THE WEST AS NATIONAL EXPERIENCE:  
THE WEST IN CINEMA

We’re talking about cowboys and Indians here, as well as bounty killers, prostitutes, train robbers, desperate men and forlorn women. Of course there will be a great deal more in this class than just these stereotypes. Historians and cultural critics have long suggested that the western experience is the defining aspect of the American character.

Theodore Roosevelt called the settling of the west the most important feature of American history. Already in 1778, men like Hector St. John De Crevecoeur were pointing to the west as the critical factor in defining American identity. The “western experience” has shaped our politics, our democratic spirit, our values, and our view of who we are as a people and how we fit into the world. In all its many shades and hues, the American character is ultimately what we are after as we investigate its complexity and importance primarily through film.

We will explore how the western experience affected and was affected by the currents in American society and culture. We will examine Anglo-native contact, non-white peoples, women, and the variety of the western experience from the flamboyant gun-fighters, to school marms, miners, ranchers, cowpokes, dudes, and all the rest of the kaleidoscope of western folks.

As a cultural studies course, we will be much more interested in cultural and social trends than the memorization of mere facts. Discussion is central to this course so you must do your assignments and take notes on them ahead of time so you are prepared to enter into the class dialogue.

TEXTS:

Tompkins, *West of Everything*

Selected readings: Roosevelt, Wister, De Crevecoeur, et al.

REQUIREMENTS:

DISCUSSION: ACCOUNTS FOR 50% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE.

WRITTEN RESPONSES: 6 ON THE MAJOR READINGS & FILMS 30%

PAPER DRAFT: 5%

RESEARCH PAPER: 15%
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<td>Intro, Concepts, Culture and History</td>
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<td>The Western in Perspective I</td>
<td>Handouts &amp; Tompkins 1-87 (Handouts &amp; 7-17 are critical)</td>
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<td>Heroes and Villains</td>
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<td>Spaghetti Westerns</td>
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Assignments:  Film 15 & Response Paper 5

Aug 5th  Television Westerns & Migrations
Assignments:  Film 16 (Draft Research Paper due)

Aug 6th  Westerns in Other Genres
Assignments:  Film 17 &

Aug 10th  Post Modern Westerns
Assignments:  Films 18 & 19 Response 6

Aug 11th  Prep Day

Aug 12th  Free Lance Potpourri
Assignments:  Film 20

Aug 13th  The Western means………………
Assignment:  Research Paper Due
The history program at UNR helps students to develop proficiency in broadly applicable skills while mastering specific subject areas. In addition to learning about American society, film and culture, students in this class will have opportunities to practice and improve the following skills:

- critical thinking (through reading and analyzing written documents and cultural sources, formulating arguments supported by historical evidence, and organizing information in a clear and logical manner)
- historical research (through finding information about historical topics in short assignments and a research project)
- written communication (through writing short assignments, a research presentation, and an integrative essay)
- primary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented historical documents and cultural artifacts created during the time periods we are studying)
- secondary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented in books and articles written by scholars about the time period we are studying)
- cultural text analysis (through thinking about the significance of cultural texts such as films and placing them in historical context)
- oral expression (through small group and whole class discussions and student presentations)
- using the internet (through research assignments and guidance on how to evaluate internet sources)

**Silver Core:**

This course satisfies Core Objective 13 of the Silver Core Curriculum:

**CO13. Integration and Synthesis:** Students will be able to integrate and synthesize Core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues.

In addition, the course helps students to hone the skills described in Core Objectives 1 and 3. These objectives are reinforced throughout the curriculum in other courses students take to fulfill core and major requirements:

**CO1. Effective Composition and Communication:** Students will be able to effectively compose written, oral, and multimedia texts for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.

**CO3. Critical Analysis and Use of Information:** Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information.
This course also integrates Core Objective 10 (Diversity and Equity) by examining the beliefs and value systems that shaped modern American culture as expressed in western films, analyzing how different groups were represented, and drawing conclusions regarding the impact of these representations on the treatment of women, nonwhite Americans, working-class people, and other marginalized groups.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Correlation to Core Objectives (COs)**

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

1. explain the ethical principles, belief systems, and social contexts that have shaped the modern American culture (also known as the “American identity”) as it was expressed in Western Films 1905 to today. Identify how different groups were represented and came to be included or excluded from this “American Identity.” (CO10, CO13)
2. analyze and synthesize primary, secondary, and cultural sources (CO3, CO13)
3. find and use historical scholarship and sources to answer a research question (CO3, CO13)
4. present ideas in a clear and persuasive manner both orally and in writing (CO1, CO13)
5. use relevant scholarship and historical evidence to articulate a theory of how and why American identity was shaped and reinforced by the social forces and cultural values exposed in American western films. (CO1, CO3, CO10, CO13)

**Participation:**

This course will be taught in a lecture/discussion format. Short lectures will provide historical background and explain key concepts, but much of your learning will occur through discussion of the assigned readings and other class activities. Therefore, regular attendance and participation are essential. If you are not present, you cannot participate, so excessive absences will lower your final grade. It is also very important that you complete the readings before the days they are assigned. Students who have not done the reading will find it hard to fulfill the class participation requirement, and this makes up a significant part of your grade.

You will not acquire the knowledge and skills you need to pass this course through passive reading or listening. Instead, you will need to take an active role in the learning process. This means working through the assigned texts carefully and critically, analyzing the information and not just summarizing it, and coming to class prepared to share your thoughts and interpretations.

**Written Responses:**

In and out of class assignments are designed to encourage you to keep up with the reading and help you to prepare for class discussions and activities each week. In addition, the research and writing exercises required by the assignments provide opportunities to practice skills related to studying American culture. Developing these skills through short assignments will help you to do well on the longer research and writing assignments required later in the course. Although the
assignments will not be cumulative, you must try and link materials and ideas and draw comparisons or make other connections to the current week’s material. This is another reason why regular attendance and paying close attention to lectures and discussions are essential.

**Research Paper:**

Students will analyze and synthesize the ideas and information presented in lectures, readings, assignments, discussions, student presentations, and their own research throughout the semester. Using a variety of primary sources as evidence you will prove a particular thesis as to what it tells us about how the West has shaped (or hasn’t) American values. This paper requires a unique blend of evidence you have taken from the readings, from the films, and from the articles and in class lectures to create a cogent and sensitive appraisal of how the West shaped a particular American value and what that tells us about the West’s role in American culture.

**Grading Criteria**

F (less than 60%)
F is for work that is not acceptable. It demonstrates that the student has no idea what the course material is about, suggesting a lack of interest or effort and possibly some absences from class.

D– (60–62%), D (63–66%), D+ (67–69%)
D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It suggests that the student has not been paying much attention to the course or is having problems understanding the material.

C– (70–72%), C (73–76%), C+ (77–79%)
C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material and is mostly accurate, but the paper lacks detail or effective organization. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence, or it might be merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

B– (80–82%), B (83–86%), B+ (87–89%)
B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with a thesis, and a conclusion.

A– (90–94%), A (95–100%)
A is for work of exceptional quality. These essays present a clear thesis supported by persuasive evidence and analysis, logically organized, and free from typing or grammatical errors. The A essay does not just competently summarize material, it manifests a deeper level of analysis and offers a clear concise perspective that is amply proved.
**Deadlines and Policies Regarding Missed Work**

Assignments are due in class on the dates indicated in the course Schedule. Makeups are possible but they are limited to three each term save for extreme situations or if pre-approved. Missing class destroys the grade you earn in many ways.

**Students with Disabilities**

The History Department is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The university’s Academic Standards policy states:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Plagiarism:** defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion.

- **Cheating:** defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one's place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official.

Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following:(1) filing a final grade of “F”; (2) reducing the student’s final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.