

Film and Politics
Political Science 410 - Capstone Seminar
Spring 2009

Professor Richard Davis
754 SWKT
Ext 2-7503
richard_davis@byu.edu
Office Hours: *Tuesdays/Thursdays – 12:30-2 pm*

Course Description

This course explores the use of a mass medium - film - as a vehicle for communicating messages about political institutions and processes and the elites (primarily politicians) who are associated with them. Film is a new medium in the history of the world. One hundred years ago, film was not experienced by the mass audience. Today, mass market films reach hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

This class is designed to analyze how directors use film to affect or reinforce political views or how they unwittingly reflect certain ideas about politics in their films. We will address film's portrayal of politicians, political institutions, political organizations, and political processes. The films we will survey primarily are feature films, designed for a mass market. All have been released for theatre viewing. The questions we will ask over the term center on the political motives of the film's director (if any) and then how these motives are transmitted through verbal content, music, visual images, camera angles and various other cinematic techniques. Some questions we will continually ask include: What are the unstated assumptions of the film? What is the purpose of the film? From whose perspective is the story told? What other perspectives are not shown? Who is the hero (heroes) of the film? What political points does the director make? What is the historical and political context shaping the film? To what extent did the film affect the larger political environment?

Instructor Expectations

The capstone seminar is designed to offer the student a small seminar experience while still an undergraduate. These courses are not centered around instructor lecture, but rather class discussion of assigned readings and student research presentation and analysis.

Consistent failure to prepare and participate will doom the class to a semester devoid of discussion. Nor will it be

possible for a few students to carry the discussion. Therefore, I expect that you will come prepared each class period having read the assigned material, watched the outside assigned films, and be ready to discuss.

I also expect you will consider the research paper to be the best and most complete work of your undergraduate career. That is why it is imperative that you start early, employ my assistance throughout the term, meet the deadlines, and listen carefully to my comments and those of your classmates concerning your work.

I also expect the best effort from each of you as you critique the work of your peers. Honest assessments and constructive criticism will aid each of you in producing works which will constitute the culmination of your undergraduate career in Political Science.

Course Requirements-

1. Comprehensive Senior Paper (50 percent)

You will be expected to complete a term paper of no less than 20 pages. The topic is of your choosing, but must be within the framework of the course and receive my approval. The first (but not rough) draft of the paper will be due five days before your oral presentation. The second and final draft will be due on June 12 by 5 p.m. The final grade will be an average of the two submissions. In order for the second submission to be graded, the first submission (with original comments) must be attached. Late papers will receive one grade less for each day they are late. Papers cannot be submitted after the last class day. However, a paper that has not been improved as suggested by the professor's comments, but is resubmitted essentially the same as the original may well be graded lower. Students should use this opportunity to learn and improve.

The research paper should be an exhaustive undergraduate treatment of a topic related to the role of the film in American politics. The paper should prove a thesis or answer an empirical question. The thesis or question will be of your choosing and the process of choosing is critical to the development of analytical skills. Make sure the thesis or question is narrow enough to address in a paper of this length.

Some examples of theses:

Film offers an inaccurate portrayal of political institutions by focusing on scandal or crisis rather than the process of policy formulation.

The tone of the portrayal of the U.S. military in American films historically is directly related to the level of public

support for the U.S. military.

Some examples of empirical questions:

What are the images of various political actors (politicians, party leaders, the mass electorate) in Frank Capra=s films and what are the techniques Capra uses to present those images?

How does Alan Pakula use film to convey his conspiracy approach to politics?

If you decide to change the topic, alert me no later than May 7. Following that date, your chosen topic will be the topic of your paper. Do your research early in order to assure that you are not caught at the end with an unmanageable paper.

Some hints about grading:

1. The minimum page length is mandatory. I will not even read a paper of shorter length. It will be returned with a grade of zero.

2. Please thoroughly proofread your written work. Spell checkers and grammatical programs make this task very easy. There is no excuse for these mistakes. If there are more than three mistakes of this character on a page, I will reduce the grade by one half letter grade (for example, A to A-) for each page.

3. Any information used from other sources must be fully cited, not just direct quotations. The paper should draw on at least 25 relevant **academic** sources. These could include both primary sources (such as interviews, public opinion surveys, speeches, Congressional reports, etc.) as well as secondary sources (books and scholarly articles). However, the majority must be secondary sources. Popular sources such as newsmagazines and newspapers should be used only when no better source is available (for example to cite some very recent event). Avoid Internet sites (including Wikipedia) unless they are known, reliable sources. Films should be listed separately.

4. The paper should begin with an introduction. The thesis statement should come at the end of that introduction. Thesis terms should be operationally defined in the paper. An overview of the paper should come early on in the paper so the reader understands the organization of the paper. Also, a methodology section needs to come early as well in order to explain how you did your research.

Prospectus

Students must submit a four-page prospectus/research design for the paper, one page of which should be a bibliography with at least 10 academic sources (books, monographs, journal articles) the student will use in the paper. The prospectus/research design is due by May 4 at noon. You will be expected to e-mail the prospectus to the professor and to every other student on that day by that time. Each student is expected to write a one page critique of each other student's prospectus and submit it at the time of that student's prospectus presentation. Students should come prepared to discuss and critique all prospecti on May 5 and to turn in two copies of their prospectus (one copy to the student and the other to the professor).

2. *Film Reviews* (10 percent)

Three 1000-word film reviews are to be written on the films assigned in the syllabus, but not watched in class. No more than one film can be used from each time period below. These film reviews are to be written as if you were a newspaper film critic writing for a movie-going general readership. The reviews for a particular time period are due on the first date we discuss that period. For example, a film from the 1930s period will be due on May 12.

3. *Historical Analysis* (20 percent)

A group of students will be assigned to write a minimum of a 20 page report and present an historical analysis of a particular time period. Those will occur on the days when we begin a new historical time period of film. This report should discuss historical events affecting the period, political parties in power, public attitudes about politics during this time, etc. Then, the report should discuss films made during this period touching on American politics (processes, institutions, political organizations) and how they reflected the time period. It is not necessary to watch all these films.

The report can be drawn from the readings and film reviews.

The paper needs to:

1. Explain the historical context of the time period. What was going on at the time politically, economically, socially that has relevance to film of the time. In order to provide this explanation, use histories of the period; public

opinion surveys; political, economic, and social statistics. Organize this part of your presentation thematically. For example, Watergate and a theme of corruption in government was a major theme of the 1970s.

2. Discuss these themes as you discuss films of the time period. Provide examples of various themes in films. Use several examples to explain a genre. For example, World War II was a major theme of the 1932-45 period. Use several films from the war to discuss how the war influenced film making in the 1940s.
3. Treat this as a major research paper. Do significant research. Use academic sources. Cite thoroughly.
4. Use a single voice in the paper. Make sure it is well connected and not visibly the efforts of several people. Work together as a group to have an even presentation and paper (the same level of effort and academic performance throughout the paper) and have one person as the editor to assure that there is one voice throughout the paper.

4. Critiques (10 percent)

Prospectus Critique

Each student is to write a one-page critique of each other student's prospectus. The prospectus will be due on May 5.

Paper Critique

Each student will be expected to circulate copies of their paper to the class and the instructor no later than five days before their presentation. This circulation to the class should be via e-mail. The student also needs to have three paper copies of the paper (two for the students critiquing and one for me) on that day. Two students will be assigned in advance to critique a paper. Students assigned to critique will be expected to write a 2-3 page peer review and critique of the paper. In addition, they need to write marginal notes on their copy of the paper and deliver that copy (with marginal comments) to the student. A copy of the critique is to be handed to the instructor on that date.

In addition, each student is expected to read every other student's paper and be prepared to discuss the paper when the oral presentation is made. Each student will then have the opportunity to rewrite the paper in response to the student critiques and the professor's comments. The first draft of the paper and the oral presentation will constitute one-half of the paper grade. The final draft will constitute the other half.

The final draft will be due on June 12 by 5 p.m.

5. Class Discussion Participation (10 percent)

Class attendance is required and full participation is expected. A senior seminar is successful only to the extent that students and the instructor can engage in meaningful discussion. Obviously that discussion is difficult to sustain when participants are not even present. Attendance will be noted. Beyond that, it is essential that the student come prepared to discuss the readings and the subject more generally.

Texts

Christensen and Haas, *Projecting Politics*, 2005
Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film*, 1998
Scott, *American Politics in Hollywood Film*, 2000.

Accessing Films

The material below includes up to three categories of films. The first film listed is the one you will be expected to view before the class period when it is listed. The second film is the one we will view in class. The other films listed by decade are not required for you to view. However, you will be expected to view three of them for your film reviews. In addition, they may provide you with relevant films for topics you wish to pursue for your research paper.

The first category of films will be available in library viewing room 4822 on two occasions during the week before the film is to be discussed in class (see schedule below). You may watch the film at the LRC sometime in an early period of the semester. You also could find the video somewhere else and watch it. Some videos (particularly the more recent ones) may be available in local video stores or libraries. All should come prepared having watched the film scheduled for out of class before that class period.

Mr. Smith

Friday May 8 3-6pm

Monday May 11 9-noon

Advise and Consent

Friday May 15 9 - noon

Monday, May 18 2-5 pm

minutes, Michael Ritchie

- May 28 -** All The President=s Men, 1975, 127 minutes, Alan J. Pakula
- June 2** Oral Presentations
- June 4** Oral Presentations
- June 9** 1990s -2000s - Scott, chapter 6; Christensen and Haas, chapters 10, 11
Group Presentation - 1 hour
Out of class film discussion - The American President 1995, 114 minutes
- June 11** Dave 1993, Ivan Reitman

Some Other Period Films

30s

All Quiet on the Western Front, 1930, Lewis Milestone
Politics, 1931, Charles Reisner
I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, 1932, Mervyn LeRoy
Gabriel Over the White House, 1933, Gregory La Cava
Duck Soup, 1933, Leo McCarey
Our Daily Bread, 1934, King Vidor
My Man Godfrey, 1936, Gregory La Cava

40s

The Great Dictator, 1940, Charlie Chaplin
Foreign Correspondent, 1940, Alfred Hitchcock
Grapes of Wrath, 1940, John Ford
Sergeant York, 1941, Howard Hawks
Meet John Doe, 1941, Frank Capra
Saboteur, 1942, Alfred Hitchcock
Mission to Moscow, 1943, Michael Curtiz
Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo, 1944, Mervyn LeRoy
Since You Went Away, 1944, John Cromwell
Lifeboat, 1944, Alfred Hitchcock
The Best Years of Our Lives, 1946, William Wyler
The Farmer=s Daughter, 1947, H.C. Potter
State of the Union, 1948, Frank Capra
The Senator Was Indiscreet, 1948, George S. Kaufman
All the Kings Men, 1949, Robert Rossen
I Married a Communist, 1949, Robert Stevenson

50s

Born Yesterday, 1950, George Kukor
My Son John, 1952, Leo McCarey
The FBI Story, 1954, Mervyn LeRoy
Strategic Air Command, 1955, Anthony Mann
Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 1956, Don Siegal
Paths of Glory, 1957, Stanley Kubrick
A Face in the Crowd, 1957, Elia Kazan
Last Hurrah, 1958, 121 minutes, John Ford
On The Beach, 1959, Stanley Kramer

60s

Advise and Consent, 1962, Otto Preminger
The Manchurian Candidate, 1962, John Frankenheimer
Best Man, 1964, Franklin Schaffner
Seven Days in May, 1964, John Frankenheimer
Kisses for My President, 1964, Curtis Bernhardt
Dr. Strangelove, 1964, Stanley Kubrick
Wild in the Streets, 1968, Barry Shear
The Green Berets, 1968, John Wayne

70s

MASH, 1970, Robert Altman
The Parallax View, 1974, Alan J. Pakula
Three Days of the Condor, 1975, Sydney Pollack
The Front, 1976, Martin Ritt
Network, 1976, Sidney Lumet
The Deer Hunter, 1978, Michael Cimino
Apocalypse Now, 1979, Francis Ford Coppola
Being There, 1979, Hal Ashby

80s-

First Monday in October, 1981, Ronald Neame
Rambo: First Blood, 1982, Ted Kotcheff
War Games, 1983, John Badham
Country, 1984, Richard Pearce
Red Dawn, 1984, John Milius
Rocky IV, 1985, Sylvester Stallone
Platoon, 1986, Oliver Stone
Heartbreak Ridge, 1986, Clint Eastwood
Wall Street, 1987, Oliver Stone
Full Metal Jacket, 1987, Stanley Kubrick
Good Morning Vietnam, 1987, Barry Levinson
Mississippi Burning, 1988, Alan Parker

Born on the 4th of July, 1989, Oliver Stone
Do the Right Thing, 1989, Spike Lee

90s/00s -

Bob Roberts, 1992, 103 minutes, Tim Robbins
The Pelican Brief, 1993, Alan J. Pakula
Dave 1993, Ivan Reitman
The War Room, 1993, Chris Hegedus
Nixon, 1995, Oliver Stone
Independence Day, 1996, Roland Emmerich
My Fellow Americans 1996, Peter Segal
A Perfect Candidate, 1996, R.J.Cutler &David Van Taylor
Get on the Bus, 1997, Spike Lee
Air Force One, 1997, Wolfgang Petersen
Primary Colors, 1998, Mike Nichols
Wag the Dog 1998, Barry Levinson
Bulworth, 1998, Warren Beatty
The Contender, 2000, Rod Lurie
The Sum of All Fears, 2002, Phil Alden Robinson
Fahrenheit 9/11, 2004, Michael Moore
The Manchurian Candidate, 2004, Jonathan Demme
The Good Shepherd, 2006, Robert De Niro
Milk, 2008, Gus van Sant
W. 2008, 129 minutes, Oliver Stone
State of Play, Kevin Macdonald, 2009

