Geography & Film

GEOG 477/677: Spring - Fall 20##

Monday 5:30 – 8:15
Mackay Science, Rm 215

Instructor, Dr. Starrs: MS 115; starrs@unr.edu
784-6930; by appointment

Course requirements:

- Assignment # 1: Initial film review (due Wk 2, ## Feb) 10 %
- Assignment # 2: Review of reviews (due Wk 5, ## Mar) 20
- Assignment # 3: Midterm in-class essay (Wk 6, ## Mar) 20
- Assignment # 4: Film Themes Review Paper
  (Undergrad pprs due Wk 14; Grad pprs Wk 15) 20
- Assignment # 5: Final in-class film essay (Wk 15) 20
- Participation / Attendance — each week 10
  100 %

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: This course examines cinema (film, movies, video) as a data source that can then be used to deploy a variety of critical techniques. An international perspective is included as a fundamental element of the course: colonialism and imperialism, for example, are subject much-commented upon in film treatments; film noir is not only a French-language term originally, it is a prominent part of that country’s film canon since the 1940s; an intensive look at the films of one region or country as one element of the course will show how the use and presentation of film evolves through time — even in one site. Students will complete the class with an understanding of the role of film in national identity and critique, as a feature of arts and protest in local, national, and international contexts, and will evaluate how film can be used as an evidence source. Because this is a capstone (CO13) course, students are required to demonstrate their ability to think critically, do research in library sources, integrate film work with course readings and required independent research, and write up the results in articulate and well-conceived papers.

Readings are posted on WebCampus, and you should come to class having read the readings assigned for any given class session. Attendance in class is required. As a
group we will try to discuss these readings in class, and certainly expect you to integrate them into your written work (papers, examination answers) over the course of the semester. In addition, you need to purchase (and read) one of the three volumes of Roger Ebert, *The Great Movies.* You can access “Contents” for each volume on amazon.com. Select the one that appeals to you the most, based on the movies reviewed; if none stands out, try Vol. I.

In addition, for graduate credit (GEOG 677), students complete an alternative task, spelled out quickly toward the end of this syllabus, and also in a second document. The main difference is in Assignment # 4, which for grads is set up to explore teaching and thesis - dissertation needs.

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION (current):** The connection between cinema and physical and cultural landscapes, concentrating on the techniques of geographical film critique. (General Capstone course.)

[EXPANDED DESCRIPTION] Integrative exploration of the connection between cinema and physical and cultural landscapes. Application of the techniques of geographical film critique to connect local, regional, and global contexts in contemporary and historical cinema.

**PREREQUISITES:** For GEOG 477: ENG 102; CH 201 or CH 202 or CH 203; junior or senior standing. Prior course work in an environmental science is suggested but not required. For GEOG 677: Graduate standing.

**GRADES:** The following is the basis for grading. Pluses and minuses will be assessed, as earned.

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<th>Grade Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>93-100% (4.0)</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92.9% (3.7)</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89.9 (3.3)</td>
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<td>83-86.9 (3.0)</td>
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<td>80-82.9 (2.7)</td>
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<td>77-79.9 (2.3)</td>
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<td>73-76.9 (2.0)</td>
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<td>70-73.9 (1.7)</td>
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<td>60-63.9 (0.7)</td>
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<td>Below 60 (0.0)</td>
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**LATE WORK:** Work turned in late will be marked down one letter grade (or numerical equivalent) for every 24 hours after the due date and time. Make-up examinations are rarely permitted, but may on occasion be arranged in consultation with the instruction.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** Submitted to fulfill CO 13 and CO 11 (Global Contexts)

Core Objective 11 (Global Contexts) reads:
• Students will apply and evaluate modes of academic inquiry, creative expression, or results of research to problems in historical and contemporary global contexts. Students will articulate connections among local, national, and international contexts and evaluate the ways that historical and contemporary global influences affect their current situations.

Core Objective 13 (Integration and Synthesis) reads:

• Students will be able to integrate and synthesize Core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues.

Additionally, students will:

• Develop a clear understanding of professional and academic geography (physical, human, and environmental)
• Manifest solid analytical and writing skills through geographic film critique
• Use and synthesize library and on-line sources to research and analyze global geographical film themes
• Manifest understanding of CO1 (Effective Composition & Communication), and CO3 (Critical Analysis & Use of Information)

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Core Objective 11 (Global Contexts):

SLO 1: Students will be able to apply techniques of geographic film critique to research the historical and/or contemporary global context of various films.

SLO 2: Students will be able to demonstrate how local and global geographic contexts affect the understanding of events or issues presented in film.

Core Objective 13 (Integration & Synthesis):

SLO 3: Students will be able to integrate Effective Composition & Communications skills (CO1) and Critical Analysis & Use of Information (CO3) to critically examine a geographical film theme (visual literacy, acceptable writing skills, show capabilities in research methods).

SLO4: Students will be able to synthesize information and techniques from previous coursework across disciplines to propose and explore global, regional, and local geographical themes in film.

*[SLO & CO Assessment techniques are at end of syllabus]*
### Weekly Schedule of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>01: Jan ##</td>
<td><strong>Introduction: Geography, Place, &amp; Film</strong></td>
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| 02: Feb ## | **Geography, Sense of Place, & Film Criticism**  
 Instructor available after class for discussion |
| 03: Feb ## | **Auteur and Genre: Whose film is it?**  
• Assignment #1 due |
| 04: Feb ## | **Locations (international: mountains, deserts, oceans, jungles):**  
2015: *Up the River, Down the River, in Search of the River* |
| 05: Feb ## | **Documentaries: International Perspectives**  
Instructor available after class for discussion |
| 06: Mar ## | **Westerns: Myth-making and Realities**  
• Assignment #2 is due |
| 08: Mar ## | **No class: Spring Break (University Holiday)** |
| 09: Mar ## | **Colonialism/Imperialism: International Perspectives** |
| 10: Mar ## | **Cities in Film: International Perspectives** |
| 11: Apr ## | **Film Noir**  
Instructor available after class for discussion |
| 12: Apr ## | **A Region or Country of Films** [variously: Latin America, or France, or Spain, or India or China or Japan, or SE Asia, or Subsaharan Africa; will change each year course is taught.] |
| 13: Apr ## | **Technological fears and hopes: Utopian and dystopian landscapes, including other-worldly**  
• Undergraduate Assignment #4 is due |
| 14: Apr ## | **Geographers & Geography in Film**  
Instructor available after class for discussion  
• Grad Assignment #4 is due. |
| 15: May ## | **Assignment #5: Final In-class Film Essay: film = ??**  

*NOTE: We cannot have the final exam at the scheduled final examination time because we need three hours for the final, and UNR only budgets two hours. I’ll be in class at the scheduled time final examination time, and can meet with you by appointment; your choice.*
Assignments:

For all writing assignments, please, double-space; one-inch margins, number your pages, 12-point type, and turn in a paper copy. You may be asked for electronic submission, but I’ll let you know. For electronic documents, I use MS Word’s “track changes” function for commenting on papers, so you should know how to use (or access and review) that.

# 1. Initial film viewing & essay: Each student will sign up for a film at the first class meeting. As soon as you have your title (the first evening of class), find it (wherever; some will be harder to locate than others, but all are “in print” so if worse comes to worst, buy it — the cost won’t be tremendous); then watch the film. If you wait until week three to look for your film, sympathy will be slight! Many are available on Amazon Instant Video or Netflix or even on YouTube. Then carefully think about, try out, and finally, list and briefly discuss 8–10 geographic components that strongly suggest themselves to you in watching the film. These must be different: “landscape” and “setting” are not distinct. These can be geographic “facts” about place; or they can employ a geographical technique; or these can be a framing of place, or a circumstance, that seems to you particularly geographical. Many of these films are international, so you should be prepared to watch a film where most dialogue is communicated via subtitles. Think about what geography is, can be, or should be, in your mind.

NOTE: For this assignment and all future assignments, it’s not only expected that you will have done the readings (which are on-line in the WebCampus system), but also that your writing and your work will SHOW that you’ve done the readings. You don’t have to quote at length, but you do have to make it clear that you’ve incorporated those readings into your understanding of film. Simple citations (Kael 1994) are fine.

Your paper, 4–6 pages, should start with a page or more of discussion of the overall film and its components. Don’t summarize; instead, think about and discuss what makes the overall work “geographical” for you. Then, list your 8–10 bullet points, (1–8, or 9, or 10) altogether. Then, in a following section, go bullet-point by bullet-point, and discuss each. Do not rest on your past prejudices or preconceptions: geography is a broad field of study; the assignment requires more than “seeing” a film, you will need to watch and think about it, about how it’s constructed, about more than “story” and “plot.” Reference to a specific scene or frame is encouraged. Two or three well-constructed sentences should spell out and explain each of the bullet-point “components” in your list. The discussion that follows each bulleted “component” should explain how and why you think it is “geographical.”

This assignment is due at the start of class for Week 3 (Feb ##), so start right away; watch more than once, and take notes while you’re viewing. — The grading rubic for this first paper is included later on in this syllabus, so you know what’s expected.

# 2. Essay analyzing film evaluation techniques: length, 5–7 pages of text, plus full citations on additional standalone page(s). NOTE: This is a research paper, by which it means you cannot complete the assignment without using library (or on-line) resources. Therefore, you need to start early — Week 3 would be wise — to find appropriate sources. What is required? Read on: First, find seven to nine published essays on the film for which
you’ve found “geographical components” in Assignment # 1. Cite each source accurately and completely (see attached guidelines), and include an abstract in your bibliography / literature-cited section, with a one- to three-sentence discussion of the main point each item raises. Then write a thoughtful essay on the various ways these writers have critiqued and analyzed the film. This part is not a list, and not a summary, and not particularly even about the film in question; it is your examination of what these other “experts” have done and how they’ve set about doing it. You are writing about THEIR techniques, perception, perspectives, and ideas about film as a source. Keep an eye out for their treatment of geographical phenomena — but some may not have any!

- Two MUST be from a scholarly journal; usual choices include Film Quarterly, Cinema Journal, Journal of Popular Culture, French Colonial History, Geographical Review, or such classics as Cahiers du Cinema — look selectively at the “Film Studies” heading in the Electronic Journals on the Library WWW-site for ideas; if the film is older, you may want to go right to the printed versions of these journals in the correct year range (many journals have full indexes for the year in the last issue of the calendar year).

- Two of your items can be from one of these newspaper sources (even if you locate the articles on-line); acceptable newspapers are the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Chicago Sun-Times, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, the Village Voice (esp. by Elliott Stein), the Miami Herald. Cite date & pages accurately and completely; if you use an electronic source, give the URL in addition to date and pages. In other words, we want to be able to find it ourselves, if we need to. For older films, you may wish to consult the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature either on the library shelves, or in its on-line version. That will help you run things down.

- Two MUST be book chapters — that is, chapters from published books of a scholarly nature — a book or collection of essays about a film director could be acceptable, as could be an extended discussion of a film in a book about the genre (western, horror, film noir, documentaries). Be judicious. This will require at least one library visit. A film review collected from newspaper sources (collections of Pauline Kael’s or Roget Ebert’s reviews, for example) will not be acceptable. Find chapters with the whole apparatus — source (foot- or end-) notes, an index at the end on the book, full citations. And cite the work correctly, using the instructions attached at the end of this syllabus.

- One review can be from a weekly publication, such as the Chicago Reader (Jonathan Rosenbaum), or from the East Bay Express (Kelly Vance), or from the San Francisco Chronicle (Mick LaSalle), or the San Diego Reader (Duncan Shepherd), or our own reviewers in the Reno News & Review. (These are a little trickier to find, but often worthwhile.) Items from something like David Bordwell’s blog site can also work; many active film critics have good supporting sites (so does Jonathan Rosenbaum). Sources such as “brightlightsfilm.com” will work, too.
• If you want to have more, that’s fine, but it’s expected that you will select essays that have meat to them, and which raise interesting questions that you then reflect on; you may not find it wise to settle for just the first seven you find. Pick good essays and chapters and MINE them. Go for more, and then winnow. Find serious sources; a quick grab from imdb.com or another Internet source will receive credit for what it is — a lowest common denominator effort. Be diligent, and locate good material.

Prepare a 5–7 page discussion of how these essays analyze the film differently or similarly to your treatments; add in at the end the page(s) of bibliographic citations, with your own annotations/abstract for each. This is due Week 6 (Mar ##). (If you have questions, contact your instructor well before Week 6!)

# 3. Midterm in-class essay of an entire film: Lone Star; Week 09 (Mar ##). Use the same techniques that you have perfected in Assignment #2 to search out and examine useful sources for the midterm examination. Bring TWO blank “blue books” (obtainable at the book store in The Joe; don’t wait until the last minute to acquire these; get two for the final, too). Bring, to the midterm, a single sheet of paper (filled out on both sides, if you wish), which you’ll turn in, that includes all the citations (and nothing BUT the citations — no additional notes, please) — that you researched and read. You may use this sheet to help you cite sources during the midterm examination. You’ll be provided, at midterm examination time, with a sheet that gives the film’s essential details, so you don’t have to memorize or record those.

# 4. Due Week 13 (for undergraduate students, due Apr ##): This requires Your assignment is to select at least five films, and no more than eight (or nine … ), that have a significant geographical theme in common. If you’re looking for a model, consider the sorts of themes that are picked for weekly lectures in this course, or “shared” themes in such literary documents as review essays in geographical, film, literary, or other journals and news magazines (the TLS or New York Review of Books or The Nation come to mind). The themes can be varied, and more specific than the fairly general themes that are picked for weekly display — depending on your interests! Longer versions by grad students are due one week later, on ## April. Graduate students — you have a different set of instructions, attached to the syllabus.

At least one-third of the films that you use in this assignment, which is to prepare a class session, should be from non-English language sources. Some examples: Films on politics as revealed in rock ’n’ roll (or punk, or jazz, or country, or reggae); films with a food theme; films about/set in the Global South (southern hemisphere) – with a point to make about that; “The Eight Best Brazilian Films”; Deserts in Film Geography (or “Mountains,” or “Alaska,” or “Jungles” or “Desert Island” films); Displaced People in Film (or “The Rich in Film,” or “The Confidence Man in Film” or “Disabilities Portrayed on Film”); or Dance in Geography (or fencing and swordplay), or “Aliens among Us on Earth” … you should get the idea from these examples. Your essay should begin not just with an introduction of your theme, it should also suggest, with at least a citation or two to
academic / scholarly literature, why this is a theme of some larger interest. Believe me when I say that inventive choices are appreciated (and rewarded).

What’s required of you is a several-part document — please include, and label, them all!

1) A title that is pungent and evocative and accurate, and below that . . .
2) A single-paragraph, indented, “abstract” of 150-250 words that forges connections and telegraphs where your paper is going. Label it as “abstract,” and follow that with these parts (3–6, below). Start this with the word “Abstract:” ...
3) … a discussion that establishes the overall view of your topic, and which binds your theme to “geography,” in ways that you set out, and explain. This section will eventually incorporate discussion of a list of 5-9 films that are linked by the above attributes and discussion. While a part of the film can be especially demonstrative of what you are interested in, we expect the film to be included because the theme is at least relatively frequently in evidence. In other words, something that appears in just a tiny part of a single scene will be less convincing than something that’s an ongoing part of the film. Be sure, please, to include references to the usual sources — course readings, on-line sites that you have found that help bolster your selection of films or arguments, and scholarly articles that support the same. You paper (and discussion) will not be “right” unless you include those.
4) The links can be various — same auteur, same city, same landscape, same genre, same take in matters of race or gender or sexual identity, same music, same horse, same buggy, same actor/-tress, same cinematographer. Make them & geography clear to us, your readers / watchers.
5) Following upon the example of some of the sorts of review-essays and critical discussions of film that you will have encountered in completing Assignment #2, dive into a discussion of the links and why these count as something of geographical (and other) significance. Draw on your researches and readings and viewings and anything else, but please DO share the sources of your insight.
6) Finally, return to the 5-9 films, and one-by-one, list each, the scene that you have chosen as especially representative of your theme, and include exact timing (beginning to end) of the scene for each film. Indicate the usual relevant information, such as whether it’s a DVD or a VHS version, whether it’s a director’s cut, or a widescreen, the full bibliographic citation of the film, and anything else your heart or head leads you to want to include. DISCUSS, after these rudimentary details, for at least a paragraph or two, why you believe this is an especially significant or worthy scene or excerpt from the film.

At this point, you should have produced a 8–10 page paper, and you need to make certain that your name, and other stuff is included. Turn in TWO copies: One will be kept, the other returned.

# 5. Final in-class essay on an entire film shown in class; **Week 15 (May ##)**. This will be similar to the midterm, except that you will not know the film in advance. It will, however, be open notes, so bring with you all your notes that may be useful in writing the essay. **No electronic devices may be used during the exam for any reason, whatsoever.** If your
class notes are on your computer, you must print them out and bring them with you in paper form.

Participation: This is necessarily a judgment call on the part of the professor; it begins with attendance – because there is such a heavy emphasis on materials and film clips in class, attendance is mandatory. Students get ONE excused absence; after that, each absence, no matter how legitimate (one excuse is as legitimate as any other), will cost you one full grade in the participation part of the course; also taken into consideration is active involvement in class. Recognizing the different starting points of students in this course, I’ll promise an even-handed best to credit you according to your involvement and effort. Some of you know a lot about geography, others a lot about film, others about writing or criticism, others have vast stores of knowledge about science or natural resources. An active effort at participation will be recognized for what it is. If you don’t try, or don’t contribute, or don’t show up, I can’t do much for you.

Other Readings: There are a number of “readings” for the course to be downloaded from the course WebCampus site; your various papers should refer to those readings that are applicable/appropriate to your paper. A word to the wise: We do understand which articles or chapters relate to which kind of film (though I am willing to be surprised by pleasantly inventive applications). You instructor chose the films, after all. And if only the first reading of the semester is referred to in an essay written for the last week of the class, it’s relatively likely that the more appropriate or significant readings weren’t referred to because you never got to them. You’ll want to incorporate the readings successfully into your own writing (citing them, too). Think about the readings, about what they tell you, and about how you COULD use them in the film(s) you are thinking and writing about.

Grading Improvement: Please see the attached materials on “how to improve your essay,” and the citation guidelines (taken from an established geographical journal; you can match this without difficulty, but ask us if there are additional questions about citation form). Consult these often; they can measurably improve not just your writing, but also your grade for the course. That’ll be welcomed.

Graduate (Geog 677) Component: You’re tasked with a larger responsibilities for “question-answering” and participation in the class, so plan on contributing some of your particular knowledge in the weekly meetings. Your other assignment is a longer paper assignment, which is spelled out as follows: By Week 09 (Mar ##) write a short abstract of an essay that you would like to write that links course material (film, geography) to some aspect of your graduate research topic. E-mail abstract to Paul Starrs (e-mail at start of this syllabus!). (If your topic is still resolving, then give it your best shot, and settle on the best-gelled theme you can come up with.) Discuss the uses of film (commercially, cinematographically, culturally, critically, what have you) in your graduate school project. Document and flesh out with appropriate sources, and a level of detail that should yield you a 10–15 page paper before the end of the semester on Week 13, ## April. (For grad students only, due the week BEFORE the Final Examination – Week 14, Apr ##). See separate sheet of instructions for grads; in general, it follows the undergrad assignment #4, though with more films & detail.
AFTER-CLASS DISCUSSIONS: There will be up to a one-hour discussion period after class (following a short break, of course) on the following days – ## Feb; ## Feb; ## Apr; and ## Apr. Come if you can — these are for those interested in an opportunity for more broadly-based discussion of course materials, assignments, or of film in general. This added class time fills out the course contact hours and lets you ask the questions that have accumulated through the semester.

Syllabus Statements

1. DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: Disability Services: Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations. Academic Success Services: Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

2. ACADEMIC SUCCESS SERVICES: Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

3. STATEMENT ON AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING: “Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.” [from Faculty Senate required statement]

4. ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student's enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog.

SLO & CO Assessment techniques

CO11: Global Contexts

Following the rubric, areas of concern are a) Global Contexts; b) Cultural and Global Awareness; and c) Applying Knowledge to Global Contexts.
— Approved in 2002 as a general capstone course, this class has always emphasized evidence use, an awareness and understanding of difference, context, and regional and national identity. It can be designed in a variety of ways. Assignment #4, which in particular emphasizes global contexts, and the themes of CO11, are to be turned in in duplicate. Second copies will be made available to a panel of faculty in geography (and outside disciplines, if desired), and after reviewing a subset (20% seems appropriate) the success or failure in meeting CO11 can be assessed. This should be done each time the course is taught.

CO13: Integration and Synthesis

— This course includes three rigorous writing assignments that must be completed outside of class, and are each evaluated by the instructor. A midterm examination, and a final examination, are specifically designed to test the success or failure of the integration and synthesis model. To succeed in the course, students must demonstrate that they understand film (movies, cinema, video) as a source, that they can use critical reasoning techniques to extract essential information, that they are able to do in-depth library research to see how OTHER critics have treated the films and materials that they are viewing, and show that they are capable of linking films made independently into a single “class” where there is a theme, a sequence and progression, and that they are able to integrate course readings and further supportive materials that they have discovered for themselves in their researches. Assignments #2, #3 (midterm examination), #4, and #5 (final in-class examination) will be reviewed by the same small panel above to evaluate success or failure, and with the same subset of Assignment #4 papers.