

COM300 Narrative and Documentary Film

Dr. Alan Hueth, Instructor

Meeting Times & Places

Our weekly, in-class meetings will occur on Wednesdays, from 6-9:00 p.m. in RLC108. However, we will also be meeting online, via the course website's "Discussion Board" throughout the semester. These online meetings will include voluntary participation in extra-credit postings, and required involvement postings based readings in the Reel Spirituality... textbook (during the last six weeks of the course). See the "Schedule" page in the "Course Information" section of this site for the online discussion times. The "Discussion Board" can be accessed via the "Course Tools" button on this site.

Course Assumptions, Content, and Format

The course content and learning objectives derive from the following assumptions:

1. Narrative and documentary films exert **powerful social, psychological, and political force** in America and around the world;
2. These media forms have an evolutionary development and can be better understood through examining their **history and influential people and forces**;
3. Classic films are vivid "**artifacts**" of film history. Their contents reveal the social and political cultures of their day, along with the evolutionary progress of writing and production technologies and techniques;
4. Viewing and studying the **art** and **science** of these films can lead to a more enriched **critical appreciation** of film and documentary--as both a consumer and prospective producer, writer, director, etc., and critic of films; and
5. Film stories engage both the **affective** and **rational** parts of our being and, therefore, affect our **feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs**. Therefore, they invite reflection and criticism from a **theological perspective**.

Course Format

1. Textbook readings and discussion of film history, theories, and production techniques;
2. Mini-lectures and screening selected films which reveal the history of the filmmaking industry--including economics, technological innovations, content and production techniques, social influences, and selected films and documentaries, and their roles in shaping the film industry;
3. Introductions to (and screenings of) selected classic, industry-shaping films, followed by short class discussions about the films. In addition, I will often arrive to class early (5:30 p.m.) and show documentaries on "the making of..." films, interviews with filmmakers, and other material. Come early and enjoy!; and
4. Online discussion on theological perspectives to film criticism, and applying a Christian worldview in the analysis and critique of films and documentaries.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

As a result of this course, the student will display an understanding of, and/or be able to do the following:

1. Identify formative moments in the history and evolution of film technology in narrative & documentary films;
2. Identify the history of filmmaking eras (star and studio systems, etc.), the emergence of genres, and their content, and an understanding of where the filmmaking industry is headed;
3. Identify techniques of cinematography, directing, production design, acting, sound, and editing;
4. Identify how particular fictional and non-fictional films have displayed the conventions, have advanced the techniques, and exhibited trends in the motion picture industry;
5. Identify prominent filmmakers' (producers, directors, actors, etc.) styles and their particular contribution to the art and business of filmmaking;
6. Display an appreciation for--and understanding of--the relevance of film as both an art form and social phenomenon; and
7. Demonstrate an ability to formulate a critical Christian response to film as both art and social phenomenon--based on biblical principles and scripture.

Textbooks & Class Presentations

Required purchases:

Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film (5th edition), by Stephen Prince (Allyn & Bacon)

Reel Spirituality: Theology & Film in Dialogue (revised and expanded ed), by Robert Johnston (Baker Academic)

On 2-hour reserve in library: Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film, by Erik Barnouw

Accessing In-Class PowerPoint presentations:

To be provided later

Course Schedule

The section contains textbook readings and Big Idea Report due dates (which are posted in Canvas), topics, and screening schedule for this course. This schedule is subject to change, based on instructor and/or student needs and preferences.

SESSION #1: No chapter outlines due

- Course overview, syllabus, introductions, etc.
- Early filmmaking: people, events, forces, etc.
- Early short films: *Eadward Muybridge Shorts*, *Thomas Edison Shorts*, *Lumiere Brothers Shorts*, *A Trip to the Moon*, by Georges Melies, *The Great Train Robbery*, by Edwin S. Porter.
- Early screen comedy: Chaplin and others

- 1st American feature film: *Birth of a Nation*: background, content, influence, and impact on American filmmaking
- View clips & discuss: *Birth of a Nation*, by D.W. Griffith

SESSION #2: CHAPTER OUTLINES DUE: Movies... chapters 1 & 6

- Discussion: film structure and principles of sound design
- "The Documentary is Born: Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*
- Clips: *Nanook of the North* (1922)
- The 'Talkie' Takes Over Filmmaking: *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and its influence
- View and discuss: *The Jazz Singer* 1927 (89 minutes)

SESSION #3: CHAPTER OUTLINE DUE: Movies... chapters 3 & 5

- Discussion: production design and editing
- "Storytelling & Editing: Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
- Clips: *Battleship Potemkin*
- "The Hollywood Musical: Background, Techniques, and Influences"
- View clips: musicals of the 1930's-'40's and discussion
- Background: *Singin' in the Rain* by Gene Kelly, 1952
- Viewing & discussion: *Singin' in the Rain* (103 minutes)

SESSION #4: CHAPTER OUTLINES DUE: Movies... chapter 7

- Discussion: nature of narrative in film
- 1920s-1940's: Studios, Moguls, Genres, & Stars
- Horror & Special Effects: Clips and discussion of *Frankenstein* (1931), & *King Kong* (1933)
- Gangster films: Clip and discussion of *Scarface* (1931)
- The Western: Clip and discussion of *Stagecoach* (1939), by John Ford
- Featured director: Frank Capra
- "The Romantic Comedy: *It Happened One Night* (1934), by Frank Capra
- Viewing & discussion: *It Happened One Night* (105 minutes)

SESSION #5: CHAPTER OUTLINES DUE: Movies... chapters 8 & 9

- Discussion: modes of screen reality and documentary
- Pare Lorentz and *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1934) and *The River* (1938)
- Different Worlds, Different Styles: Selection of Contemporary & Award-Winning Documentaries
- Dreams & Visions: Selection of Award-Winning Experimental Student Films
- Discussion: Hollywood, Independent, and International Films
- Viewing & discussion: *Run Lola Run* (1998)

SESSION #6: NO CLASS MEETING--SCREEN TWO DOCUMENTARY FILMS IN MEDIA SERVICES LISTED BELOW

CHAPTER OUTLINE DUE: One chapter from: Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film, by Erik Barnouw (on 2-hour reserve in library)

- Screen/scan *Triumph of the Will*, by Leni Riefenstahl (1935), and write 2 page paper on the production techniques and message of this phenomenal documentary
- Screen *WWII: The Propaganda Battle*, with Bill Moyers (52-min.), and write a 2-page paper on Nazi propaganda and American propaganda in World War II--the 10 most interesting things that you learned from watching this. Also available in Media Services.
- **NOTE:** Both documentaries available in PLNU Media Services--you must screen them there

SESSION #7: CHAPTER OUTLINES DUE: Documentary: A History... chapter reading; and Movies... chapters 2 & 11

PAPERS DUE: Essay on *Triumph of the Will* and *WW II: The Propaganda Battle*

- Discussion: cinematography and models of film theory
- View documentary: *The Making of 'Citizen Kane* (25 minutes)
- View & discuss *Citizen Kane*, by Orson Welles, 1941 (119 minutes)

SESSION #8: CHAPTER OUTLINES DUE: Movies... chapters 4 & 10; and review Ch. 8--realism POSTINGS (Discussion Board)—see questions for chapter 11 reading on Discussion Board

- Discussion: acting & film criticism and interpretation
- "The 'Problem Picture' and Social Action: *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Ford (1940)
- Clips: *The Grapes of Wrath*
- Late 1940's-1950's: Motion Picture Industry Changes & Factors Driving Changes
- View portion of documentary: *American Cinema Series: Film Noir*
- The Method and Brando
- James Dean: An American Icon
- Clips: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Blob*, *The Ten Commandments*, etc.

SESSION #9: READING & POSTINGS: Reel Spirituality, Chapters 1 & 2 (Questions posted on Discussion Board)

- Discussion: film criticism and interpretation
- "The Master of Suspense: Alfred Hitchcock"
- *Psycho* (1960): Background and Technique
- View & Discuss *Psycho* (109 minutes)

SESSION #10: READING & POSTINGS: Reel Spirituality, Chapters 3 & 4 (Questions posted on DB)

- Introduction to *The Graduate* (1967)
- View & discuss *The Graduate* (106 minutes)

SESSION #11: READING & POSTINGS: Reel Spirituality, Chapters 5 & 6 (Questions posted on DB)

- Introduction to Stanley Kubrick
- Introduction to *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964)
- View & discuss: *Dr. Strangelove...*(93 minutes)

SESSION #12: READING & POSTINGS: Reel Spirituality, Chapter 8 (Questions posted on DB); also, read Ch. 7, but no posting on that chapter required.

- The 1960's: Social Upheaval and Film
- Introduction to *Easy Rider* (1969)
- View & discuss *Easy Rider* (94 minutes)
- The Documentary Tradition Continues
- View and discuss clips of *Woodstock*

SESSION #13: READING & POSTINGS: Reel Spirituality, Chapters 9 & 10 (Questions posted on DB).

- View segments of documentary: *American Cinema Series: The Film School Generation*
- Introduction to Steven Spielberg & George Lucas
- View and discuss selected Spielberg film

SESSION #14: See handouts and links on *Schindler's List* to be provided

- View *Schindler's List* (1993)

SESSION #15: Wednesday, December 10, 2014

READINGS: Handouts or links to be provided

FILM CRITICISM PAPER AND SCRIPT DUE

- Discussion: *Schindler's List*
- Discuss articles on the current situation of Christians in secular and religious film
- Viewing and discussion of selected "Christian films"

Final Exam: Check Date on Canvas (syllabus is web posting)

Evaluation – Grading Policies

Assignment Deadlines:

Chapter outline due dates and the criticism paper due dates are all posted on the "Course Schedule" page of this website. The Reel Spirituality readings and online posting due dates are posted on the "Discussion Board." **NO LATE CHAPTER OUTLINE OR POSTING SUBMISSIONS ACCEPTED.**

Assignments and Weighting:

Chapter Outlines (11 @ 10 points each) 110

Criticism Paper 300

Movies... (1) & Reel Spirituality

(6) Discussion Board Postings @ 40 points each 240

Final Exam 250

Attendance & Participation 100

Total points: 1000

EXTRA CREDIT:

Film Reflections postings (16 at 3 points/each) 48

Grade & Point Scale:

921-1000= A

900-920= A-

880-899= B+

821-879= B

800-820= B-

780-799= C+

721-779= C

700-720= C-

680-699= D+

621-679= D

600-620= D-

Test Information

You will have one test in this course: a final exam. It will be a comprehensive exam that will include questions derived from all chapters in Prince's Movies and Meaning... textbook, and questions derived from the PowerPoint lectures in class--I will make sure the powerpoint presentations I used are included on the happy drive for your perusal. This part of the test will consist of 150 objective questions (T/F and multiple choice) and will be worth 150 points. This will be an open-note test. You are allowed to use your **graded chapter outlines (only)** as notes for the exam. You are not allowed to bring notes on the PowerPoint lecture material.

Date and time of objective portion of exam: **Date on Canvas (syllabus is for web posting)**

Here's a final exam study guide.[FinalExam Study Guide - movies and meaning.docx](#) to prepare you for the objective portion of the exam.

There will also be two final postings for this course.

1. Post a take-home essay based on the article A Filmmaker's Progress by Scott Derrickson. Just click [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to see the article and do the reading. The essay post is due by/before **(Date on Canvas)**. Post your essay as your thread on the discussion board assignment -- either in the message box, or attach it as a Word document in your thread. No tech excuses/problems for late postings accepted. The essay should be 3-4 pages long

"A Filmmakers Progress," by Scott Derrickson, the author metaphorically compares his experience with film and entering and working in the film industry with the classic book, Pilgrim's Progress, (1678) by John Bunyan. Your task for this essay is to summarize and critique Derrickson's experience and, most importantly, his concluding comments/advice to Christians that want to be filmmakers. An outstanding essay is one that briefly summarizes the different groups that Scott experienced, but then provides a critique and either agrees with and expands upon his argument—providing more supportive reasoning, and/or disagrees with his conclusions (in minor or major ways) and includes supportive reasoning for this position. WARNING: although interesting and articulate, God is not done with Scott yet, and I challenge you to critique Scott's journey and conclusions (to date) and share why you think his journey is probably not over...God's not done with him yet on this subject. He has not "arrived" yet.

2. I will read all of your essays, then select one or two of the most compelling essays BY/BEFORE Tuesday, 12/16/14, 5 p.m. I will let you -- know via email and a response on the essay assignment on discussion board -- which one(s) to read, and provide a response-critique to their points and perspective. You'll post your responses as "replies" to the papers posted by your peer(s). This peer-critique post is due by/before **(Date on Canvas)**.

The exam is worth 250 points (25% of course grade). You must do both posts to get any credit for this essay part of your exam. If you do not do both postings (your essay on "A Filmmakers..." and the peer reply), you lose all 100 points--which is a full course grade reduction. So, be sure to get these done. I think you'll find this to be a great learning experience.

Attendance & Participation Policy

From the Provost: Regular and punctual attendance at all classes in which a student is registered is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. Therefore, regular attendance and participation in each course are minimal requirements to be met. There are no allowed or excused absences except when absences are necessitated by certain university-sponsored activities and are approved in writing by the Provost.

Whenever the number of accumulated absences in a class, for any cause, exceeds ten percent of classes (this is equivalent to one and one-half weeks or longer in a 15-week semester course), the faculty member has the option of filing a written report to the Vice Provost for Academic Administration which may result in de-enrollment, pending any resolution of the excessive absences between the faculty member and the student. If more than 20 percent (three weeks) is reported as missed, the faculty member may initiate the student's de-enrollment from the course without advance notice to the student. If the date of de-enrollment is past the last date to withdraw from a class, the student will be assigned a grade of "F" or "NC." There are no refunds for courses where a de-enrollment was processed.

From the instructor:

I consider class attendance as a valid and important factor in my evaluation of you as a student. Working professionals (in communication and non-comm. professions) concur with this and suggest that consistent classroom attendance is a sign of a student's ability to establish priorities in their lives, and to commit and follow-through with a task to its completion. Therefore, I expect you to make attendance a priority. This means that you will arrive by or before the class period starts, and not depart class until the end of the class session--except for the one scheduled--and/or an emergency bathroom visit. Extreme illness or death in the family are considered excused absences. All other absences will incur penalties. Absence from a single session (3 hours in length) in this course is equivalent to missing one week of school in a regular 3-credit hour, semester-long course.

Let this be your warning: each late arrival to class will incur an "L" note on my attendance sheet, and point reductions from your A & P portion of your course grade. Each unexcused absence will incur an automatic 20 point reduction from the "Attendance and Participation" portion of your course grade. If you have three unexcused absences, you will be dropped from the course without notification (as per provost policy). If you must be absent, I expect you to notify me in advance of the session.

Also, your participation in the online discussions will be factored into your attendance and participation grade for this course.

If you miss a class session:

You must do the following:

1. Check out and screen the film(s) that you missed in class -- they are available in PLNU Media Services (2 floors above the classroom in same bldg).
2. Write a 2-3 page, typed, double-spaced essay on what you learned from the film--based on assigned chapter reading--if chapter reading was assigned for that evening. If no ch reading assigned, the essay

can reveal other things that you learned -- perhaps based on past chapters. You must submit a report for every full film and partial clip screened in the class session that you missed; and

3. You must submit your report by/before the following class session that you missed.

A special note: as stated earlier, I expect you to arrive on-time for the beginning of all class sessions, and also to arrive on time back to class after our short bathroom breaks. Although I take roll at the beginning of class, I also monitor attendance throughout the evening during film screenings--all the way to the end of class. If I notice that you left the class session during a screening (for other than bathroom emergency), I will note this and count you as absent for the entire evening session. Finally, although the room is dark during screenings, this is not nap time. Someone napping in class might as well be in bed sleeping-- you're psychologically and intellectually disengaged and "absent" from the class, therefore, you'll lose A & P points (or be counted absent)...just so you know. So, DRINK COFFEE, TEA, EAT LOTS OF CHOCOLATE...whatever it takes to stay awake!

Course Policies

Academic Accommodations

All students are expected to meet the standards for this course as set by the instructor. However, students with learning disabilities who may need accommodations should discuss options with the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of class. The ASC will contact professors with suggested classroom needs and accommodations. Approved documentation must be on file in the ASC prior to the start of the semester.

Link to Academic Support Center:

<http://www.ptloma.edu/studentdevelopment/StudentHandbook/index.htm> (Links to an external site.)

Campus Computer/Network Usage

Careful and ethical use of computing resources is the responsibility of every user. Students will be held to a standard of accountability for how they use computers at PLNU.

Link to Computer Use Policy:

<http://www.ptloma.edu/studentdevelopment/StudentHandbook/index.htm> (Links to an external site.) (Links

Cheating and Dishonesty

Students will be honorable in all of their academic work. Dishonesty in assignments, examinations, or any other academic work is an affront to fellow students and faculty and will not be tolerated. In addition, dishonesty as a student is not acceptable. ...Student Handbook

Link to Cheating and Dishonesty Policy:

<http://www.ptloma.edu/studentdevelopment/StudentHandbook/index.htm> (Links to an external site.)

Course Assignments

Big Idea Reports

Your task for this assignment is to compose a Big Idea Report **for each assigned chapter reading** in the *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film (5th ed)* text, and one chapter from one of the books on documentary (on reserve).

The purpose of the Big Idea Reports is to keep you up-to-speed on the assigned readings and deepen your understanding of the course content. They will help to assure active participation in class discussions. I expect to see evidence that you've read and understand the important points in each chapter.

The reports should be 1.5-2 pages in length (minimum), typed, 12-pt Times-New Roman, single-spaced for each point, and double-spaced between each point. It may be in the form of a formal outline or bullet points with short descriptions of main points--whichever format that you prefer. Each report is due the day of the assigned chapter reading on the the "Schedule" page, and must be submitted at the end of each class session. Also, these reports may be used as notes for the "open-note final exam!"

Criticism Paper (on Canvas)

Description:

Your task for this assignment is to compose a critical analysis of one of the films that we have screened in the course this semester. This analysis can employ the use of one-two of the following theories: realist, auteur, thematic, psychoanalytic, genre, ideological, feminist, and/or cultural criticism, and must include a complete theological analysis as well--as per areas explained and discussed on discussion board postings from Reel Spirituality readings. You should use appropriate chapters in Movies and Meaning and Reel Spirituality as your basis for thinking and approach in writing this paper. The paper will be ten (10) pages in length, typed, double-spaced, stapled, with a title page.

DUE DATE: (On Canvas, syllabus for web posting)

Grading Criteria:

Content & analysis (70%):

Evidence of comprehension and analysis skills in film criticism. This includes the type of criticism you're applying in your paper (genre, auteur, cultural, or thematic--discussed in both texts), along with concepts of "transcendence," "...movie itself" vs. "theological partner," etc. (in Reel...). Your paper should reflect the analytical points reflected in the textbook, Reel Spirituality, and utilize 1-2 of the film theories in ch 12 of the Movies and Meaning text.

Form (30%):

This includes spelling, grammar, syntax, punctuation, and other technical writing factors.

"Reel Spirituality" Online Discussions

Your task for this assignment is to engage in six (6) postings during the second half of the course. The postings will be a combination of revealing your understanding of the readings, along with discussions of topics and issues raised in the assigned readings and posting topics. The postings will occur on the course website's "Discussion Board" (in the "Communication" section of this website). The discussion will be based on readings in the books Movies and Meaning and Reel Spirituality.

Your postings will consist of an individual essay/response to a question posed by the instructor, then responses to one/several of your peer's postings (as directed).

The purpose of this discussion will be to deepen your understanding of documentary and narrative film, and the relevance of theology/Christian faith to film. These discussions will also help you to clarify your own theological perspective on these media. These assignments will also enrich your understanding of this subject--in preparation for your "Film Criticism" paper & script-assignment.

Film Reflections

Film Reflections provides a venue for expressing your thoughts, insights, and learning beyond the classroom screening and post-film screening discussion experiences. The purpose is to expand our very limited in-class discussions of chapter readings and films beyond the classroom. This is your chance to express what couldn't be expressed in class--due to time constraints, after-thoughts, etc. This can include thoughts, observations, feelings, and learning about anything related to the film(s) which were seen, the readings, the pre-screening lecture, etc. You can also reply to your peers' postings. I will participate by providing feedback, answering questions, and lighting and putting out fires...as needed.

Film Reflections will be available on the Eclass discussion board. You must post by/before midnight of the day of each class screening session. There will be fifteen (15) opportunities for posting your reflections, and you can earn up to a total of three (3) points (EXTRA CREDIT) for each posting session. This equates to a potential (cumulative) close-to-half-grade point increase in your final grade. I heartily encourage you to participate in this activity! If you do all of them with max points, it will, mostly likely, mean you'll get a "C," "B," or "A" grade in the course--rather than the "D," "C," or "B" you earned on required assignments.