FILM TV 84A – Overview of Contemporary Film Industry (4 units)

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SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Class Website

Session A: https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/171A-FILMTV84A-1
Session C: https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/171C-FILMTV84A-3

Objectives

This six-week online course provides an overview of the contemporary Hollywood film industry, examining its changing economic and business structures.

Through a close examination of the current management teams and industry practices governing the development, production, marketing and distribution of media product, the course considers how the emphasis on easily marketed film blockbusters since the 80s and 90s has spawned a corporate Hollywood increasingly focused on the bottom line of profits. The corporate by-product of theatrical releases such as Batman or Spider-man, for instance, have spawned sequels, spin-offs in other media, interactive gaming, licensing and merchandising agreements, theme parks, and other strategic corporate tie-ins with non-entertainment companies. The course will also closely examine several distinctive, but still commercial films (e.g., Seven, American Beauty, etc.) to determine if they represent significant departures from the classical Hollywood tradition in terms of narrative structure, genre and the star system.

How Class Works

Students watch bi-weekly lectures via web browser or podcast download. Reading assignments and articles accompany each lecture. There is a short report, a weekly reading quiz, a final paper, and graded participation on the Discussion Board.

Readings


Book and reader are available for purchase at the UCLA Bookstore—either on campus or online (http://shop.uclastore.com/t-textbooks_homepage.aspx). The book is also available at stores and from online booksellers such as Amazon.com. A digital version of the course reader is available for purchase and download via Redshelf.com: https://ucla.redshelf.com. Search for Film 184A.

Screenings

Students are expected to watch at least one film in a blockbuster franchise: Batman, The Matrix, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Spider-man, etc.

Required films can be streamed at low resolution from the Class Website. Films chosen for assignments or papers should be viewed at full quality on DVD or via web services such as iTunes or Netflix.

Assignments

1 – Weekly Reading Quizzes
Each week you will write short answer responses (between 100 and 200 words each in length) to questions about that week’s readings. Your answers should demonstrate your understanding of the course material by including specific references to the readings in question. Your responses should be revised for proper grammar, punctuation, and usage, and include correct spellings of company and individual’s names. These quizzes will be submitted at the end of each week before Sunday at 11:59PM PST through Turnitin.

2 – Midterm Coverage Report
Read a screenplay of your choice from a film that was released by a major studio within the last three years. Write a two to three-page, single-spaced coverage report on that screenplay, including one to two pages of synopsis and one page of comments. Consider the following categories when evaluating the screenplay:

- Quality of Writing: Is it well written and structured?
- Premise: What is it about? Is the story fresh and new?
- Appeal: Who will want to see it? What are the key demographics?
- Conflict: What’s the hero’s central conflict? When is it introduced?
- Characters: Does the main character have an arc? Are the roles well defined?
- Dialogue: Does it evoke emotion? Does each character speak in a unique voice?

3 – Final Paper
SSA: Write an 8-10 page, double spaced, typed, case study, research-driven report that analyzes how a studio’s marketing, merchandising & licensing, and various distribution outlets are mobilized during the release of a major tent-pole release THAT BEGAN AS A YOUNG ADULT (YA) NOVEL AND WAS RELEASED IN THEATERS IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS (e.g. HUNGER GAMES, DIVERGENT, TWILIGHT, HARRY POTTER, GOOSEBUMPS) to create a “brand” both domestically and internationally in today’s corporate Hollywood. You may not choose one of the films that was used as a case study in your section’s discussion board.
SSC: Write an 8-10 page, double spaced, typed, case study, research-driven report that analyzes how a studio’s marketing, merchandising & licensing, and various distribution outlets are mobilized during the release of a major tent-pole ANIMATED release THAT TARGETS A FAMILY AUDIENCE (KIDS & ADULTS) AND WAS RELEASED IN THEATERS IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS (e.g. INSIDE OUT, ZOOTOPIA, MINIONS, FROZEN, ETC.) to create a “brand” both domestically and internationally in today’s corporate Hollywood. You may not choose one of the films that was used as a case study in your section’s discussion board.

Your analysis of this tent-pole release should demonstrate your understanding of the concept of conglomerates and conglomerations and the way your film functioned as a transmedia text within them. If your film’s studio is a part of a conglomerate, you should consider the conglomerate’s holdings; the relative autonomy of your studio within its conglomerate; whether your studio is the conglomerate’s money maker or loss leader; and whether the other holdings of the conglomerate primarily provide material that your studio utilizes or vice versa. If your studio is not a part of a conglomerate, you should consider whether or not that is a benefit or a hindrance to their success; if they were in the past, why they are no longer; how do they continue to function in an industry increasingly dominated by conglomerates.

You must use at least five reputable sources for your research. Those sources include industry trades like Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, and Deadline Hollywood, as well as newspapers like The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times. Do not rely on sources such as Wikipedia or fan sites.

Your paper must have an original and argumentative thesis statement, which should be underlined. The content of your paper should all then be in service of your thesis statement. Do not simply repeat information provided in class readings, lectures, or the discussion board. Your writing should be well organized, thorough, and concise.

Your paper should be formatted according to MLA format using endnotes and a bibliography, or in-text citations with a work cited page. You should use Times New Roman 12 point font, with 1” margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs, etc.

PAPERS MUST BE SUBMITTED VIA TURNITIN AT THE UPLOAD LINK IN THE CLASS WEBSITE. THEY CANNOT BE EMAILED DIRECTLY TO YOUR TA. Please make sure you receive a submission receipt when you upload your paper to Turnitin. If you do not receive a confirmation, your submission was not successful. It is your responsibility to make sure your paper was uploaded successfully. Papers that are not uploaded successfully will be treated as late. Please contact your Teaching Assistant if you have any questions.

Grade Breakdown

Your final grade is calculated on a point scale, as follows:
25% - Participation (Discussion Board)
25% - Weekly Reading Quizzes
20% - Midterm: Screenplay Coverage Report (due week 3)
30% - Final Paper (due week 6)
Late Policy

Late assignments will be docked by half a letter grade each day they are late.

Discussion Board

The Participation grade is based on contributions to the Discussion Board. Your TA is both moderator and active contributor, but the exchange of ideas on the Discussion Board is between you and your classmates. While there may be some overlap in responses, try to be original in your arguments and observations, and do not simply repeat what everyone before you has said.

Weekly Discussion Board Questions

Your instructor posts 2 questions on the Discussion Board every Monday. You must answer both questions. One initial post of 250-300 words to each discussion board question and two follow up posts of 75-100 words are the minimum required per week for full participation credit.

Guidelines for Posting

These are not Discussion Board posts as you know them. They are mini-essays.

Properly written English is required. You must make an argument and support it with references to the readings, lecture, and clips. Examples from your own independent study or experience are appropriate if they advance your argument. While there is a minimum length required, ultimately, you are graded on substance. Write what you need to make your point.

Evaluation of Posts

Posts are evaluated on both individual merit and the contribution they make to the unfolding discussion. Timely posting is required, but avoiding late posts is not the key to a good participation grade. Instead, keep the following in mind:
- be a presence on the board, have a voice, be memorable, an active citizen
- posting early in the week increases the chances of getting helpful feedback
- lively, thoughtful posts can help your grade overall
- posts in response to a previous week’s questions are not likely to be read by your TA

Recommended Online Research Tools

Students are encouraged to read the daily industry trades (Daily Variety, Hollywood Reporter) and industry resources such as http://www.thewrap.com and http://www.deadline.com. This research guide set up by the Film and Television librarian, Diana King, contains some incredibly useful links: http://guides.library.ucla.edu/media_convergence. Many of these sources are available through free registration and/or to currently enrolled UCLA students via http://www.lexis-nexis.com by linking to http://www.bol.ucla.edu/. Other helpful
resources: www.imdb.com (which provides basic information on film titles, credits, company credits, budget and box-office, etc.); Hollywood Creative Directory.

Policies

This class takes advantage of MyUCLA and a third-party service known as Turnitin. Submissions are screened for improper citations and potential plagiarism. You are expected to turn in original work for this course. Quotes or ideas paraphrased from other work(s) must be properly cited. Taking credit for another's idea or writing is plagiarism and is a violation of the University's Code of Academic Integrity. If you are unsure of how to credit your sources, please ask for clarification.

Remember that it is also possible to plagiarize yourself. You may not use material you have used in papers for other classes. This should be your own original work.

Any cases of suspected plagiarism will be forwarded to UCLA’s Dean of Students office for their review.

http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Student-Conduct-Code

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310)825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu. Disability accommodations needs should be communicated to the instructor and/or Teaching Assistant before assignments are due unless there are extenuating circumstances. These policies apply to both matriculated UCLA students and visitors in Summer Session.

SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

Lesson One

Lecture: The Old vs. New Hollywood Studio System


Articles:


Screening: Bonnie & Clyde
1967, Directed by Arthur Penn

Discussion Board: answer instructor questions, respond to classmate posts

Lesson Two

Lecture: Is Bigger Better? Does Consolidation Represent a Failed Business Philosophy?


Articles:
2. “Why Are All the Superhero Stories The Same Now?” Joanna Robinson, March 29, 2016

Screenings: X-Men: Days of Future Past
2014, Bryan Singer

Godzilla
1998, Directed by Roland Emmerich

WEEK TWO

Lesson Three

Lecture: The Agency Stranglehold over Hollywood

Reading: Contemporary Hollywood Cinema, Chapter 3: “Hollywood Corporate Business Practice and Periodizing Contemporary Film History” (pp. 47-57)
Articles:


Screening:  
*The Player*
1992, Directed by Robert Altman

Discussion Board: answer instructor questions, respond to classmate posts

**Lesson Four**

Lecture:  
Independent Producers—Maverick Mavens Fuel Studio Pipelines

Reading:  
*Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, Chapter 6: “To the rear of the Back End: The Economics of Independent Cinema” (pp. 91-105)

Articles:

4. Anne Thompson, “2017’s Sundance Sales Are In Overdrive: Here’s Why, Plus See Our Full Deal Scorecard

Screening:  
*Little Miss Sunshine*
2006, Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris

**WEEK THREE**

**Lesson Five**

Lecture:  
Feature Film Development: Heaven or Hell?

Reading:  
*New Hollywood Cinema*, “Chapter 4: Genre Benders” (pp. 116-146, 178-223)
Lesson Six

Lecture: Feature Film Marketing: Selling High Concept vs. Low Concept

Articles:

Screenings: Seven
1995, Directed by David Fincher

Nashville
1975, Directed by Robert Altman

Billy Jack
1971, Directed by Tom Laughlin

Discussion Board: answer instructor questions, respond to classmate posts

Assignment Due: Coverage Report

WEEK FOUR

Lesson Seven
Lecture: Distribution/Acquisition — Mini Majors vs. The Majors: A Qualified Independence


Articles:
4. “Netflix Leads $100 Million-Plus Worth of Deals At Sundance Film Festival 2017,” by Natalie Robehmed, January 18, 2017
5. Sean Fennessey, “The End of Independent Film as We Know It,” The Ringer (April 10, 2017)

Screenings: *Pulp Fiction*
1994, Directed by Quentin Tarantino

*The English Patient*
1996, Directed by Anthony Minghella

*The Mask*
1994, Directed by Chuck Russell

Lesson Eight

Lecture: Digital Movie-Making Today

Articles:
3. “YouTube Strikes Development Deals with Creators Following Sundance Program” by Natalie Jarvey, January 18, 2017

Screenings: *Paranormal Activity*
2007, Directed by Oren Peli

*The Blair Witch Project*
1999, Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez
Discussion Board: answer instructor questions, respond to classmate posts

**WEEK FIVE**

**Lesson Nine**


Articles:

Screenings:  *Crash*
2004, Directed by Paul Haggis

*Slumdog Millionaire*
2008, Directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan

Discussion Board: Answer instructor questions, respond to classmate posts

**Lesson Ten**

Lecture: Media Franchises: Studio Merchandising and Licensing Departments

Articles:
4. Bart, Peter “Keeping Faith With Franchises”
5. “Box-Office Picture Darkens Amid Focus on Tentpoles, Analyst Says” by Georg Szalai, March 2, 2015

Recommended: “Searching for the Origami Unicorn” (from Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide by Henry Jenkins)

“How Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!” (from The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media by Eileen R. Meehan)

Screening:  *Transformers*
2007, Directed by Michael Bay
WEEK SIX

Assignment Due: Final paper