

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2015

RELS 280: RELIGION AND FILM
Introductory Lectures Mon 7:00-7:15 PM
Film Screening Mon 7:15 PM - ?
Discussion and Analysis Wed 7:00-8:15 PM
Ed Center 118

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler
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Office: 4 Glebe St. #206
Office Hours: Wed 1-3 and Friday 10-noon or by appointment

In this class we will critically examine **the myth of the American hero** through weekly viewings of important and entertaining American movies.

This course will fulfill the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes:**
Student Learning Outcome #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
Student Learning Outcome #2: Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These two learning outcomes will be assessed by the term paper (worth a total of 25%), which will ask students to analyze primary sources, in this case, films, in terms of the religious, political, and cultural ideas they express.

There are two required books:
Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World by S. Brent Plate
ISBN-13: 978-1905674695

Ethan Coen and Joel Coen: Collected Screenplays 1: Blood Simple, Raising Arizona, Miller's Crossing, Barton Fink
ISBN-13: 978-0571210961

There are also required readings on OAKS. Print these out! Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.

Films will be at the circulation desk at Addlestone a few days after they are screened in class. You can watch them in the library on your laptop or on a library computer. Personal screenings are meant to supplement not to replace the classroom viewings.
Warning: Films and readings may be violent or otherwise offensive.

Course Requirements:

Participation and attendance: **10%**

Two short writing assignments (2 x 5%): **10%**

Two “surprise” reading and viewing quizzes: (2 x 5%) **10%**

Open-book essay midterm exam: **15%**

Closed-book objective midterm exam: **10%**

7-9 pp. term paper: **25%**

Take-home essay final exam: **20%**

All work must be original and all sources correctly cited. The university’s honor code will be strictly enforced. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Wed Aug 26: What is this class about? What is myth?

Read: Useful Terms (Handout)

Mon Aug 31: *High Noon* (Zinneman, 1952) 85 mins

Read: “Basic Glossary” (OAKS); Coen 113-122; Ellwood (OAKS)

Wed Sept 2: How do we talk about film?

Read: Voytilla I (OAKS); Campbell (OAKS); Plate 18-23

[Watch excerpt from *Big Fish* (Burton, 2003)]

Exercise in formal film analysis due in class

Mon Sept 7: *Platoon* (Stone, 1986) 120 mins

Read: Voytilla II (OAKS)

Wed Sept 9: Mythological, Theological and Political Film Criticism

Read: Beck (OAKS); Pippin (OAKS)

Exercise in diagramming the Hero’s Journey due in class

Mon Sept 14: *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros., 1999) 136 mins

Read: Holroyd (OAKS)

Wed Sept 16: How does film create myth and ritual?

Read: Wagner (OAKS); Plate 23-24, 27-31, 38-43

Mon Sept 21: *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) 121 mins

Read: Gordon (OAKS)

Wed Sept 23: Criticizing the Monomyth
Read: Plate 24-27, 31-37; Lawrence (OAKS); Plate 78-91; Lyden (OAKS)
[Watch excerpts from *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1934) and *Star Wars Uncut* (Pugh, 2010)]

Mon Sept 28: *Seven Years in Tibet* (Annaud, 1997) 136 mins
Read: Iwamura (OAKS); "White Savior" (OAKS)

Wed Sept 30: The Orientalist Critique
Read: Mullen (OAKS)

Mon Oct 5: *The Big Lebowski* (Coens, 1998) 117 mins
Read: Andrus (OAKS)

Wed Oct 7: The Myth of Authenticity and The Critique of Capitalism
Read: Siegler (OAKS); Martin-Jones (OAKS)

Mon Oct 12: Midterm Exam film screening
Read: Midterm exam material

Wed Oct 14: **Midterm Exam**
Term Paper Guidelines Handed Out

Mon Oct 19: FALL BREAK

Wed Oct 21: Jesus as American Hero
Read: TBA
[Watch excerpt from *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004)]

Mon Oct 26: *Miller's Crossing* (Coens, 1990) 115 mins
Read: Mitchell (OAKS); Coen 249-396

Wed Oct 28: Death and the Hero Myth
Read: Plate 59-61, 69-77; Altman (OAKS)
[Watch excerpts from *Act of seeing with one's own eyes* (Brakhage, 1971) and *True Grit* (Coens, 2010)]

Mon Nov 2: *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 2000) 121 mins
Read: Rickman (OAKS)

Wed Nov 4: The Female Hero
Read: Schubart (OAKS); Carter (OAKS); Beavis (OAKS)

Mon Nov 9: *Fargo* (Coens, 1996) 98 mins
Read: Amesbury (OAKS)

Wed Nov 11: Race and Class in the American Hero Myth
Read: TBA (OAKS)

Mon Nov 16: *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Coens, 1999) 106 mins
Read: Seales (OAKS)

Wed Nov 18: The Homeric Hero Revisited
Read: Roberts (OAKS)
[Watch excerpt from *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Coens, 1994)]

Mon Nov 23: Class cancelled
Final Paper Due by Tues Nov 24

Wed Nov 25: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon Nov 30: *Barton Fink* (Coens, 1991) 116 mins
Final exam review handed out

Wed Dec 2: Conclusions—The Artist as Hero and World- Creator
Read: Plate 1-13; Plate and Siegler (OAKS); Coen vii-xi, 397-521.

Mon Dec 7: Final Exam film screening
Take home exam and reading assignment handed out

Mon Dec 14: **Take Home final exam due**

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Note: Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at 953-1431.

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The Center for Student Learning has writing labs and can arrange individual tutoring for this particular class. Drop by, go to <http://www.cofc.edu/~csl/> or call 953-5635.

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Technology policy

Let's face it: technology breaks. **An issue you may have with technology is no excuse for late work.** You need to protect yourself by managing your time and backing up your work. **Turn your cell phone on silent when you come into class. Do not text in class.** If you bring a laptop to class, use it for class. I reserve the right to ask anyone with a laptop or tablet to use it to lookup something to help our class discussion. I also might check your screen to make sure you are not checking your friend's Instagram, etc.