COURSE OVERVIEW

According to the Motion Picture Association of America, more than one billion movie tickets are sold in a typical year in the United States and Canada. While most people go to the movies for mere entertainment, a good film can inspire its viewers, challenge people to think in new ways, and even educate its audience. The purpose of this course is to tap into the power of film to study, learn about, and deepen your understanding and appreciation of politics and government. Throughout the semester, we will view several films with political messages. As you watch these films, try to interpret their larger meaning. I also encourage you to think critically about several important questions that will inevitably arise. How much power should government have? What is the proper balance between freedom (civil liberties) and order (national security)? What should the government’s role be in promoting social equality and economic fairness? What is the proper role of the press in a free and democratic society? What influence do political parties and interest groups have on elections and government policies, and does this influence have mostly positive or negative consequences for how government operates? What is the proper role for the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government? What are the causes and consequences of corruption in government? Why does war exist and what justifies going to war?

COURSE STRUCTURE

Classes begin with a 30 to 60 minute lecture on the background of the political subject covered in the film; the second and third hours of class are devoted to the screening of the film; and the final 30 to 60 minutes of class involve discussion of the film and an analysis of its political meaning and significance. I encourage everyone to be active participants during class discussions. The best learning environments are those where there is open dialogue, free conversation, and respectful debate. Your active participation in these discussions should challenge and engage you to think critically about the topics presented and the questions raised in this course.

READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS


(2) Requirements: Several movies that are a part of this course will not be shown in class. It will be your responsibility to see these movies on your own time. I strongly recommend a subscription with Netflix, iTunes, Amazon, Blockbuster, or your local video store.

(3) Warning: Several of the films shown in class have an “R” rating. An R-rated motion picture may include dialogue with profanity, racial, ethnic, and/or sexist slurs; graphic violence; nudity and/or sexual situations; drug use; and/or other adult themes. Please see me if you have any moral, religious, political, or other objections to viewing films with an “R” rating.
EVALUATION

Your final grade in the course is based on your class attendance and participation, and performance on four writing assignments and two exams. The weights assigned to your class participation and exam grades are as follows:

1. Writing assignment #1 = 10% of your overall grade.
2. Writing assignment #2 = 10% of your overall grade.
3. Writing assignment #3 = 10% of your overall grade.
4. Writing assignment #4 = 10% of your overall grade.
5. Mid-term exam = 20% of your overall grade.
6. Final exam = 20% of your overall grade.
7. Class attendance and participation is worth the remaining 20% of your overall grade.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Class attendance is mandatory. To keep record of attendance, I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each lecture. It is your responsibility to make sure that you sign the attendance sheet if you are present in class. If you arrive excessively late to class or if you leave class early, you will receive only partial credit for attendance. Your class attendance grade will be based on the percentage of classes that you attend (e.g., a student who attends every class will earn a 100; a student who attends half of the classes will earn a 50, etc.). Students who are active participants during class discussions will receive a bonus point added to their overall course grade. To encourage participation further, I will pass out a question sheet before the screening of each film. Please complete the question sheet as you watch the film. I reserve the right to call on any student during our discussion of the movie. If you take careful notes, this will ensure that you are prepared and ready to participate in class if called upon. I also encourage everyone to access the Internet Movie Data Base website, which is available online at http://www.imdb.com. The IMDB website provides an overview of thousands of films. Please print out and bring the IMDB overview of the film to be screened with you to class. This will help you identify characters with actors as well as provide other basic information about the film that should help make your note-taking considerably easier.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Due to the national outbreak of influenza, I will excuse absences, including on exam dates, for anyone suffering from flu-like symptoms. Following the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control, I will not require a doctor’s note for anyone who believes he or she may be sick with influenza. Please stay home to help prevent exposing others. When you are healthy, simply notify me within one week after returning to class that you suffered from the flu or had flu-like symptoms. For reasons other than the flu, I will excuse absences for: (1) participation in an authorized activity as an official representative of the university (i.e., athletic events, delegate to regional or national meetings or conferences, or participation in university-sponsored performances); (2) participation in other activities deemed by the Dean of Students to warrant an excused absence; (3) an extreme personal emergency; (4) the death of an immediate family member (such as parent, sibling, spouse, or child); and (5) participation in religious holidays. To have your absence excused for any of these reasons, you must present some form of verification no later than one week after the absence if you wish to have it excused.
EXAM RULES AND LATE-PAPER POLICY

Failure to be present for any of the scheduled exams will result in a “0.” On exam dates, please come prepared with an exam booklet and a pen. If you cannot attend the exam, you must contact me at least 30 minutes before I have administered the test. I will grant a make-up exam only for circumstances that I deem extraordinary or for circumstances that meet university guidelines. If you miss the exam because of an illness, you are still required to contact me before the exam. You must also present me with proper verification. Writing assignments, which will be explained in detail in separate handouts provided in class, are to be submitted at the start of class on their due dates. I will accept writing assignments up to one week late, but with a one-letter-grade penalty.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is a fundamental value of higher education shared by all at East Carolina University. Consistent with this principle, I expect all students to complete their academic work honestly. I will not tolerate any student’s involvement in cheating, plagiarism, falsifying work, submitting the same assignment for more than one course, or other acts that would be in violation of the university’s academic integrity standards. If I become aware of or suspect a potential academic integrity violation, I will meet with the student under suspicion following the procedures outlined in the university’s academic integrity policy. Should I determine that an academic integrity violation has occurred, I reserve the right to assign a grade penalty up to and including an “F” for the assignment or course. If it also comes to my attention that the student involved in such an incident has had a prior academic integrity violation, or if there are other aggravating circumstances, I will refer the case directly to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Should the Academic Integrity Board determine that the accused student committed an academic integrity violation, the penalties, as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, may include a grade penalty and/or up to and including suspension from the university. The Student Handbook is available online at: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-studentlife/policyhub/academic_integrity.cfm.

CLASSROOM RULES

The classroom is a learning environment. I expect all students to observe some basic rules of courtesy, which include the following: (1) arrive to class on time and do not leave before class is dismissed; (2) do not pack up your things early; it is disruptive to others around you; (3) turn off cell phones; (4) no laptop use during class unless it is for the purpose of taking notes from the class lecture; (5) no eating during class; (6) do not read the newspaper or listen to music through headphones during class; (7) do not sleep during class; (8) do not carry on private conservations with others in the classroom while someone else is speaking; and (9) please be courteous to your classmates and respectful of your fellow students’ views, comments, and questions. Classroom discussion is meant to allow us to hear a variety of viewpoints, and this can only happen if we respect each other and our differences. Failure to follow these rules will negatively affect your class attendance and participation grade. Repeated offenses could result in your expulsion from the class.

DISABILITY SERVICES

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a covered disability must go to the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 to verify the disability before any accommodations can occur. The telephone number is 252-737-1016.
INFORMATION ABOUT UNIVERSITY CLOSINGS

If you have questions about a possible school closing due to severe weather or other reasons, please call the University Emergency Telephone Number at 252-328-0062 or visit the ECU emergency alert website (http://www.ecu.edu/alert).

APPOINTMENTS

My office is located in the Brewster Building, Room A-119. My office hours are from 2 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday, and from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. every Wednesday. If you cannot meet with me during office hours, please see me after class or contact me by telephone or e-mail to schedule an appointment. If you need to reach me after 4 p.m., please use e-mail.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (Jan. 16). Types of Government and Government Oppression

Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapters 1 and 3
Comparative film: Good Night, and Good Luck (2005, George Clooney)

Week 2 (Jan. 23). Tyranny of the Majority: Civil Rights and the Role of Government

Screening: Mississippi Burning (1988, Alan Parker)
Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 2
Comparative film: Do the Right Thing (1989, Spike Lee)

Week 3 (Jan. 30). The Courts and Justice

Screening: 12 Angry Men (1957, Sidney Lumet)
Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 9
Comparative film: To Kill a Mockingbird (1962, Robert Mulligan)

Week 4 (Feb. 6). Executive Power

Screening: Gabriel Over the White House (1933, Gregory La Cava)
Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 6
Comparative film: All the King’s Men (1949, Robert Rossen)

Week 5 (Feb. 13). The Legislature

Screening: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939, Frank Capra)
Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 7
Comparative film: Charlie Wilson’s War (2007, Mike Nichols)

Week 6 (Feb. 20). The Media

Screening: Network (1976, Sidney Lumet)
Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 11
Comparative film: Wag the Dog (1997, Barry Levinson)
Week 7 (Feb. 27). Review for Mid-term Exam

Week 8 (Mar. 6). Mid-Term Exam

Week 9 (Mar. 13). Spring Break

Week 10 (Mar. 20). Civil Liberties
   Screening: The People vs. Larry Flynt (1996, Milos Forman)
   Reading: Blackboard, “Civil Liberties”
   Comparative film: Dirty Harry (1971, Don Siegel)

Week 11 (Mar. 27). Elections and Political Parties
   Screening: Primary Colors (1998, Mike Nichols)
   Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 10
   Comparative film: The Last Hurrah (1958, John Ford)

Week 12 (Apr. 3). Interest Groups and Collective Action
   Screening: Norma Rae (1979, Martin Ritt)
   Reading: Blackboard, “Labor Unions”

Week 13 (Apr. 10). Economics and Capitalism
   Screening: The Company Men (2010, John Wells)
   Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 4
   Comparative film: Other People’s Money (1991, Norman Jewison)

Week 14 (Apr. 17). Foreign Policy and War
   Screening: The Hurt Locker (2009, Kathryn Bigelow)
   Reading: A Novel Approach to Politics, chapter 12
   Comparative film: All Quiet on the Western Front (1930, Lewis Milestone)

Week 15 (Apr. 24). Review for Final Exam

FINAL EXAM
May 8, 2013. The final exam is scheduled from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Brewster C-102.