# TH 2080-07: Introduction to Film and American Culture
## California Polytechnic University - Pomona
## Course Outline/Syllabus - Spring 2023

TH 208 is an introductory course examining the development of American cinema from a technical, theoretical, social and multicultural perspective. Students will be exposed to various film genres, methods of film production, film theory, and the impact film has on American society (and vice-versa.)

Students will develop knowledge of how a film is made, as well as evaluation measures for critiquing films and an understanding of aesthetic choices made by film artisans in creating their art. Students will appreciate the role of film in responding to and shaping cultural perceptions of race, gender and sexuality in the United States from its beginning to the present.

Required Text: Selections will be made available on Canvas

<u>Methods of Evaluation</u>
**1. Attendance:** You are required to attend every class. That said, I know there are extenuating circumstances, especially during current times, so each student is allowed ***<u>three (3) excused absences</u>***. Just email me in advance of the class you will be missing and the absence will be considered excused and your grade will not be affected.

If you do not communicate with me in advance or you have exceeded your three excused absences, then the absence will be considered unexcused. Each unexcused absence will result in your losing 5 points off your grade for attendance. Attendance is worth 15% of your total grade.

You can make up for an absence by watching any of the alternate films listed on the Canvas module, writing a 300-word critique of the film, and emailing it to me before the end of the semester.

**2. Participation:** You will be graded according to your participation in our weekly, online discussions. You are required to contribute to ***<u>four (4)</u>*** of these discussions. Contributions need to be 1-3 complete sentences, minimum. Your participation in these discussions will be worth a total of 20% of your grade.

**3. Response papers**: For each of the films shown in class, there will be a corresponding response question posted in that week on Canvas. You need to respond to at least ***<u>four (4)</u>*** of these questions. <u>Each response should be no less than 300 words in length</u>, due by the beginning of the following week's class. Papers turned in beyond one week of the screening will lose 5 points for each week the paper is late. Written assignments will be evaluated based on the student's ability to present a clearly organized and complete argument with sufficient

supporting detail and effective language to support that argument.  These papers are each worth 10% of your grade, for a grand total of 40%.

*If you are unhappy with a grade you receive, you may turn in more than four papers and I will use your four highest scores to calculate your grade.*

**4. Final project.** You will choose between two options:

- 1. Imagine that you are programming a double-feature, and pair one of the movies we have watched in class with another movie of your choosing. Write a 5-page paper in which you defend your choice. Why do you think these two movies would be interesting to watch back-to-back?

  The paper should touch on the following topics:

  - **Story:** What are the differences and similarities in how the film approaches its subject matter and how their respective stories are told? How do the plots and themes of the two movies relate to each other? Do they reinforce one another's themes? Do they instead offer contrasting opinions?
  - **Style:** How is the subject matter visually treated in these two films? Compare and contrast the production design, cinematography, and editing of the two films?
  - **Tone:** Compare and contrast how the respective stories and styles of the two films make you feel.

    *The paper should be typed in 12-point Times font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.*

- 2. Create a screenplay and a storyboard for an original scene of your own creation.

  - You will use Walter Murch's description of his process from the chapter "The Decisive Moment" in *In The Blink of an Eye*, to create at least 12 photos/images/drawings depicting each shot for your script. You can use whatever tools and talents you have to create the images but they must be visual representations, and you will need to demonstrate a complete understanding of visual storytelling through your use of a wide variety of framing and composition choices.

  - Your script must be at least five pages long and depict a complete scene, including characters in conflict and acting with intention; and a plot that builds to a climax and resolution.
    *Examples of proper screenplay formatting will be provided*

There will be class time devoted to fully explaining the assignment. The final project counts for 25% of your grade

<u>Trigger Warnings</u>
There is violence, sexuality, and strong language in some of the films we will watch. You may find the treatment of some of the themes to be offensive due to your personal beliefs. Trigger warnings are listed for each of the films below. Please check in with me prior to film screenings; if you have an issue with any of the films, we will discuss a substitute film that similarly addresses that week's theme or topic of discussion.

<u>Course Schedule</u>
*The course is organized by week. Listed is the movie that will be shown that week, the topics we will cover, and any trigger warnings for the film. All information is subject to change.*

**Week 1, Jan 24: Introductions / Early Film History**

**Week 2, Jan 31: Early Hollywood History**

**Week 3, Feb 7: *His Girl Friday* (1940)**
      Hollywood's Golden Era - '30s - '60s

**Week 4, Feb 14: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)**
      New Hollywood - '60s and '70s
      *Triggers: blood/gore, violence*

**Week 5, Feb 21: *Jaws* (1975)**
      Blockbuster filmmaking + Steven Spielberg
      *Triggers: blood/gore*

**Week 6, Feb 28: *Minari* (2020)**
      Cinematography + the immigrant experience in American film

**Week 7, March 7: *Minding The Gap* (2018)**
      Documentary filmmaking
      *Triggers: descriptions of physical and emotional abuse of children and partners*

**Week 8, March 14: *The Hurt Locker* (2008)**
      Editing + war in American film
      *Triggers: blood/gore, violence, hate speech*

**Week 9, March 21: *Citizen Kane* (1941)**
      Production design + Orson Welles and auteur filmmaking

- SPRING BREAK -

**Week 10, April 4: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988)**
 Animated film + film noir

**Week 11, April 11: *Marie Antoinette* (2006)**
 Style in film

**Week 12, April 18: *El Mariachi* (1992)**
 DIY filmmaking + indie Hollywood

**Week 13, April 25: *Do The Right Thing* (1989)**
 Race in American film + Spike Lee
 *Triggers: violence, police brutality, hate speech*

**Week 14, May 2: *Thelma & Louise* (1991)**
 Feminism in American film
 *Triggers: violence, depiction of rape, hate speech*

**Week 15, May 9: *The Florida Project* (2017)**
 Outsider cinema + DIY filmmaking pt 2

**Week 16, May 16: Finals**