

ENGL 250  
Fall 2020  
Online, Tuesday 7:00 pm-9:40 pm

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## Overview and Goals

This course aims to introduce you to the formal aspects of film, as well as develop your visual literacy. Motion picture, like any other medium, has its own language for expressing ideas, and living in a media saturated culture means that we develop an ability to “read” film at a young age. This course will break down the elements of film to help you understand this language that has in many ways become second nature, and with that awareness help you to become a more proficient and deliberate interpreter of image based communication. The first half of the course will focus on developing your vocabulary in order to give you the language to discuss film in a comprehensive and critical way. Weekly discussion posts will help you hone your skills as you use the vocabulary from class to write about visual media. The second half will turn to more thematic elements, as we move from watching clips, to watching whole movies, where you will use the language you developed in the first half to explore themes and discuss whole films critically. It is easy to watch a film and let the images wash over you, but by the end of the course you should be able to shift from a passive viewer to an active translator of visual media.

## Course Breakdown

Blackboard Posts	30%
Participations	10%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Final Paper	20%

## Contact and Online Lectures

Because this course is online, email contact is of the utmost importance. Over the course of the online seminar, please make sure to check your email often, as essential information will be sent each week. Weekly Zoom meetings, and online tools posted to Blackboard will replace in-person lectures, and will be vital for your success in this course. You will be required to respond to prompts on Blackboard, as well as comment on posts made by your fellow classmates. All exams will be taken through Blackboard, and your final paper will be submitted online. The class is synchronous online, but due to the difficulties that technology can present, this time will be meant for discussion and clarification. I will do some lecturing during this time, but it will be supplemented with non-synchronous material.

## Blackboard Posts

Each week you will write a one page (~300 words) response paper and upload it to Blackboard. The paper will respond to a prompt I provide, and will relate to the topics we are covering. There is no right or wrong answers in your response, it will be your personal reactions, thoughts, and inclinations regarding elements of our class discussion and the films we watch. This exercise is meant to improve your ability to talk about film, and encourage you to reflect on the things you see. My feedback on these assignments are meant to help you develop your writing in this area, and grades for the posts are pass/fail. If you write a one page response in which you address the prompt in a thoughtful manner, you will receive full marks for that week. I am not going to be a stickler for grammar and spelling, I am looking at your ideas and an improvement over the semester in your ability to convey those ideas. Blackboard posts are a major aspect of your grade in this course, and if you wish to do well it is imperative that you keep up with them. The second aspect of the blackboard posts will be your responses to other students' posts. You will comment on at least one other student's assignment post each week, sharing your reaction to their thoughts, and offering your own insights. Responses will need to be at least two or three thoughtful sentences that

engage with your classmate's post to foster discussion and help one another expand our ideas. The idea here is not so much criticism as it is engagement. Posts should be construction, thoughtful, and above all else respectful.

### **Midterm Exam**

The mid-term exam will contain multiple choice, as well as a series of slides and clips with fill-in-the-blank questions. You will identify the aspects of film discussed in class in each of these images (ex. POV shot, low-key lighting, parallel editing, etc). We will cover this in more detail closer to the mid-term, as well as giving examples of what to expect during the exam.

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will cover more thematic elements of film. Multiple choice questions will address thematic elements we address throughout the class. Using the language you developed during the first half of the semester, you will respond to stills and clips in short answer format, touching on character relations, themes, and other interpretations.

### **Final Paper**

Your final paper will be a three to five (3-5) page analysis of one of the full films we watch in class. Using the skills you honed throughout the semester with your Blackboard posts, you will write a thesis statement, and breaking down the elements of visual language, cite evidence from the film to support your argument. This paper is meant to bring together everything you learn over the course of the semester, and apply this knowledge to analyzing a feature length film. At the point that you begin this paper you should be able to discuss what certain elements of film are doing and what kind of an effect this is having on the viewer. I highly recommend discussing final paper topics with me prior to beginning your paper, and will be available to work with you to develop these ideas further.

### **Tentative Schedule**

Aug 18      Introduction  
                 Visual Literacy Exercise

Aug 25      Visual Grammar  
                 Frame/Shot/Scene  
                 **Discussion Post 1**

**August 30 is the last day to drop the class**

Sep 1        Mise en scène  
                 The World of the Film  
                 **Discussion Post 2**  
                 **Classmate Response 1**

Sep 8        Cinematography

Lighting, Movement, Picture  
**Discussion Post 3**  
**Classmate Response 2**

Sep 15 Editing  
Continuity/Discontinuity  
**Discussion Post 4**  
**Classmate Response 3**

Sep 22 Mid-Term Prep  
**No Discussion Post**  
**Classmate Response 4**

Sep 29 **Mid-Term**

Oct 6 Genre  
Film-Noir: View *Double Indemnity*  
**Discussion Post 5**

Oct 13 Experimentation  
Film as Art: View *Meshes of the Afternoon*  
**Discussion Post 6**  
**Classmate Response 5**

Oct 20 Film and Social Issues  
Race/Class/Gender  
**Discussion Post 7**  
**Classmate Response 6**

Oct 27 View *Do the Right Thing*  
**Discussion Post 8**  
**Classmate Response 7**

Nov 3 **University Closed**

Nov 10 View *La Haine*  
**Discussion Post 9**  
**Classmate Response 8**

Nov 17 Wrap Things Up  
Discuss Final Papers

**No Discussion Post  
Classmate Response 9**

Nov 24      Final Paper Due

**November 24 is the last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of “W”**

Dec 1        Final Exam

## UNIVERSITY BOILERPLATE:

### E-mail Policy

Electronic mail or "e-mail" is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost effective and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU e-mail on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking e-mail daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student e-mail account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU e-mail address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/askit/policies-and-publications/information-technology-policies-standards-baselines--guidelines/student-e-mail-policy/>.

### VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity." In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
  - Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
  - Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
  - Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and,
  - Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."
- [http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy Library/VCU Honor System.pdf](http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/VCU%20Honor%20System.pdf). View the Honor System in its entirety: (<https://policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Honor%20System.pdf>)

More information can also be found on the Division of Student Affairs website:

[http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/students/student\\_honor\\_system.html](http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/students/student_honor_system.html).

Student Conduct in the Classroom According to the Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings ([http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/](http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf)

[Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf](http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf)), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. Also, the university Rules and Procedures prohibit anyone from having "in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university..."

### Students with Disabilities

SECTION 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended require that VCU provides "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). More information is available at Disability Support Services or the Division for Academic Success. Any student who has a disability that requires an academic accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chair of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

### Campus Emergency information

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor

will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.

- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information: <http://alert.vcu.edu/>.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

#### Withdrawal from Classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Harris Hall or contact a financial aid counselor

at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact.html>. The last day to withdraw from classes is 22 March.