English 2530, Section 001

FILM NOIR: THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

Instructor: Dr. Jana Davis
Classes: Fall 2011, Monday nights 18:30-21:50 in A136a
Office: A302
Phone: 323-5943
email: jdavis@langara.bc.ca
Office Hours: Mon 11:30-12:20, Tues 13:30-14:20, 15:30-17:00, Weds 10:00-11:20

Course description: A study of film noir and neo-noir. Each class will include the showing of a feature noir, lecture and discussion.

Learning outcomes: Upon successful completion of English 2530, students should be able to
* understand historical developments in the film noir
* comprehend the key narrative patterns of film noir
* comprehend the different styles of film noir
* relate film noir to varied contexts: for instance, the American film industry, the hard-boiled detective novel, and German Expressionism
* understand film noir’s portrayal of the opposite of the American Dream, that is, noir’s focus on the dark sides of life in the United States: alienation, pessimism, despair, and widespread crime and corruption
* demonstrate knowledge of the above issues and ability to analyze films in class discussion, essays, quizzes, and the exam.

Textbook: Andrew Spicer, Film Noir (Longman, 2002)

Books on Reserve in the Langara Library: Readings are also assigned in books I have placed on reserve for this course in the Langara Library. Here is a list of titles of books on reserve: The Book of Film Noir, The Film Noir Reader, The Film Noir Reader 2, The Film Noir Reader 3, The Film Noir Reader 4, Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir, In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity, More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts, Hollywood’s Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir, Women in Film Noir, In a Lonely Place, Dark Cinema:
**Film Noir in Cultural Perspective, Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia, The Philosophy of Film Noir, 100 Film Noirs, Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity, Chinatown, Double Indemnity, and Night and the City.** One copy of Spicer is on reserve, and there are also two encyclopedias on *film noir* on the reference shelves, as well as some ebooks – see the library catalogue for these. You should find the books on reserve useful in writing your research essay; they include a number of key articles on noir, and the encyclopedias and *100 Film Noirs* may be helpful in deciding which films to write on. Assigned films are also at the library.

**Assignments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Sept. 26, Oct. 17, Nov. 7, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/sources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm essay</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Oct. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Nov. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Throughout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The in-class quizzes and midterm start at **6:30 pm**, so be on time.

The midterm and quizzes may only be made up with an acceptable medical excuse and only if I have not returned the essays or quizzes to the class. I will accept late research essays only up until essays are returned to other members of the class, but will take 5% off for each day they are late unless you have arranged an extension at least a week in advance.

**Attendance and Participation:** Regular attendance is important because we move quickly in this course. If students miss one class, they miss a whole week of class. If students miss more than two classes, they should withdraw. Your attendance contributes to your participation mark, since you cannot participate if you are not there. But to get a passing participation mark, you need to speak and not just be.

**OUTLINE OF TOPICS, FILMS, AND ASSIGNMENTS**

I. Classical *Film Noir* 1943 -1947: Its Narrative Patterns, Style, Contexts, and Themes

Sept. 12  
**Introduction to Film Noir Style and Content**  
**Feature:**  *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, Paramount, 1944)  
**Clips:** *Film Noir*
Sept. 19  Fatal attraction and investigative narratives, flashbacks and voice-overs, \textit{noir} studio expressionism, German Expressionism and the hard-boiled detective novel, the critical portrayal of American life in \textit{film noir}

Feature:  \textit{Murder, My Sweet}  (Edward Dmytryk, RKO, 1944)

Clips: \textit{The Big Sleep} (Howard Hawks, Warner, 1946)
\textit{The Lady in the Lake} (Robert Montgomery, MGM, 1946)

Assignment for this week:
- READ Spicer, Ch. 1 and pp. 52-54 and 74-83 AND
- SEE \textit{The Big Sleep} (films to see are at the Langara library on reserve; you need to watch them in the library)

Sept. 26  Thriller narratives; B-film minimalism and noir style; Existentialism, World War II, and the Production Code; returning soldiers; alienation, entrapment, and victimization in \textit{film noir}

QUIZ #1 at 6:30 (covering Sept. 12, 19)

Feature: \textit{Detour} (Edgar G. Ulmer, PRC, 1945)

Clips: \textit{Dark Passage} (Delmer Daves, Warner, 1947)

Assignment for this week:
- READ Spicer, Ch. 2 and pp. 64-8 AND
- EITHER SEE \textit{Dark Passage}
- OR READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING (articles to read are in the books on reserve for English 2530 at the Langara library):
  - Paul A. Cantor, “Film Noir and the Frankfurt School: America as Wasteland in Edgar G. Ulmer's \textit{Detour},'' \textit{The Philosophy of Film Noir}, 139-61.
  - James Naremore, \textit{More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts}, Ch. 4 on B-films.

Oct. 3  Mixtures of narrative types, wartime shooting restrictions and
technological advances, location shooting and changes in noir style, noir auteurs, dark and inescapable pasts

DUE: topic for research essay, preliminary thesis (a one-sentence statement of what you plan to argue in your essay, that is, your main point), list of 2-3 films you plan to discuss in your essay, and list of at least five sources you hope to find useful in writing your essay (typed). I will approve and/or comment on your topic via myLangara so you can begin your research by the end of the this week.

Feature: The Killers (Robert Siodmak, Universal, Mark Hellinger Prod., 1946)

Clips: Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, RKO, 1941)

Assignment for this week:
- READ Spicer, Ch. 6 especially 112-19, 54-57
- EITHER SEE Citizen Kane or Out of the Past (Jacques Tourneur, RKO, 1947)
- OR READ ONE OF
  - Robert Porfirio, “Expressiveness of Sound and Image in Film Noir,” Film Noir Reader, 177-87
  - Frank Krutnik, In a Lonely Street, 114-24.
  - Michael Walker, “Robert Siodmak,” in Cameron, Book of Film Noir, 110, 128-35

Oct. 10 No Class: Thanksgiving

Oct. 17 Women's picture/noir hybrids, dangerous and victimized female protagonists, 3rd person narratives, noir limit cases, Technicolor noir, Freud, the portrayal of women's anxieties and issues in women's noir

QUIZ # 2 at 6:30 (covering Sept. 26 and Oct. 3)

Feature: Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, Warner, 1945)

Clips: Leave Her to Heaven (John M. Stahl, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1945)

Assignment for this week:
- READ Spicer, Ch. 5 and pp. 68-69 AND
- EITHER SEE Leave Her to Heaven
- OR READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
  - Sylvia Harvey, “Woman's Place: The Absent Family of
Film Noir,” *Woman in Film Noir*, 35-46.

Oct. 24  Women’s noirs continued, Hitchcock and noir

MIDTERM at 6:30 (covering Sept. 12-Oct. 17)

Feature: *Shadow of a Doubt*

Assignment for this week:
- READ Spicer 49-52

II. Three Classic Film Noir Thrillers from 1950:  The Popularity of the Thriller in the 1950s, the Influence of the Semi-Documentary *Film Noir*, Realism and Expressionism, the British *Film Noir*, New Contexts, and Social Themes

Oct. 31  1950s thrillers with professional criminal protagonists, the noir heist film, the influence of the semi-documentary *film noir* on noir style, leftist Hollywood filmmakers and actors, social and legal corruption, capitalism and crime


Clips: *The Naked City* (Jules Dassin, Universal, Mark Hellinger Prod., 1948)

*The Brothers Rico* (Phil Karlson, William Goetz Prod., 1957)

Assignment for this week:
- Spicer, pp. 57-59, 69-73
- SEE EITHER *The Naked City* OR *The Brothers Rico*

Nov. 7  3rd person noir narratives, 1950s thrillers with psychologically-disturbed or criminal protagonists, realism and expressionism,  HUAC and the blacklists, betrayal, capitalism and crime, British noir

FILM QUIZ 3 at 6:30 (covering Oct. 24 and 31)
Feature:  *Night and the City* (Jules Dassin, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1950)  
Clips:  *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, London Film Prod., British Lion Film, 1949)  
Assignment for this week:  
– READ Spicer, Ch. 9  
– EITHER SEE *The Third Man*  
– OR READ ONE OF  
  – Andrew Pulver, *Night and the City* (you don’t have to read all of it)  
  – Glenn Erickson, “Expressionist Doom in *Night and the City*,” *Film Noir Reader*, 203-7.

Nov. 14 The “wrong man” thriller, 1950s thrillers with criminal or psychologically-disturbed protagonists, psychological realism, HUAC and the blacklists, Hollywood *noir*, *noir* romance and betrayal  
Feature:  *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, Santana Pictures, 1950)  
Clips:  *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, Paramount, 1950)  
Assignment for this week:  
– EITHER SEE *Sunset Boulevard*  
– OR READ ONE OF  
  – V. F. Perkins, “*In a Lonely Place,*” *The Book of Film Noir*, 222-31.  
  – J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir*, 189-94.

III. Late Classic *Film Noir* 1953-1960 and Neo-Noir  

Nov. 21 Late Classic film noir: Exaggeration or Simplification of *Noir* Content and Style,  decreasing popularity of *film noir* by the mid-1950s, Postwar Anxiety  
DUE: RESEARCH ESSAY  
Feature:  *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, Universal International Pictures, 1958)  
  *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, United Artists, 1955)  
Assignment for this week:  
– READ Spicer  59-63, 73-74
- EITHER SEE *The Hitch-Hiker* OR *Kiss Me Deadly*
- OR READ
  - Stephen Armstrong, “*Touch of Evil* (1958) and the End of the Noir Cycle,” *Film Noir Reader 4*, 133-43.

Nov. 28    Neo-*noir* in the late 1960s and 1970s, modernist and revisionist neo-*noir*, retro *noir*, colour and widescreen *noir*, capitalism and greed, corruption, and violence; neo-*noir* from the 1980s on, the commodification of neo-*noir*, nostalgia and fragmentation, knowledge and truth
Feature:  *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, Paramount, Long Road Prod., Penthouse, 1974)
Clips:  *Taxi Driver*
Assignment for this week:
  – READ Spicer, Ch. 7 and 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Distribution</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>95-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>85-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>80-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>75-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>65-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>60-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>55-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>less than 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Distribution

I mark essays and exams by letter grade and assign these percentages for calculating final marks.

To pass, students need to have a passing average on the in-class midterm and exam, as well as a passing average overall.

For questions regarding transfer and articulation, please go to the BC-TRANSFERGUIDE, <http://bctransferguide.ca/>