

CMM / FST 1400- Film Criticism



[Class Schedule](#) | [Assignments](#)

Instructor: Dr. Stephanie Brown

What should you call me? Dr. Brown or Professor Brown

Email: stephanie.brown@slu.edu

When should you e-mail me? If you have a quick question that you've already attempted to figure out on Blackboard, the syllabus, by asking a classmate, or by asking me in class. If you have an extensive question, come to a help session or e-mail me to set up an alternate appointment. If you e-mail me after 5, I will likely not get back to you until the following day.

Office: Xavier 302

Study/Chat Sessions: Monday 11-1 | Tuesday 9-10:50 | Wednesday by appt

When should I come to a session? Literally any time! You do not need to be struggling or confused to take advantage of help sessions, though that is a great reason to come. You can come to chat about a concept you're interested in, to get writing advice, to brainstorm projects, or just to talk about films. I love to talk to students one-on-one, and students who come see me in office hours tend to do much better in the class than those who do not. You can give me a heads up that you're coming, or you can just drop in!

Class Meeting Times: Tuesday/Thursday -11:00-12:15 Xavier Hall 218

Course Description

This course fulfills the fine arts requirement for the College of Arts and Sciences core. It also counts toward the film studies interdisciplinary minor.

How is it that film becomes art? This course takes up this question by examining the aesthetic, narrative, and cultural qualities of cinema. Movies have the power to move us, to introduce us to new places and new ideas, to provide ways of seeing the world that were not possible before. Movies can be frustrating or heartening, funny or serious, or all these things at once. This course provides technical and aesthetic lenses to critique film from an artistic perspective.

Course Objectives

- Students will learn the technical vocabulary of filmmaking
- Students will gain an understanding of the evolution of film as art over the past century
- Students will be able to identify film as creative expression
- Students will recognize how film art reflects and challenges cultural values
- Students will close read, analyze, interpret, and critique cinematic texts.
- Students will be able to differentiate between film opinion, criticism, and review.

Required Texts

Available at the SLU bookstore, Amazon, Barnes, and Noble, and various other online outlets.

Film Studies: An Introduction (2009), Columbia University Press. Ed Sikov
ISBN: 9780231142939

Students must also have access to a Netflix account for all out of class screenings. If you have trouble accessing the textbook or Netflix, please come talk to me so we can make arrangements.

What Is Expected of Me In This Class? What Should I Expect of the Instructor?

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/policy_academic-integrity_6-26-2015.pdf.

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

Changes to the Syllabus

Our subject is one that is ever-changing and so I may change readings or screenings one week to reflect something that has recently happened in the world. I also may change assignment schedules depending on the needs of the class. I will announce changes to the syllabus in class and via Blackboard announcements. This means you need to be in class and you need to regularly check your e-mail. You are responsible for keeping up with announced changes to the syllabus.

Discussion and Respect

The course addresses not only the art and aesthetics of film, but also questions about representation, ideology, and power in society. This means that you may be asked to critique things you love and challenge beliefs you hold.

Up front, I want to say that I respect your opinions and beliefs, but expect you to be able to engage with ideas that may be uncomfortable in a respectful manner. You are free to agree or disagree with the theories in this course, but you are to do so in a way that thoughtfully considers and engages with the material. That being said, **I will not tolerate** offensive, hateful, or malicious language as a difference of opinion. While this class is a space to grow, learn, and make mistakes, the humanity and rights of people is not a topic up for debate in this class.

Because popular culture is a major part of our identity and lived experience, there is also a tendency to want to generalize our experiences as universal. Therefore, throughout the semester, whenever you find yourself wanting to use your own experience as proof or evidence, make sure that you're only making an argument about your experience and grounding your argument in theory from the course material. I also expect you to accept and listen to others' experiences, believe them, and understand that they may differ from our own.

Grade Disputes and Rewrites

Blackboard is finicky. At times, it may register a 0 instead of 10s or I make a small error or calculation in the grade book. In these cases, please politely alert me via e-mail as soon as possible so that I may fix your grade. You are responsible for checking that your grades are accurate in a timely manner.

In the cases of grade disputes, 24 hours after receiving a grade, if you genuinely feel you deserve a higher grade, please submit to me via e-mail the details of the discrepancy and your argument for why you believe you have earned a higher grade. This paperwork does not guarantee alterations to your grade.

If you agree with the grade, but would like the chance to earn a higher grade, 24 hours after receiving the grade and after closely reading my feedback, please submit to me your intent to redo the assignment with your plan for revision, referencing the feedback you have received.

E-Mail

I will send updates and announcements via e-mail, therefore you are responsible for checking your SLU email **at least once per day**. Not seeing an e-mail announcement from me does not constitute an acceptable excuse.

College is about learning to be professional, and that includes learning to send professional e-mails. Following these guidelines is part of this education:

1. Include CMM1400 in the subject line
2. Always start your e-mail with an appropriate greeting.
YES: Dear/Hello Dr. Brown
NO: hi /what's up?/hey prof
3. Let me know what you need, what you've already done to try to solve the problem, and possible solutions.

For example: If you can't find a reading online, tell me what you've already done to figure it out yourself-- like asked a classmate, asked a librarian etc. If you haven't at least done some legwork, I'm less inclined to help you, especially if your problem can be solved with a simple Google search.

4. If you have an issue that requires extensive explanation or discussion, please e-mail to set up an office hours meeting.

Assignments and Late Work

You will get 3 “grace passes” at the start of the semester to use as you see fit. Each are good for one day of penalty-free late work (reports, critiques, or film analyses). You can use them all at once or one at a time. Once you use up your grace passes, late work will be subject to a 10% point deduction per day. In other words, if your work is 1 minute late, you'll be deducted 10%, if it's 24 hours and one minute late, 20% etc.

Extra Credit

In addition to your 3 initial grace passes, you can earn extra grace passes throughout the semester (up to 3 additional) that you can use for late assignments or for extra credit on your final. We will come up with a list of activities you can do to earn extra grace passes. Other than that, do you work well and come talk to me in office hours if you're struggling. I won't offer extra credit during the last few weeks of class when you decide to start worrying about your grade. Plan in advance!

Feedback and Evaluation of Assignments

Timely feedback on assignments is needed in order to assure that students are aware of their progress. For routine assignments, homework, response papers, presentations and exams, feedback will be provided within one week after the due date, provided that students have submitted work in class on the day it was due. For longer assignments such as literature reviews and research project papers, feedback will be provided within 1-2 weeks after the due date of the assignment, depending on the length of the assignment. In the event that these deadlines cannot be met, students will be informed of the delay and the extra time needed in providing quality feedback.

What Do I Do If I Need Help?

Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, ***that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator***, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; akratky@slu.edu; [314-977-3886](tel:314-977-3886)) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: www.slu.edu/here4you and <https://www.slu.edu/general-counsel>.

Learning Accessibility

I recognize that accessibility is not limited to documented needs and accommodations.

If you have documentation from Saint Louis University's Disability Services office, please provide me with the paperwork during the first week of class. If you need to contact the Disability Services office, you can reach them at 314-977-8885, by visiting the Student Success Center, Suite 331 in the Busch Student Center, or by visiting <http://www.slu.edu/x30727.xml>. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

If you don't have documentation but want to discuss any accessibility concerns, questions, or issues **please set up a time to meet with me** to discuss how I can help to meet your learning needs and goals. You can also see our website for partial list of academic, personal, and health resources.

Additionally, if you are ever struggling with the class **for any reason**, including but not limited to personal crises, mental health struggles, or food/housing insecurity - please let me know. Even if you don't feel comfortable coming to me with specifics, at least let me know if something is going on that is or will affect your ability to keep up with the

class. I am more than happy to work with you on a plan for you to keep up with the class and to direct you toward resources that can help.

Student Success Center

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center assists students with academic-related services and is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331). Students can visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/> to learn more about tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, and academic coaching.

University Writing Services

Students are encouraged to take advantage of University Writing Services in the Student Success Center; getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels. Trained writing consultants can help with writing projects, multimedia projects, and oral presentations. University Writing Services offers one-on-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more information, visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/> or call the Student Success Center at 314-977-3484.

Basic Needs Security

Students in personal or academic distress and/or who may be specifically experiencing challenges such as securing food or difficulty navigating campus resources, and who believe this may affect their performance in the course, are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office (deanofstudents@slu.edu or 314-977-9378) for support.

Furthermore, please notify the instructor if you are comfortable in doing so, as this will enable them to assist you with finding the resources you may need.

Grading and Assignments

Total: 500 points

Exam 1: 100 points

Exam 2: 100 points

There will be two non-cumulative exams, one for the first half and one for the second, mostly over film terms covered in the book and in class.

Film Reports (10 x 10 points): 100 points

You will fill out a screening report to guide your viewing for both in-class and out of class screenings. For in-class screenings, reports will be due at the end of class on Thursday. For out of class screenings, they will be due on Tuesday. I will give you all of your screening report forms at the start of the semester and I will give them back to you once they have been marked. I suggest that you keep them collected together in a notebook or three ring binder. These will form the basis of your film critiques.

Film Critiques: (5 X 20 points): 100 points

[\(Directions here\)](#)

750-1,000 words

You will develop five of your film reports into full critical essays. You can turn them in anytime throughout the semester. The first three due anytime before the midterm, second two due anytime before the final. Use your time wisely! Use this exercise to practice time management and planning.

Final Portfolio: 100 points

Students will revise and expand on work done throughout the semester and create a final portfolio, taking into consideration feedback given throughout the semester.

The Final portfolio should be uploaded as one single PDF document and will consist of:

1. A title page (you can be creative with it if you want - but you don't have to)
2. A table of contents that gives the title and page number of each critique
3. A short reflection on how your understanding of film has changed over the course of the semester (does not need to be more than a page)
4. Two revised and expanded film critiques
5. One critique that compares and contrasts two of the films from the semester along one specific axis
6. Each should be 1,000-2,000 words each and should cite any outside resources used in MLA format. Should be written in 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double-spaced.

Attendance and Participation

You all are adults, and I will treat you as such. I will take attendance for the first several weeks to learn names, but I have no interest in adjudicating excused and unexcused absences. That being said, I will not reteach you what you missed in class and you are responsible for watching films on your own and doing a report if you miss a screening. You should buddy up with someone to get notes from if you miss a day. If, for some reason, you face a prolonged illness or a personal or family emergency, come see me so we can make arrangements to keep you up to date on the course.

During the first week of class, we'll talk about participation and what it means to be a good citizen of the class. Participation means not just talking in class, but also paying attention, treating your fellow classmates with respect, only using devices to take notes or look up info relating to our discussion, turning off devices for screenings, and being on time for class. I won't take attendance, but I will know who has been in class and been engaged, and it will affect your final participation grade if you consistently don't show up to class, show up late, or don't engage with the class.

Student Scene Analysis

For each week we don't screen a film in class, 3 students will present a scene analysis at the beginning of class based on the reading/screening homework. For this, students will cue up one scene, play it, and pause to conduct an analysis in which they apply terms/concepts from the reading to the scene. You will be graded for effort and completion rather than sophistication of analysis. You can choose to work alone or with others signed up for that day. This will be 20% of your final participation grade. We'll sign up for slots the first week of class. If you miss your day, you are subject to the same 10% penalty as late work.

Reading/Assignment Schedule

This syllabus will likely change depending on how fast we get through material, unexpected weather, class strengths and interests, etc. Consider this an evolving plan for the semester.

Week 1 – Mise-En-Scene

1/15 – 1/17

For Thursday

READ: *Film Studies* Introduction and Chapter 1 (1-23)

Week 2 – Mise-En-Scene: Camera Movement

1/22-1/24

When you watch films on your own- readings, screenings, and reports are due Tuesday

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 2 (24-37)

["The Truman Show Was a Delusion that Came True" A.V. Club \(2018\)](#)

["The Truman Show Review" Rolling Stone \(1998\)](#)

WATCH: *The Truman Show* (dir. Peter Weir, 1998)
(all films will be available on Netflix streaming)

Week 3 – Cinematography: *Pariah* (dir. Dee Rees, 2011)

1/29-1/31

When we watch films in class- reports are due Thursday at the end of class, readings should be done by Tuesday for full understanding of the screenings.

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 3 (38-54)

[Interview with Director Dee Rees *Cinema Blend* \(2012\)](#)

[The Visual Aesthetic of 'Pariah' *Indiewire* \(2015\)](#)

Week 4 – Editing

2/5-2/7

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 4 (55-73)

["Keynote: City of God," *The Dissolve* \(2013\)](#)

WATCH: *City of God* (dir. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002)

Week 5 – Visual Style

2/12-2/14

READ: [Butler, Jeremy "Visual Style" *The Craft of Criticism*](#)

["Forget Me Not," *American Cinematographer* \(2004\)](#)

WATCH: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (dir. Michel Gondry, 2004)

Week 6 – Visual Style: *The Florida Project* (dir. Sean Baker, 2017)

2/19-2/21

READ: [Stables, Katie. "The Florida Project Paints a Hardscrabble Wonderland in Candy Colors." *Sight and Sound*.](#)

DUE SUNDAY (Feb 24): Extra Credit Oscar ballots

Week 7 – Sound

2/26-2/28

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 5 (74-88)

[Kisner, Jordon. "The Art of Sound in Movies" *The Guardian*.](#)

Listen: ["The Sound of Roma with Skip Livsay"](#)

WATCH: *Roma* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2018)

Week 8 –

3/5-3/7

Tuesday: In class review

Thursday: Midterm \ Final day to turn in three film screening essays on Blackboard

----Spring Break----

Week 9 – Narrative

3/19-3/21

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 6 (89-102)

[Coco's screenplay](#)

[Story Structure Primer](#)

[Plot Structure Primer](#)

WATCH: *Coco* (dir. Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, 2017)

THURSDAY: Start script/storyboarding group activity (See Blackboard)

Week 10 – Screenplays

3/26-3/28

No Class Tuesday 3/26 - meet with group if necessary

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 7 (103-115)

[“Why Do So Many Animated Films Have Great Stories? Storyboarding.” VOX](#)

Thursday: Finish storyboarding group activity. Each group should bring one printed script to exchange with another group.

Week 11 – Genre: Horror

4/2-4/4

By TUESDAY: See *US* at a local theater

(and if you don't want to be spoiled, watch *Get Out*).

LISTEN: [Code Switch: “Get Out” And The Place of Race in Scary Movies](#)

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 10 (143-157)

[Hu, Jane. “Can Horror Movies be Prestigious?” *The Ringer*](#)

PERUSE: Film reviews of *Get Out* and *US*

THURSDAY: Peer Review of Critical Analysis 2

Week 12 – Genre (Rom-Com)

4/9-4/11

READ: [Inhat, Gwen. "Why Did Millions of Netflix Subscribers Watch Rom-Coms This Summer?" A.V. Club.](#)

[Mei, Gina. "To All the Boys I've Loved Before is an Extraordinary Rom-Com About Ordinary Teens."](#)

WATCH: *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (dir. Susan Johnson, 2018)

Week 13 – Performance

4/16 (No class Thursday 4/18)

READ: *Film Studies* Chapter 9 (129-142)

[Foulkes, Sarah. "The Yorgos Lanthimos School of Acting" *Film School Rejects*.](#)

WATCH: *The Lobster* (dir. Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015)

Week 14 – Wrap-Up and Review

4/23-4/25

Tuesday: Wrap-Up

Test Review: Thursday

DUE Thursday at 5:00 PM on Blackboard: Final Two Screening Essays

Week 15 – Final Exam

4/30-5/2

Tuesday, April 30 - Final Exam

Thursday - Party!

Week 16 - Finals Week

Final Portfolio Due: Tuesday, May 14 at 5:00