



First summer session, 2013 — 8 credits / CRN: 40038

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Office: SEM II – B3104
Office hours: by appointment

Class Sessions: 5 Saturdays, June 29 – July 27 (10 am – 6 pm)
Evaluation conference times TBA
Classroom: SEM II, C1105

For more than 25 years, Joel and Ethan Coen, aka The Coen Brothers, have been among the most revered, controversial and influential filmmakers of modern cinema. Their subjects are uniquely American. Their idiosyncratic filmmaking style ranges from original films to screen adaptations of diverse sources. They have recast classic genres, such as film noir, screwball comedy and the Western (to name a few) within a post-modern perspective. This program will explore the influences on, and the art and legacy of the Coen Brothers. Be advised that this is a partial online program. Students will need access to a comprehensive source for DVD rentals (such as Netflix, Amazon.com, Deep Discount, etc.) and will be using Moodle for required online seminars.

A sampling of questions that will inform our learning goals:

- What are the distinguishing features of the Coen Brothers approach to filmmaking?
- How have they borrowed from and re-imagined classic American genres?
- Why is violence central to virtually every film they have made?
- What aspects of the Coen's films are generally considered postmodern?
- What writing and cinematic innovations (camera work, editing, sound, etc.) are unique to the Coens?
- How have they adapted other sources—novels, films, and stories—to suit their particular vision?
- Is it true, as the Ethan Coen has stated, “none of the films have messages”?
- What function does black humor serve in their films?
- One critic summed up the Coens this way: “I know of no other filmmakers whose work is such a puzzle, at the same time so thrilling, annoying, provocative, grating, excitingly unclassifiable, boringly predictable, fresh, and poised to shut down the cinema as we’ve known and loved it.” Why does their work commonly elicit this kind of response?

Required Books

- Doom, Ryan P. *The Brothers Coen: Unique Characters of Violence* (ISBN 9780313355981)
- McCarthy, Cormac. *No Country for Old Men* (9780375706674)
- All relevant Coen Brothers screenplays will be linked on Moodle as available
- We will also read diverse short materials posted on the web, including articles and book chapters. Students are required to download all supplemental readings and bring paper copies to class.

Recommended books

- Bordwell, David & Kristin Thompson. *Film Art*
- Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*
- King, Lynnea Chapman. *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*
- Monaco, James. *How to Read a Film*
- Schatz, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres*
- Mottram, James. *The Coen Brothers: The Life of the Mind*

****Screening films outside of class.** You will be required to screen two films per week outside of class. There is no reliable way to have timely access to the required films unless you join Netflix, Amazon, or some comparable DVD source before the beginning of class. You will need to subscribe for approximately 5 weeks. This will guarantee that you have access to films at the lowest price. If a film does not arrive on time, it is the student's responsibility to find an alternative means of screening prior to the due date for class and any related assignments. You are urged to screen recommended films as well.

****Please note:**

*Updated weekly reading and other assignments are posted **Sundays** on Moodle*

Online Seminars and Concept Worksheets

There will be online seminars in weeks 2 and 4. The seminar format will involve three stages: initial draft due on Wednesday at midnight, responses to essays written by seminar partners by Thursday at midnight, and final draft posted by Friday midnight. A hard copy of the final draft will be due on Saturday at 10 am.

Final Essay:

A final critical essay will be turned in on the last day of class, Saturday, July 27. Your topic must be faculty approved and submitted no later than Saturday, July 13. This essay will involve researching and screening significant genre influences as well as analyzing the central themes and filmmaking techniques of the Coens. It is expected that you will develop a thesis about the topic using terminology, readings and concepts that we have studied. **Five typed pages, double spaced.**

Access Services

If you are a student with a **documented disability** who would benefit from support or services to ensure full access to this course, please contact Access Services in Library 2120 in the Student Advising Center, PH: 360-867-6348. In order for your program faculty to make accommodations, faculty must be informed *by the student and in writing from Access Services* during the first week of the term.

Portfolio:

You are required to keep an organized portfolio. It will be turned on the final day of class and returned during your evaluation conference. The portfolio labeled by section and will contain in this order:

1. Syllabus and covenant at the front
2. Lecture and reading notes
3. Workshops and other class handouts with notes
4. Completed screening response paragraphs and screening notes
5. Concept worksheets: weekly questions/reflections about films and readings
6. Online seminar writings (yours and comments from classmates)
7. All readings downloaded from the website with margin notes and/or highlighted passages of importance
8. Final essay assignment
9. A final self-evaluation and faculty evaluation

Evaluation

You will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Successful completion of all program requirements
- Adherence to the syllabus and agreements in the covenant
- Excellent attendance, preparation for and full participation in all program activities and assignments
- Excellent preparation for and participation in online seminars
- The quality of ideas and the writing in your papers
- Demonstration of acceptable understanding of program content and learning goals

Expectations

The faculty member assumes that students have well-rounded college-level skills. In case of deficiencies in basic skills, students are expected to work with the Learning Resources Center. The faculty member does not assume that students initially will be conversant with critical terminology or special techniques for discussing the works to be assigned. It is assumed that by the end of the program, students will have developed the ability to think, to speak, and to write effectively about the materials and themes of the program.

In general, students are expected to fully participate in all aspects of the class, to thoroughly prepare for each class session, and to complete all assignments on time. Late assignments may not be evaluated. Attendance and being on time for class are essential. Unexcused absences, late, incomplete or unsatisfactory completion of assignments or plagiarism will constitute grounds for loss of credit.

Incomplete status will be granted only for reasons of family crisis, illness, or similar documented emergency. Evaluation conferences will be held at the end of the quarter. *Credit is not the same as positive evaluation.* Students receive credit for fulfilling minimum requirements and standards. The evaluation is a statement describing the quality of the student's work. It is possible for a student to receive credit but receive an evaluation that describes poor quality work. It is also possible for a student to attend class regularly yet receive no or reduced credit because of unsatisfactory performance.

Coen Brothers calendar:

What follows is a tentative schedule. Final decisions about assignments about screenings and readings will be posted on **Moodle** on Sundays for the following Saturday class.

- **Week 1** (June 29):
Screen *Blood Simple* in class along with *Paris Je T'aime* and Film Noir genre clips. Hand out program docs, etc. Questionnaire. Screening forms. Reading workshop and discussion. Lecture: introduction to the Coen Brothers.
- **Week 2** (June 30 – July 6):
Screen at home: *Miller's Crossing* (streams on Netflix) and *Road to Perdition*
Recommended: *Sullivan's Travels*, *Scarface* and *It Happened One Night*
Screen in class: *O Brother Where Art Thou?*
Online seminar Moodle – *Miller's Crossing* and *Road to Perdition*
Read: Doom, pp. xi – 42, Schatz chapters on noir and gangster film genres (linked on Moodle)
DUE: 1.) concept worksheet 2.) screening paragraph 3.) Online seminar
- **Week 3** (July 7 – 13):
Screen at home: *Raising Arizona* (streams on Netflix) and *Burn After Reading*—
Screen in class: *Fargo*
Read: Doom, pp. 69-83 and 97-110. Any other readings on Moodle TBA
DUE: 1.) concept worksheet 2.) screening paragraph 3.) final essay proposal due
- **Week 4** (July 14 – 20)
Screen at home *The Hudsucker Proxy* and *The Big Sleep*
Screen in class: *The Big Lebowski*
Online seminar Moodle – topic TBA
Read: Doom, pp. 55-68 and 163-174, and Schatz chapter on screwball comedy genre. Any other readings on Moodle TBA
DUE: 1.) concept worksheet 2.) screening paragraph 3.) Online seminar
- **Week 5** (July 21 – 27)
Screen at home: *True Grit* (streams on Netflix) and *No Country for Old Men*
Recommended: *Red River* and *True Grit* (John Wayne version)
Screen *Barton Fink* in class
Read: Doom, pp. 55-68 and 163-174, and Schatz Western genre excerpt
Schedule evaluation conferences
DUE: 1.) concept worksheet 2.) final essay 3.) completed portfolio

By registering for this class, you are accepting the terms of the Covenant. If you have any questions or concerns, make them known to your faculty by the end of the first week of class.