A. Course Description

1. Catalog description.

Studies in a specific film genre, such as the Western, screwball comedy, horror, war, melodrama or noir film, with the individual topic(s) announced in the course schedule. May be repeated as topics change. Grade only.

2. Course outline of the major topics and subtopics (minimum of two-level outline).

Note: as this course will offer studies in film genres that will change from semester to semester, the sample outline below addresses one planned iteration of the course.

This version of the course will study the history of two film genres, melodrama and film noir, as well as their contextualization in U.S. cultural and social history. In both genres, the topics of gender, sexuality, class, race, work, and family will be recurring themes for our collective discussion and analysis. The class will conclude with an examination of the intersections between the two genres and the ways in which each genre informs more contemporary narrative films.

1. Melodrama
      i. Production history: silent era, location shooting, Griffith-Lish collaboration
      ii. Historical context: maturity of the silent form
      iii. Screening
      iv. Character and narrative: character types in melodramatic films
      v. Cinematography and mise en scene: close-up and reaction shots
      vi. Music and editing: cross-cutting, continuity editing
     vii. Reception and interpretation
     viii. Discussion topics: narrative elements of silent melodrama

   b. A Star is Born (dir. William Wellman, 1937)
      i. Production history: origins of script
      ii. Historical context: post-code, post-sound era; Great Depression and film
      iii. Screening
      iv. Character and narrative: character types; journey/seeker narrative; frame, disclaimer
      v. Cinematography and mise en scene: Technicolor costs and concerns
vi. Music and editing: the transition to sound
vii. Reception and interpretation: Hollywood’s cautionary tale
viii. Discussion topics: lessons of melodrama

c. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (dir. Max Ophuls, 1948)
i. Production history: Fontaine’s company, S. Zweig’s story, adaptation
ii. Historical context: European émigré directors; cracking the Code
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: the femme fatale, the narrative frame
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: tracking shots, point-of-view shots
vi. Music and editing: piano and the musical score
vii. Reception and interpretation: Ophuls’ reputation; the “woman’s film”
viii. Discussion topics: adaptation of story; narrative framing

d. *The Bad and the Beautiful* (dir. Vincente Minnelli, 1952)
i. Production history: The studio system
ii. Historical context: Old Hollywood ages
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: the adapted story, the “prismatic” narrative; “reel-life” legends
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: the long take and the close-up
vi. Music and editing
vii. Reception and interpretation:
viii. Discussion topics: star-making in the studio system; adaptations of story

e. *All That Heaven Allows* (dir. Douglas Sirk, 1955)
i. Production history: the “Star” vehicle
ii. Historical context: social norms in the 1950s
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: social norms, widowhood, and sexuality
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: the Sirkian style
vi. Music and editing: the melodramatic score
vii. Reception and interpretation: Sirk’s reputation
viii. Discussion topics: social critique of conformity

i. Production history: Ray’s social critiques
ii. Historical context: “Father Knows Best”; modern psychiatry and prescriptions
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: the descent narrative; the protagonist’s change
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: widescreen and Cinemascope
vi. Music and editing: scoring the climax and ending
vii. Reception and interpretation: film criticism and the auteur theory
viii. Discussion topics: melodrama and masculinity

2. Film Noir

i. Production history: Hammett, Huston, and the Hays Code
ii. Historical context: the noir style in prose fiction
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: the archetypal noir protagonist
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: low-key lighting, low and expressive angles
vi. Music and editing: leitmotif
vii. Reception and interpretation: influence on later films
viii. Discussion topics: homosexuality in film; the noir style and genre

b. *Double Indemnity* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944)
i. Production history: origins of narrative; Cain novella and Snyder tabloid photo
ii. Historical context: getting away with murder
iii. Screening
iv. Character and narrative: the noir dupe and femme fatale
v. Cinematography and mise en scène: Seitz’s lighting; the noir style matures
vi. Music and editing: flashback sequence and scoring
vii. Reception and interpretation: audience reaction, censorship campaigns
viii. Discussion topics: noir and sexuality
   i. Production history: casting, scripting, and censorship
   ii. Historical context: The silent era; Norma Talmadge and Nora Desmond
   iii. Screening
   iv. Character and narrative: gigolo and faded star
   v. Cinematography and mise en scene: the opening scene; Nora’s staircase descent
   vi. Music and editing: Waxman’s score and silent influences
   vii. Reception and interpretation: Will it play in Peoria? Poughkeepsie?
   viii. Discussion topics: authenticity and illusion

d.  *In a Lonely Place* (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1950)
   i. Production history: adapting the Hughes novel
   ii. Historical context: McCarthyism and censorship
   iii. Screening
   iv. Character and narrative: Dix Steele, from book to film; the iconic Bogart
   v. Cinematography and mise en scene:
   vi. Music and editing: the avant garde score
   vii. Reception and interpretation: the ending, marketing, and mass appeal
   viii. Discussion topics: celebrity and its discontents

e.  *Touch of Evil* (dir. Orson Welles, 1958)
   i. Production history: Welles in Hollywood; casting concerns; the Welles memo
   ii. Historical context: end of the classic noir era
   iii. Screening
   iv. Character and narrative: adaptation and origins
   v. Cinematography and mise en scene: the long take
   vi. Music and editing: Foley effects and subjective sound
   vii. Reception and interpretation: versions and restorations; the B-movie
   viii. Discussion topics: noir and the end of an era

3.  **Intersections and Interpretations**
      i. Production history: wartime cost-cutting
      ii. Historical context: noir and melodrama intersect
      iii. Screening
      iv. Character and narrative: “women’s work” and its costs
      v. Cinematography and mise en scene: noir lighting in the melodramatic narrative
      vi. Music and editing: the recycled score
      vii. Reception and interpretation: the feminist critique of melodrama
      viii. Discussion topics: 2010 Haynes remake; Feminism and film; genres and hybridity
      i. Production history: the Sirkian homage
      ii. Historical context: third-wave feminism and the dream of post-racialism
      iii. Screening
      iv. Character and narrative: melodramatic types and concerns
      v. Cinematography and mise en scene: style, color, and expression
      vi. Music and editing: updating conventions; Bernstein’s score and 1950s style
      vii. Reception and interpretation: style and content
      viii. Discussion topics: reclaiming melodrama in the new queer cinema
      i. Production history: adapting the story
      ii. Historical context: the “independent” film
      iii. Screening
      iv. Character and narrative: the “backwards” narrative; signs, tropes, cues
      v. Cinematography and mise en scene: modernizing generic noir elements
      vi. Music and editing: dissolves and reveals; connections and disconnections
      vii. Reception and interpretation: Nolan’s reputation
      viii. Discussion topics: the noir style in postmodern context
3.a Instructional delivery methods utilized: (Please check all that apply).

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3.b MnSCU Course media codes: (Please check all that apply).

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4. Course requirements (papers, lab work, projects, etc.) and means of evaluation.

- weekly quizzes, participation, and activities (informal quizzes on film screenings; class discussion; and informal active-learning class procedures: 20% of final course grade)
- a formal oral presentation (conducted collaboratively on a modern film employing elements of the melodramatic or noir genre: 20% of final course grade)
- midterm exam (matching, short-answer, and take-home essay: 20% of final course grade)
- a course paper (1000-word, five-source paper on an approved comparison-contrast topic: 20% of final course grade)
- final exam (short-answer, long-answer, and essay: 20% of final course grade)

5. Course materials (textbook(s), articles, etc.).

The primary texts for this class will consist of the major course films themselves, which are analogous to the primary literary works in a literature class.

These are listed here in the order they are likely to be presented in class.

- **Far From Heaven**. Dir. Todd Haynes. Perf. Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, Dennis Haysbert. Focus, 2002. DVD.
This course viewing will be supplemented with assigned reading selections from WSU library databases, consisting primarily of scholarly articles on film topics. A few such are listed here as examples.


McKee, Alison. “What’s Love Got To Do With It?: History and Melodrama in the 1940s Woman’s Film.” Film & History 39.2 (Fall 2009): 5-15.

6. Assessment of Outcomes

Student learning will be assessed through student performance on the course requirements as listed.

Students will be able to name, identify, and analyze critically a number of melodrama and noir films.

► Assessment on weekly quizzes, midterm and final exams.

Students will be able to list and explain the generic elements of melodrama and noir films.

► Assessment on weekly quizzes, midterm and final exams.

Students will be able to name, identify, and analyze critically the generic elements of classical melodrama and noir films as they appear in contemporary films.

► Assessment on course paper, presentation assignment, and final exam.

Students will be able to name, identify, and explain film elements and techniques relevant to narrative, mise en scene, cinematography, editing, sound, and directing.

► Assessment on course paper, midterm and final exams.

Students will be able to identify, explain, and analyze thematic concerns raised by melodrama and noir films.

► Assessment on course paper, presentation assignment.

7. List of references.

**GENRE**


MELODRAMA


NOIR


Cameron, lan, ed. The Book of Film Noir. New York; Continuum, 1993.


**B. Rationale**

1. **Statement of the major focus and objectives of the course.**

   This course will study the history of two film genres, melodrama and film noir, as well as their contextualization in U.S. cultural and social history. In both genres, the topics of gender, sexuality, class, race, work, and family will be recurring themes for collective discussion and analysis.

   Melodrama—sometimes called, and sometimes pejoratively so, “the woman’s film”—emphasizes exaggerated emotions, interpersonal conflicts, and plots that rely on contrivance and stereotype to project a moral universe demarcated clearly into forces for good and evil. Melodrama can also be examined as a cinematic style of excess, evident in its mise-en-scène, music, star iconography, and performance techniques—ones that have become essential to film and other popular forms (for instance, star biographies). Given that the original sense of the term has its origins in theater (“drama with music”), melodrama can be seen as a narrative mode intrinsic to the film medium from the silent era to the present day. From this perspective, the melodramatic dimension of film challenges dominant aesthetic assumptions about the medium’s realism. It has been and continues to be essential to the way that film speaks to and connects with popular culture.

   Film noir refers to a group of films—typically, ones in gritty, urban settings where dark, violent passions lead to bleak consequences for troubled protagonists—made during and in the decade after World War II. Film noir is at once an historical moment, a visual style (denoted by its use of low-key, black-and-white, chiaroscuro lighting and cinematography), and, for some, a film genre. From the latter perspective, noir films normally address, primarily within the narrative terms of the thriller, some of the cultural problems facing postwar American society, in particular questions about gender, sexuality, alienation, paranoia, and identity. The noir film may feature any range of potential plots (a protagonist may be a private eye, plainclothes policeman, insurance agent, hapless grifter or gigolo, law-abiding everyman, or simple victim of circumstance); yet at the same time, noir films frequently evidence a commonality not just of visual style but narrative motifs. Today the tropes of the noir film remain not only immediately recognizable but even iconic, a testimony to the lasting importance of the genre to U.S. film and cultural history.
2. Specify how this new course contributes to the departmental curriculum.

Currently, WSU students have few opportunities to study film narrative at levels higher than those offered by our approved introductory course, Humanities 140, Approaches to Film. Humanities 240, Film Genres, offers students the opportunity to study similar disciplinary content at a higher level and in a more concentrated, focused delivery. Many students who complete Humanities 140 express the desire to continue their studies of film narrative, and a One-Time Course offering in Film Genres (offered as The War Film, in conjunction with the minor in War, Peace, and Terrorism) taught in Spring 2010 enrolled more than its maximum without the benefit of any advertising or even USP approval. (USP approval was granted the OTCO later in Spring of 2010.) The high enrollment for the OTCO suggests student interest is keen, and various sections of Humanities 240 may be offered as an elective towards other minors (e.g. WAGS).

3. Indicate any course(s) which may be dropped if this course is approved.

No course will be dropped. Currently, the department offers up to three sections of Humanities 140, Approaches to Film, a USP: Humanities course, each year. The department will offer one fewer section of 140 for each section of 240.

C. Impact of this Course on other Departments, Programs, Majors, or Minors

1. Does this course increase or decrease the total credits required by a major or minor of any other department? If so, which department(s)?

N/A.

2. Attach letter(s) of understanding from impacted department(s).

N/A.

Definitions:

Attach a Financial and Staffing Data Sheet.

Attach an Approval Form with appropriate signatures.

Department Contact Person for this Proposal:

J Paul Johnson
Name (please print)

457-5453
Phone

pjohnson@winona.edu
e-mail address
WINONA STATE UNIVERSITY
FINANCIAL AND STAFFING DATA SHEET

Include a Financial and Staffing Data Sheet with any proposal for a new course, new program, or revised program.

Please answer the following questions completely. Provide supporting data.

1. Would this course or program be taught with existing staff or with new or additional staff? If this course would be taught by adjunct faculty, include a rationale.

2. What impact would approval of this course/program have on current course offerings? Please discuss number of sections of current offerings, dropping of courses, etc.

3. What effect would approval of this course/program have on the department supplies? Include data to support expenditures for staffing, equipment, supplies, instructional resources, etc.
# WINONA STATE UNIVERSITY

## NEW AND REVISED COURSE AND PROGRAM APPROVAL FORM

Routing form for new and revised courses and programs.  
Course or Program: **Humanities 240, Film Genres**

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[Revised 7-5-07]
This checklist enables A2C2 representatives to endorse that their departments have accurately followed the Process for Accomplishing Curricular Change. For each course or program proposal submitted to A2C2, this checklist must be completed, signed by the submitting department’s A2C2 representative, and included with the proposal when forwarded for approval. Peer review of proposals is also strongly advised, e.g., departments should discuss and vote on the proposals as submitted to A2C2, rather than on just the ideas proposed or drafts of proposals.

If a proposal fails to follow or complete any aspect of the process, the Course and Program Proposal Subcommittee will postpone consideration of the proposal and return it to the department’s A2C2 representative for completion and resubmission. Resubmitted proposals have the same status as newly submitted proposals.

Note: This form need not be completed for notifications.

1. The appropriate forms and the “Approval Form” have been completed in full for this proposal. All necessary or relevant descriptions, rationales, and notifications have been provided.
   ___ X ___ Completed

2a. The “Financial and Staffing Data Sheet” has been completed and is enclosed in this proposal, if applicable.
   ___ X ___ Completed _______ NA

2b. For departments that have claimed that “existing staff” would be teaching the course proposed, an explanation has been enclosed in this proposal as to how existing staff will do this, e.g., what enrollment limits can be accommodated by existing staff. If no such explanation is enclosed, the department’s representative is prepared to address A2C2’s questions on this matter.
   ___ X ___ Completed _______ NA

3. Arrangements have been made so that a department representative knowledgeable of this proposal will be attending both the Course and Program Proposal Subcommittee meeting and the full A2C2 meeting at which this proposal is considered.
   ___ X ___ Completed

Name and office phone number of proposal’s representative:  ____ J Paul Johnson, x5453

4. Reasonable attempts have been made to notify and reach agreements with all university units affected by this proposal. Units still opposing a proposal must submit their objections in writing before or during the Course and Program Proposal Subcommittee meeting at which this proposal is considered.
   _______ Completed ___ X ___ NA

5. The course name and number is listed for each prerequisite involved in this proposal.
   _______ Completed ___ X ___ NA

6. In this proposal for a new or revised program (major, minor, concentration, etc.), the list of prerequisites provided includes all the prerequisites of any proposed prerequisites. All such prerequisites of prerequisites are included in the total credit hour calculations.
   _______ Completed ___ X ___ NA

7. In this proposal for a new or revised program, the following information for each required or elective course is provided:
   a. The course name and number.
   b. A brief course description.
   c. A brief statement explaining why the program should include the course.
   _______ Completed ___ X ___ NA

8. This course or program revision proposal:
   a. Clearly identifies each proposed change.
   b. Displays the current requirements next to the proposed new requirements, for clear, easy comparison.
   _______ Completed ___ X ___ NA

9. This course proposal provides publication dates for all works listed as course textbooks or references using a standard form of citation. Accessibility of the cited publications for use in this proposed course has been confirmed.
   ___ X ___ Completed _______ NA

__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
Department’s A2C2 Representative or Alternate                   Date                     [Revised 9-05]