Film and Politics
Political Science 410 - Capstone Seminar
Winter 2011

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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 barely a new medium for 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 plot line, dialogue, 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?

Course Objectives

Students will be able to discern the existence of political messages of film, both intentional and unintentional.
Students will understand the usage of various elements of film such as perspective, dialogue, story development, etc. in communicating specific political messages.
Students will appreciate the relationship between the content of political film and its historical context.
Instructor Expectations

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

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. Such an experience weakens the seminar experience this course is designed to foster. Therefore, I expect that each student will come prepared each class period having read the assigned material, watched the outside assigned films, and be ready to discuss.

I also expect each student will consider the research paper to be the best and most complete work of the undergraduate career. That is why it is imperative that the paper be commenced early in the semester, my office hours be generously employed to gain my assistance throughout the term, deadlines be met, and careful consideration is given to my comments about the research paper, as well as those made by other students.

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

Course Requirements-

1. Comprehensive Senior Paper (50 percent)

Each student will be expected to complete a term paper of no less than 20 pages. The topic is of the student’s 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 one week before the oral presentation. The second draft will be due on April 13 at the beginning of class. 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 test a thesis. The thesis will be of each student’s choosing and the process of choosing is critical to the development of analytical skills. Make sure the thesis is narrow enough to address in a paper of this length.

Some examples of theses:

Film portrayal of political institutions focuses 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.

The film portrayal of presidents has changed in accordance with public confidence in the president.

If a student decides to change the topic, I must be alerted no later than February 23. Following that date, the topic is set. Do research early in order to avoid working with an unmanageable topic.

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 all 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 should primarily consist of secondary sources (books and scholarly articles). A few can include primary sources (such as films, interviews, public opinion surveys, speeches, Congressional reports, etc.). 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). Do not use Internet sites unless they are known, reliable sources. Do not use encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), either online or hard copy. Put films into a separate section from academic sources in your bibliography. Also, I will not grade a draft without citations and a citation page (or endnotes or footnotes). Such a draft automatically
receives a failing grade.

4. Make sure your paper includes a one-sentence thesis statement, a definition of terms used in the thesis that may be unclear to the reader, an overview describing how the paper is organized, and a method section discussing your research methodology. Avoid the use of first person except when discussing your methodology.

**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 February 2. You will be expected to e-mail the prospectus to every other student on that day and submit a hard copy to me (via the secretaries on the 7th floor of the SWK). 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 prospecti on February 9 and to turn in two copies of their prospectus critique at the time that student presents (one to me and one to the student).

**First Draft**

Each student will be expected to submit a hard copy of their first draft on March 23 – one week before the scheduled oral discussion of their paper to the instructor and to the students assigned to write lengthy critiques of their paper. They also will be expected to circulate electronic copies of their paper to the class on that same day. If the student earns an A on the first draft, then they need not submit a final draft.

**Final Draft**

Each student will have the opportunity to rewrite the paper in response to the student critiques and my comments. The first draft of the paper will constitute one-half of the paper grade. The final draft will constitute the other half. The final draft will be due on April 13 at the beginning of class.
2. **Film Reviews (15 percent)**

Three 1000-word film reviews are to be written on the films assigned in the syllabus, but not discussed in class. The three films must be from different time periods. These film reviews are to be written as if you were a newspaper film critic writing for a movie-going general readership. (Please don’t spoil the ending for the reader!) A review done for a film in a particular time period must be handed in on either of the two dates when we discuss that period. For example, a film from the 1930s would be due on February 9 or February 17.

2. **Prospectus Critiques (5 percent)**

Each student will be expected to read every other student’s prospectus and write a one-page critique. These critiques should be brought to class on the day the student’s prospectus will be discussed. The critiques should be handed to the student after the discussion of their prospectus. A second copy of the critiques should be stapled together and handed to the professor at the end of the class period.

3. **Paper critiques (10 percent)**

Each student will be expected to read every other student’s paper and come prepared to make comments in class. In addition, each student will be assigned to write a lengthy (at least three page) critique of two other students’ papers. These critiques are intended to help the student improve the paper for the second draft. The critique should highlight strengths, weaknesses, and suggested improvements. In addition, each student reviewer needs to write marginal notes on their copy of the paper and deliver that copy (with marginal comments) to the student. The critique will be due when that paper is discussed in class. Review assignments will be made later in the semester.

4. **Class Discussion Participation (20 percent)**

Three students will serve as the discussion leaders for each class period when we discuss an historical period. These discussion leaders will be responsible for circulating via email a list of questions to the class regarding the readings two days before the class period. The discussion leaders then will pose those questions. Everyone needs to be prepared to discuss the readings.
Generally, 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.

**Texts**

Christensen and Haas, *Projecting Politics*, 2005  

**Reading and Discussion Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 5</td>
<td>Introduction - Film in Political Communication – Gianos, chapter 1 and 2; Christensen &amp; Haas, chapter 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 12</td>
<td>Politics and Film –; Gianos, chapter 3; Christensen and Haas, chapters 2, 3; Coyne, chapter 1</td>
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| January 19   | 1930s and 1940s – Gianos, chapter 4; Christensen and Haas, chapter 5  
              | Film discussion – Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, 1939, 125 minutes, Frank Capra |
| January 26   | Gabriel Over the White House, 1933, 86 minutes, Gregory La Cava       |
| February 2   | Citizen Kane 1940, 119 minutes, Orson Welles                         |
| February 9   | Prospectus Presentations                                              |
| February 9   | 1950s and 1960s – Coyne, chapter 5, 6; Gianos, chapter 5; Christensen and Haas, chapters 6, 7  
              | Group Presentation – 1 hour                                           |
|              | Film discussion – 1 hour – Advise and Consent, 1962, 142 minutes, Otto Preminger |
| February 16  | Dr. Strangelove, 1964, 93 minutes, Stanley Kubrick                    |
February 23 – The Best Man 1964, 102 minutes, Franklin Schaffner

March 2
1970s and 1980s – Gianos, chapter 6, Christensen and Haas, chapters 8, 9, Coyne, chapter 7
Group Presentation – 1 hour
Film discussion – Being There, 1979, 130 minutes, Hal Ashby

March 9 – The Candidate, 1972, 109 minutes, Michael Ritchie

March 16 – One on one Discussion of Papers

March 23 – 1990s to today – Christensen and Haas, chapters 10, 11; Coyne, conclusion
Group Presentation – 1 hour
Film discussion – The American President 1995, 114 minutes

March 30 – Paper Presentations

April 6 – Good Night and Good Luck, 2005, 93 minutes, George Clooney

April 13 State of Play, 2009, 127 minutes, Kevin McDonald

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 different. You don’t need to view them all. You do need to view three of them (each from a different historical period) in order to write a film review. Which you choose of the list in each historical period is up to you. You also may be interesting in seeing them if you are pursuing a related topic for your research paper and would like to use them.

The first category of films is available in the LRC in the library. Mr. Smith also is available at online sites. You also
can acquire them through Netflix or a public library.

Watch Out of Class and Discuss in Class

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
Advise and Consent
Being There
The American President

Watch in Class and Discuss in Class

Our Daily Bread
Citizen Kane
The Best Man
Dr. Strangelove
The Candidate
Good Night and Good Luck
State of Play

Films for Film Review

1930s

Politics, 1931, Charles Reisner
All Quiet on the Western Front, 1930, Lewis Milestone
I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, 1932, Mervyn LeRoy
The Phantom President, 1932, Norman Taurog
Duck Soup, 1933, Leo McCarey
Our Daily Bread, 1934, King Vidor
My Man Godfrey, 1936, Gregory La Cava
Ninotchka, 1939, Ernest Lubitsch

1940s

Grapes of Wrath, 1940, John Ford
Sullivan’s Travels, 1941, Preston Sturgis
Sergeant York, 1941, Howard Hawks
Meet John Doe, 1941, Frank Capra
Saboteur, 1942, Alfred Hitchcock
Lifeboat, 1944, Alfred Hitchcock
Best Years of Our Lives, 1946, William Wyler
The Farmer’s Daughter, 1947, H.C. Potter
Gentlemen’s Agreement, 1947, Elia Kazan
State of the Union, 1948, Frank Capra
The Senator Was Indiscreet, 1948, George S. Kaufman
I Married a Communist, 1949, Robert Stevenson
Pinky, 1949, Elia Kazan

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

1960s
To Kill a Mockingbird, 1962, Robert Mulligan
The Manchurian Candidate, 1962, John Frankenheimer
Seven Days in May, 1964, John Frankenheimer
In the Heat of the Night, 1967, Norman Jewison
Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, 1968, Stanley Kramer
Wild in the Streets, 1968, Barry Shear
The Green Berets, 1968, John Wayne

1970s
M*A*S*H, 1970, Robert Altman
The Godfather, 1972, Francis Ford Coppola
The Parallax View, 1974, Alan J. Pakula
Three Days of the Condor, 1975, Sydney Pollack
All the President’s Men, 1975, Alan J. Pakula
Network, 1976, Sidney Lumet
The Front, 1976, Martin Ritt
Coming Home, 1978, Hal Ashby
The Deer Hunter, 1978, Michael Cimino
Apocalypse Now, 1979, Francis Ford Coppola
The China Syndrome, 1979, James Bridges

1980s–
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

1990s -

Hunt for Red October, 1990, John McTiernan
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
The Siege, 1998, Edward Zwick
Wag the Dog 1998, Barry Levinson
Primary Colors, 1998, Mike Nichols
Bulworth, 1998, Warren Beatty

2000s -

The Contender, 2000, Rod Lurie
Journeys with George, 2002, Alexandra Pelosi
The Sum of All Fears, 2002, Phil Alden Robinson
Fahrenheit 9/11, 2004, Michael Moore
The Manchurian Candidate, 2004, Jonathan Demme
Syriana, 2005, Stephen Gaghan
War of the Worlds, 2005, Steven Spielberg
An Inconvenient Truth, 2006, Davis Guggenheim
Sicko, 2007, Michael Moore
W., 2008, Oliver Stone

Plagiarism/Other Work

While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See http://www.byu.edu/honorcode for specific examples of intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification. Work for other courses will not be accepted for assignments in this
Sexual Harassment

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People with Disabilities

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895, D-282 ASB.