English 346 Film Topics: Genre and Auteur
Coens and Context

Instructor: Steve Marsden
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Webpage: http://d2l.sfasu.edu – check it daily

Course Description and Objectives
According to the course description, ENG 346 is:

| Film Topics: | Intensive study of developments in film categorization, classification and interpretation. Studies of genres such as the western, screwball comedy, film noir, musicals, horror, thrillers. Individual directors studied may include Hitchcock, Welles, Hawks, Ford, Sayles, Lee, Spielberg, Kubrick, Coen, Chaplin, Keaton, Cukor and Sirk. May be repeated when topic changes. Prerequisite: consent of instructor. |
| Genre and Auteur | |

This course will deal with some of the films produced and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen, as well as works and genres (films, short stories, and novels) that their movies adapt or reference.

Course Outcomes
By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Learn the narratological vocabulary for the analysis of written and film narrative, and be able to write accurate analyses of texts and films using that vocabulary.
- Show your ability to understand the techniques used to arouse audience response in a film, and analyze individual applications of those techniques.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the signature style of the auteurs studied, and be able to chart the path of their careers and their influences.
- Show your familiarity with the genres taken on and transferred by the directors.
- Demonstrate a knowledge of cultural and historical forces at work in the films studied.
- Demonstrate your understanding of the roles of audience, media, money, and culture in filmmakers’ decisions.
- Demonstrate your ability to compare the treatment of similar themes across films in an auteur’s canon.
- Use appropriate research skills to produce a high-quality scholarly or literary-critical paper.

Books:

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Coen, Joel, and Ethan Coen, *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, UP of Mississippi, 2006. (Required—buy this first)

Conard, Mark T, editor. *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, UP of Kentucky, 2009. (Recommended—I’ll hand out some chapters.)

Rowell, Erica. *The Brothers Grimm: The Films of Ethan and Joel Coen*, Scarecrow P, 2007. (Recommended, but expensive and older—I’ll hand out some chapters.)

Context books:

Cain, James M. *The Postman Rings Twice / Double Indemnity* (any edition)

Hammet, Dashiell. *Red Harvest* (any edition)

Hammet, Dashiell. *The Glass Key* (any edition)


**Films:**


--- *Miller’s Crossing*, 1990.
--- *The Hudsucker Proxy*, 1994
--- *Fargo*, 1996
--- *Hail Caesar!*, 2016.

Context films (we may screen portions of these—they are recommended viewing, and some may be required for particular assignments). This is an incomplete list: I’ll give out more comprehensive lists of influential films for each Coens movie in the day-by-day on D2L.

--- *The Man Who Wasn’t There*, 2002. (On Reserve)
--- *The Ladykillers*, 2004. (On Reserve)


Capra, Frank, director. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, 1936.

Hawks, Howard, director. *The Big Sleep*, 1946. (On Reserve)

Hawks, Howard, director. *His Girl Friday*, 1940.

Wilder, Billy, director. *Double Indemnity*, 1944. (On Reserve)

Some works, including extensive theoretical works, will also be assigned through online copies on D2L or as links. You may find it useful to print these out or access them via a portable device for classroom purposes. Background information will frequently be provided in the form of web links or handouts: you’re responsible for reading and keeping up with these.

**Required Film Viewing**
We will be watching one to two films a week, and students are responsible for viewing those films before the discussion takes place. Copies of the appropriate films will be placed on 4 hour reserve at the library circulation desk for those who cannot attend the viewings. Some films may be available on Youtube, Hulu+, Amazon instant view, Shudder, Filmstruck, or Netflix for those who find that more convenient. If there is sufficient interest, weekly viewings will be scheduled.

You are responsible for having watched the films when they are assigned, and coming to class able to discuss them.

**Course Policies**

**Phones**
If you have a cell phone, please turn it off during our course unless you’re looking something up at the request of the instructor or to use in discussion. If you must receive calls due to some developing emergency, please set the phone to a silent setting. If you must talk on your phone due to some earth-shattering emergency, please leave our classroom to do so. On exam days if exams are in-class, please leave all electronic devices that are not essential to your survival at home.

**Eating, Drinking, Sleeping and So On**
Feel free to drink coffee or eat anything that’s not loud, messy, and/or smelly. Please clean up after yourself, however. If you sleep in class, you will be woken up. At least feigning attention and interest is very important: please don’t read the newspaper, listen to an ipod, or send instant messages during class.

**Reading, Participation, and Note Taking**
This course is reading (and viewing) intensive, and some of the works we will be studying will be quite difficult. Budget your time and read ahead when necessary. Take notes as you read or watch, and write out questions about your reading for use in class. Mark up your books. Reread when necessary. Talk about your reading outside of class. Ask questions in class. If you find anything particularly impenetrable and need help, feel free to drop by my office hours to chat about it. My job is to help you understand this stuff.
This course is taught largely as a dialogue--I ask and answer questions. The students who get the most out of the class are those who participate well in class discussion. If you can answer, do.

**Contact by Email**
Correspondence relating to this course must use your sfasu email account. **Do not send using the D2L mail system.** The subject line must be ENG346. I am not certain to respond to emails with any other subject line, especially if they resemble spam. I never accept assignments by email without previous permission.

**Plagiarism**
I take plagiarism very seriously. According to SFASU Policies and Procedures:

> Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

If a student’s paper contains plagiarized material, the student will meet with me, and I will determine the outcome, which typically involve penalties from an un-revisable zero on the paper to an F for the course. In addition, an Academic Dishonesty Form may be filed. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or fear you may not have properly cited something, please talk to me immediately.

**Attendance and Absences**
Regular attendance is required for success in this course. Lectures and discussions will highlight what sorts of things will be on the tests, there may be short writing assignments and frequent reading quizzes will be given at the beginning or the end of classes. Please arrive on time. No homework or in-class assignments may be made up unless your absence is excused or has been pre-arranged with me at least a full day in advance. If you miss a class for a university-excused reason, you must (by the second day you return to class) present me with a typed memo giving the date of and explaining the reason for your absence, and you should attach any documentation (such as a note from your doctor) to this memo.

Regardless of the reason for your absence, you are responsible for all information and work covered in class. If you missed homework or in-class assignments during an excused absence, it is your responsibility to find out what you’ve missed and arrange with me to make it up.
After four unexcused absences, every additional unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 5 percentage points from your total grade. Usually, that total will already be quite low due to missed quizzes and poor test preparation.

In accordance with university policy, after six absences (the equivalent of three weeks of missed class) for any reason whatsoever, you may fail the class. Please keep an eye on your absences: retain the dates you’ve missed and any documentation.

**Late Papers and Free Homework Late**
Each student has one (1) free late homework assignment: to use it, write “Oops” clearly at the top of the completed assignment and turn it in within one week of the assigned due date (and before the last day of class). Other than this “oops” assignment, no late homework will be accepted without a university-approved absence or a very compelling excuse (my judgment) in writing, detailing your reasons and providing evidence as necessary.

Major papers turned in after the beginning of the class period on which they are due will be considered late, and will have one full letter grade (10 percentage points) deducted from their final grade. Another full letter grade will be deducted for each weekday (that school is in) that passes. The easiest way to receive a very poor grade in this course is to turn things in late. Do not turn in papers under my office door or with office staff without arranging it with me in advance via email. I am not responsible for the loss of papers turned in that way, or your subsequently lower grade.

Some papers may require an online submission via D2L and some drafting may occur via the D2L discussion boards.

**Extra Credit**
Several times during the semester, I will announce extra credit assignments. Extra credit will only be assigned in class (it will not be posted on the website). Please do not ask me for individual extra credit. Any extra credit assignments I given will be applied to the homework / quiz score, and will be offered to everyone. With extra credit, the daily work score will top at 100%.

**Accommodations for Disabilities**
According to the University:
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

Assignments and Grade Determination
Grade Breakdown
Quizzes, written responses, discussion prep, d2l quizzes or posting: 15%
Context screencast or multimedia online essay: 20%
Midterm exam: 15%
Proposal of paper or adaptation: 5%
Researched paper: 25%
Final Exam: 20%

Percentage Grade
90-100 A
80-89 B
70-79 C
60-69 D
0-59 F

Short Responses
Often, I'll have you write some relatively informal response to the readings for a day. These should be about a page in length, should be typed, and will have other requirements as posted. Some may be placed on D2L discussion boards in order to start commentary. The intention is to get you thinking and recording what you think about the works, and to prepare you for class.

5 = Excellent, flawless: Very insightful, and otherwise dazzlingly good. I think "wow! I wonder if I can get a copy to teach with next semester!" This is a rare score.
4.5 = Very good: Accomplishes everything needed with style and economy, reflects a strong understanding of the subject matter, and has no very significant errors. I think "good!"
4 = Good: Does the work expected, and contains only errors that might be expected of the average careful student at this point in the semester. I think "okay!"
3.5 = Needs some work: Ideas may be incomplete or unfocused, organization may be sloppy. May be "off" in tone or style. I think "well, okay, I guess."
3 = Needs a lot of work: May be unclear in spots, or have numerous, embarrassing, or unprofessional errors. I think "well, maybe next time."
2 = Unacceptable: Fails to accomplish some aspect of the assignment, or has a variety of unprofessional errors. I think "maybe he or she had a high fever or something."
1 = Token effort: Wrong assignment or shows very little work. Accomplishes little of what the assignment asks. Reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the assignment or a deficit of effort or skill. I think "why did I ever get into this line of work?" A paper with a name on it and a sentence, turned in on time.
0 =Didn't turn paper in: I think "hmm, I wonder if he or she has dropped the course?"

Quizzes
Often, at the beginning or end of the class period, I will ask a question, answerable by one well-constructed sentence, about something we've read or watched. They will be graded on a three point scale, as follows:

0 You weren't there to take the quiz or didn't put your name on it.
1 You have your name on the paper, and what you have written is indeed a sentence.

2 Your answer represents a good attempt, and shows that you've read the work with some care, but isn't entirely correct.

3 The sentence answers the question and indicates that you've read well and attentively.

I don't intend these to be hard or trick questions, but they will require that you read and remember what you have read. If you have an excused absence on a day when we have a reading quiz, you must bring a memo to me within two class periods explaining your absence and providing what documentation is possible. Then I will ask you another question about that day's reading. If you come in late and don't turn in a signed paper, or you have an unexcused absence and miss a quiz, you will receive a 0.

**Online Quizzes**
Occasionally, I may give reading quizzes through D2l, which must be completed before class and require that you've read the work to answer. These will be open-book quizzes, but will be very difficult to guess.

**Review or Screencast Review focused on Context / Influence**
You either a screencast review with spoken narration, or an online review with screen captures or images for a semi-academic audience of cinephiles. You'll do some research (at least 3 good sources) on the relationship of a Coen brothers movie to some contextual work—a film inspiration or reference, a source novel, a wider definition of a particular genre, or the work of a particular director, actor, historical or artistic figure. Then you'll clearly explain some similarities, citing your sources, but making this understandable and relevant to your audience.

This should be written (or delivered) in an entertaining, ideally witty manner. Visual references should be made with images or clips. You’ll either turn in a mixed media report (a web page with images, possibly clips, and links) or as a script and a screencast (of 15 minutes or less). Screencasts can be cooperative between two students if you prefer.

**Midterm Exam**
A take-home essay midterm applying concepts important to the course to films we have covered. Likely to focus on recurring elements or techniques.

**Term Paper Proposal**
Your term paper proposal will be a brief document (maximum of two pages) explaining the area you plan to work in for your term paper and what you would like to accomplish with it. It will include what works you plan to deal with, and as much explanation about the question you plan to answer, the approach you plan to take, and the themes you plan to engage as you can. It will be graded on mechanics and format, completeness, and rhetorical strength (how you prove to me that the topic will be excellent and you will do it well). You’ll turn it in to turnitin through D2L before class the day it is due.

**Researched Paper**
The term paper is a 7-10 page paper. You may go over length if you feel it absolutely necessary, but seven full pages (MLA double-spaced, Times New Roman 12, 1 inch margins, not including the required Works Cited page) are absolutely required. In this rather brief paper, you will write an analysis of a film or films by the Coen brothers (any they have produced / directed: not limited to the ones we worked with in class), coming up with a thesis and proving it through careful reference to the specifics of the text(s). I encourage papers that deal with other films or literary texts as well (influence study / context study / genre study), but at least half of the paper should deal with work by the Coens.

You must use at least four good, relevant, scholarly outside sources to bolster your argument or to argue against (you may, of course, use many more). This paper must do much more than echo our discussion in class: at the least, it should add depth. You will be graded on your analysis, your writing skills, your ability to incorporate quotation and outside evidence, the care and correctness of your concepts and terminology, and your conformity to standards of grammar, punctuation, and format (MLA 8).

Longer prompts and information on grading standards for all the major written assignments will be handed out in class or posted to D2L in advance of their due dates.

**Final Exam**
Another take-home essay exam, focused on checking your ability to run formal, thematic, tonal, or stylistic quirks across multiple films.

**Important Dates**

February 22—Review / Podcast / Screencast
March 8—Take-home Midterm Exam due
April 12 – Paper Proposal
May 1–Draft of Paper due (full draft)
May 3—Final Draft of Paper
Thursday, May 10 8-10am—takehome final exam is due

**Reading / Viewing Schedule**

An extremely tentative topic schedule follows below. Expect the schedule to be tuned for reading and viewing speed, time available, and student interest. Daily work, quizzes, and other small assignments are not indicated here. They will be added as the course requires and announced on D2L one class period before due. As this is the first time for this course under the present instructor, the time required for each work is a very rough estimate at best, and may be pushed back. I will make an effort to keep the major deadlines in place, and they will never move forward. The daily posts on D2L will be the authoritative source for reading and homework assignments.

**Week 1**
T: Introduction, terminology intro. Why study the Coens? Read introductory chapters.
R: Readings and resources on *Blood Simple*, the genre of the Noir. Read or watch *Double Indemnity*.

**Week 2**

**Week 3**
TR: *Raising Arizona* (1987)—articles on genre, etc.

**Week 4**

**Week 5**
TR: *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) – watch selections from *His Girl Friday, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, read selection on screwball comedy genre. Read articles.

**Week 6**

**Multimedia report or screencast due, February 22**

**Week 7:**

**Week 8:**

**Midterm Take-Home, March 8**

**Week 9**
Spring Break—Woo!

**Week 10:** Music and Southern History. Read articles, listen to Spotify list, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, 2000.

**Week 11:** *No Country for Old Men*, 2007. Read selections from McCarthy’s novel.

R: Easter

**Week 12:** Finish *No Country, True Grit*, 2010. Look at Hathaway clips, Portis, interviews.

**Week 13:** Finish *True Grit*, 2010. **Proposal, April 12**

**Week 14:** *Inside Llewyn Davis*, 2013.

**Week 15:** Classic Hollywood master class: *Hail Caesar!* 2016.

**Week 16:** RD paper, workshops, May 1

Projects come in—brief discussion of them, prep for take-home exam, May 3

Final take home due: Thursday, May 10 8-10am—takehome final exam is due