

Course Syllabus
CST 555: Relational Communication and the Hollywood Feature Film
Spring 2008
Thursday 5:30-9:20 pm
Ferguson 100

GRADUATE SYLLABUS

This semester, we will follow a thematic approach to our study of relational communication and film. Our semester theme: *Mythic Journeys*.

Structure: Course meets one evening/week for 4 hours for lecture, screening, and discussion; additional discussion threads will be conducted via the Blackboard system.

Course Prerequisites: Upper Division or Graduate Standing

Instructor:

Dr. Chris Poulos

Office: Ferguson Building # 107

Office Hours: Thursday 4:00-5:20 and by appointment

Contact: cnpoulos@uncg.edu; 336.686.2514 (office); 336.316.1010 (home)

Communication Studies Department Mission:

We research, teach, and practice communication to cultivate the ethical voices of people that speak in critical, constructive, and transformative ways to identities, relationships, and communities.

Philosophy of Scholarship: We believe that communication is formative and foundational to human identities, relationships, and communities--and that ethical and strategically effective communication can be the means of critiquing, constructing, and transforming identities, relationships, and communities. We engage in communication scholarship in the form of research, teaching, and service that:

- Integrates dialogue and other approaches to communication as the foundation for scholarly inquiry and application to the world
- Cultivates diversity and respect for differences
- Promotes change that leads to more democratic, just, and peaceful relationships and communities
- Engages creative partnerships of faculty, students, and other stakeholders in addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities for improving communication

Course Purpose/Catalog Description: Course emphasizes analysis and application of the images, discourses, and practices concerning human communication and relationships

as they are represented in the powerful cultural medium of film.

Detailed Course Description: One of the most powerful influences on the conduct of our everyday social lives is popular culture; particularly prominent in this regard is the Hollywood feature film. Hollywood's entrees serve a dual function of holding a mirror before us, reflecting our identities, and of shaping how we think about and therefore enact our various identities within the larger culture. These identity reflecting and shaping functions of film have a profound effect upon how we relate to one another. In this course, we will explore theory and research relevant to relational communication, as shaped and reflected in Hollywood feature films. Our primary purpose will be to mount a critical study of our shared cultural understandings of relational communication as they are developed, reflected, represented, and constructed in film. In our quest, we will discuss issues such as: the social construction of selfhood; power; communication and meaning; the development of friendship, love, and intimacy; storytelling and dialogue; relational dialectics; gender and communication; the ethical dimensions of relationships; types and levels of relationships; heroism, villainy, and violence; conflict; intercultural communication and diversity; building community; and the visions of Hollywood and Madison Avenue as they relate to self-and-other identity, authenticity, orientation, and recognition.

Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:

You will:

- 1) Employ, in conversation and in writing, an extensive vocabulary of terms related to the study of relational communication and film;
- 2) Demonstrate a richer understanding of the theoretical frameworks used by scholars to assess relational communication and film;
- 3) Demonstrate a grasp of the importance of relational communication and of the impacts of film in everyday life;
- 4) Demonstrate, in conversation and in writing, an understanding of both the reflecting and shaping functions of Hollywood feature films, with a particular focus on questions related to identity and relational communication;
- 5) Discuss the relationships between communication and cultures, especially the ways in which communication serves to shape cultures;
- 6) Speak and write intelligently about relational communication and film, with a special focus on the connections between communication and:
 - a) the coordinated management of meaning;
 - b) the construction and development of the self (identity, etc.);
 - c) the understanding of the Other;
 - d) the development, depth, and quality of various kinds of relationships;
 - e) the meaning and practices of family;
 - f) the contours and dialectics of friendship;
 - g) love & intimacy;
 - h) conflict;
 - i) the employment of violence;
 - j) the social construction of power;
 - k) dialogue and conversation;
 - l) consciousness and reflexivity;

- m) memory and synchronicity;
 - n) narrative structure, story, and storytelling;
 - o) culture; and
 - p) the social construction of gender.
- 7) Demonstrate a clear understanding of the relationships between film and the social construction of culture; and
- 8) Demonstrate competence at using the resources of the World Wide Web and the library.

Teaching Strategies: This course will be taught via a combination of methods, including lectures, film screenings, class discussions, small group exercises, student presentations, writing exercises, and partner dialogues.

Attendance: This is a screening and discussion-driven class, so your active attendance and participation is vital to our success. ***THEREFORE, ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. WE ONLY MEET 15 TIMES DURING THE SEMESTER! EACH MISSED CLASS PERIOD BEYOND ONE (OTHER THAN ABSENCES EXCUSED BY ME IN ADVANCE) CONSTITUTES A 50-POINT FINAL GRADE REDUCTION. DO THE MATH!***

Participation: Notice that **20% (200 points)** of your grade total is for participation. Active participation in dialogue is a primary learning process in the department of communication. I expect you to participate actively in class discussions. Speak up! Offer your insights, ideas, conjectures, critical evaluations, responses to questions, and so on, as we engage in discussion. Offer relevant examples from daily life, the media, the arts, etc., to illuminate discussion; bring in items (articles, newspaper clippings, video clips, exercises, etc.) to spur discussion; think and respond actively and creatively. By attending class regularly and actively participating, you will not only be better prepared for your writing assignments and for successful completion of this course, you will also help make this course a more valuable and enriching experience for us all!

Academic Integrity <http://deanofstudents.uncg.edu> and <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/#one>

“Academic integrity is founded upon and encompasses the following five values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Supporting and affirming these values is essential to promoting and maintaining a high level of academic integrity. Each member of the academic community must stand accountable for his or her actions. As a result, a community develops in which students learn the responsibilities of citizenship and how to contribute honorably to their professions.”

There is more! Read and acquaint yourself with the student code of conduct and the university’s academic integrity policy. It is your responsibility to know and abide by the academic integrity policy of this university. **Note: If you are wondering, or have further questions about academic integrity, see me or read the entire Academic Integrity web page.**

Disability:

If you have a disability or special need, which I should be aware of or for which special accommodations need to be made, please see me privately during my office hours (or make an appointment).

Evaluation Methods and Guidelines for Assignments:

General: Students will write four essays and develop a final creative project. Evaluation will be based upon the quality of the essays, the final project, and in-class and Blackboard-based discussion participation.

CLICK THE “COURSE DOCUMENTS” LINK ON BLACKBOARD AND READ THE COURSE SUCCESS GUIDE, WHICH GIVES COMPLETE INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS! Below are some general guidelines regarding the way your progress and performance will be evaluated.

Study: Reserve plenty of time outside of class to conduct your independent work (writing, re-writing, reading, re-reading, developing questions, working on course projects, etc.). Learning is a process, not an event. Work hard, and you will reap great rewards!
Everything worthwhile requires effort...

Reading: Reading for this course will be central to the conduct of class discussions. We will discuss the readings in class, so reading assignments are to be completed **prior** to the day for which they are listed. For example, before coming to class on Day 2, read the selections from Berger, Wallace, and Corrigan. Bring the reading/text/book to class with you on the day we will discuss it...

Writing/Research:

- You will write **2 critical reflection essays (100 points each)** that offer you an opportunity to demonstrate critical judgment concerning the themes of our course and the films and readings related to those themes. **Note: There are three due dates listed on the syllabus for these essays. You will choose two of these opportunities, based upon your preferences and your schedule.** See course success guide for instructions.
- Twice during the semester, you will see films outside of class. For these, you will write a movie review (in the style of a newspaper film critic). See course success guide for instructions.
- Graduate students will write a brief reflection essay at the end of the semester, focusing attention on pedagogical and research implications of involvement in this course, as a way to look to your academic future and integrate key learning into that enterprise.
- You will also develop a final **research/creative project**. This project will require you to develop a critical assessment and creative extension/interpretation of one of the problems or issues we will be facing in this course or of a related problem, issue, or theme, and to use films as primary text(s) under examination/exploration. See course success guide for instructions.
- **SEE COURSE SCHEDULE FOR DUE DATES.**

Skillful discussion/dialogue: This is a course that requires your active engagement in ongoing, lively conversation about film and relationships. We will actively employ small and large group discussion and dialogue processes, practices, and exercises on a weekly basis. For this teaching methodology to succeed, your active and skillful participation will be necessary. For each film, a viewing guide will be handed out in class and used to spark discussion. Additionally, each week, you will participate in a **critical/reflective discussion thread on the Blackboard system**. This discussion is designed to supplement our in-class discussion of the week's film. I will raise a question for your consideration, and offer you the opportunity to respond. You will also have the opportunity in this forum to raise your own questions for discussion, offer an insight relevant to our current topic/theme/film, or develop your own interpretation or application of a theme, principle, practice, or theory we are examining in class.

Teaching/Facilitation: As a graduate student in a mixed upper-division undergraduate/graduate course, you are expected to take a leadership role and to set a strong example for participation. Weekly, you will facilitate a small group post-screening discussion related to the film we've viewed. I will also ask you to either conduct a setup lecture prior to a film screening, or to facilitate a large (full class) discussion session following one of our films. You will also develop and distribute a viewing guide for that evening's film. We will meet briefly at the end of the first class session to set up a calendar for these teaching events. I will model these processes during the first couple of weeks of class.

Grading/Evaluation:

Assignment	Points
Critical Reflection Essay 1	100
Critical Reflection Essay 2	100
Movie Review #1	75
Movie Review #2	75
Final Creative/Research Project	150
In-class Teaching/Facilitation	100
Graduate Pedagogical/Research reflection	100
Blackboard Participation	100
In-class participation	200
Total	1000

Scale:

930-1000 = A 900-929 = A- 870-899 = B+ 830-869 = B
 800-829 = B- 770-799 = C+ 730-769 = C 700-729 = C-

Important guidelines to remember:

1. **Show up, prepared! Attendance and participation are central to learning in this class! Be prepared. The readings are designed to engage your attention and passion. We view our films together, as a community.**
2. **Do NOT email me your papers. If I printed every paper from every student in every class, I would spend over 3000 minutes per semester just printing them,**

not to mention paying for ink and paper, and all the glitches that can occur in cyberspace. Bring them when due in hard (paper) copy form!

Required Texts

- Corrigan, T. (2001). *A short guide to writing about film*, Fifth Edition. New York: Longman.
- Various readings on e-reserves

TOPICAL OUTLINE/COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: STORIED/MYTHIC JOURNEYS

WEEK 1 (JANUARY 17): CINEMA AND STORY

Conceptual Frames: Moviemakers as storytellers; the contours of visual storytelling; the structure of cinematic texts/narratives.

Film: *Visions of Light* + various clips

Exercise: Group formation

After class: Brief meeting of graduate students for planning!

WEEK 2 (JANUARY 24): STORYTELLING AND MEANING

Conceptual Frames: The power of story and the nexus of meaning...

Film: *Big Fish*

Read: Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, Ch.1 & Glossary of Film Terms (pp. 173-177) + (e-reserves) Berger, A. Chapter 1: *The Nature of Narratives (1)* & Wallace, D. *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* (selections)

WEEK 3 (JANUARY 31): REFLEXIVE STORYTELLING, AGENCY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Conceptual Frames: Story and Reflexivity and Freedom

Film: *Pleasantville*

Read: (e-reserves) Giddens, A. *Ontological Security and Existential Anxiety*; Giannetti, L. *Understanding Movies* (Ch. 1: Photography)

WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 7): JOURNEY TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE SELF (AWAKENINGS)

Conceptual Frame: Self-Knowledge and Writing the Self

Film: *Stranger Than Fiction*

Read: (e-reserves) Berger, A. Chapter 2: *Theorists of Narrativity* + Corrigan, Ch. 2.

DUE MONDAY FEBRUARY 11, 4 PM, FERGUSON 103, CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAY #1*



UNIT 2: (MYTHIC) ADVENTURES IN FRIENDSHIP

WEEK 5 (FEBRUARY 14): FRIENDSHIP AS ADVENTURE

Conceptual Frame: Relational Dialectics in childhood and adolescence; the call of adventure...

Film: *Stand by Me*

- Read: (e-reserves) Rawlins, W. *Friendship Matters*, Chapters 1& 2: *A dialectical perspective* (1) & *Childhood Friendships* (2) + Corrigan, Ch. 3

WEEK 6 (FEBRUARY 21): FESTIVAL TIME!

A LITTLE "INTERMISSION": THE CAROLINA FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL (with lively discussion of current festival offerings!)...THE FESTIVAL RUNS February 20-23, 2008 at the Elliott University Center - UNCG Campus

DUE: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 4 PM, FERGUSON 103: MOVIE REVIEW #1

WEEK 7 (FEBRUARY 28): WOMANHOOD, FRIENDSHIP, AND DEVIATION

Conceptual Frames: The contours of adult friendship; friendship as adventure; forms of intimacy; the "outlaw" as friend and as foe...

Film: *Thelma & Louise*

Read: (e-reserves) Cooper, B. *Chick Flicks as Feminist Texts* + (e-reserves) Rawlins, W. *Adult Friendships* + Corrigan, Ch. 4

WEEK 8 (MARCH 6): FRIENDSHIP AND FREEDOM

Conceptual Frames: Making connections; the enduring bonds of friendship; the dialectic of control


Film: *The Shawshank Redemption*

Read: (e-reserves) Giddens, A. *The Constitution of Society* (selections + Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish* (selections) + Corrigan, Ch. 5

DUE: FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 4 PM, FERGUSON 103, CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAY #2*



<<MARCH 10-14: SPRING BREAK!!! TAKE YOUR OWN MYTHIC JOURNEY!!! >>



UNIT 3: MEMORY, MYTH, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

WEEK 9 (MARCH 20): IMAGINING A WORLD: MYTH, MEMORY, ADVENTURE, or FRIENDS AND FOES, DEMONS AND HELPERS...

Conceptual Frames: Myth and the Hero's Journey; Living a storied life...

Film: *Oh, Brother, Where art Thou?*

Read: (e-reserves) May, R. *The Cry for Myth* (selections); Eliade, M. *The Structure of Myths and Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting* (selections); Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XII (e-reserves or: <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.12.xii.html>)

WEEK 10 (MARCH 27): ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Conceptual frames: The life giving gift of acknowledgement; family secrets/family shadows

Film: *Ordinary People*

Read: (e-reserves) Hyde, M.J. *The Life-Giving Gift of Acknowledgement* (selections); Poulos, C. *Narrative Conscience and the Autoethnographic Adventure*

WEEK 11 (APRIL 3): A NIGHT AT THE LOCAL CINEMA (YOUR CHOICE)

DUE: MONDAY, APRIL 7, 4 PM, FERGUSON 103: MOVIE REVIEW #2

WEEK 12 (APRIL 10): THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Conceptual frames: Consciousness and (in)sanity

Film: *A Beautiful Mind*

Read: (e-reserves) Jung, C.G. *On the psychogenesis of schizophrenia*; Schrag, C. *The self in community*

WEEK 13 (APRIL 17): SYNCHRONICITY, CONVERSATION, AND MEANING

Conceptual Frames: Ethics, Actions, and Synchronicities...

Film: *Thirteen Conversations about One Thing*

Read: (e-reserves) Burkitt, I. *Relational Moves and Generative Dances*; Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*

DUE: MONDAY, APRIL 21, FERGUSON 103, CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAY #3*

WEEK 14 (APRIL 24): VISION-RELATION AND THE SOUL OF A NATION

Conceptual frames: Imagining the "who" of "my people"; The circle of connection; memory and the living story...

Film: *Thunderheart*

Read: (e-reserves) Burgoyne, R. *Native America, Thunderheart, and the National Imaginary*; Neihardt, J. *Black Elk Speaks* (selections); + Corrigan, Ch. 6

WEEK 15 (MAY 1): LAST NIGHT OF CLASS (STUDENT CHOICE FILM!)

DUE: (IN CLASS) FINAL RESEARCH/CREATIVE PROJECT

Links of interest:

- The Carolina Video and Film Festival: <http://www.carolinafilmandvideofestival.org/>
- The UNCG Communication Studies Department web site: <http://www.uncg.edu/cst>
- The UNCG Broadcasting and Cinema Department web site: <http://www.uncg.edu/bcn>
- The Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com>
- Leonard Maltin's web site: <http://www.leonardmaltin.com/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com>
- Ebert & Roeper: <http://tvplex.go.com/buenavista/ebertandroeper/today.html>

- Women and Film: <http://www.bama.ua.edu/~mbarrett/filmwsslinks.html>
- Reel Movie Critic: <http://www.reelmoviecritic.com/id358.htm>
- Net film: <http://www.inetfilm.com/resources/ressites.html>
- Commentary on Wounded Knee: <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/knee.htm>
- The Ghost Dance:
<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/woundedknee/WKghost.html>
- Carolina Theater: <http://www.carolinatheatre.com/>
- Greensboro Cinema Guild: <http://greensborocinema.org/>
- Go Triad (includes movie listings): www.gotriad.com
- [MovieTickets.com](http://www.MovieTickets.com)
- Mr. Movie Times: <http://www.mrmovietimes.com/>
- Netflix: <http://www.netflix.com/>

*** CHOOSE TWO OF THE THREE DUE DATES FOR CRITICAL REF. ESSAYS.**