

# **POLITICS THROUGH FILM**

**POLS 3012**

**Summer Session II, 2019**

Classroom: Brewster C-304  
Class time: Tues. & Thurs., 1:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.  
Office hours: Wed., 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
or by appointment

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## **COURSE OVERVIEW AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

According to the Motion Picture Association of America, there are more than one billion movie tickets sold in a typical year in the United States and Canada. While most people go to the movies for 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 summer session, 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 arise from the films we view. What is the proper role of government? How much power should government have? What are the effects of war, and when is war justified? How do the media and their reporting of the news shape society and affect the quality of a democracy? How fair is the criminal justice system? By the end of this course, you should be able to identify and interpret the political messages in the films we cover; compare and contrast these political messages; assess the strengths and weaknesses of each film's message; and apply the lessons from these films to controversial questions that surround American politics and government. Please note that I will not share my partisan affiliation to anyone in the class and pledge to present both sides of every political argument as fairly as possible. My larger and ultimate learning objective in this course is to teach each of you *not what to think*, but rather *how to think* about the issues we address in class.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE**

Classes begin with a one-hour lecture on the topic listed in the course outline; the second and third hours of class are devoted to the screening of the film; and the final 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.

## **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.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

Elizabeth Haas, Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas, *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge, 2015).

## **MOVIE SUBSCRIPTION REQUIREMENT**

Not every movie that is a part of this course will be shown in class. It will be your responsibility to see these movies on your own time. I strongly recommend a subscription with Netflix, VUDU, Amazon, or some other source.

## **PACKBACK REQUIREMENT**

Online participation is a requirement for this course and Packback Questions will be used to expand our film discussions outside of the classroom. You should have received a welcome email from holla@packback.co prompting you to complete your Packback registration. Packback has already created an account for you with your university email. All you need to do is reset your password. This email may be directed to spam or filtered out, so please make sure you do a thorough scan of your inbox if you cannot find the email. If you search your inbox and still cannot find the welcome email, or if you are new to the course, you may manually register by following the instructions below:

1. Navigate to <https://Packback.co/questions> and click “Register as a new student.” Note: If you already have an account on Packback you can login with your credentials.
2. Make sure to register with your ECU email address and real first name and last name.
3. Enter our class community’s access code into the “Join a new Community” module on your dashboard. Our community access code is: 888f5692-1077-4b15-be92-23050ab32934
4. Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding Packback, please contact the customer support team at holla@packback.co. For a brief introduction to Packback Questions and why we are using it in class, watch this video: [vimeo.com/packback/Welcome-to-Packback-Questions](https://vimeo.com/packback/Welcome-to-Packback-Questions).

## **EVALUATION**

Your final overall grade in the course will be based on the following:

- (1) Packback online assignments = 15% of your final grade.
- (2) One short (4-5 page) writing assignment = 15% of your final grade
- (3) Mid-term exam on July 11 = 25% of your overall grade.
- (4) You have the option of choosing to write and submit a 10-page comparative film paper or to take an in-class final exam on July 26. The paper/exam = 25% of your final grade.
- (5) Class attendance is worth the remaining 20% of your overall grade.

## GRADING SCALE

Course averages will be converted to letter grades using the scale below:

Course Average	Grade	Course Average	Grade
93 and above =	A	73 to 76 =	C
90 to 92 =	A-	70 to 72 =	C-
87 to 89 =	B+	67 to 69 =	D+
83 to 86 =	B	63 to 66 =	D
80 to 82 =	B-	60 to 62 =	D-
77 to 79 =	C+	Below 60 =	F

## ONLINE ASSIGNMENTS

Your online grade will be based on your answers to discussion board questions posted on Packback. There will be two questions for you to answer per week. Both posts are due no later than Monday at 11:59 p.m. Your responses must include supporting materials (i.e., links to articles or videos from reputable sources) to earn credit. I expect your answers to be more than your opinions. A credit-worthy answer justifies your thoughts and supports your claims with material that you cite. In total, there are 5 weeks with assignments throughout the semester. This means that you will be asked to answer a total of 10 discussion board questions. Your online grade will be based on the percentage of those questions that you have successfully answered throughout the semester. For example, if you successfully answered all 10 questions, you would earn an online grade of 100%. Alternatively, if you successfully answered 7 of the 10 questions, you would earn a 70% ( $7/10=.70$ ). Before you start posting, be sure to read the Community Guidelines found in the tutorial on Packback. If your post does not follow the Packback Community Guidelines, it will be removed and you will not receive credit for that post. If you wish to post a question of your own to generate additional discussion, I will award one extra-credit point to your overall online grade (with a maximum of 10 questions or 10 points).

## SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT

There are a total of three short writing assignments. You are required to complete any one of them. If you wish to write on more than one the paper assignments, I will count your highest grade and drop your lowest scores. The topic and instructions for each assignment are available on Blackboard. The papers should be roughly four to five pages in length (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font). The grading rubric for each paper topic is also available on Blackboard, along with additional information concerning some helpful writing tips and proper preparation of your citations and bibliography.

## OPTIONAL COMPARATIVE FILM PAPER

If you decide to write the 10-page comparative film paper, a one-page summary of your topic is due to me on July 11. The completed 10-page paper is due at the beginning of class on July 26. No extensions will be granted for any reason. If you have not completed the one-page summary by July 11 or have not finished your paper by July 26, then you must take the in-class final exam. I will not accept any work via e-mail attachments (hard copies only). Please see pages 7-9 of this syllabus for instructions and specific information about completing this paper assignment.

## **EXAM POLICIES**

For the mid-term exam and in-class final exam (if applicable), please come prepared to class with an exam booklet and a pen or pencil. Failure to be present for an exam will result in an automatic “0.” If you cannot attend an 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 an exam because of an illness, you are still required to contact me before the exam. You must also present me with proper verification (see below).

## **CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

Class attendance is mandatory. 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 may decide to call on you, even if you do not raise your hand, 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 AND VERIFICATION**

I will excuse absences, including those on exam dates, for the following reasons: (1) participation in an authorized activity as an official representative of the university; (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; (5) participation in a religious holiday; and (6) health reasons such as an incapacitating or contagious illness or unavoidable surgery. Please do not schedule non-emergency doctor’s appointments or any other personal commitments during our class time. Serious students plan their personal schedules around their academic schedules, not the other way around. If your absence meets any of the criteria mentioned above, I will need you to present me with some form of verification no later than one week after the absence if you wish to have your absence excused. Some acceptable forms of verification include the following: a note from Student Health Services; a note from a doctor or medical office; an obituary; or official documentation from the athletic department indicating your travel schedule. In the event of severe weather, please call the University Emergency Telephone Number at 252-328-0062 or visit the ECU emergency alert website (<http://www.ecu.edu/alert>) to check on whether the university has canceled classes. If the university has not canceled classes, but you commute to campus from a considerable distance and believe driving conditions may be hazardous, I will consider excusing your absence.

## 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 the 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 up to suspension from the university. For more information, please see: <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/fsonline/customcf/currentfacultymanual/part6section2.pdf>.

## CLASSROOM RULES

The classroom is a learning environment. I expect all students to observe some basic rules of courtesy and respect, 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 and keep them put away during class; (4) no laptop use during film screenings; (5) no listening to music through headphones during class; (6) no sleeping during class; (7) no carrying on private conversations with others in the classroom while someone else is speaking; and (8) 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 grade. Repeated or extreme offenses could result in your expulsion from the class.

## E-MAIL

E-mail is a valuable tool for me to communicate announcements and information to the entire class. Please check your ECU e-mail at least once a day (weekends excluded). E-mail is also a good way for you to contact me. Please feel free to use e-mail to set up one-on-one meetings with me if my office hours conflict with your schedule. If you have specific questions about the course material, I am happy to answer them through e-mail; however, I would encourage you to set up a one-on-one meeting with me if you are having general difficulty with your understanding of the course material. I am also happy to answer any specific questions concerning academic or career advising through e-mail, but again I would encourage you to set up a one-on-one meeting with me if you need more general academic or career advice. Please do not use e-mail to request information already listed in the syllabus, such as an exam date or the weight assigned to a specific exam.

## APPOINTMENTS

I have two offices located in the Brewster Building, Room A-101 and Room D-303. During the summer session, I work from D-303. My office hours are from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. every Wednesday. If you cannot meet with me during my office hours, please see me after class or contact me by telephone or e-mail to schedule an appointment. I am also happy to have lunch with anyone on either Monday or Wednesday. If you wish to schedule a lunch, please contact me at least one day in advance.

## 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.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### **Week 1. Course Overview / Power and Government**

June 20, 2019. *The Lives of Others* (2006, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck)  
Home screening: *All the King's Men* (1949, Robert Rossen)

### **Week 2. Law Enforcement and Justice**

June 25, 2019. *Dirty Harry* (1971, Don Siegel)  
June 27, 2019. *Les Miserables* (1998, Billie August)  
Home screening: *Dead Man Walking* (1995, Tim Robbins)  
\* Short paper assignment on topic #1 is due on June 27.

### **Week 3. War**

July 2, 2019. *The Hurt Locker* (2009, Kathryn Bigelow)  
July 4, 2019. **HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)**  
Home screening: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998, Steven Spielberg)

### **Week 4. Politics**

July 9, 2019. *Primary Colors* (1998, Mike Nichols)  
July 11, 2019. **MID-TERM EXAMINATION (PAPER TOPIC SUMMARY DUE)**  
Home screening: *The Contender* (2000, Rob Lurie)  
\* Short paper assignment on topic #2 is due on July 11.

### **Week 5. The Free Press and Democracy**

July 16, 2019. *All the President's Men* (1976, Alan Pakula)  
July 18, 2019. *Network* (1976, Sidney Lumet)  
Home screening: *Wag the Dog* (1997, Barry Levinson)  
\* Short paper assignment on topic #3 is due on July 18.

### **Week 6. Race and Society**

July 23, 2019. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967, Stanley Kramer)  
July 25, 2019. *Do the Right Thing* (1989, Spike Lee)  
July 26, 2019. **FINAL EXAM / PAPER DUE**

## **10-PAGE PAPER ASSIGNMENT**

The movies shown in class have various messages about important political and social subjects. These films each make somewhat different statements about the health of American government, criminal justice, the press, and decisions about military intervention and war. Some films have a pessimistic outlook. Others acknowledge problems, but remain optimistic about the future. For your paper, select a political message of your choice and compare it to two films listed in the addendum (see pp. 8-9). The paper should identify similarities and differences in the two films, and discuss how the political circumstances surrounding the historical era in which each film was made may have influenced its message. I strongly encourage you to utilize the recommended reading, *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) for this assignment.

There are two deadlines for this assignment. The first deadline is **July 11**. By this date, you must submit a one-page summary of your paper topic for approval. Your final paper is due on **July 26**.

### *PREPARING THE PAPER*

- Your paper should include a minimum of three academic sources.
- You may find it useful to access movie reviews and other information. Some helpful websites include: mrqe.com; imdb.com; metacritic.com; rottentomatoes.com. Lexis-Nexus is another excellent resource for movie reviews published in newspapers and magazines.
- Please note that any papers without in-text citations are guilty of plagiarism. These papers will receive an **automatic “F”** and may be subject to additional disciplinary action.
- **ALL PAPERS MUST FOLLOW THE APSA STYLE MANUAL FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE.** The APSA Style Manual for Political Science can be downloaded at: <https://www.csuchico.edu/lref/pols/APSA.pdf>. It is also available on Blackboard.
- All papers should be organized with headings and subheadings, as well as double-spaced with one-inch margins in 12-point Times New Roman font. Page numbers also should be included.
- A well-written paper requires a thesis or an argument. You should state your thesis in the beginning or introduction of the paper.
- The introduction should tell the reader what you are going to say in the paper. The introduction also should arouse the interest of the reader.
- The body of the paper should provide evidence that convinces the reader of your central argument. Citations from books, articles, and other sources are necessary to make your argument as convincing as possible. The best outside sources are academic books and journal articles.
- The conclusion should summarize your major arguments and consider any implications related to your thesis. It should also tie together your central points in a coherent manner.

## FILM ADDENDUM

Any of the 80 films listed below are acceptable for your 10-page paper. Undoubtedly, countless more films could be added to this list. If there is a film that you wish to include in your paper that is not on this list, please see me for approval (no later than July 13).

<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> (1930, Lewis Milestone)
<i>I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang</i> (1932, Mervyn LeRoy)
<i>Gabriel Over the White House</i> (1933, Gregory La Cava)
<i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939, Frank Capra)
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1940, John Ford)
<i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941, Orson Welles)
<i>Meet John Doe</i> (1941, Frank Capra)
<i>State of the Union</i> (1948, Frank Capra)
<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i> (1951, Robert Wise)
<i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i> (1957, David Lean)
<i>12 Angry Men</i> (1957, Sidney Lumet)
<i>The Last Hurrah</i> (1958, John Ford)
<i>Spartacus</i> (1960, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Advise and Consent</i> (1962, Otto Preminger)
<i>The Manchurian Candidate</i> (1962, John Frankenheimer)
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1962, Robert Mulligan)
<i>The Best Man</i> (1964, Franklin Schaffner)
<i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Seven Days in May</i> (1964, John Frankenheimer)
<i>In the Heat of the Night</i> (1967, Norman Jewison)
<i>Planet of the Apes</i> (1968, Franklin Schaffner)
<i>Easy Rider</i> (1969, Dennis Hopper)
<i>Catch-22</i> (1970, Mike Nichols)
<i>Patton</i> (1970, Franklin Schaffner)
<i>The Candidate</i> (1972, Michael Ritchie)
<i>Swept Away</i> (1974, Lina Wertmuller)
<i>F.I.S.T.</i> (1978, Norman Jewison)
<i>An Unmarried Woman</i> (1978, Paul Mazursky)
<i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979, Francis Ford Coppola)
<i>The Deer Hunter</i> (1979, Michael Cimino)
<i>Hair</i> (1979, Milos Forman)
<i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i> (1979, Robert Benton)
<i>Norma Rae</i> (1979, Martin Ritt)
<i>Gandhi</i> (1982, Richard Attenborough)
<i>WarGames</i> (1983, John Badham)
<i>Red Dawn</i> (1984, John Milius)
<i>Platoon</i> (1986, Oliver Stone)
<i>Full Metal Jacket</i> (1987, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Matewan</i> (1987, John Sayles)
<i>Wall Street</i> (1987, Oliver Stone)



**FILM ADDENDUM (continued)**

<i>Mississippi Burning</i> (1988, Alan Parker)
<i>Born on the Fourth of July</i> (1989, Oliver Stone)
<i>The Hunt for Red October</i> (1990, John McTiernan)
<i>Boyz N the Hood</i> (1991, John Singleton)
<i>Bob Roberts</i> (1992, Tim Robbins)
<i>Malcolm X</i> (1992, Spike Lee)
<i>Dave</i> (1993, Ivan Reitman)
<i>Philadelphia</i> (1993, Jonathan Demme)
<i>Schindler's List</i> (1993, Steven Spielberg)
<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> (1994, Frank Darabont)
<i>The American President</i> (1995, Rob Reiner)
<i>Braveheart</i> (1995, Mel Gibson)
<i>Nixon</i> (1995, Oliver Stone)
<i>Mars Attacks!</i> (1996, Tim Burton)
<i>The People v. Larry Flynt</i> (1996, Milos Forman)
<i>Amistad</i> (1997, Steven Spielberg)
<i>Bulworth</i> (1998, Warren Beatty)
<i>The Patriot</i> (2000, Roland Emmerich)
<i>Thirteen Days</i> (2000, Roger Donaldson)
<i>Black Hawk Down</i> (2001, Ridley Scott)
<i>Good Night, and Good Luck</i> (2005, George Clooney)
<i>Thank You for Smoking</i> (2005, Jason Reitman)
<i>V for Vendetta</i> (2005, James McTeigue)
<i>Charlie Wilson's War</i> (2007, Mike Nichols)
<i>W.</i> (2008, Oliver Stone)
<i>Frost/Nixon</i> (2008, Ron Howard)
<i>Milk</i> (2008, Gus Van Sant)
<i>The Company Men</i> (2010, John Wells)
<i>The Ides of March</i> (2011, George Clooney)
<i>Too Big to Fail</i> (2011, Curtis Hanson)
<i>Lincoln</i> (2012, Steven Spielberg)
<i>Zero Dark Thirty</i> (2012, Kathryn Bigelow)
<i>12 Years a Slave</i> (2013, Steve McQueen)
<i>American Sniper</i> (2014, Clint Eastwood)
<i>Selma</i> (2014, Ava DuVernay)
<i>Spotlight</i> (2015, Tom McCarthy)
<i>The Big Short</i> (2015, Adam McKay)
<i>Moonlight</i> (2016, Barry Jenkins)
<i>Sand Castle</i> (2017, Fernando Coimbra)
<i>The Post</i> (2017, Steven Spielberg)