**POLS 243 • Introduction to Politics and Film**

3 Credits • Spring, 2008
Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:30pm to 6:55pm
Hale Palanakila 102

**Instructor:** Brian Richardson  
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**Office Hours:** Wednesday, 1:30 to 3:30 and by appointment  
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**Web Resources:** via Laulima (at http://laulima.hawaii.edu)

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**WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION STATEMENT**

*Windward Community College is committed to excellence in the liberal arts and career development; we support and challenge individuals to develop skills, fulfill their potential, enrich their lives, and become contributing, culturally aware members of our community.*

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**Catalog Description**

The course introduces students to analysis of the politics of films and the film industry through viewing and discussion of classic political films and descriptive analysis of the distribution of power and money in the film industry. (3 hrs. lecture) WCC: DS

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**Student Learning Outcomes**

The student learning outcomes for the course are:

1. Identify and describe the narrative and compositional structure of film.
2. Clearly explain and evaluate the political thoughts, assumptions and implications of several key films.
3. Examine and interpret contemporary political issues in film through the application of political thought.
4. Relate media, technology, and language to the formation and maintenance of the political order.
5. Carefully justify one’s own political position.
From the very beginning, politics has been tied to images. We live in a world permeated by pictures that move, tell us stories, and provide us with visions of the world. But this is a world that we take for granted, that we slip into with very little reflection. But what happens when we watch a film? Why do we watch films? How much can a film tell us about the world? How are they valuable or dangerous? What, in the end, are the relationships between politics and films?

One goal of this course is to familiarize students with different ways of making sense of films as objects of political analysis. A political analysis of a film tells us more than what the film is about; it tells us how the film is organized, what it assumes about the world, or, perhaps, what the film is trying to make its audience believe.

Part of our discussions will focus on what a film shows to its audience; part of our discussions will focus on the things that are left unsaid.

There are many theoretical and political questions to consider. What sorts of films are overtly political? What kinds of political implications can films have? What is the nature of representation? What are the structural relationships between the film and the audience? What are the connections between films and the social, political, economic world of which they are a part? What forms of power are on display in the film? Does the film have any power over the audience? What relations of power remain hidden or taken for granted?

The course combines a philosophical analysis with a concern for the material conditions (the media) on which political debate depends. It should be noted that "media" is not only television and newspapers, but includes anything we communicate through. Different kinds of media have different strengths and weaknesses. What kinds of information can a particular media communicate? How do different media organize information differently? How do media affect how people look at the world?
Concepts or Topics

• Perception
• Framework
• Bias
• Freedom
• Propaganda and Lies
• Perception and Perspective
• Power (different definitions of)

Skills or Competencies

1. Assess the cognitive impact of specific genres, elements of composition, and social assumptions.
2. Analyze the impact of different media technology on human understanding
3. Evaluate normative arguments regarding the quality of information suitable for a democracy
4. Discuss implications of patterns of media ownership on a democratic political system.

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Paper Writing and the Learning Center

The Learning Center provides excellent resources to help you succeed in this class. They can help you to develop, organize, and clearly compose your papers. Insofar as paper writing accounts for a large percentage of your final grade, it is highly recommended that you take advantage of this resource. The instructor is also available for assistance. A time to meet can be arranged if you cannot stop by during office hours.

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Disabilities Accommodation Statement

If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to fully participate in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Specialist Counselor to discuss reasonable accommodations that will help you succeed in this class. Ann Lemke can be reached at 235-7448, lemke@hawaii.edu, or you may stop by Hale ‘Akoakoa 213 for more information.
“It is not enough to destroy one’s own and other people’s experience. One must overlay this devastation by a false consciousness inured ... to its own falsity.” — R. D. Laing

Learning Resources

Readings

Zerzan, John (ed.) *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections* (Feral House: 978-0922915989: $14.00)

Reading packet (available at the bookstore)

The assigned books are also on reserve at the WCC Library. Additional readings will be handed out in class or made available via the internet.

Students must check their UH email accounts on a regular basis or have their UH email account forwarded to an account that they do check on a regular basis.

Films we may discuss

- Apocalypse Now
- Architecture of Doom
- Birth of a Nation
- Blade Runner
- Blazing Saddles
- The Bounty
- Brazil
- Citizen Kane
- Daily Show: Indecision 2004
- Dead Poet’s Society
- Dr. Strangelove
- Driving Miss Daisy
- Forrest Gump
- From Here to Eternity
- Gone With the Wind
- Henry V
- Holy Grail
- Hours
- In Memoriam
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- Life as a House
- Life of Brian
- Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
- Natural Born Killers
- Psycho
- Rabbit-Proof Fence
- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead
- Schoolhouse Rock
- Thelma and Louise
- Top Gun
- Triumph of the Will
- Unforgiven
- Wag the Dog

Note: This course will review many films. Some films include varying degrees of sex, violence, profanity, or emotionally disturbing scenes. Any student sensitive to such depictions should consider dropping the course.
“The words ‘Kiss Kiss Bang Bang,’ which I saw on an Italian movie poster, are perhaps the briefest statement imaginable of the basic appeal of movies.” — Pauline Kael

Course Tasks and Assessment

Classes will combine discussion and lecture. Because of the heavy emphasis on discussions, the success of the class relies on the involvement of every one of the course participants.

While we will be focusing on film analysis, this is also a reading intensive class. Students must come to class having read the assigned material and being prepared to discuss it. Many of the readings are not easy, and students should expect to have to read them several times to understand them well.

Grading will be assessed as follows:

- Short Obsessive Papers (10 papers, 5% each) 50% total
- In Class Writings 20%
- Final Exam 20%

Students will write ten short obsessive papers on specific topics being discussed in class and in the readings. In these writing assignments, students are expected to critically address topics discussed in class.

The short papers cannot be more than 699 words, and must be a well organized, thought-out, and effective discussion of the topic. Papers longer than 699 words will not be accepted.

The short papers must be submitted electronically to the instructor by 12:00 noon on the day they are due (that is, several hours before class begins). No late papers will be accepted.

The final exam will be in the classroom, will be essay questions, and will cover concepts and discussions that have taken place throughout the class.

A Note on Attendance

Attendance in class is very important. Students are allowed to miss two classes with no excuse necessary. Beyond that, students will lose 1% of their grade for every class missed (with no exceptions). Students who are late for class will be penalized half a day absence.
"The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished."
— George Bernard Shaw

The Obsessive Short Paper

It is harder to write a short paper. At least an impressive one. The obsessive short paper assignment is designed to focus attention on how to write in a focused and effective way. Papers cannot be longer than 699 words (the length of president Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address). Recall George Orwell’s advice in “Politics and the English Language”:

(i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
(ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
(iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
(iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

In other words, don’t waste your time (and your reader’s) with fluff, with wordiness, or with trying to fill up space for the sake of filling up space. Have something to say, and say it. Or, as Cicero said, “When you wish to instruct, be brief; that men's minds take in quickly what you say, learn its lesson, and retain it faithfully. Every word that is unnecessary only pours over the side of a brimming mind.”

Some Technological Requirements for these assignments

- Be able to write a paper on a word processor
- Perform a word count on their word processor
- Know how to send a file as an attachment
How I Assign Letter Grades on Papers

A superior paper will show that the student has understood and thought about the topic, will be clearly organized and written, and will demonstrate that the student understands what is at stake in the topic.

When grading a paper, I ask myself the following questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Is the paper free from long stretches of quotations and summaries that exist only for their own sakes and remain unanalyzed?
4. Can the writer produce complete sentences?
5. Is the paper free from basic grammatical errors?
6. Has the choice of key words made the basic points understandable?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no”, I give the paper some kind of “C”.

If the answer to many of the questions is “no”, its grade will be even lower.

For papers which have emerged unscathed thus far, it becomes possible to add the following questions:

7. How thoughtful is the paper? Does it show real originality?
8. How adequate is the thesis? Does it respond to its question or topic in a full and interesting way? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity?
9. How well organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is another kind of organizing principle at work? Are the transitions well made? Does it have a real conclusion, and not simply a stopping place?
10. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
11. Does the writer betray any special elegance?
12. Above all, can I hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speaking to me (or to another audience, if that’s what the writer intends) as I read the paper?
Some Small Print

Statement Regarding Academic Integrity
Students are required to adhere to accepted standards of academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity include cheating, plagiarism, and complicity in academic dishonesty. It is your responsibility to be aware of behavior that constitutes academic dishonesty. We take these policies very seriously; so, if we find a student to be in violation of academic integrity, we will notify the department chairperson and the appropriate dean, the result of which may be expulsion from the college.

Personal Communication Devices
Pagers and Cell Phones are not conducive to the educational process in this class. I will assume that any interruption due to a personal communication device will be justifiable based on a real emergency and that the student being summoned will need to leave immediately to deliver a baby, attend to the dying, retrieve an injured child from daycare, or otherwise take immediate action which necessitates leaving. This is especially significant during exams.

Academic Dishonesty
Because the University is an academic community with high professional standards, its teaching, research and service purposes are seriously disrupted and subverted by academic dishonesty. Such dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism as defined below. Ignorance of these definitions will not provide an excuse for acts of academic dishonesty.

Cheating includes but is not limited to giving or receiving unauthorized assistance during an examination; obtaining unauthorized information about an examination before it is given; using inappropriate or unallowable sources of information during an examination; falsifying data in experiments and other research; altering the record of any grade; altering answers after an examination has been submitted; falsifying any official University record; or misrepresenting the facts in order to obtain exemptions from course requirements.

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to submitting, in fulfillment of an academic requirement, any document that has been copied in whole or in part from another individual’s work without attributing that borrowed portion to the individual; neglecting to identify as a quotation another’s idea and particular phrasing that was not assimilated into the student’s language or style; or paraphrasing a passage so that the reader is misled as to the source; submitting the same written or oral material in more than one course without obtaining authorization from the instructors involved; or grabbing, which includes obtaining and using experimental data and laboratory write-ups from other sections of the course or from previous terms, or fabricating data to fit the desired or expected results.

In cases of suspected or admitted academic dishonesty, the instructor shall attempt to discuss the matter with the student. If appropriate, the instructor may bring it to the attention of the departmental chairperson and the student’s advisor. Additionally, an instructor may refer such case of academic dishonesty to the Dean of Student Services for action under this code. In cases where the student admits that an act of academic dishonesty was committed, the instructor may, within the context of the course require the student to redo the assignment, give the student a failing or reduced grade for the assignment, or give a failing or reduced grade for the course. If the student contests his or her liability, the instructor may not take action against the student but must refer to the case to the Dean of Student Services for hearing and disposition under this code. The Dean of Student Services may pursue such matters as disciplinary actions under this code if after a preliminary investigation, it is his/her determination that probable cause exists to establish that acts of academic dishonesty took place.

refer to http://www.wcc.hawaii.edu/policies/campus/5_3_Student_Conduct.html for more information