only introduce abstract and complex topics if they have allotted the appropriate amount of time to discuss the topic and field questions from the students. Attempting to blaze through difficult topics in too short of time will only confuse and frustrate the students. Worse, if a complex topic is explained too hastily, the students may erroneously think they grasp the subject matter when they do not. In *Talking About Movies*, lighting and color correction was touched upon briefly in one class and then not addressed again. At the end of the course, in a final presentation, one student discussed how color correction was used to lighten scenes in *Braveheart* shot in barns where there is no good light source. The instructors had failed to make clear to students that almost all scenes, even those done outside, utilize at least some artificial lighting. While there will inevitably be students who fail to grasp all of the concepts, such misunderstandings can be minimized by giving thorough coverage to each topic selected.

Because the topic of introductory film analysis is so broad, consulting sample syllabi can be beneficial to beginning teachers. Samples can be found in some academic film journals as well as some specialty books. Beginning instructors should, of course,

only use these samples as jumping off points for their own syllabus. They should neither plagiarize nor feel bound to the suggestions of the sample syllabi (Tomasulo "Teaching" 73). After selecting topics to be addressed, films must be chosen that will illustrate the topics. Sample syllabi can also offer helpful suggestions for film selections, but again, instructors should not feel bound to certain movies. Beginning teachers may feel pressure to show only "classic" films, but this is not required or always the best choice. While it is important and beneficial to the students for them to be exposed to older films they are not familiar with, they may also initially resist movies that are too foreign to their past cinema experiences, both in content and style. *Talking About Movies* chose to start the class with a screening and discussion of *High Fidelity*, a revisionist romantic comedy. This is a popular movie that students are open and accessible to, so the instructors felt that this would be an excellent way to initiate conversation amongst the students. A more erudite selection may have been more filmic and contained more potential material to discuss, but the instructors felt that beginning with too high-concept of a movie would stunt conversation rather than foster it.

Beginning instructors should also resist the belief that only old, classic movies can illustrate analytical film concepts. If one of the class discussion topics is *film noir*, the genre could be illustrated with a classic like *The Maltese Falcon*, but the same genre lessons could as effectively be taught with a revisionist-*noir* like *Chinatown* or a modern neo-*noir* like *Brick*. In *Talking About Movies*, for a unit on personality comedy, the instructors chose to screen *Zoolander*. This Ben Stiller vehicle may not be as lauded as Marx Brothers or Charlie Chaplin films, but *Zoolander* is just as effective an example of personality comedy as those older films. Showing more current films can also help

students analyze popular, recent movies by making them aware of cinematic qualities that they may have thought only occurred in older, classic films.

The actual film screenings should be done at a separate time from the lecture and discussion class sessions. Students need time to digest a movie before they will be ready to discuss it. The preferable structure for films screenings is to first introduce the movie and the week's topic in lecture, then hold the screening, and follow that in the next session with discussion. Beginning instructors should also consider showing segments of some films rather than their entirety. An instructor may choose to show the lobby gunfight from *The Matrix* to illustrate the concept of editing but choose not to screen the whole movie. This is a useful practice for highlighting cinematically meritorious scenes contained within movies that do not have enough cinematic interest to be shown in their entirety. Instructors can also re-show certain portions of a movie that they have screened during the discussion session to highlight certain concepts that they think the students may not have fully grasped during the first screening.

Before the screening takes place, it is important to provide background context for the films. This can be accomplished partially with lecture and also with assigned readings. Famed movie critic Pauline Kael was concerned that assigned readings were one of the many potential dangers of film pedagogy to kill a student's love of movies. She considered an assigned text to be a "book that, under the guise of simplifying, makes things more dull and meaningless and difficult and forgettable than they have ever been" (Kael 14). While Kael's opinion is extreme, she has a valid point about the potential for readings to kill the natural enthusiasm students will have for a film class. While beginning instructors should not forgo reading assignments for fear that students will find

them tedious, effort should be made to select readings that will actively engage the students' interest. Beginning instructors must also remember that the students are new to film analysis, so the language of the assigned readings must be at a level which they will be able to grasp. The instructors should also make certain to frequently reference the ideas and topics in the assigned readings, otherwise students will not feel a need to keep up with the assignments. While this can be partially combated by having reading quizzes, active discussion of the reading topics is more engaging to the students and is a less stressful way to ensure completion of the assignments than quizzes.

While lecture is a necessary part of any class, class participation ensures that the students are learning the concepts. The best way to engage students in a film analysis class is by leading discussion. Discussion is an integral part of learning in any classroom. According to C. Emory Burton, author of *Sociology and the Feature Film*, "it is essential that discussion be a required part of the experience" (265). Open conversation is the key to getting students' ideas on the table, and also helps in discovering what they are actually learning and understanding. In *Talking About Movies*, discussion made up half of the class, with the actual film viewing being the other half. Very little lecture was used in this course; therefore, the discussion had to be carefully guided and planned in order to insure the most learning on the students' part.

For the instructors of *Talking About Movies*, the easiest way to plan a discussion day was to create an outline. This outline consisted of major points to be reached by the end of the class time, as well as questions to ask the class to spark discussion. The points should be arranged in logical order, in order to better facilitate learning. The instructor, of course, should know much more about the subject than the student. Dr. Patrick Collier,

the faculty mentor for the instructors of *Talking About Movies*, once said that if a cup is knowledge, the instructor should be able to fill the cup – but the instructor need only give just a little bit to the students. The point being, of course, that the instructor must have the knowledge to back up the teaching. Along with this, it is important to be able to pursue new points the students bring up, with knowledge to spare.

Many times, students ask questions that catch their instructors off-guard, and it is important to be able to be spontaneous. One way to effectively be able to go along with the student's question, and possible new discussion point, is to research heavily the subject you are presenting in class. For seasoned film instructors, this may not be necessary, but for first-time instructors, it is important to know more than the students, and to be able to prove that. Dr. Collier once suggested simply doing an academic search of your topic, and reading the articles that come up. This helps to gain knowledge from different sources, and overall benefits the discussion.

While learning about the topic yourself, it is easy to pick up trivial details about the film you are showing, or the actors, directors, or topics you are researching. It is important in the discussion to limit the use of trivia. Trivia does not contribute to a discussion with an analytical focus, unless a student asks a question that would require such an answer. When teaching film to students who have never studied it, trivial details may be helpful, but trivia is never good to lead a discussion with.

When students bring up new points, it may be tempting to allow conversation to steer its own way. However, the instructor should remember to not allow the discussion to become unbeneficial. According to Burton, “a good discussion consists of interaction and feedback, not just a rotation of viewpoints” (265). Efforts should be taken to insure

that the discussion is worthwhile for the students' learning, rather than just letting inconsequential talk take away from the points you were trying to make in class that day. Many times it may seem easy if the students are already talking to let them talk, but you should always make sure that it contributes to the overall analytical focus of the day.

A crucial point of discussion is to bring out the students' critical analysis. When leading a conversation and asking questions, do not let students get away with, "I really liked that," or "I did not like that." Ask questions to expose what the student is really thinking, and encourage them to state their opinions; however, they should be constructive to the discussion. In order to help along discussion, Burton suggests "restating what others have said, formulating examples, asking questions, adding to what someone else has said, stating ways your understanding differs from that stated by another member, and framing questions which will help the group test the usefulness of points" (265). The point of discussion is, of course, to encourage the students to use their own critical thinking to help them learn. Film is not an exact science, and the instructor is merely a guide to the students.

One thing that can help film discussion is the use of film stills. Like using film clips in the classroom, stills are a great supplement to the discussion, and can also greatly help the conversation. In *Talking About Movies*, the instructors used film stills through PowerPoint presentations. The stills were generally from the movie being discussed, but occasionally they were stock photos to illustrate a point. One example is when the class was discussing *Reservoir Dogs* and the students were shown a still of the first scene, and were asked to examine the layout of the characters in the scene. An example of stock photos being used was in a discussion of camera angles. The students were shown several

different still shots, such as bird's eye view, extreme close-up, wide shot, etc. and were asked to come up with uses for those shots.

While discussion is extremely beneficial to student/film learning, assessment must also be part of the class; although, admittedly it is much different to assess learning in a film course. To begin, Dana Bickford Tipton and Kathleen A. Tiemann, who wrote the article *Using the Feature Film to Facilitate Sociological Thinking*, the instructor "must consider the sophistication (or lack of sophistication) of introductory students" (188). This is to say that you cannot expect too much from first time film students. With that said, the easiest form of assessment is class participation. A discussion-based class should include frequent participation from all members of the class, which helps their learning. In *Talking About Movies*, most students, being Honors students, were very willing to participate. Keep in mind, students chime in when they feel as though they have something worthwhile to say, so of course, praising students for making a good point is helpful for both instructor and student. If a student is not actively or regularly participating, it may be necessary to simply call on them when asking a discussion question. If the students as a whole are unwilling to participate (especially at the beginning of class), it may be necessary to again simply call on someone to jumpstart conversation.

In order to assess student participation over the course of the semester, the instructors of *Talking About Movies* kept track on the attendance sheet. Attendance is also a part of participation, since students cannot be participating in the class if they are not attending regularly; therefore, attendance was carefully monitored as well. With that said, at the end of the semester, it is easy to reward students for good participation, as there is a

record of it for the entire semester. An important point, however, is that some students are simply very shy, or take a long time to get used to the environment, or may feel as though their points aren't good enough. In order to assess their learning, and others, journals are another good form of assessment.

In *Talking About Movies*, journals were due every Monday, following class the previous week. In these journals, students were encouraged to write about the class discussion, critically analyze the film, discuss the readings assigned, and give their opinions. In film classes the instructors have taken previously, journals were also assigned, but were due at the very end of the semester. Having the journals due weekly greatly improved the quality, and also worked to keep the students involved with the point of the previous class much longer. The instructors felt as though asking them to write about the subject every week helped the students retain the information longer.

Another writing assignment given to the class was to do two movie reviews. The students were given guidelines for a movie review, which included using a reviewer voice, not allowing the audience to know if you enjoyed or disliked the film, analyzing the film critically, and keeping it brief, as though it were to appear in a magazine or on the Internet. Because the students were asked to do two, the review grades were averaged to make up for possibly not hitting the assignment on the head the first time. The movie review was also the first assignment due, and it gave the instructors good insight into what the students were learning, and what they were struggling with. This proved to be a good assignment, and the second round of reviews, due at the end of the semester, were much improved and very impressive.

Following several weeks of genre discussion in the class, another writing assignment was given to the students in which they would focus on one genre. This paper was 4-5 pages in length and the students were to go in depth with their film research. A handout was given to them detailing guidelines which included staying away from plot summaries, focusing on one genre, identifying the characteristics of the genre, the history of the genre, and using film examples and research to back up their points. The students chose a wide array of genres from screwball comedy to gangster to action films. These papers turned out to be a great outlet for the students to really get into film analysis and critique. The paper was also due around the middle of the semester, and the students really seemed to display that they were on track with their learning. On that note, reading student work can be very encouraging to an instructor, especially if students are reiterating things discussed in class and demonstrating learning. Tipton and Tiemann suggest that “frequent misinterpretations of a particular theory or concept help [instructors] to decide where to focus [their] attention” in later semesters (190). With that said, student performance on these papers would be helpful in determining how to teach to other classes.

For the final assessment, the class was given a creative project. Because this was still their first film class, it is important to insure that the assignment presents “a realistic challenge rather than an insurmountable task” (Tipton and Tiemann 188). The assignment was to create a five to seven minute commentary on a scene from a film of their choosing. In one class period, the students were shown several DVD commentaries ranging from movie critics to directors. The students were again given a handout detailing the guidelines for the project. Their commentaries were to be constant

throughout the scene they chose, should include several things discussed during the semester, and should display well developed film analysis. One note for this assignment, however, is to be aware of the technological limits of the students. The instructors of the course had to arrange for most of the students to record their commentaries, so that should be kept in mind if using this sort of assignment. Overall, the DVD commentaries were very impressive from the students, and were very rewarding for the instructors, since it was clear that the students had increased their knowledge of film analysis over the course of the semester.

Assessing student learning is extremely important in a class that is set up with film viewing taking up one entire class period, because student learning can only be actually observed half the time. Writing assignments are extremely useful because it forces the students to put their thoughts and analysis on paper so the instructors can actually see their progress. Assigning a creative project is also a great idea because the students get to do a non-traditional assignment, and most of the students really shine with this opportunity.

Most students who enroll in an introductory film class will be doing so because they love movies. While some will enroll because they think that a film class will be easy, early written assessments can correct students of this notion. In *Talking About Movies*, the first assignment resulted in several low grades that stressed to the students that the stated expectations of the course were genuine. However, for the most part, the students will be enthusiastic for a film class. This makes the beginning instructor's job slightly easier. Rather than creating interest where there is none, the instructor simply has to cultivate the interest that already exists without killing it. A careful balance of

lecture with well-chosen films will inspire the students while they are learning. Still, the best tool to teach students while keeping them interested is interaction. This is done best through class discussion and assignments that engage the students' intellect and creativity. By carefully managing all of these elements, the beginning film instructor can ensure that the introductory film course will be enjoyable, informative, and beneficial for student and teacher alike.

Annotated Bibliography

Burton, C. Emory. "Sociology and the Feature Film." *Teaching Sociology* 16.3 (Jul., 1988): 263-271.

This source mostly discusses using films in the classroom to help further the understanding of students about sociological issues. While this article was written for a sociology journal – the majority of it is not really addressing sociological things, but rather the benefits to using film in the classroom. On the whole, for teaching purposes, this article touts the benefits of using feature films rather than documentaries or educational films in order to better reach students. The author recognizes that students of the day are born into a time of mass media – and talks about how using films is more effective than and just as relevant as using books. This author also realizes that it may not always be practical to use films in the classroom, and thus gives helpful tips about how to incorporate films into the classroom – be it combining classes to watch films, arranging other times to see films, providing multiple viewing times for a greater chance of attendance, and the possibility of showing only clips to get the point across. Another point the author makes is that discussion is necessary to the further understanding of film meanings, and that discussion enables the students to get more out of the experience. The author suggests many ways to incorporate discussion from large group discussion to small group discussion. Also, the author states that in order to evaluate the learning experience, discussion can be monitored, along with participation, and also students should be encouraged to use the films in essays and papers. The author, finally, includes an appendix of films that can be used to convey different topics.

In evaluation of this source, it is important to note that the article was written in 1988. The source also makes many mentions of videocassettes and VCRs, rather than more modern technologies. Other than that, however, all the points made in this article are relevant twenty years later. The author of the article seems to be either a sociologist of some sort, or a teacher of sociology himself or herself. While this may be the case, the article does not seem biased in any way; it just conveys the benefits to using film in the classroom as a teaching tool.

Overall, this is a really helpful and relevant source. This article provides a lot of information that really backs up the whole emphasis of the class. While seemingly geared just for sociology teaching, the points made apply also to really all types of teaching, especially teaching with film as the main source of teaching material. This article covers a lot of similar things that are occurring in the Honors 390 classroom, including discussion and ways to evaluate student learning.

Burton, Howard A. "The Development of Taste in Movies." *College English*. Vol. 17, No. 4. (Jan., 1956), pp. 235-238.

Developing a strong taste in movies is an essential part of a college education, author Howard Burton argues. He warns against the folly of assuming that students will learn a mature taste for movies just because they learn a mature taste for other art forms. Such development is important as a distinguishing sign of a liberal education. Burton offers numerous tips for how such a mature taste should be developed. Burton advises that students begin by evaluating their current taste in movies and whether or not it has changed over the years. Students need to learn that criticism is composed of more than just fault-finding; that it is a full intellectual assessment of a work's both good and bad traits. If students are concerned that developing their tastes means some movies will not be enjoyable to them anymore, they need to know that they will be compensated by having a deeper appreciation for other works of art. Students should read as much as they can about movies, both histories and film reviews. Burton also advocates reading plays and novels, from which parallels of dramatic structure and criticism can be drawn. With the film reviews, however, students should learn not to take them at face value. They must learn how to critically analyze the reviews themselves, detecting biases and preferences from the reviewer and how that influences their opinion of the movie. Understanding film criticism will aid students in their own writing about films. Since enthusiasm for films generally runs high, students should be actively willing to participate in these activities, and their overall understanding and appreciation of the arts will grow along with their love for film.

Burton's article, while obviously dated, still is beneficial to those interested in crafting a film studies curriculum. His emphasis on reading and understanding film criticism is particularly important, as watching films is not enough to increase appreciation of them; some outside scholarship is necessary. Burton stresses the importance of watching only quality films, and this is a good tactic, but Burton seems to display an elitist attitude that is slightly troubling. Burton dismisses slapstick as second or third-rate cinema; just because a film relies on physical humor does not necessarily mean it is below other types of cinema. Students and instructors would be wise to view quality films from all genres, including slapstick comedies.

Despite his attitude and the age of the article, Honors 390 still put several of Burton's strategies to use. We used this article as the basis for the introductory discussion of the course to flesh out students' idea about film criticism and what they expected from the course. Burton's emphasis on reading outside criticism coincides with our assignment of two movie reviews for the semester. Honors 390 screened for the students both good and bad movies, so as to allow them the opportunity to critically analyze why one is good and one is bad, as Burton has suggested.

Chipman, Bruce. "Watching with New Eyes: Broadening the English Curriculum Through Cinema Studies." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (Nov 15-20, 2001).

This article is about English instructors using film to teach, rather than relying solely on the written word. The author realizes that while English instructors prefer other mediums, film's impact on English education is enormous. The author also states that English departments need to focus on gaining "visual literacy" in the classroom. In this article, the author discusses a film study course that seeks to teach film literacy through "reading films." He also stresses the importance of learning a "critical vocabulary" with students, so they may talk more intelligently about films. The author also created a course that focuses on one element of film, to be used in a shorter term. Some examples he cites for this more focused course are discussing one director, genre, or time period. The author also believes that teaching film helps to enhance thinking and writing skills, as well as helps students keep abreast of technical advances. The author also admits that while teaching film might be seen as an obstacle, he believes that it should be utilized and instructors should not be afraid to use it in the classroom. He also believes that film is important enough to be studied by itself, and not just used as a literary crutch. The author also states that the study of film is different from the study of literature, and requires new analytical perspectives. The author also then includes sample lesson plans and course outlines for different course studies, including a blanket film study course, a course about American cinema/culture, a Hitchcock centric course, and American Film Noir.

The author of this article has been teaching film studies for 22 years, ever since the NCTE placed a high value on using film in the English classroom. The author seems to

be knowledgeable on the different aspects of teaching film, and its importance as a teaching tool, and stresses the importance of using film study as an integral part of English classes. This article was also written in 2001, which is still current enough to be relevant.

This article is extremely useful for the discussion of teaching film, mostly due to the author's structuring of his courses very similarly to Honors 390. The article is timely, and seems to be a reliable source, and the author provides good information that can reinforce many issues that will be presented in the discussion.

Considine, David M. and Frank Baker. "Focus on Film: Learning It Through the Movies." *National Middle School Association, Middle Ground*, 10.2 (Oct 2006): 12-15.

This article discusses the benefits of using film in the classroom. The authors first discuss how using films as a teaching tool may not be as respected as other mediums, and how using feature films rather than educational programming may be looked down upon, and cite an example of such an occurrence. The article discusses how recently, the use of films as teaching tools has been supported by major reading and language arts organizations, which is a major endorsement. The article also discusses how SpringBoard, a middle school English curriculum, included more than 30 films to help teach students how to view a film critically, while also using novels and poems as supplementary material. There is a discussion about how students as early as middle school are now taught different aspects of filmmaking; they study historical context, audience responses, aesthetic values, and even production. The article also discusses how students can learn better by watching films, and also how to prepare lessons around films to facilitate better learning. The authors also encourage teachers new to using films, saying that it should be taken slowly – one step at a time. Also, they emphasize not thinking that students will take everything in at once; the students also need time to understand film. Another suggestion in this article for first time film using teachers, is to try studying film elements and how the elements of a film are put together to create a final product.

The authors of this article work in media literacy and are obviously advocates and champions for film in the classroom. The only real biases of these authors are that they

make books and other literature seem outdated, but they still recognize their importance in the classroom. Another issue with this article is that it was written for middle school teachers, but it still relates to classes teaching all ages. This article was also written in 2006, which makes it up to date and relevant.

This article can be used in our discussion of film teaching by using elements of how to get started using film in the classroom, as the instructors of Honors 390 have never before used film as a teaching tool – let alone taught at all. This source seems to also support literacy and critical thinking about film, which is something that the Honors 390 course is trying to achieve. The authors believe that film should be handled as its own medium, with literature used to supplement – as is done in Honors 390. The students in the courses taught by the authors are required to turn in film critiques, which have proved to be useful in Honors 390 as a way to get students to express intellectually their ideas on a particular film. It also addresses how teaching film isn't always taken seriously, but when done correctly, can be a great teaching device.

Gallagher, Brian. "Film Study and the Teaching of English: Technology and the Future of Pedagogy." *The English Journal*. Vol. 77, No. 7. (Nov., 1988), pp. 58-61.

With the widespread use of the VCR changing consumer access to movies, author Brian Gallagher considers how VCR technology will change how movies are used and studied in the classroom. Gallagher raises the issue that viewing movies through a VCR may change their status as movies altogether, both in the physical and psychological scaling down of the content and the inevitable linking of movies and television by viewing them on the same small device. Also, the fact that the user now has the ability to control how the movie is played back changes the relationship that viewers once had with movies. However, Gallagher quickly sidesteps these issues and dives into discussing how VCR technology will benefit film pedagogy. The ability of the VCR to pause the movie and rewind it means the composition of individual shots can now be studied as well as particular camera movements, rather than just studying the film as a whole, as was previously required when viewed as filmstrips. This will bring the study of film and literature closer together. Because of this, Gallagher argues for the need to teach students basic film analysis vocabulary, as well as make them aware of the close relationship that already exists between film and literature with the numerous literary adaptations in film. As film becomes more and more studied as form of literature, Gallagher believes that teachers will need to move beyond the traditional written essay to a form of student composition that combines the written word with graphics and sound.

The questions that Gallagher raises about the effect of transferring movies from the medium of film to videotape are important and worth discussing, so it is disappointing that he merely glosses over them in the first few paragraphs before moving on to his predictions for how VCR technology will change classroom teaching. While the main point of the article is his predictions, Gallagher does offer some tips for how VCRs could be used effectively in the classroom. These tidbits instill a desire that Gallagher had spent more time proactively writing as to how film studies should be taught in the classroom, rather than just how he thinks they will be taught in the future.

One of the key components that Gallagher lists for teaching film as literature is teaching students a basic film vocabulary, a task that was set as one of our original goals for Honors 390. Gallagher also stresses the close relationship that film and literature already have with adaptations, another concept that we devoted a specific week to as well as other class time when the issue arose. The model we have selected for the final project, a spoken commentary on film, bears a resemblance to the combination of written word/graphical/spoken essay that Gallagher predicted would become the norm in English classrooms.

Kael, Pauline. "It's Only a Movie." *Performing Arts Journal*. Vol. 17, No. 2/3, *The Arts and the University*. (May-Sept., 1995), pp. 8-19.

In this reprint of a speech she gave in 1973, Pauline Kael is upfront about her disdain for the teaching of films in academic settings, but she accepts the inevitability of it. Her biggest fear is that the teaching of films will render them dull and boring to a generation that has embraced them. Students flock to movies because unlike other media, films have not been forced on them. Watching a movie is never a burden, and young people are not expected to react a certain way. Students are met with shock if they criticize a classic novel like Dickens, but they are free to react however they wish to movies without fear of scorn for not appreciating the classics. Part of the push for film education is coming from the movie industry itself in hopes of boosting ticket sales by increasing film appreciation. Kael understands the intent, but points out the high risk that is run by potentially sapping the enjoyment out of the medium like other subjects of academic study. She lists many suggestions for ways to avoid damaging students' love of movies any more than absolutely necessary. Kael urges professors to steer away from the use of written texts. She believes that in the arts, a text only renders the art dull and meaningless in its attempt to simplify the work in question. Repetition of movies is also to be avoided. If students do not comprehend the meaning of a film the first time, the only thing that making them watch it over again will do is increase their dislike for it. To add variety of class content and viewpoints, Kael suggests bringing in industry professionals as guest speakers, but not just the successful ones. She also suggests having industry failures speak so that students can see all sides of the business. Another of her suggestions is that teachers only show movies that they have strong feelings about one way or another. If students are

shown a film that the teacher is indifferent to, most likely the students will be indifferent as well and nothing will be learned.

Kael makes explicitly clear her biases throughout the article. However, after making it clear how bad of an idea teaching film is, she moves on to how it should be done if it is going to be done at all. Her suggestions are articulately explained and flow logically from one to another. The biggest downside to the article is the abrupt conclusion; Kael spends several pages crafting her suggestions, but then takes no time to bring everything together for one final, cohesive thought.

Kael's argument is one that arises frequently in the discussion of film in academia, and is something Honors 390 wanted to address at the very beginning of class: does the study of film lead to over-analysis that ultimately ruins the students' enjoyment of movies? If students are actively enrolling in a film studies class, hopefully they are not concerned with such an issue. However, it is a valid concern, and in crafting the lesson plans throughout the semester, the instructors of Honors 390 took many of her suggestions to heart. We selected only films we felt either strongly positive or strongly negative about, and we tried to avoid forcing students to feel a particular way about the movies. While Kael's opinion of academia's effect on its subjects may be harsh, she nonetheless provides valuable tips for giving students an enriching film education.

Rieck, William and Donna Dugger-Wadsworth. "From Broadway to the Classroom: Using Entertainment to Get Your Point Across." *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81.4 (Mar-Apr 2008): 165-168.

This source discusses the use of Broadway musicals as a tool for getting students to understand certain concepts in the classroom. The article makes the point that students today learn in a variety of ways, and not all of them traditional. The authors also state that different techniques must be applied in order to teach students more effectively. The authors realize, first of all, that arts education is being removed from schools for budgetary, among others, reasons. Students are usually only tested on "cognitive" activities, including math, science and social studies, rather than the arts. The affective side of a student's education is often left to the wayside. According to the article, the authors don't always find the use of film in the classroom to be appropriate (especially musicals, as used in this article), but the authors believe that when used correctly, they can be an instrumental tool, which aids in students' arts education, helping them to become more well-rounded. The authors also realize that teachers need to have lessons that will help facilitate high-order learning, and they believe that using film is a great instrument. The authors also offer encouragement to teachers who have not used film before, and offer some tips for getting started. The authors also state that students usually see educational films as uninteresting, and feature films become something exciting, and usually become more effective. Also, due to the availability of technology today – DVD players and computers and televisions in many classrooms (with portable televisions nearby - if not in the classroom), teachers have little excuse to not use films as an enhancement of the curriculum. The use of film also serves to address different intelligences and learning styles, which makes a better lesson plan. In addition, the use of

films can convey emotions and situations that help students to understand what is going on in their own world, which is especially useful for middle and secondary school students.

The authors of this article are professors at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and seem to have had success using these techniques in the classroom, as well as success in teaching others to do the same. No biases seem to exist, other than that of film in the classroom advocacy, especially for their intended use. – using musicals to explain and appeal to affective learning. The authors say that while there is such a focus on cognitive learning, musicals can bring both affective and cognitive learning to the forefront. Film appeal to affective learning, but the authors say that music also enhances cognitive thinking – making using musicals in the classroom a double-edged sword. This article was published in 2008, making it new and up to date.

While the Honors 390 course does not use musicals, the article is still relevant as it goes through the teaching process of using film. This article is well written and discusses the reasons for using film in the classroom – as a benefit to both teachers and students alike. This article provides examples of what films to use, and which scenes, to convey different points, and would be an extremely valuable source if Honors 390 involved musicals, but it seems to be a useful and helpful article for constructing a discussion of film pedagogy.

Tipton, Dana Bickford and Kathleen A. Tiemann. "Using the Feature Film to Facilitate Sociological Thinking." *Teaching Sociology*, 21.2 (Apr. 1993): 187-191.

The main thrust of this article is focusing on an assignment given to students that revolves around film. The assignment in this case was to write a paper after watching films and to learn and understand conflict theory and functionalism. The article begins with encouragement for this type of assignment, saying that students, on the whole, are more satisfied by learning through film, especially in the introductory course in which this article discusses. A study quoted by the article also found that students did better academically in a film-based course, rather than a lecture format, and that students preferred the film instruction. The article then discusses the preparation for undertaking such an assignment, and begins with how to arrange times for the film to be shown. The authors don't recommend using classroom time to show the film, but rather offer several out of class times for viewing opportunities. Prior to the showing of the film, the authors suggest introducing the paper ahead of time, and provide a handout of what is to be accomplished in the paper, and also including that it is to be an analysis of the films and concepts, rather than a summary. Following the assignment, an exercise is also done to aid the students in preparing their minds to undertake this assignment. The authors also note that the instructor must also realistically recognize the knowledge/lack there of, of the students and be sure they are receiving a reasonable task. The authors then discuss and provide some summary of the two films shown to demonstrate the concepts, *The Milagro Beanfield War*, and *Roger and Me*. The article then goes into how most students view the films and how most write their papers, and then gets into some of the difficulties with the assignment. The authors admit that there usually are few difficulties, but one

major issue is that students are usually unsure of their analysis. Because of this, the students sometimes have trouble completing the assignment correctly. The authors also give tips for students who cannot attend the film screenings, and say that out of 240 students a semester, usually less than 6 cannot attend. The authors also provide insight into how the papers are graded. The article ends with a conclusion about how students really like the change of pace with this format, and most thought the paper was hard to write, but enjoyed it. The authors also discuss how the instructor receives feedback of what to do differently based on the quality of the papers, and how it becomes a good indication of how to teach to get the papers you want.

This article seems to be a good source about film and its application in the classroom. The authors are professors who work in a variety of studies, which include innovative teaching techniques, which this seems to be. One issue, however, is that the instructors of this course don't seem to place an emphasis on actually teaching film techniques or theories; their main objective is to teach sociology, but some actual film education is most likely required. The article is also a little outdated as it's from 1993, but on the whole it is relevant.

This article works well with a discussion of film pedagogy because it involves a college course, like Honors 390, and gives an example about how paper writing, film analysis, and learning can go hand in hand, not unlike the genres paper assignment in Honors 390. The source provides a lot of good information and seems to have a lot of concrete techniques that can be applied to the discussion.

Tomasulo, Frank P. "Teaching the Introductory Cinema Studies Course: Some Strategies and Resources." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 34, No. 4. (Summer, 1995), pp. 72-78.

The primary focus of Tomasulo's article is on specific resources and classroom exercises that can be useful in teaching an introductory film studies course. Tomasulo's focus is predicated on the assumption that the class is composed of students who have not taken a film studies class before and that the instructor has never taught such a class before.

Tomasulo acknowledges that there are many topics that can be addressed in a film studies course, including history, industry, genre, and production, however, Tomasulo's emphasis in the article is on strategies for teaching understanding of cinematic imagery and the relationship between style and ideology. The remainder of the article is divided into sections pertaining to individual resources and ways to obtain them. For the initial crafting of a syllabus, Tomasulo recommends reviewing sample syllabi from such notable film scholars as Vivian Sobchack, Gerald Mast, and Lous Giannetti. Sources for these and other resources are included, as well as a note of caution about using these syllabi only as suggested models and to avoid plagiarizing them. Tomasulo recommends putting outstanding former student work at the disposal of current students. This allows students to see both what is expected of them as beginning film scholars and that such film scholarship is possible by people their age. In addition to sample papers, Tomasulo encourages instructors to make use of film clips, educational documentaries about film, and slides of film stills. The slides offer a particular advantage because this allows students to key onto a particular shot and do an in-depth analysis of its shot composition from both technical and critically interpretive standpoints.

The article provides detailed lists of potential books and movies to use as teaching tools, but Tomasulo shows a clear preference for movies made in the 1960s and earlier. The fact that the article is written in 1995 almost comes as a surprise, since almost no movies made past the 1960s are referenced. Tomasulo also includes many foreign and silent films in his recommendations. While the merit of his choices cannot be denied, at times his selections seem too advanced for what is supposed to be an introductory course. In making his recommendations, Tomasulo ignores the issue of potential resistance to foreign and silent films, as can often be the case with beginning film students. In an article written for college instructors, it also seems somewhat insulting that Tomasulo would stress that sample syllabi should only be used for inspiration, not for direct copying.

Many of Tomasulo's recommended strategies were ones we employed in our curriculum. On occasion, Honors 390 showed examples of student writing in class in order to illustrate what was expected from the journals. For the movie review assignment, students were pointed them in the direction of websites where stellar examples could be found. While we did not employ slides, the instructors both used film stills in order to convey the same stylistic and ideological concepts that Tomasulo discussed.

Tomasulo, Frank P. "Theory to Practice: Integrating Cinema Theory and Film Production." *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 36, No. 3. (Spring, 1997), pp. 113-117.

This article is written as a rebuttal to the belief held by many film industry professionals that film theory classes are detrimental to those who wish to participate in the actual practice of making movies. Tomasulo insists that there is much to be gained for film students by studying film theory, and that the ideal education contains an integrated balance of motion picture theory and practice. Tomasulo draws upon his own experiences as a film professor at UCLA, Ithaca College, and Georgia State University. At Ithaca, Tomasulo helped devise an integrated curriculum wherein students would take a film theory class in the fall and a production class in the spring. Tomasulo lists the various topics covered in the different classes, including history of documentary, fiction, and avant-garde films; techniques such as tracking shots, advanced lighting, and multi-track sound mixes; and such theories as images of men and women in cinema and contemporary film criticism. Tomasulo provides specific examples of student work that integrated film theory concepts into shorts made in production classes. The author also discusses several specific classroom discussions he led that successfully integrate theory and practice, such as the analysis of a film still to determine the physical mechanics of how it was lit and then why it was lit in such a manner. The article closes with an anecdote about how the author had silent filmmaker Hal Roach in as a guest speaker and that Roach confirmed the use of film theory concepts in the film industry, despite claims to the contrary from other industry members.

The article addresses an important issue for the academic world of film: the balance between theory and practical production knowledge. Tomasulo rightly argues that a film education that focuses only on the production with no knowledge of theory amounts to nothing more than a vocational craft. It is the understanding of theory that helps elevate the craft of film into an art. Likewise, film theory is also stunted if there is no understanding of the technical side that goes into the creation of film. Tomasulo makes a good argument for the integration of theory and practice, but his point may have been better served if he had gone into more specifics of how the classes were taught, and not just a brief overview of their course names and bullet-points of topics.

Since the students in Honors 390 are primarily non-production majors, the focus has been more on theory than practical production. However, on a number of occasions practical points have been introduced into our theory discussions. There was a discussion of the effects of certain cinematography and editing choices on the mood of a movie with *The Bourne Ultimatum*, and an illustration of several technical aspects in *Ellie & Marianne* and how they were put to positive or negative use. The instructors of Honors 390 both share the sentiment that an integration of film theory and technical understanding yields better understanding and analysis, so we appreciate the efforts of Tomasulo to combat the denigration of film theory.

Reflection

In the beginning, the idea for this class was a sort of collaboration. We knew that we had to do an Honors Thesis project, and we wanted to do one together, because Telecommunications projects are hard to do alone. We also were both Film minors, and we had a class cancelled on us because the professor was going on sabbatical. Katie also remembered that Dr. Joanne Edmonds had mentioned at orientation that Honors students had taught courses in the past – so the idea was born. We decided – let’s teach a class that focuses on film (so we could get more film education), and we’ll teach it to other Honors students. Dr. Collier signed on to be our thesis mentor, and we went through the steps to create a class.

We had the idea to focus the class on teaching non-TCOM students film studies, and we felt as though we had sufficient background to give them a good learning experience. The reason for teaching beginning students was because we really didn’t feel comfortable teaching anyone much past that level. We were allowed a fantastic opportunity to share our learning with other students, but we didn’t want the students to be more advanced than we were. Also, in sticking with the usual themes of Honors Colloquiums, we wanted our course to cover a broad range of topics, all pertaining to film studies.

To begin, we both chose films that we really enjoyed, and topics that we would like to talk about. We decided to show twelve films, with six a piece. The format would be to show the whole film, and then whoever chose the film would teach the class that day. On the whole, Katie made most of her picks modern personal favorites, and Jeff

made most of his classics. We figured this would give the class a broad mix of current and older movies, with a wide range of topics. Most of the topics and film selections were ones that we had both learned about in our own film classes, and felt comfortable teaching to other students. The subject matter included general topics like genre studies, and more specific topics like cinematography and editing. Films that were shown were classics like *High Noon* and *Chinatown*, and newer films included *Zoolander* and *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Things that also developed in the planning stages of the course were what the assessments would be. We thought movie reviews would be a fun way of getting students to critically analyze films in a new way, and that we would get a lot of insight into the students' minds. Another assessment that we came up with was based on a paper both of us had written in another film class. This paper was to be about a specific film genre, where the students were to research the history, conventions, and film examples of the genre of their choice.

Our final assessment was a project that we came up with ourselves. The idea was to have the students take a movie and create their own DVD commentary from a scene of their choosing. Originally, we were going to have the students work in pairs to do one longer scene, but then we decided on everyone doing their own individual project. We knew this project would pose some problems because the students would be non-TCOM majors, and wouldn't have access to the equipment necessary to complete the assignment. However, we were going to create opportunities for the students to get some help from us in completing the assignment.

Before the class was to begin, we decided to make all the students meet with at least one of us to get permission. We did this because we wanted them to all be aware that they would be taught and evaluated by their peers, and that the class was being taught as an Honors Thesis. Because of this situation, however, we wanted to make sure the students were mature enough to handle a class set-up like ours, and we made it only open to juniors and seniors. We also originally wanted only non-TCOM majors with no previous film experience, but in the end we allowed three to take the course.

To begin research for the course, we started the summer before our senior year. Research included reading film textbooks, searching online for articles that backed up points that we wanted to make, making sure the films we chose were appropriate for their intended topics, and overall spent time preparing to teach the class. One very helpful book was *Understanding Movies* by Louis Giannetti, which Dr. Collier actually uses in his classes. Other research continued into the fall semester, however, much of it was spent working on the master plan for the class – the syllabus.

Much of the language of the syllabus was modeled after syllabi we had from other classes. We collaborated on the description and objectives of the class, settling on the basic goal of building a basic film vocabulary for our students and helping them learn beginning analytical skills. We toyed with the idea of holding office hours, but ultimately decided to just have ourselves available by appointment, as that would work best with Katie, Jeff, and Dr. Collier's fluctuating schedules.

When we first concocted the order of the movies we would screen, the main two criteria for our order was making sure Katie and Jeff alternated weeks and that *Catch-22* fell right after spring break so that students would have a chance to read the novel while

they were on break. After reviewing the first draft of our syllabus, Dr. Collier commented that there could and should be more of a logical progression in our selection of movies. The three of us sat down and re-worked the semester into the order that we have now.

In addition to the six movies that we would each individually teach, we decided to jointly teach an introductory movie the first week. Katie suggested the revisionist romantic comedy *High Fidelity*, and we decided to move ahead with it. Because of the structure of our class, the first class meeting was a screening. *High Fidelity* was going to run nearly the full two hours of our meeting time, so we said only a few words of welcome, handed out the syllabus, and then showed the movie. Everything went smoothly (no equipment malfunctions or anything).

We met with Dr. Collier for a pep talk on our first real class for that Thursday. He offered encouraging words, but also this note of caution: the first day of class can make or break an entire semester. With these foreboding words in mind, we went to work. We broke down the syllabus and assigned who was going to speak about what in the first class meeting. Jeff prepared a discussion of general views and reactions on the film-watching experience, while Katie drew up discussion points for *High Fidelity*.

Jeff was expecting the worst out of the first class: we would ask questions, and everyone would clam up with nothing to say. The exact opposite happened. After the syllabus review ended and the first question was asked, everyone hopped into the discussion. We could barely keep up with the number of hands popping up in the air. Jeff only got through about half of the material he had prepared before handing it over to Katie with ten minutes left in class, who only had time to touch briefly upon a few of her

bullet points. At the end of the class when all of the students had left, we were exhilarated and relieved.

In our first meeting after that class, Dr. Collier congratulated us but also offered some tips. When Jeff mentioned that he had been concerned that no one would talk, Dr. Collier replied that the opposite is usually true in film classes: people talk too much. The trick, he said, was to keep all the talk driven and focused and not to let it just become a bull session. Keeping this in mind, Jeff prepared for his first solo week teaching: the silent classic *Sherlock, Jr.*

After the screening of *Sherlock, Jr.*, we committed our first major *faux pas* as teachers. In attempting to revise the Blackboard page where the students post their journals, we accidentally deleted all of the posts from the first week. We had checked off all of them and read a few, and we soon learned there was no way to get them back: they were gone forever. We sent out an email apologizing to the class and asked them to re-submit their journals. We learned a valuable lesson because of this: most of the students were writing their journals right in the submission box and not saving their own copy. Of the fourteen students, only roughly four re-submitted. We told the class that from that point on, they should always save their own copy of their work in case anything like this happened again. Katie and Jeff pressed on, a little embarrassed, but determined to make a good showing in the next class: the discussion for *Sherlock, Jr.*

High Fidelity was a very current, accessible movie, so with the transition to a relatively obscure silent film, Jeff was nervous that there would be a significant downturn in the amount of conversation. To an extent, his fears were justified, as people were noticeably less chatty about *Sherlock, Jr.* However, in preparation for this lesson, Jeff

had assembled a PowerPoint presentation defining a lot of common film terms. We both watched with no small bit of pride as the students dutifully took notes during the presentation. As for *Sherlock, Jr.*, Jeff was pleased that so many of the students enjoyed it, even those who had never seen a silent film before. The discussion of silent films went well, but the assigned reading and discussion questions on films as dreams was a little more abstract, and the conversation took another dip.

Katie followed the same teaching model the following week with a PowerPoint presentation on genres. The class again paid attention and scribbled down notes. Katie's presentation was even easier to follow, as it all had a cohesive point, whereas Jeff's the previous week had been a smorgasbord of important film terminology that did not all necessarily relate.

The discussion during the *GoodFellas* class elicited our first lively disagreements. A few students expressed distaste over the subject matter; Claire described the movie as "nasty people doing nasty things and getting away with it." We also had our first near-derailment of the class. The issue of Catholicism and gangsters soon devolved into a debate between two over Catholicism in general, and Katie had to quickly steer the conversation back towards film.

The following week was *High Noon*, and Jeff had to do his first off-the-cuff adapting of his lesson plan. Many of the dramatic scenes in *High Noon* were met with gales of laughter from the students, so Jeff altered his lesson plan to allot time to discuss why some films do not age well. This sparked good conversation that Jeff was pleased with, but he was slightly frustrated that he could not cover all the points he had planned on, an issue that would come to be a reoccurring problem.

Over the next few weeks, the class reached a bit of a plateau. While there was always discussion, the talk often seemed to be unfocused and rambling. Dr. Collier continued to stress that we needed to work on consolidation: taking everything that had been said by the students and forming it into one solid point. Too often we were moving on to other topics without reaching a conclusion on the previous point, so it was not always clear what the students were supposed to get out of each class. This even proved to be a problem with classes that we felt good about, like Katie's Oscar discussion, which Dr. Collier still had some reservations about.

The following week was *Reservoir Dogs*, a movie Jeff knew nearly inside and out thanks to writing a term paper on it. Jeff and Katie had started following Dr. Collier's advice of googling their movies and reading as many academic articles as they could, and Jeff went into the *Reservoir Dogs* discussion feeling very prepared. The result was what Dr. Collier called "a breakthrough." The objectives were clear, and the class seemed to be getting the point, as there was lots of lively discussion. However, we soon learned that we should not judge our performance by the students' chattiness. The following week, Katie felt horrible about her lecture on editing and cinematography in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, as the students barely spoke the whole class period. However, Dr. Collier declared it to be Katie's best class, because her objectives were clearly communicated. Katie and Jeff tried to take these lessons to heart and maintain a high level of quality during their remaining few weeks of instruction.

The assessments worked, overall. Students struggled with the first movie review, but by the second, most had established the proper reviewer tone and voice. The genre papers were impressive, and made Katie feel that she had done a good job of

communicating the concept. There was one notable exception amongst the papers. One student handed in a lazily-written, poorly researched paper that Jeff and Katie awarded a "D+". We felt odd bestowing such a low grade, but the student earned it. Sometimes when students were performing poorly, we got incensed, but Dr. Collier reminded us that we could not take it personally. The situation was a little more tense since we were teaching our peers, but we had to separate ourselves from our students and only focus on grading the quality of their work, not on getting angry at poor achievers.

Almost unanimously, the students excelled at the final commentary project. The students spoke about their movies in an analytical way that they would not have been able to do at the beginning of the semester. This made us feel proud; we realized that the students really had learned something from us, and that it had been worthwhile for them, which means it was worthwhile for us, too. Both of us had aspirations to be film professors some day, and this class solidified that desire. We learned a lot about how to plan and organize our lessons, and what questions sparked good discussion (it took both of us forever to quit the habit of asking "Yes/No" questions). We faced the difficulty and awkwardness of teaching our friends and peers and dealing with the occasional problem student. Through the teaching of our students, our appreciation for film grew, as well as our appreciation for film pedagogy, and we could not have asked for more from our capstone senior class.

Honors 390-H
“Talking About Movies”
Tuesdays 2-4 LB 125
Thursdays 2-3 CA 106

Dr. Patrick Collier
pccollier@bsu.edu

Katie Day
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Jeff Laub
jmlaub@bsu.edu

Office Hours by Appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To help students build a basic film vocabulary.
- To expand students' understanding and appreciation of film by the cultivation of beginning analytical skills.
- To facilitate conversation amidst students as a means of refining their ability to articulate their views and feelings about film.

WRITTEN WORK and GRADING

Journal Entries/Participation: 15 %

Journal entries are to be one typed page in length, double-spaced, and posted on Blackboard no later than the Monday following the screening/discussion of a film. This is also a discussion-based class – so participation on Thursdays is expected.

Two Movie Reviews: 20%

Review two outside movies, two-pages in length, during the semester. The films can be whatever you choose, and the reviews handed in at any time – but **the first must be turned in before March 6.**

4-5 Page Paper: 25%

Demonstrate knowledge about genres: choose a genre and discuss the definition, qualifications, and examples of that specific genre. **Due February 28.**

DVD Commentary: 40%

Create your own DVD commentary for a portion of a film of your choosing, to be shown in class.

POLICIES

Come to class having all the readings for that day **completed**. Read the articles and books carefully to help aid in understanding. If you have questions, bring them to the discussion class on Thursdays. Most of the readings aren't long – so make sure you finish them **before** the class they're listed for. You should also address readings in your journal entries.

The film screenings are the basis for the course – so you must attend. If you must miss a screening, you must watch the film on your own.

You may only miss 2 classes without affecting your grade, but you are highly encouraged not to miss. Please contact Jeff or Katie if you will be missing a class.

Papers and other work are due on the date under which the assignment is listed.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated. Make sure you are familiar with the University's policies concerning these topics.

If you have a disability, please speak to one of the instructors, and accommodations will be provided.

The instructors reserve the right to alter the syllabus as they deem it necessary during the semester.

TOPIC AND READING SCHEDULE

Week One: Introduction to the Course

- | | | |
|----------|------|---|
| Tuesday | 1/8 | Screening: Introductory Film, <i>High Fidelity</i>
Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "The Development of Taste in Movies," Howard A. Burton |
| Thursday | 1/10 | Introduction to the Course, Film Discussion
Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "It's Only a Movie." Pauline Kael |

Week Two: How We Watch Films

- | | | |
|----------|------|--|
| Tuesday | 1/15 | Screening: <i>Sherlock, Jr.</i>
Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ "Films and Dreams." Robert Curry |
| Thursday | 1/17 | Discussion
Reading: "The Great Stone Face," Christopher Bishop |

Week Three: Genre Studies

- | | | |
|----------|------|---|
| Tuesday | 1/22 | Screening: <i>Goodfellas</i>
Readings:
Filmsite.org
http://filmsite.org/genres.html
http://filmsite.org/crimefilms.html |
| Thursday | 1/24 | Genre Discussion
Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ "The Mob and the Family." John Simon |

Week Four: Historical/Allegorical Films

- | | | |
|----------|------|--|
| Tuesday | 1/29 | Screening: <i>High Noon</i> |
| Thursday | 1/31 | Discussion
Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "The Women of <i>High Noon</i>: A Revisionist View."
Don Graham◆ "<i>High Noon</i>: Everyman Rides Again." Howard A. Burton |

Week Five: Film Noir

- Tuesday 2/5 Screening: *Chinatown*
Reading:
♦ www.filmsite.org/filmnoir.html
- Thursday 2/7 Discussion
Reading:
♦ "Incest and Capital in *Chinatown*." Vernon Shetley

Week Six: Auteurs

- Tuesday 2/12 Screening: *The Breakfast Club*
Reading:
★ "The Man Who Understood Teenagers." Shanda Deziel
- Thursday 2/14 Discussion – John Hughes

Week Seven: Oscar Week

- Tuesday 2/19 Screening: *Shakespeare in Love*
Reading:
Filmsite.org
Oscars – History, Background, Categories, etc.
<http://filmsite.org/oscars.html>
- Thursday 2/21 Discussion

Week Eight: On-Screen Interaction

- Tuesday 2/26 Screening: *Reservoir Dogs*
- Thursday 2/28 Discussion
Reading:
★ "Tarantino's Incarnational Theology: *Reservoir Dogs*, Crucifixions and Spectacular Violence." Kent L. Brintnall
"It's Not Easy Being Pink: Tarantino's Ultimate Professional." Stephen Weinberger

Week Nine: Editing/Cinematography

- Tuesday 3/4 Screening: *The Bourne Ultimatum*
Reading:
★ "A Case of Mistaken Identity." Philip Kerr
- Thursday 3/6 Discussion
Reading:
★ "Company Men." Stuart Klawans

Week Ten: Spring Break

Great time to read *Catch-22*!

Week Eleven: Adaptation Discussion

- Tuesday 3/18 Screening: *Catch-22*
Reading:
Catch-22, Joseph Heller
- Thursday 3/20 Discussion

Reading:

♦ "I See Everything Twice: An Examination of *Catch-22*."
Chuck Thegze

"*Catch-22*." Roger Ebert

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19700101/REVIEWS/1010305/1023>

Week Twelve: Personality Comedy

Tuesday 3/25 Screening: *Zoolander*

Reading:

"They're in on the Joke." Sharon Waxman

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/27/movies/27waxm.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

Thursday 3/27 Discussion

Week Thirteen: How Films Go Wrong

Tuesday 4/1 Screening: *Ellie and Marianne*

Reading:

"Shooting for Success: An Actor's Guide to the Student-Filmmaking Experience." Luke Crow

<http://celebritycola.blogspot.com/2004/09/acting-in-student-films-interviews.html>

♦ "Student Film-Making: First Report." Jackson Burgess

Thursday 4/3 Discussion on how films go wrong, given the right tools

Week Fourteen: Foreign Films

Tuesday 4/8 Screening: *Pan's Labyrinth*

Reading:

★ "The Other Side." Richard Alleva

★ "Brilliance Beyond the Border." Richard Corliss

Thursday 4/10 Discussion

Week Fifteen: DVD Commentary

Tuesday 4/15 Screening: DVD commentary of a film

Thursday 4/17 Discussion of final projects

Week Sixteen: DVD Commentary

Tuesday 4/22 Discussion of final projects

Thursday 4/24 Screening of final projects

Final Exam

Wednesday 4/30 Screening of final projects

★ Can be found on EBSCO Host

♦ Can be found on JSTOR

Genre Paper Requirements

- 4-5 Pages, Typed, Double-Spaced
- Demonstrate knowledge about genres: choose a genre and discuss the definition, qualifications, and examples of that specific genre.
- Identify and discuss the genre in terms of the categories we discussed in class: settings, themes, moods, icons, etc.
- Trace the origin of the genre and how it has evolved. Has it moved into self-parody? Has it undergone revision?
- Use examples of movies to provide evidence of the genre characteristics, but avoid plot summaries that do not contribute to the point you are making about genre.
- Include a bibliography/works cited page of any work that is referenced.
- Due February 28th.

DVD Commentary Project

Due: Wednesday April 23, 2008 by 4:30 pm

- Select a 5-7 minute clip from a film of your choosing
- Create a commentary for that clip, demonstrating knowledge of concepts from class
 - i.e. Genre elements, editing, camera angles, shot composition, pacing, character development, etc.
- Avoid summaries and trivia about the scene.
- You may either record the commentary on your own, and submit on a CD, or as a data file.
- If you cannot record your own commentary – there will be arranged time for Jeff and Katie to assist you.
 - These times are Tuesday April 15 after class, Thursday April 17 during class time, and Tuesday April 22 during class time. Other times can be arranged as needed by contacting Jeff or Katie.
- Your DVD (with the scene) needs to be submitted to Jeff and Katie by Wednesday at 4:30, along with the accompanying audio (CD or data file)
 - Provide the beginning and ending time code of the scene, so your final project will sync.
- The DVD with the scene will be returned the next day (Thursday), when we begin screening the commentaries.
- If you can put your commentary and DVD scene together on your own – turn it in by Wednesday at 4:30 burned to a DVD.
- The commentaries will be shown in class on April 24, and will continue during the finals time on April 30.

Honors 390 - Talking About Movies

Participation	Journal Complete ✓														
	1/8	1/10	1/15	1/17	1/22	1/24	1/29	1/31	2/5	2/7	2/12	2/14	2/19	2/21	2/26
Bogert, Nathan					✓		✓		✓				✓	★	✓
Calvert, Brian		★		★		★	✓	★		★			✓	★	✓
Culiver, Andrea					✓		✓		✓		✓	★	✓	★	✓
Griffin, Margarette		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓
Griffith, Megan				★				★	✓	★	✓	★	✓		
Manz, Claire		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★		★	
Miller, Kevin				★	✓	★	✓		✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓
Miller, Ryan					✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓
Mulert, Alison		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓		✓
Perchlik, Emily		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓
Pohl, Brittany		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓		✓	★	✓
Rambeau, Sarah		★		★	✓	★	✓		✓		✓	★	✓		✓
Vander Weerd, Bryant		★		★		★		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓
Winkler, Daisy		★			✓		✓		✓		✓	★	✓	★	
	2/28	3/4	3/6	3/18	3/20	3/25	3/27	4/1	4/3	4/8	4/10	4/15	4/17	4/22	4/24
Bogert, Nathan	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★			✓			
Calvert, Brian	★	✓	★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓		✓			
Culiver, Andrea		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	★				
Griffin, Margarette	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓			
Griffith, Megan		✓	★	✓	★	✓		✓	★	✓	★	✓			
Manz, Claire	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓		NO CLASS	
Miller, Kevin		✓			★		★		★		★	✓			
Miller, Ryan	★	✓	★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★				
Mulert, Alison	★	✓	★		★	✓	★		★	✓	★	✓			
Perchlik, Emily		✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓			
Pohl, Brittany	★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★	✓			
Rambeau, Sarah	★	✓			★	✓	★	✓	★	✓	★				
Vander Weerd, Bryant	★		★		★		★	✓	★	✓	★	✓			
Winkler, Daisy	★	✓		✓	★	✓		✓	★	✓	★	✓			

Honors 390 Grade Sheet

Student	Movie Review 1	Movie Review 2	Average	Genre Paper	DVD Commentary
Bogert, Nathan	3.33	4	3.665	3.667	2.667
Calvert, Brian	3	3.667	3.3335	3	3.667
Culiver, Andrea	3.667	3	3.3335	3.667	3.667
Griffin, Marggy	3.667	4	3.8335	3.33	3.667
Griffith, Megan	4	3.8335	3.91675	2.33	3.5
Manz, Claire	3.667	3.5	3.5835	3.33	3
Miller, Kevin	3	3.5	3.25	4	4
Miller, Ryan	3.667	4	3.8335	3.667	4
Mulert, Alison	3.33	3.5	3.415	3.667	4
Perchlik, Emily	4	4	4	3.667	4
Pohl, Brittany	3.33	4	3.665	3.33	3.834
Rambeau, Sarah	3.667	3.5	3.5835	3.33	3
Vander Weerd, Bryant	2.667	3.667	3.167	1.33	3.5
Winkler, Daisy	4	4	4	3.33	4

Journals (%)	Participation (%)	Participation Total
Bogert, Nathan	0.045 Bogert, Nathan	0.025 0.12
Calvert, Brian	0.035 Calvert, Brian	0.05 0.135
Culiver, Andrea	0.05 Culiver, Andrea	0 0.1
Griffin, Marggy	0.05 Griffin, Marggy	0.05 0.15
Griffith, Megan	0.04 Griffith, Megan	0.025 0.065
Manz, Claire	0.045 Manz, Claire	0.05 0.145
Miller, Kevin	0.035 Miller, Kevin	0.025 0.11
Miller, Ryan	0.045 Miller, Ryan	0.025 0.12
Mulert, Alison	0.04 Mulert, Alison	0.05 0.14
Perchlik, Emily	0.05 Perchlik, Emily	0.05 0.1
Pohl, Brittany	0.045 Pohl, Brittany	0.05 0.145
Rambeau, Sarah	0.045 Rambeau, Sarah	0.025 0.12
Vander Weerd, Bryant	0.025 Vander Weerd, Bryant	0.05 0.125
Winkler, Daisy	0.05 Winkler, Daisy	0.025 0.125

Attendance (%)

Bogert, Nathan	0.05
Calvert, Brian	0.05
Culiver, Andrea	0.05
Griffin, Marggy	0.05
Griffith, Megan	0
Manz, Claire	0.05
Miller, Kevin	0.05
Miller, Ryan	0.05
Mulert, Alison	0.05
Perchlik, Emily	0
Pohl, Brittany	0.05
Rambeau, Sarah	0.05
Vander Weerd, Bryant	0.05
Winkler, Daisy	0.05

Participation **Final** **Final Grades**

3.2	3.19655	B
3.6	3.4235	B+
2.666666667	3.45025	B+
4	3.666	A-
1.733333333	3.02585	B
3.866666667	3.3292	B+
2.933333333	3.69	A-
3.2	3.76345	A
3.733333333	3.75975	A
2.666666667	3.71675	A
3.866666667	3.6791	A-
3.2	3.2292	B+
3.333333333	2.8659	B
3.333333333	3.7325	A

Grade Scale

A	4
A-	3.667
B+	3.33
B	3
B-	2.667
C+	2.33
C	2
C-	1.667
D+	1.33
D	1
D-	0.667
F	0.33

Course Introduction and General Discussion – High Fidelity

1. Welcome

2. Icebreaker

- Name
- Major
- Best or worst movie you saw last year.

3. Syllabus

4. Discussion of Articles

A. How do you decide to see a movie?

- Trailers/commercials?
- Movie posters?
- Word of mouth (friends' recommendation)?
- Critics?

B. After you see a movie, do you/how do you express your feelings about it?

- Talk about it with friends?
- Post on message boards?
- Recommend it (or not) to friends?

* Why are you taking this class? What do you hope to learn/take away from it?

C. "Students should begin by reviewing their growth in taste, by considering whether or not they have outgrown certain childhood preferences."

- Are there any movies (or types) that you used to enjoy but no longer do?
- Hook

D. According to the article, that "learning to be content with nothing but the best narrows one's field somewhat, and that one is almost certain to attend fewer movies as his taste improves."

- Is this desirable?

E. "If you think movies can't be killed, you underestimate the power of education."

- Concern that you will lose love for a movie?
- You may enjoy movies less because of this class?

F. "Movies are so rarely great art, that if we cannot appreciate great *trash*, we have very little reason to be interested in them."

G. "Don't talk about movies that you don't care about one way or the other."

- Katie and I have strove to pick movies that we feel passionate about in one way or another.
- "Dead zone" movies are the hardest to discuss."
- Movies have not been selected just because they were a "classic or a milestone."

5. Discussion of *High Fidelity* (Katie)

Silent Film – Sherlock, Jr.

I. Welcome/Apology Over Journals

II. Film Vocabulary

A. Shots

1. Extreme long-shot
2. Long Shot
3. Full Shot
4. Medium Shot
5. Close-up
6. Extreme Close-up

B. Angles

1. Bird's Eye/God's Eye
2. High Angle
3. Eye-level
4. Low Angle
5. Oblique Angle (Canted)

C. Realism, Classicism, and Formalism

1. Examples of types of movies.
2. Which shots and angles would you expect to see in which types?

III. General Reactions

A. What have been your experiences with silent film before?

1. How did this compare to other silent movies you have seen?
2. Those of you who haven't seen one before, how did this play into your expectations?
3. Could you tell when Keaton broke his neck?
4. Keaton falling off the motorcycle.
5. Keaton's training in vaudeville and physical comedy is evident.

IV. Film as Dreams

A. How do films usually portray dreams? How does this differ from the reality of dreams?

1. Difference between beginning of Sherlock Jr. dream sequence and greater portion.
 - a. Realism vs. Formalism
2. Ebert quote about nightmares.

B. Filmgoer as participant in dream (film).

1. "What is there about film form that encourages this kind of self-forgetful involvement?"
 - a. Is one style (Realism or Formalism) more involving?
 - b. What types of things take us out of movies?
 - c. Direct address?
 - d. The complicated tricks of Keaton? Is his stuntwork more involving than his obvious special effects?

e. Keaton's regret for over-complicating things (distracting the viewers from the jokes).

C. The "It was all a dream" twist.

1. Why is it viewed as so frustrating? What if we didn't know until the end that it was all a dream?

2. Can we still be involved with the action of a movie when we know beforehand it is all a dream?

a. Are we not as involved?

b. Or does our foreknowledge allow us to accept it?

V. How We Watch Movies

A. The opening shot - POV of the screen looking back at the viewer.

B. Constant framing of the booth, of curtains.

1. We watch as Buster watches (bi-presence)

C. Buster's expectation of the banana peel.

D. Buster's lessons of love from the ending of the movie.

1. How is our view of the world/love influenced by what we see in the movies?

Week 2

Film Vocabulary

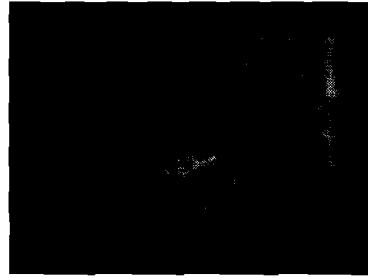
Bird's Eye Angle



High Angle



Eye-Level Angle



Low Angle



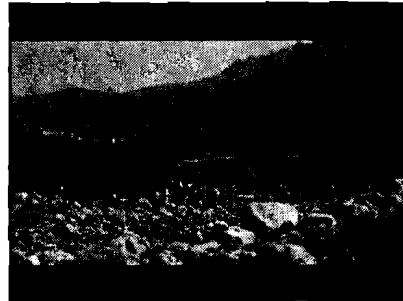
Oblique/Canted/Dutch Angle



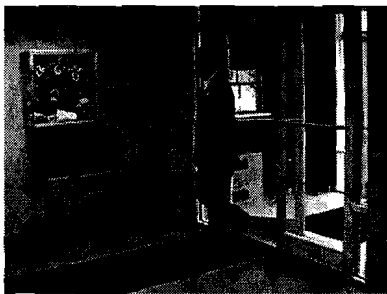
Extreme Long Shot



Long Shot



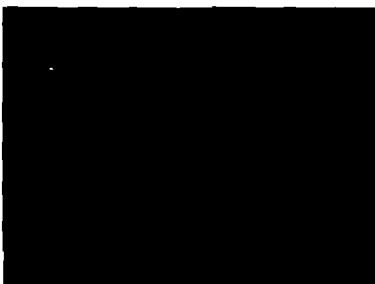
Full Shot



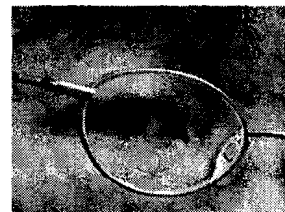
Medium Shot



Close-Up Shot



Extreme Close-Up



**Realism
vs.
Formalism**

Gangster Genre - Goodfellas

PowerPoint:

Themes

- Central Characteristics, Ideas
- Broad Sweeping
- Motifs – Elements that are repeated... Lines, images, words

Subject Matter

- Issues, Things that are discussed on screen, ex. Drugs, Family importance, true love, saving people, etc.

Settings

- Locations – Cities, Buildings, Outdoors – in a desert, in New York, in a school, at the beach, in a church

Mood

- Anger, attitudes towards subjects, happiness, bitterness – Shared by all in film

Icons

- IMPORTANT
- Things that are seen in all movies of a genre – actual objects
- Guns (crime), hats (westerns), knives (horror), cameras (mockumentary)
- Won't always be an actual object, but look for recurring things like wedding dresses or something

Characters

- Overbearing females, Weak males, Heroes, Helpless females, The Boss, Faithful servants

What Aren't Genres

- Documentaries, "Classic" films – Citizen Kane, Wizard of Oz, Animated Films, British Films

Screwball Comedy

"Old boy meets girl story, turned upside down."

Spoofs traditional Love story

Characters - Battle of the sexes with a stronger female lead, sexually frustrated, eccentric

Themes – Idle rich, childlike lead

Settings – city, then a move to the country

Icons – dogs

ASK FOR EXAMPLES

Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn movies, Irene Dunn, Arthur – Liza Minelli and Dudley Moore

Personality Comedy

- Comic styling of one central actor – it's about the actor, not the character necessarily
- Shtick – certain thing the actor does, voices, physical comedy
- Characters – visually funny, Ben Stiller in Dodgeball, Charlie Chaplin as the Tramp
- Theme – inability to be normal, even if everyone else is
- Ridiculous subject matter – NASCAR drivers, someone who can't hold a job

Examples – Will Ferrell, Owen Wilson, Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn, Marx Brothers, Chaplin, Keaton

Sci Fi

- Imaginative, Visually Stunning, Special Effects, Distant Places
- Characters – Heroes, Aliens, “Mad Scientists”
- Themes – Must save something – a planet, the earth, the world characters are in, a person
- Settings – Planets, Spaceships, Time Traveling
- Icons – Futuristic weapons, space suits
- Moods – impending doom

Musical

- Choreography, singing, etc
- Themes – Heavy themes, racial tensions, wars, a city in peril, evil people
- Subject Matter – Trying to make a difference, using music to tell a story
- Characters – Part of the situation, sometimes being oppressed, strong people, leaders
- Moods – Optimistic, “we can make a difference,” but at the same time, there is an overcast of negative feelings about the situation

Crime/Gangster

- Highlight the life of the gangster or mobster, his family, inside his life, Morality tale – why you shouldn't do that
- Characters – over the top, murderers, hustlers, think no one can touch them, materialistic, immoral, ethnic in some way – poor families, first generation Americans
- Themes – Importance of Family, Violence, lack of repercussion from the “law” – punishment comes from other gangsters
- Settings – Major cities – New York, Boston, Las Vegas, courts, prisons

What are some icons of Crime Films? Guns, drugs, alcohol, nice cars, suits

What makes this a crime film?

Goodfellas

What did you think of Goodfellas?

Have you seen a Scorsese film? **Auteur!** Often uses same character types, same actors (De Niro), similar filming style.

Did anything disturb you about this film?

The fact that it's true?

Did you notice anything about the filmmaking style? Did that add to the experience?

Take away?

Point of view from the character, long takes,

Realism or Formalism?

Review of what that is

How did you feel about the character of Henry Hill?

Disturbing? Odd? Out of place?

Family – didn't really put emphasis on his own family – the mob was his family

Different than Coreleones

How did you feel about Henry by the end? Was it better that he got away with it, but gave up everyone?

Did you want him to get what he deserved?

Genres

Themes

- Central Characteristics, Ideas
- Broad Sweeping
- Motifs – Elements that are repeated...

Subject Matter

- Issues
- Things that are discussed by characters

Settings

- Locations – Cities, Buildings, Outdoors

Mood

- Anger, attitudes, happiness, bitterness
- Shared by all in film

Icons

- Actual Objects
- Guns, hats, knives
- Look for reoccurring objects