

READING FILM

ENGL 250-902
Hibbs Hall 203
Thu. 4:00–6:40 pm
Spring 2019

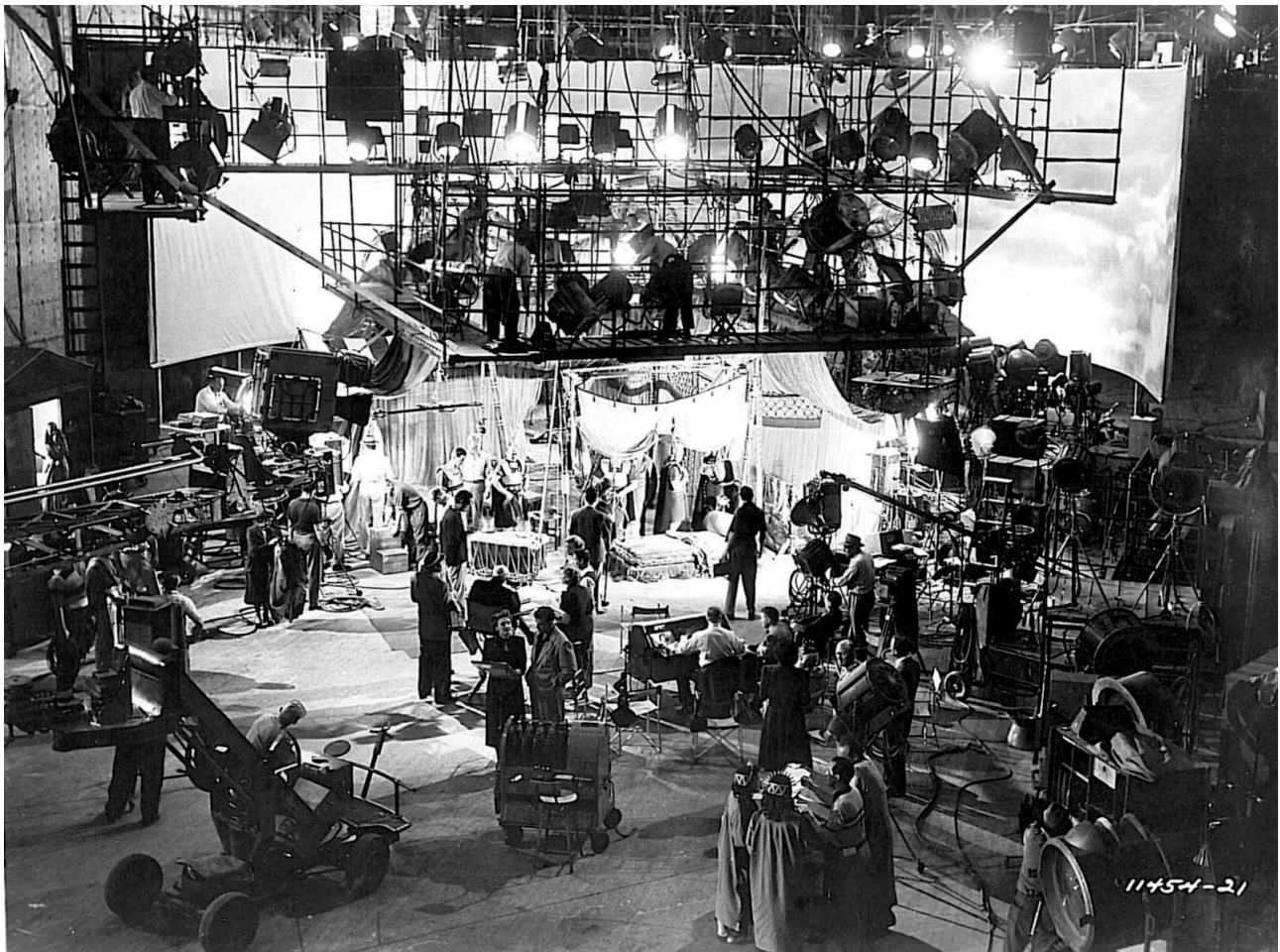
website: adamabraham.info

GA: Paige Deans
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Dr. Adam Abraham
Office: Hibbs Hall 323
Office Hours: Thu. 1:45–3:45 pm
or by appointment

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GA: Hannah Kilgore
Office Hours: Hibbs 234, Mon. 4:15–5:15
contact: kilgorehr@vcu.edu



“The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.”
—Martin Heidegger

“There’s no business like show business.”
—Irving Berlin

This general-education course aims to introduce you to some of the formal elements of film—the building blocks of motion pictures—that are essential for a close or detailed analysis of cinema. As such, the course aims to increase your visual literacy and make you more savvy consumers of visual images. You should also gain a well-developed technical and critical vocabulary with which to talk and write about films and other visual media. We will screen and analyze scenes, some shorts, and three feature-length films drawn from both American and world cinemas. Overall, this course should help you think, talk, and write more effectively about your viewing and make you a more confident and knowledgeable “consumer” of the moving image in all its forms and media.

REQUIRED READING:

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Love of the Last Tycoon*. 1941. New York: Scribner, 2003.
 Tolkin, Michael. *The Player*. New York: Grove Press, 1988.

New and/or used copies are available at the Virginia Book Company, 900 West Franklin Street. (Support local, independent vendors!)

ASSESSMENT:

- I. Midterm examination: 50 points
- II. Essay: 50 points
- III. Final examination: 50 points

TOTAL = 150 points

EXPECTATIONS:

Attendance

Woody Allen once said that 80 percent of success is showing up. In this course, attendance will affect your final grade. Because there is no “textbook,” no online readings, and very little homework, everything important will happen in the classroom. So here is the policy: each student is permitted up to three *excused or unexcused* absences. There is no need to tell me your reasons: it’s three for free, no questions asked. If, however, you miss four classes (roughly 30 percent of the course), you will lose ten points. If you miss a few more, then you are at risk of receiving a failing grade. So if you know right now that you will have to miss three or four classes this semester, I recommend that you enroll in a different course.

Participation

This is a large lecture class: there is no denying it. Nevertheless, I will encourage you to participate in the occasional classroom discussion. We learn by articulating ideas and refining those ideas in conversation with others. You are certainly welcome to sit quietly every Thursday and absorb information. But if you choose to participate in a thoughtful

manner from time to time, you will earn five or ten extra-credit points. That is to say, you could increase your final result by one letter grade.

Note-Taking

You should take notes during every single class. Because there is no “textbook” as such, the lectures are your textbook. Studies show that students who take notes *by hand with a pen or pencil* perform better on examinations than those who take notes on a laptop. If you insist on typing notes on a computer, please do not glance at emails, shop, or browse the Internet. It is distracting to yourself and to those around you. During in-class screenings, please close your computer or lower the light. For any classes that you miss, it is your responsibility to get the notes from another member of the class.

Electronic Devices

Because paying attention is one of the goals of this course, I ask that all phones and electronic devices are turned off and placed out of sight. Sitting on the desk does not count as “out of sight.” We will have a ten-minute break during most class sessions: this will be your time to catch up on those unanswered texts and emails. If you cannot stay away from your phone for sixty or seventy consecutive minutes, consult a doctor.

Midterm Examination

An in-class midterm will take place on Thursday 28 February (instead of the usual lecture). Expect that the exam will take two hours (thus shorter than the usual class session). This midterm will focus on the terminology and film techniques that we discuss during the first half of the course. There will be fifty questions, worth one point each. An extra-credit practice quiz will be made available one week earlier. Students who miss the midterm for any reason will have an opportunity to sit for a makeup exam.

Essay

Deleuze says that we write “at the frontiers of our knowledge,” and college writing assignments are designed to push those frontiers, to expand our knowledge. I will ask each student to write one essay of no more than 1,000 words. The essay must be submitted by *email only* to Paige Deans (if your last name begins A–J) or Hannah Kilgore (K–Z). You will write a visual analysis of a single scene from a feature-length film chosen from a list that I will share. Further details for this assignment will be provided when the date draws closer. An essay received after the 9:00 am deadline will lose five points. No excuses or exceptions. An essay submitted more than one week after the original deadline will be graded without the benefit of comments and corrections. Any course work received after Thursday 2 May will receive a score of zero.

Readings

Instead of reading a conventional introduction-to-film textbook, you will read two novels that illustrate the highs and lows of Hollywood filmmaking—one from the 1940s,

one from the 1980s. Because this is an English class offered by an English department, it seems appropriate that you should acquire at least a passing familiarity with some literary works. These two novels will supplement the trajectory of the course by providing insights into the filmmaking process. You will be tested on this material during the final examination.

Final Examination

The in-class final exam will take place during the last class meeting, Thursday 2 May at 4:00 pm, *not* the date that appears on the university's final-exam schedule. The focus will be the second half of the course, but a few questions will ask about terms from the first half. There will be forty multiple-choice questions, worth one point each, and two open-ended questions, worth five points each. As with the midterm, an extra-credit practice quiz will be made available. The previous Thursday, 25 April, will include a review session. Students who miss the final exam for any reason should contact Paige Deans or Hannah Kilgore to arrange a makeup exam.

Learning Needs

You are welcome to come to my scheduled office hours to discuss anything related to the course. Other meeting times can also be arranged. If you require accommodation for a diagnosed disability, please notify me privately at the beginning of the semester.

Academic Integrity

It is the assumption that the work you present in this course will be your own. If you incorporate someone else's words or ideas, you must cite that person, text, or source. If you do not know how to cite sources, read chapter 14 of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or ask me for guidance. If you submit someone else's work as your own, in whole or in part, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment.

SCHEDULE:

JANUARY

Thu. 17 General Introduction, Film Form, and Film Production

I. GRAMMAR

Thu. 24 Frame/Shot/Scene
 • Begin reading *The Love of the Last Tycoon*

Thu. 31 Cinematography

FEBRUARY

Thu. 7 Continuity

- Thu. 14 Discontinuity
- Thu. 21 Sound
 • Finish reading *The Love of the Last Tycoon*
- * [EXTRA-CREDIT QUIZ DUE Monday 25 February by 9:00 am]

Thu. 28 **••• MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

MARCH

Thu. 7 NO CLASS (Spring Break)

II. SYNTAX

- Thu. 14 Genre
- ESSAY DUE Monday 18 March by 9:00 am**

Thu. 21 Surrealism
 • Begin reading *The Player*

Thu. 28 Animation

APRIL

- Thu. 4 Objectivity
- Thu. 11 Propaganda
- Thu. 18 Race
- Thu. 25 Self-Reflexivity
 • Finish reading *The Player*
- * [EXTRA-CREDIT QUIZ DUE Monday 29 April by 9:00 am]

MAY

Thu. 2 **••• FINAL EXAMINATION**

UNIVERSITY BOILERPLATE:

E-mail Policy

Electronic mail or "e-mail" is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost effective and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU e-mail on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking e-mail daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student e-mail account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU e-mail address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/askit/policies-and-publications/information-technology-policies-standards-baselines--guidelines/student-e-mail-policy/>.

VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity." In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and,
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."
- [http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy Library/VCU Honor System.pdf](http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/VCU%20Honor%20System.pdf). **View the Honor System** in its entirety: (<https://policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Honor%20System.pdf>)

More information can also be found on the **Division of Student Affairs** website: http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/students/student_honor_system.html.

Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the **Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings**

(<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. Also, the university Rules and Procedures prohibit anyone from having "in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university..."

Students with Disabilities

SECTION 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended require that VCU provides "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). More information is available at **Disability Support Services** or the **Division for Academic Success**.

Any student who has a disability that requires an academic accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chair of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

Campus Emergency information

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU

- Sign up to receive **VCU text messaging alerts**. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for **additional emergency information**: <http://alert.vcu.edu/>.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

Withdrawal from Classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Harris Hall or contact a financial aid counselor at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact.html>. The last day to withdraw from classes is 22 March.