**Contemporary Film and Television Genres in Comparison**

**Course Description:**
This course provides students with an introduction to genre studies facilitated through an overview of a sampling of highly contemporary film and television genres. As the course uses genre studies to introduce students to the synergized yet stratified film and television industries, each genre is represented through one film example and one example from television, creating a closely comparative study of genres across different yet related industrial spheres. The course engages several key questions: (1) Where do genres come from and how do they evolve? (2) What is the relation between genres and the industry (i.e., did the industry invent genres?) (3) What is the relationship between genres and popular audiences? (4) How have genre studies evolved over time and how are they keeping up with contemporary genres? (5) Do contemporary genres fulfill similar functions as their ancestors during the classical era, such as furnishing viewers with popular myths? The current popularity of the genres selected for this course ensures that this sampling reflects American popular culture in representative manner. Later iterations of this course may substitute certain weeks, should other genres emerge as more popular. The course readings have been selected with an eye to striking a balance between overarching critical takes on genre in general and specific case studies of individual genres.

**Summary of Course Objectives:**
- Students will be introduced to a range of contemporary genres popular in film and television.
- Students will study popular genres to gain insight into the stratified yet synergistic relation between the motion picture and television industries.
- Students will study contemporary genres to understand the basic principles of how genres work economically and culturally, that is, as industrial branding tools and as building blocks for modern-day mythologies.
- By mastering the particularities of the sampling of genres selected for this class, students will be able to apply the principles of genre study to the most recent ebbs and flows in film and television production.

**Course Scope and Distribution of credit hours:**
This class meets over 14 sessions, each consisting of an in-class lecture/discussion portion that requires preparatory media viewing, which, however, is individually arranged by students. As this course constitutes the academic component of the LA Study Abroad program, the course structure is shaped to accommodate the particular time demands of the program’s practical component, the internship. During the first 4 weeks, the course will meet twice a week for 2 ½ hours each session. Over the remaining 6 weeks, the course will adopt a once-a-week meeting schedule, each session 2 hrs long. In addition, the syllabus includes a total of 8 hours of activities closely related to the curriculum, including a required class visit to the Getty Museum and the attendance of a panel of experts discussing the relation between the film and television industries.
Course Requirements:
Regular attendance of lecture and discussion sections is mandatory. Grades will be distributed according to grade breakdown listed below.

The midterm paper is a concise (1,800 words) take-home exam that tests students’ knowledge of course materials and in-class discussions.

Students will file weekly journal entries with the instructor and also keep a blog on the designated course website. Journal entries should include the synthesis (not just summary) of the assigned readings and the application of those readings to contemporary film and television artifacts. Blog posts will track the student’s central interest in genre, how that interest evolves as the course proceeds, and how that interest ultimately manifests itself in the final paper.

[Note: To respond efficiently to the competing, but potentially fluctuating, demands of the program’s academic and internship portions, future instructors may elect to reduce the parameters of the midterm paper and, in turn, expand the weekly journal entries and blogging assignments. Grade Breakdown will be adjusted accordingly.]

The final paper is an individualized argument/research project, for which students will submit a proposal to the instructor on a designated date.

Grade Breakdown:
Journal: 20%
Midterm paper: 20%
Final paper: 40%
Blog and overall quality of class contributions: 20%

Plagiarism Statement:
"Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else's creative and/or academic work as your own, in full or in part. It can be an act of commission, in which one intentionally appropriates the words, pictures or ideas of another, or it can be an act of omission, in which one fails to acknowledge/document/give credit to the source, creator and/or the copyright owner of those words, pictures or ideas. Any fabrication of materials, quotes or sources, other than those created in a work of fiction, is also plagiarism. Plagiarism is the most serious academic offense that you can commit and can result in probation, suspension, or expulsion."

Use of laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices prohibited in class:
While some of you may consider laptops instrumental for note taking, I consider the introjection of an interface between you and me in the classroom alienating and counterproductive. If laptops are used in class, I am unable to tell whether students pay attention to lectures and class discussion or to the multiple functions of their laptops. The use of laptops in my classes thus violates my notion of a productive oral communication scenario that involves the attention and commitment of all students for the duration of the class. The prohibition of cell phones and i-phones should be self-explanatory
Syllabus of Screenings and Readings:

**Week 1:** Introduction to Genre in Film and Television: Where Do Genres Come From? How Do They Evolve?

**Session 1:** Transforming Common Understandings of Genre
Film Genres vs. Genre Films; Culture and Genre

**Viewing:** Selected Excerpts from American television and films

**Readings:**
- Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (British Film Institute, 1999), Chapter 2: What is Generally Understood by the Notion of Film Genre?,” pp.13-29.

**Due:** Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

**Session 2:** Genres as Industrial Categories; Genre and Hollywood

**Viewing:** Selected Excerpts from American television and films

**Readings:**

**Due:** Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
**Week 2: The Dominance of Movie Horror and the Scarcity of TV Horror**

**Session 1: The Long Life of Horror in Movies**

**Viewing:**  
*Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992, Francis Ford Coppola) (outside viewing)  
*The Twilight Saga* (2009-2012) (selected excerpts)

**Reading:**  

Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

**Session 2: Horror as a Recent Development on TV**

**Industrial and Moral Constraints in Early Television**

**Horror and HBO’s Industrial Strategies**

**Viewing:**  
*True Blood* (HBO) (selected episodes)

**Reading:**  

Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
Week 3:  Musicals between Tradition, Failure, and Rebirth

Session 1:  TV Musicals
Musical failures and successes on commercial TV
Industrial complications: original compositions vs. covers
Target audiences and popular music
Can genres programs be ahead of their time?
Genres and procedurals vs. Genres and serials

Viewing:  Cop Rock (ABC) (selected episodes)
Glee (ABC) (selected episodes)


Due:   Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Session 2:  Movie Musicals
Failures and Rebirths: from Industry Staple to Niche Product
Do Genre Studies Make Sense?
The Musical’s Questioning of Genre
Theory Subcycles of Musicals: Backstage Dramas, Dance Films, Jukebox Musicals, Professionals vs. Amateurs

Viewing:  La La Land (2016; Damien Chazelle dir.) (outside viewing)
All That Jazz (1979; Bob Fosse dir.) (excerpt)
Saturday Night Fever (1977; John Badham dir.) (excerpt)
Step Up (2006; Anne Fletcher dir.) (excerpt)


Due:   Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
**Week 4:** Gangster Treatments as Vehicles for Quality and Industrial Prestige

**Session 1:** TV Gangsters  
Moral Panic and TV Gangsters  
Violence and Quality Television  
Crime Family Melodrama—the Meeting of Film and Television Genre Traditions  
Male Antiheroes/Difficult Men

**Viewing:**  *The Sopranos* (HBO) (selected episodes)


**Due:** Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

**Session 2:** Movie Gangsters  
Two Classic Sociological Models of the Gangster  
Gangster Films and Movie Censorship: a Historical Outline  
Gangster Films as Expressions of the Cinematic Auteur  
The Evolving Role of the City: from Mythical Backdrop to Authentic Locale

**Viewing:**  *Goodfellas* (1990; Martin Scorsese dir.)


**Due:** Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
Week 5:  TV Buddies

Buddy Shows and Television Formats
Gendered Buddy Treatments
Friendship and Sexuality

Viewing:  *Friends* (selected episodes)
*Will & Grace* (selected episodes)
*Lethal Weapon* (selected episodes)


Due:  Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Week 6:  Movie Buddies

Masculinities and Male Friendship
Historicizing Hollywood Buddy Treatments
Mixed Race Buddy Films
Male vs. Female Buddy Films

Viewing:  *Lethal Weapon* (1987; John Badham dir.) (outside viewing)
*Rush Hour* (1998; Brett Ratner dir.) (excerpts)
*Bridesmaids* (2011; Paul Feig dir.) (excerpts)


Due:  Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
Week 7: Women’s Stories: Television

Women’s TV as a Concept
Gendered Audiences/Gendered Programming
The History of Women’s Television
Reality Shows and Representations of Heterosexual Couplings
Women at Work
Female Antiheroes

Viewing: UnREAL (Lifetime) (selected episodes)


Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Week 8: Women’s Stories: Film

Women’s Films
The Woman’s Film as Hybrid Genre
The Significance of Melodrama and Comedy
Stardom as Genre

Viewing: The Devil Wears Prada (2006; David Frankel dir.)(outside viewing)
Hidden Figures (2016; Theodore Melfi dir.)


Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
Week 9:  **Superheroes and American Television**

*Irony and Comedy in Television Adaptations of Superheroes*

*Comic Books and TV*

*Media Conglomeration and the Superhero Franchise*

*Independent Production Companies and Major Studios*

**Viewing:**  *Batman* (ABC) (selected episodes)  
*Marvel's Agents of SHIELD* (ABC) (selected episodes)


Clark, Jennifer S. “Liberating Bicentennial America: Imagining the Nation through TV Superwomen of the Seventies.” *Television & New Media* 10, no. 5 (September 1, 2009), 434-454.

**Recomm:**  Matt Yockey, Introduction and Ch. 1 from *Batman* (Wayne State University Press, 2014)

**Due:**  Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Week 10:  **Superheroes on the Big Screen**

*Superheroes in American Culture*

*The Superhero and the Movie Franchise*

*The Significance of Fandom and the Role of Fan Communities*

**Viewing:**  *The Avengers* (2012; Joss Whedon dir.)


**Due:**  Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard
Bibliography:


