

POLITICS THROUGH FILM

POLS 3012
Summer I, 2023

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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. Many people now turn to video on demand and streaming services to see films as well. While most of us watch 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 of political and social issues as well as government. Throughout this semester, I will ask that you 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? How do the media and their reporting of the news shape society and affect the quality of a democracy? What are the causes and effects of war? What is the “American Dream” and how does capitalism affect the pursuit of that dream? How does the criminal justice system operate, and does it achieve justice? 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

POLS 3012 is a 6-week summer course. Delivery for POLS 3012 will be entirely online. POLS 3012 will be asynchronous. That is, we will not meet as a class at a specific date and time. Instead, I will post my lecture notes (which will often include video and audio segments in the slides) in a Power Point file on Canvas twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday before 2 p.m. Please read through the slides carefully and watch all video material included in the slides. My intent in including the videos is to heighten your interest in the course material and to help you better understand the films that I will require you to watch and analyze. I ask that you review the online class lectures within 48 hours of when I post them. To ensure that you are looking over the lecture slides and viewing the videos, you will have to complete online quizzes that you can access via Canvas. The Course Outline section of this syllabus provides the dates for each quiz, as does the Canvas website for this course.

As an additional part of the course's online instruction, I will offer extra credit if you participate in the course's discussion board on Canvas. I will post a question on the discussion board every Thursday afternoon. The questions should generate critical thinking about the material that I cover in my lectures and the issues covered in the films. Your responses should be thoughtful and, when possible, substantiated with citations (i.e., links to articles or videos from reputable sources). Your post is due no later than the following Monday at 11:59 p.m.

MOVIE SUBSCRIPTION REQUIREMENT

Not every movie that is a part of this course will be available through Joyner Library. To view all the movies in this course, it is your responsibility to sign up for a movie subscription service such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, VUDU, or some other provider. If you decide to use Netflix, the "DVD rental by mail option" will be necessary (although this option will be ending soon). Netflix has only a limited selection of films available through its streaming service.

WARNING

Several of the films 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 contact 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*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2015).

QUIZZES AND EXAMS

As noted above, you will have to complete short online quizzes. There will be a quiz or exam every week that you can complete via Canvas. There are three quizzes in total. Each quiz is worth 15% of your overall course grade. In total, your three quiz grades will account for 45% of your overall course grade. There is a time restriction of one hour on quizzes. That is, once you begin the quiz, you will be timed out after one hour. The mid-term and final exams also will be taken online via Canvas. The exams will include fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions, and an essay question. You may use your readings and notes while taking the exam. Again, there is a time restriction, but for three hours on exams. That is, once you begin the exam, you will be timed out after three hours. The mid-term exam is worth 25% of your overall course grade. Your final exam will follow the same format as the first exam. It is also worth 30% of your overall grade.

OPTIONAL COMPARATIVE FILM PAPER

Instead of taking the final exam, you may opt instead to write a 10-page comparative film paper. Your completed 10-page paper is due on the date of the final exam. No extensions will be granted. If you have not finished your paper by the date of the final exam, then you must take the final exam. Please e-mail the paper to me as a Word or PDF file. Please see pages 6-8 of this syllabus for instructions and specific information about completing this paper assignment.

DISCUSSION BOARD PARTICIPATION

The Canvas discussion board will account for extra credit and will be used for online participation about class topics. Your online extra credit points will be based on the quality of your answers to discussion board questions posted on Canvas. There will be a question for you to answer every week. Your post is due no later than the following Monday at 11:59 p.m. A high-quality response can earn a maximum of 5 extra-credit points. A high-quality response should include supporting materials (i.e., links to articles or videos from reputable sources) to support your observations and main points. I expect your answers to be more than your opinions. A high-quality answer justifies your thoughts and supports your claims with material that you cite.

EVALUATION

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

Discussion board participation = Extra credit

Canvas quizzes = 45% of your final grade (15% for each of the three quizzes).

Mid-term exam = 25% of your overall grade.

You have the option of choosing to write and submit a 10-page comparative film paper or to take a final exam. The paper/final exam = 30% of your final 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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS COURSE

This course is designated as a *General Education* course for the social sciences (GE:SO). Courses in the Social Sciences introduce students to the study of the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of individuals and groups. These courses provide students with the knowledge necessary to solve problems in the Social Sciences and in scholarly fields that apply the methods used in the Social Sciences. They introduce students to the theoretical, analytical, and methodological techniques and perspectives of Social Sciences that advance the understanding of individual and group behavior. Scholarly study in the Social Sciences provides students with the foundation for understanding real-world problems necessary for meaningful participation in society. Courses in the Social Sciences develop the intellectual abilities, knowledge, and skills that students need to become broadly informed, to participate in interdisciplinary scholarship, and to be successful in their professional specialization. *The following program learning outcomes define the Social Science Competency.*

Students who have completed the General Education Social Sciences requirements can:

- (1) Apply discipline specific knowledge in the social sciences to explain the key factors that shape social institutions, structures, and processes that shape human behavior and social interaction.
- (2) Explain how cultural and historical contexts influence individual behavior, society or culture.
- (3) Apply discipline specific theories and modes of inquiry in the social sciences to analyze social contemporary behavioral or cultural issues.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

East Carolina University is committed to fostering a vibrant community of scholars. Academic integrity is a fundamental component of achieving this goal. All ECU students are expected to complete their academic work honestly. I will not tolerate acts of cheating, plagiarism, falsification, multiple submissions, attempting or assisting with an academic integrity violation. If I become aware of a potential academic integrity violation, I will meet with you following the procedures outlined in the Academic Integrity policy. Should I determine that an academic integrity violation has taken place, I reserve the right to assign a grade penalty up to and including an F for the course. A student knowing of circumstances in which an Academic Integrity Violation (AIV) may have occurred (or is likely to occur) should bring this knowledge to my attention. An AIV is defined as any activity that exhibits dishonesty in the educational process or that compromises the academic honor of the university. Examples include, but are not limited, to the following:

Cheating: Unauthorized aid or assistance or the giving or receiving of unfair advantage on any form of academic work.

Plagiarism: Copying the language, structure, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and adopting the same as one's own original work.

Falsification/Fabrication: The statement of any untruth, either spoken or written, regarding any circumstances related to academic work. This includes any untrue statements made with regard to a suspected Academic Integrity Violation.

Multiple Submission: The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work for credit more than once without authorization from the faculty member who receives the later submission.

Violation Assistance: Knowingly helping or attempting to help someone else in an act that constitutes an Academic Integrity Violation.

Violation Attempts: Attempting any act that, if completed, would constitute an Academic Integrity Violation as defined herein.

Information about ECU's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/fsonline/customcf/currentfacultymanual/part6section2.pdf>.

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 Teams or Zoom meetings with me

if you feel it is necessary. If you have specific questions about the course material, I am happy to answer them through e-mail. I am also happy to answer any specific questions concerning academic or career advising through e-mail. My one request to you is to please 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

My office hours will be conducted online. Please schedule a time with me through e-mail to make an appointment. I prefer to use Teams or Zoom for appointments, but if you prefer an alternative such as Skype or Facetime, please let me know.

DISABILITY SERVICES

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138. For additional information, please review ECU's policy on accommodation requests at <https://accessibility.ecu.edu/students/dss-guidelines/#AccommodationRequests> or call 252-737-1016. Additional DSS student resources can be found at <https://accessibility.ecu.edu/students>.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1. Government, Power, and Politics

May 16, 2023. *The Last Hurrah* (1958, John Ford)

May 18, 2023. *The Lives of Others* (2006, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck)

May 19, 2023. Quiz #1 (due on May 22 no later than 11:59 pm)

Week 2. The Media

May 23, 2023. *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005, George Clooney)

May 25, 2023. *Network* (1976, Sidney Lumet)

May 26, 2023. Exam #1 (due on May 30 no later than 11:59 pm)

Week 3. War and Foreign Policy

May 30, 2023. *WarGames* (1983, John Badham)

June 1, 2023. *The Hurt Locker* (2009, Kathryn Bigelow)

June 2, 2023. Quiz #2 (due on June 5 no later than 11:59 pm)

Week 4. Capitalism and Labor

June 6, 2023. *Wall Street* (1987, Oliver Stone)/**PAPER TOPIC SUMMARY DUE**

June 8, 2023. *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006, Gabriele Muccino)

June 9, 2023. Quiz #3 (due on June 12 no later than 11:59 pm)

Week 5. The Criminal Justice System

June 13, 2023. *12 Angry Men* (1957, Sidney Lumet)

June 15, 2023. *Dead Man Walking* (1995, Tim Robbins)

June 16, 2023. Exam #2/optional paper (due on June 20 no later than 11:59 pm)

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 government, politics, the media, war, economics, labor, and criminal justice. 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. 7-8). 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* (2nd ed.) for this assignment.

There are two deadlines for this assignment. The first deadline is June 6. By this date, you must e-mail me a one-page summary of your paper topic for approval. Your final paper is due on June 20.

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: imdb.com; metacritic.com; rottentomatoes.com; and rogerebert.com. Major newspapers, such as The New York Times, are another excellent resource for movie reviews.

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://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual>. It is also available on Canvas.

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 contact me for approval.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1930, Lewis Milestone)
I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932, Mervyn LeRoy)
Gabriel Over the White House (1933, Gregory La Cava)
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939, Frank Capra)
The Grapes of Wrath (1940, John Ford)
Citizen Kane (1941, Orson Welles)
Meet John Doe (1941, Frank Capra)
State of the Union (1948, Frank Capra)
All the King's Men (1949, Robert Rossen)
The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951, Robert Wise)
The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957, David Lean)
Spartacus (1960, Stanley Kubrick)
Advise and Consent (1962, Otto Preminger)
The Manchurian Candidate (1962, John Frankenheimer)
To Kill a Mockingbird (1962, Robert Mulligan)
The Best Man (1964, Franklin Schaffner)
Dr. Strangelove (1964, Stanley Kubrick)
Seven Days in May (1964, John Frankenheimer)
Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967, Stanley Kramer)
In the Heat of the Night (1967, Norman Jewison)
Planet of the Apes (1968, Franklin Schaffner)
Easy Rider (1969, Dennis Hopper)
Catch-22 (1970, Mike Nichols)
Patton (1970, Franklin Schaffner)
The Candidate (1972, Michael Ritchie)
All the President's Men (1976, Alan Pakula)
F.I.S.T. (1978, Norman Jewison)
Norma Rae (1979, Martin Ritt)
An Unmarried Woman (1978, Paul Mazursky)
Apocalypse Now (1979, Francis Ford Coppola)
The Deer Hunter (1979, Michael Cimino)
Kramer vs. Kramer (1979, Robert Benton)
Gandhi (1982, Richard Attenborough)
Red Dawn (1984, John Milius)
Platoon (1986, Oliver Stone)
Full Metal Jacket (1987, Stanley Kubrick)
Matewan (1987, John Sayles)
Mississippi Burning (1988, Alan Parker)

FILM ADDENDUM (continued)

Born on the Fourth of July (1989, Oliver Stone)
Do the Right Thing (1989, Spike Lee)
The Hunt for Red October (1990, John McTiernan)
Boyz N the Hood (1991, John Singleton)
Malcolm X (1992, Spike Lee)
Dave (1993, Ivan Reitman)
Philadelphia (1993, Jonathan Demme)
Schindler's List (1993, Steven Spielberg)
The Shawshank Redemption (1994, Frank Darabont)
The American President (1995, Rob Reiner)
Braveheart (1995, Mel Gibson)
Nixon (1995, Oliver Stone)
Mars Attacks! (1996, Tim Burton)
The People v. Larry Flynt (1996, Milos Forman)
Amistad (1997, Steven Spielberg)
Wag the Dog (1997, Barry Levinson)
Bulworth (1998, Warren Beatty)
Les Miserables (1998, Billie August)
Primary Colors (1998, Mike Nichols)
Saving Private Ryan (1998, Steven Spielberg)
The Contender (2000, Rob Lurie)
The Patriot (2000, Roland Emmerich)
Thirteen Days (2000, Roger Donaldson)
Black Hawk Down (2001, Ridely Scott)
Thank You for Smoking (2005, Jason Reitman)
V for Vendetta (2005, James McTeigue)
Charlie Wilson's War (2007, Mike Nichols)
W. (2008, Oliver Stone)
Frost/Nixon (2008, Ron Howard)
Milk (2008, Gus Van Sant)
The Company Men (2010, John Wells)
The Ides of March (2011, George Clooney)
Lincoln (2012, Steven Spielberg)
Zero Dark Thirty (2012, Kathryn Bigelow)
12 Years a Slave (2013, Steve McQueen)
American Sniper (2014, Clint Eastwood)
Selma (2014, Ava DuVernay)
The Big Short (2015, Adam McKay)
Moonlight (2016, Barry Jenkins)
Sand Castle (2017, Fernando Coimbra)
The Post (2017, Steven Spielberg)
Vice (2018, Adam McKay)