English 111-202 Fall 2011: Syllabus
Entertainment Arts: Film, Television, and Digital Media

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday from 11:30 am - 1:30 pm and by appointment

Course Description

From cinema to cell phones, the multimedia context of contemporary life is rapidly changing. This course will examine some of those shifting and ubiquitous technologies and images by offering a general introduction to the critical study of film, television, and digital media. While examining each medium individually we will also work in a state of persistent comparison, endeavoring to comprehend media culture as a larger phenomenon. This will be achieved, in part, through weekly film, television, and/or digital media "screenings" that will catalyze reflections on media convergence. Through readings, screenings, and discussions, students will develop sophisticated understandings of media culture in terms of technical and aesthetic properties, industrial practices, representation, cultural theories, social responses and more.

There are no prerequisites for this course and you are therefore not expected to have any prior knowledge of media studies. You are, however, expected to treat the material as a legitimate object of study. We will begin with the premise that film, television, and digital media offer much more than "entertainment" and that, accordingly, studying these forms is a serious undertaking requiring rigor and diligence.

Course Readings

You will not be required to purchase texts for this class. Course readings will be uploaded to the D2L course site or will be provided in the form of links to content. You are free to save the articles and read them offline, print your own hard copies, or read them online.

Course Screenings

As this is a media studies course, most weeks you'll be viewing a film, television show, or piece of digital media to accompany the readings. Each week you will be given a list of screening items to choose from. You are responsible for making time to acquire and view the requisite films or programs in time to do the week's work. Course screenings are required, so you must make sure you have the time and technical capacity for viewing.

Important Notes on Screenings:

- Each week I will try to provide you with several viewing options. This will typically include content available online on sites like Hulu.com, Crackle.com, on Netflix's online streaming feature ($7.99 a month), and the UWM Media Library. The screenings consist of popular content that is also typically available for rental at your local library and/or video rental store. All students in this course must have some sort of access to rented video content.

- I do not require students to have a Netflix account for this class, but it is recommended. You may want to consider temporarily signing up for one of their basic online streaming accounts ($7.99 a month) for the duration of this class. Or, you might want to ask around and see if a friend has an account you can share. Like I said, I will always try to provide you with viewing options that are easily found at a library or video rental store, but having a Netflix account may make your life easier.

- If you aren't near the UWM Library and want to keep your costs down, check out your local public library. You'd be amazed at how many films they have. (Also, tip: These days you can usually log into the library's website and reserve films for yourself in advance.)

- When discussing film and television, you may also be asked to go to a movie theater to watch a film or turn on a television and watch content as it is broadcast live (commercials and all). When we focus on digital media, you may need to visit websites that require you to download and install plug-ins (i.e. Quicktime, Flash, etc.) to view their content. If you think you may have problems doing any of these things, be sure to contact me the first week of class so we can discuss it.

Assignments

Discussion and Participation (35%)

As an online course, this class relies heavily on the active participation of all students. Each week, most of our time will be spent discussing the readings and screenings. To fully participate in the course and to get the most out of it, you must take the time to reach through all posts and comments. (Just FYI, D2L lets me see who does and does not read each post.) Regularly reading and responding will help you with the course material. Just as importantly, your contributions will also allow you to help others in the class, as all of you work together to flush out an idea or hammer through a challenging question.

As an online class, you will find yourself writing a lot in this course. Each week you are required to post one discussion post and two responses. With each of our study units (film, tv, digital media), you will find yourself writing several pages worth of comments and posts. I have provided guidelines to help you with creating your posts and to give you a sense of the appropriate tone for our discussions. I will also asses your posts each week and assign them a grade (1-5 points). At the beginning of the semester, I will also give you feedback on your posts and comments so that you have a sense of what's expected.

As you post, remember that this is a classroom and the tone of your writing should be appropriate to an academic environment. I have no problem with an occasional smiley :-), but I do expect you to write clearly and to keep an eye on spelling and grammar. Essentially, this is a classroom, not an IM session with a friend.

Reading and Screening Notes (5%)

Each week you are expected to take notes as you do both the readings and the screenings. These notes need to be uploaded to D2L by 11 pm each Tuesday. (If you prefer to take notes by hand, instead of typing them in a document, you may scan your handwritten notes and upload them as a pdf file.)

Notes are simply graded pass/fail. The purpose of assigning notes is to make sure we're all ready to start the week together and to help you build an archive of your ideas, questions, and observations from the readings and screenings. Use these as a tool each week when writing your posts and when it comes time to write your papers.

Essays (60%)

You will write three short essays this semester, one for each of the three study units (film, tv, digital media). These essays should be 4-5 pages long (double-spaced), use a standard sized font and follow the MLA style of citation and formatting. The essays will assess your understanding of the theories, methods, trends, histories, and styles that will be presented to you through lectures, readings, and screenings.

All work in this class must be your own. Any material or ideas taken from another person must be appropriately cited and contextualized. Failure to do these things will be considered an act of plagiarism and will lead to failure in the class.

Be warned, plagiarism is a serious offense under UWM's code of ethics and has serious consequences. For more

information and additional university policies, go here: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf.

Grading

Reading/Screening Notes: 5%
Discussion Postings: 35%
Three Short Essays: 60% (20% each)

Scheduling

Since this is an online course, our schedule is different from a traditional class that meets face-to-face. Our week typically runs from Monday to Saturday, with Monday and Tuesday being prep days (time to do the readings and screenings) and Wednesday through Saturday being discussion days. Whether you are working at two pm or two am, as long as your work is up by the deadline, you are free to post whenever you wish.

P.S.

If you have any questions regarding the course policies or assignments, please post them to the "Questions and Problems" discussion forum. All general questions on the class should be posted in this forum. For personal concerns, please email me directly (morriss9@uwm.edu).

Do remember that the schedule is subject to some change, as is this syllabus.

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Course Calendar

A Typical Week*

Days 1-2 (Monday - Tuesday): Prep days

- Official allotted time for readings and screenings, as well as the review of lecture/reading notes and discussion questions.
- Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.

Days 3-4 (Wednesday - Thursday): Discussion

- Initial post (175-250 words) due by 11 pm Thursday.

Days 4-6 (Thursday-Saturday): Discussion Continues

- Two response posts (100-150 words) due by 11 pm Saturday.
- You are only required to make two responses, but you are welcome and encouraged to respond further and continue your conversations.

 * *This schedule may be different on weeks when essays are due.*

This course moves fast and requires careful planning and scheduling on your part. I strongly recommend that you set up a weekly schedule for yourself, keeping in mind your other outside obligations, so you know when the best times are for you to get online and get the work done. Pay close attention to the overall schedule, requirements and deadlines, so that you can stay on track. It usually takes a few weeks for your weekly schedule to fall into place, plan to give yourself lots of extra time in the first few weeks, so you'll be sure you don't fall behind.

A quick note on screenings...

Many of the films we can screen online are only available for a limited time. Because of this, I typically wait until Sunday evenings to finalize and post our weekly screenings. (This is why many of the screenings on this calendar are listed "TBA" or To Be Announced). So far, this hasn't caused any problems for students, but I can imagine circumstances where it might. For example, some of you may need to rent your movies a day or two earlier or have schedules that require you to get a head start on the week. If so, please contact me and let me know. I'll do my best to work with you and get you the screening options up earlier.

Week One (9/6 - 9/10) Introductions/Orientation

- **Read**: Carefully read *all* the course documents and respond to the plagiarism document as requested. (Any student who does not respond will not be graded on assignments until they do.)
- **Discussion**: Introductory post by Friday at 11 p.m. Also, post any questions about the class or course documents to the "Questions and Problems" discussion forum.

Week Two (9/12 - 9/17) Film: Shots

- **Read**: Giannetti, "Photography"
- **Watch** (pick one): Charade (links provided under Week Two section of content)
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Three (9/19 - 9/24) Film: Composing Shots, Settings and Scenes

- **Read**: Giannetti, "Mise en scène"
- **Watch** (pick one): *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (on Netflix Instant; at UWM Media Library), *Moulin Rouge* (2001) (on Netflix Instant; at UWM Media Library)... possibly one more option TBA.
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Four (9/26 – 10/1) Film: Stitching Shots Together

- **Read:** Giannetti, "Editing"
- **Watch**: *The 39 Steps* (Hulu, Netflix, etc.) or *The Lady Vanishes* (Hulu, Netflix, etc.)
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Five (10/3 - 10/8) Film: The Stories Moving Images Tell

- **Read:** Giannetti, "Story"
- **Watch**: *TBA*
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Six (10/10 - 10/15) Film: The Ideologies Behind Our Stories

- **Read**: Giannetti, "Ideology"
- **Watch** (pick one): *Do the Right Thing* (on Netflix Instant, rental); *Brokeback Mountain* (on Netflix Instant; at UWM Media Library) ...possibly one more TBA.
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Seven (10/17 - 10/22) Essay 1 Due

- **Discussion**: Initial post by 11 pm Monday.
- **Response**: One required response (and any additional questions) due by 11 pm Wednesday.
- **Post**: Essay 1 due to D2L Dropbox by 11 pm Sunday.

Week Eight (10/24 - 10/29) TV: The Production Environment

- **Read**: Butler, "Television's Ebb and Flow in the Post Network Era," Mittell, "Introduction: Why Television?"; Excerpts from "Chapter 1: Exchanging Programming"; Excerpts from "Chapter 2: Exchanging Audiences"
- **Watch**: TV episodes/clips TBA.
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Nine (10/31 - 11/5) TV: Form and Storytelling

- **Read**: Mittell, "Chapter 5: Making Meaning"; "Chapter 6: Telling Television Stories." Butler, "Chapter 2: Narrative Structure: Television Stories"
- **Watch**: TV episodes/clips TBA.
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Ten (11/7 - 11/12) TV: Ideology and Representation

- **Read**: Mittell, "Chapter 7: Screening America" and TBA
- **Watch**: TV episodes/clips TBA.
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Eleven (11/14 - 11/19) Essay 2 Due

- **Discussion**: Initial post by 11 pm Monday.
- **Response**: One required response (and any additional questions) due by 11 pm Wednesday.
- **Post**: Essay 2 Due in D2L Dropbox by 11 pm Sunday.

Week Twelve (11/21 - 11/26) Digital Media: Looking Forward 10 years Later - What has occurred? What might still occur?

- **Read**: Rushkoff, "Renaissance Now!" and Cairncross, "The Trendspotter's Guide to New Communications"
- **Watch/Browse:** TBA
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Thirteen (11/28 - 12/3) Digital Media: Some of the Shapes Digital Content Takes

- **Read**: Sunstein, "Many Working Minds: Wikis, Open Source Software, and Blogs" and Marshall, "The New Intertextual Commodity"
- **Watch/Browse:** TBA
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Fourteen (12/5 - 12/10) Digital Media: Telling Digital Stories

- **Read**: Murray, "From Game-Story to Cyberdrama"
- **Watch/Browse**: TBA
- **Post:** Reading/Screening notes due by 11 pm Tuesday.
- **Discussion:** Initial post by 11 pm Thursday.
- **Responses:** Two discussion responses by 11 pm Saturday.

Week Fifteen (Sunday, 12/11 – Wednesday, 12/14) Prepping for Essay 3

- **Discussion**: Initial post by 11 pm Monday.
- **Response**: One required response (and any additional questions) due by 11 pm Wednesday.
- **Post**: Essay 3 Due in D2L Dropbox by 11 pm Sunday.