

**Course Syllabus**  
**MLS 620A: Film and the American Dream**  
**Summer 2006**  
**Monday & Thursday: 5:45 p.m.—9:30 p.m.**

**Structure:** For the five-week summer session, course meets two evenings/week for lecture, screening, and discussion; additional discussion threads will be conducted via the Blackboard system.

**Course Prerequisites:** Graduate Standing

**Instructor:**

Dr. Chris Poulos

Office: Ferguson Building # 110

Office Hours: By appointment

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**Course Purpose/Catalog Description:** Course emphasizes appreciation, interpretation, analysis, and application of the images, discourses, stories and practices related to pursuit of the American Dream as they are represented in the powerful cultural medium of film.

**Detailed Course Description:** Ah, the American Dream! We live by it. We seek it. But ...what is it? How has this ideal shaped our culture? How has it evolved over the years? What has Hollywood done with it? This semester, we will focus on a collection of films and readings that can be understood as reflecting on the evolution of the "American Dream." We will focus our attention on the evolution of this guiding myth of American culture by critically watching and discussing several important films that offer us a glimpse into our culture's changing self-conception. Along the way, we will explore the cinema as a powerful cultural medium that both reflects and re-shapes our collective imagination and the trajectory of our shared cultural history. And we will strive to increase our collective cinematic literacy.

**Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes**

*You will:*

Develop a greater degree of cinematic literacy by studying the art, technology, language and criticism of film;

Employ, in conversation and in writing, an extensive vocabulary of terms related to the study of film;

Develop ways to critically view, interpret, analyze, and write about the intersections between film and the American Dream;

Demonstrate a richer understanding of various writings and theoretical frameworks connected to these intersections;

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, ideology, and the American Dream; Speak and write intelligently about the intersections between film and the American Dream, with a special focus on:

- The shared values and ideologies of communities;
- The construction and development of the self, community, and culture;
- The pursuit of “the good life;”
- The meanings and practices of family, love, and friendship, especially in relation to the pursuit of the American Dream;
- The uses and abuses of power;
- Dialogue;
- Consciousness and reflexivity;
- Race, class, gender, and other constructions of “otherness.”
- Narrative structure, story, and storytelling;
- Technology and the good life;
- Anxiety, faith, and hope;
- History, myth, and representations of reality; and
- The quest for self-fulfillment;

Consider these films in relation to the historical and social contexts they seek to represent; and Amplify historical, social, and cultural understanding with critical and literary readings.

**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. Attendance at each class session is expected.

**Participation:** Notice that **20% (200 points)** of your grade total is for participation. Active participation in dialogue is a primary learning process that makes your education possible. 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** (excerpted from the Academic Integrity web page at <http://studentconduct.uncg.edu/policy/academicintegrity/>):

*“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.*

*If knowledge is to be gained and properly evaluated, it must be pursued under conditions free from dishonesty. Deceit and misrepresentations are incompatible with the fundamental activity of this academic institution and shall not be tolerated. Members of the UNCG community are expected to foster in their own work the spirit of academic honesty and not to tolerate its abuse by others. First responsibility for academic integrity lies with individual students and faculty members of this community. A violation of academic integrity is an act harmful to all other students, faculty and, ultimately, the university.”*

**Note: If you are wondering, or have further questions about academic integrity, see me or read the entire Academic Integrity Policy at: <http://studentconduct.uncg.edu/policy/academicintegrity/>.**

#### **Evaluation Methods and Guidelines for Assignments:**

General: Students will write five weekly critical reflection essays. Evaluation will be based upon the quality of the critical essays, as well as our in-class and Blackboard-based discussion participation.

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.

Writing/Research: You will write a series of weekly **critical reflection essays** that offer you an opportunity to demonstrate critical judgment concerning the themes of our course and the films and readings related to those themes.

Skillful discussion/dialogue: This is a course that requires your active engagement in ongoing, lively conversation about film, about key themes in the history of the American Dream, about overarching life problems, issues, and challenges, and so on. 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.

Blackboard 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.

**Grading/Evaluation:**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Critical Reflection Essay 1	150
Critical Reflection Essay 2	150
Critical Reflection Essay 3	150
Critical Reflection Essay 4	150
Critical Reflection Essay 5	150
Blackboard Participation	50
In-class participation	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>

**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-

**Required Texts**

Corrigan, T. (2001). *A short guide to writing about film*, Fifth Edition. New York: Longman.  
Cullen, J. (2003). *The American dream: A short history of an idea that shaped a nation*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.  
Various readings on E-Reserve (accessed via Blackboard)

## Topical Outline/Course Schedule

### **Session 1: May 18**

*The Dream of the Good Life, Part 1: Social Class and a Place Called Home*

Film: *The Grapes of Wrath*

Read: Cullen, Introduction and Ch. 1. + Corrigan, Ch.1 & Glossary of Film Terms (pp. 173-177).

### **Session 2: May 22**

*The Dream of the Good Life, Part 2: Upward Mobility*

Film: *Modern Times*

Read: Cullen, Ch. 2 + 3, + Corrigan, Ch. 2

Due: Critical Reflection Essay #1

### **Session 3: May 25**

*The Dream of the Good Life, Part 3: Baseball, Hot Dogs, Apple Pie and Chevrolet...*

Film: *Roger & Me*

Read: Cullen, Ch. 3 + E-RESERVES+ Corrigan, Ch. 3

### **Session 4: May 29**

*Dreams of Wealth and Power, Part 1: "From Rags to Riches"*

Film: *Citizen Kane*

Read: E-RESERVES + Corrigan, Ch. 4

Due: Critical Reflection Essay #2

### **Session 5: June 1**

*Dreams of Wealth and Power, Part 2: "Lock and Load"*

Film: *Wall Street*

Read: E-RESERVES + Corrigan, Ch. 5

### **Session 6: June 5**

*Dreams of Wealth and Power, Part 3: How to "Play"*

Film: *The Player*

Read: E-RESERVES + Corrigan, Ch. 6

Due: Critical Reflection Essay #3

### **Session 7: June 8**

*The Dream of Family: Race and Class, and...*

Film: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

Read: Cullen, Ch. 4 + E-RESERVES

**Session 8: June 12**

*Dreams of Family, Dreams of Perfection, and the Need for Acknowledgment*

Film: *Ordinary People*

Read: E-RESERVES

Due: Critical Reflection Essay #4

**Session 9: June 15**

*Suburban Daydreams: What is "out there?"*

Film: *The Truman Show*

Read: Cullen, Ch. 5 + E-RESERVES

**Session 10: June 19**

*Big Stories and the Continuing Dream*

Film: *Big Fish*

Read: E-RESERVES

Due: Critical Reflection Essay #5

**Links of interest:**

My web site: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.uncg.edu/%7Ecnpoulos>" <http://www.uncg.edu/~cnpoulos>

The UNCG Communication Studies Department web site: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.uncg.edu/cst>" <http://www.uncg.edu/cst>

The UNCG Broadcasting and Cinema Department web site: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.uncg.edu/bcn>" <http://www.uncg.edu/bcn>

The Internet Movie Database: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.imdb.com/>" <http://www.imdb.com>

Leonard Maltin's web site: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.leonardmaltin.com/>" <http://www.leonardmaltin.com/>

Rotten Tomatoes: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/>" <http://www.rottentomatoes.com>

Ebert & Roeper: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://tvplex.go.com/buenavista/ebertandroeper/today.html>" <http://tvplex.go.com/buenavista/ebertandroeper/today.html>

Women and Film: **HYPERLINK**

"<http://www.bama.ua.edu/~mbarrett/filmwsslinks.html>"

<http://www.bama.ua.edu/~mbarrett/filmwsslinks.html>

Reel Movie Critic: **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.reelmoviecritic.com/id358.htm>"

<http://www.reelmoviecritic.com/id358.htm>

Net film: **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.inetfilm.com/resources/ressites.html>"

<http://www.inetfilm.com/resources/ressites.html>

Local cinema:

The Scene on South Elm: **HYPERLINK** "<http://thescene.us/>"

<http://thescene.us/>

Carolina Theater: **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.carolinatheatre.com/>"

<http://www.carolinatheatre.com/>

**Greensboro Cinema Guild:** HYPERLINK "http://greensborocinema.org/"  
<http://greensborocinema.org/>

**Go Triad (includes movie listings):** HYPERLINK "http://www.gotriad.com"  
[www.gotriad.com](http://www.gotriad.com)

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