

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

Film 3366F (Section 001)¹
Film Noir and the Crime Genre
Fall 2023

SYLLABUS NAVIGATION

[Course Materials \(films and readings\)](#)

[Attendance & Late Policy](#)

[Intellectual Property/Copyright](#)

[Academic Offenses \(Plagiarism\)](#)

[Assignments Overview](#)

[Methods of Evaluation](#)

[A Word on Course Content and Language](#)

[Accommodation & Accessibility Policies](#)

[Need Help? Student Supports & Resources](#)

[Land Acknowledgment](#)

Calendar Description

This course examines the narrative and aesthetic innovations of film noir in relation to its literary origins and cinematic influences. Tending to key figures such as the hard-boiled detective and the femme fatale, the course will chart the development and revision of noir from WWII to the present.

Course Description

Film noir emerged as an identifiable phenomenon in the United States in the 1940s and continues to influence contemporary culture. This course challenges students to consider film noir and its historical and cultural contexts, considering the way it both emerges from and shapes aesthetic and social visions. We will consider its distinctive representations of crime, the law, racial issues, ideas about masculinity and femininity, the impact of American consumer culture. While “noir” is one of the most widely applied descriptions of film style, it is also one of the most notoriously contentious filmic categories: is it a genre, a period, an aesthetic, a mood, a psychology, a philosophy, an associated set of themes, icons, character types, and/or narrative conventions? In this course, we will explore film noir from a variety of critical lenses, considering both classical exemplars and revisionary approaches to noir.

General Objectives²

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Understand film noir in terms of style, genre, themes, icons, and narrative conventions.
- Understand the development of film noir in its historical, industrial, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions.
- Advanced research in film studies.
- Advance critical analyses, including integration of scholarly resources.
- Advanced presentation and oral communication skills.

¹ Prerequisites: At least 60% in Film Studies 1020E or Film Studies 1022 or permission of the Department. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

² Detailed objectives at end of syllabus.

Course Materials

Links to film streaming sources and critical readings are in the Schedule of Films and Readings in the Syllabus folder in OWL.

Methods of Evaluation³

| ASSIGNMENT | VALUE | LENGTH/FORMAT | DUE DATE |
|---------------------|-------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| OWL scavenger hunt | 1% | (bonus mark) | Fri. Sept. 15, 2023 |
| Selfie Noir | 5% | 500 words + image(s) | Fri. Sept. 22, 2023 |
| Sequence Analysis | 10% | 40 mins. (in class) | Wed. Oct. 25 2023 |
| Neo-Noir Assignment | 25% | See below | Wed. Nov. 15 th 2023 |
| Comparative Essay | 25% | 1500 words | Wed. Dec. 6 th 2023 |
| Final Exam | 30% | 2 hours | TBA |
| Participation | 5% | See below | |

Attendance Policy: Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades.

Late Policy: Assignments submitted late will be deducted at a rate of 2% per day late.

A Word on Course Content and Language

The content of this course will engage with powerful and potentially upsetting representations of violence, race, and sex. I will do my best to alert you in advance to particularly difficult moments, and steer you through a discussion of these issues with sensitivity, respect, and care. Students who anticipate discomfort while screening/discussing particular issues or imagery should prepare themselves by looking up information on the content of films in advance of viewing them (eg., on IMDB). While it may be employed in the dialogue of films we discuss, the use of [derogatory, racist, sexist language](#) will not be tolerated in this class.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation & Accessibility Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or

³ Students are fully responsible for being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>

more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Religious Accommodation: Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism includes the use of any material generated by artificial intelligence programs or large language models (LLMs) such as [ChatGPT](#), with the exception of those instances where they form part of the assignment instructions.

Plagiarism Checking: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Supports & Resources

[Registrarial Services](#)

[Student Support Services](#)

[Services provided by the USC](#)

[Academic Support & Engagement](#)

Students who are [in emotional/mental distress](#) should refer to [MentalHealth@Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past, you will find information about [support services for survivors](#), including emergency contacts.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca or call 519-661-3568.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

| | | |
|--|---|------------------|
| OWL Scavenger Hunt | Due in class or by Sept. 15 th | Value 1% (bonus) |
| <p>Find the four easter egg links in the following locations in the syllabus. Email a description of each image to mjones@uwo.ca using the header “Scavenger.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where the breakdown of grades is listed... 2. Resources if you find yourself in distress... 3. Policies on the use of ChatGPT... 4. Offensive language in films vs. in class... | | |
| Selfie Noir | Due Friday, September 22 nd | Value 5% |
| <p>Read Place & Peterson’s essay “Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir” (in OWL Resources folder). Take a cell phone photo of yourself (or 30 second video, if you prefer). Write a short paragraph (500 words) under the heading Commentary, identifying and explaining the formal features of your image that are suggestive of film noir style. In the same document, under the heading Biography (max. 250 words), introduce yourself, including the Film courses you have taken and your interest in Film. The second section won’t be marked.</p> | | |
| Sequence Analysis | October 25 th | Value 10% |
| <p>This is a short analysis of a film sequence taken from one of the films on the course and posted on OWL on October 18th. Detailed instructions are available on OWL in the Assignments folder.</p> | | |
| Neo-Noir Assignment | Due November 15 th | Value 25% |
| <p>This assignment allows you to consider the ways in which noir style has been elaborated in recent culture. It will develop your presentation skills. For this assignment, you will choose a recent (post 2020) film, television series, novel, computer game, fashion line, or advertisement. You will complete a 5-minute narrated PowerPoint on the text you have chosen, demonstrating how it exemplifies “the persistence of noir” in contemporary culture and reflecting on how noir influences impact on its meaning. You should also consider its innovations to and/or reactions against conventional noir characteristics. For the last day of classes, students will screen the presentations before class and we will use them as a way of reviewing the course material and ideas developed out of it. Detailed instructions for this assignment are available on OWL in the Assignments folder. You may choose to collaborate with up to two other students on this assignment, in which case you should get approval from the instructor for the collaboration and negotiate a fair length.</p> | | |
| Essay | Due December 6 th | Value 25% |
| <p>This is a short comparative essay of 1,500 words on a topic developed in consultation with the instructor or from a list of suggested themes included in the Assignments folder in OWL.</p> | | |
| Participation | Weekly | Value 5% |
| <p>This grade is based on your active engagement and participation in the class: asking questions, offering contributions, responding to and supporting the views of others, submitting questions via email etc.</p> | | |
| Final Exam | Date TBA | Value 30% |
| <p>The final exam will help evaluate your knowledge of films on the course and your understanding of key terms, concepts, and contextual information discussed in class.</p> | | |

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The spaces where we teach and learn at Western are located on traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations. The land continues to be enriched by the presence of diverse Indigenous peoples. Making this acknowledgement is meant to inspire action and commitment towards furthering relationships with Indigenous communities here and elsewhere.

SCHEDULE OF FILMS AND READINGS 2023-2024

| WEEK | DATE | YEAR | FILM TITLE | DIRECTOR | ACCESS | READINGS | ASSIGNMENTS | |
|------|----------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|---|--|
| 1 | Sept. 13 | 1941 | <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> | Houston | Criterion | Naremore, "American Film Noir The History of an Idea" and Place & Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir" | Scavenger hunt | |
| 2 | Sept. 20 | 1944 | <i>Double Indemnity</i> | Wilder | Internet Archive | Tasker, "Women in Film Noir" | Selfie Noir (Friday, Sept. 18 th) | |
| 3 | Sept. 27 | 1947 | <i>Out of the Past</i> | Tourneur | McIntyre Media | Hollinger, "Film Noir, Voice-Over, and the Femme Fatale" | | |
| 4 | Oct. 4 | 1953 1945 | <i>The Hitch-Hiker Detour</i> | Lupino Ulmer | Internet Archive McIntyre Media | Naremore, "Low is High: Budgets and Critical Discrimination" | | |
| 5 | Oct. 11 | 1947 | <i>Nightmare Alley</i> | Goulding | Criterion | Krutnik, "'Film noir and the popularization of psychoanalysis" | | |
| 6 | Oct. 18 | 1974 | <i>Chinatown</i> | Polanski | Criterion | Cawelti, " <i>Chinatown</i> and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films" | | |
| 7 | Oct. 25 | 1981 | <i>Body Heat</i> | Kasdan | McIntyre Media | Lipiner & Maurer "Looks that kill: Double Indemnity reimagined in postmodern neo-noir and television" | Sequence Analysis (in class) | |
| | Nov. 1 | FALL READING WEEK | | | | | | |
| 8 | Nov. 8 | 1995 | <i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> | Franklin | McIntyre Media | Nieland, "Race-ing Noir and re-placing history: the mulatta and memory in <i>One False Move</i> and <i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> " | | |
| 9 | Nov. 15 | 1996 | <i>Bound</i> | Wachowskis | McIntyre Media | Straayer, "Femme Fatale or Lesbian Femme: <i>Bound</i> in Sexual Différance" | Neo-noir Assignment | |
| 10 | Nov. 22 | 2000 | <i>Memento</i> | Nolan | McIntyre Media | Ghislotti, "Narrative Comprehension Made Difficult: Film Form and Mnemonic Devices in <i>Memento</i> " | | |
| 11 | Nov. 29 | 2005 | <i>Brick</i> | Johnson | McIntyre Media | Vermeulen, "Teen Noir: The Suburb as Lived Space" | | |
| 12 | Dec. 6 | Post-2020 | Neo-Noir discussion and exam review | | | | Essay | |