

Soci 3000: Sociology in Film  
Prof. James J. Dowd  
[weberian@uga.edu](mailto:weberian@uga.edu)

Office Hours: Mon, Tues: 4:30-5:30  
Baldwin Hall, Rm. 320  
542-3231/2421

## Course Syllabus Summer 2008

This course is designed to supplement and to reinforce some of the lessons learned in the 1000-level sociology courses, particularly Introduction to Sociology (Soci1101). The distinctive feature of this course is its extensive use of feature-length films to illustrate sociological concepts and issues. This semester, the course will be organized both by film genre and by sociological concepts. We will discuss the distinctive aspects of various film genres and the ways in which an application of the sociological imagination can increase our understanding of the cultural effects that movies produce. We will also consider various sociological ideas, including modernization, anomie, social class and social mobility, cultural capital, gender roles, social identity, subcultures, and assimilation. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to the ways in which forces of social reproduction and social transformation continually operate to make and remake American society.

For our purposes in this course, there are certain types of film that work less well than others. I try to focus on movies that are contemporary, which is to say that they are made and set in our time. Historical dramas, which I enjoy (*Elizabeth* with Cate Blanchett is a favorite of mine), are of less interest for this course since they typically do not focus on contemporary American society. Documentaries are also excluded from our syllabus. Since documentaries come already packaged with a definite point-of-view, they work less well in this course, in which we strive to apply the sociological imagination to films that were not intended to be analyzed sociologically. I also tend not to include foreign films in this course for the simple reason that our focus is on American culture, and one of the central goals of this course is a better understanding of that culture. I make no claims for the quality or importance of any of the films we will view and discuss in class; films have been chosen for the course solely because in one way or another they say something about American culture.

### Getting Started

Your primary responsibilities in this course are (1) to come to class with something to say about the assigned readings; and (2) to view all assigned films and to contribute to our analysis of the sociological content of these films. We will be reading material and viewing films that are thought provoking, contradictory, and sometimes controversial. Consequently, our discussions will be most productive if we all come to class prepared and willing to contribute. Doing this not only will make our class time more enjoyable but will also prepare you for the exam and improve your final grade.

Get the Readings. All of the readings are available either in paper from the reserve desk in the main library, on e-reserve that is accessible through GIL, or through a direct link from this syllabus to the reading. The e-reserve password for this course is *filmsummer*. You are free to get the readings any way you wish, but please note that computer problems are not an excuse for not reading. If you are having trouble getting the readings in electronic format please go to the

reserve desk where you can get a hard copy or contact one of your classmates who may already have printed out a copy.

Explore the WebCT page set up for this course. This website will serve as the definitive source of information about the course. I will be posting some of the course notes and also changes to the syllabus if necessary. So please refer to WebCT for the most up-to-date information, links to assignments, supplementary material, and much more.

**Make Sure Your E-mail Is Working.** Even during a short summer session, there will be occasions when we will be communicating via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your e-mail regularly to make sure you do not miss any important announcements or personal communications. Be sure to clean out your mailbox from time to time. If your mailbox is full, emails will not reach you.

## **Course Requirements**

### *Film Critiques*

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to write a film critique on **four** of the six out-of-class films that you will see. In each paper, your goal should be to demonstrate a good understanding of the relevant course material and the ability to analyze the particular film from a sociological perspective. The keys to a good critique will be clarity, quality insights, and information. Although short critiques are similar to film reviews that one might read in the newspaper, these two forms of writing are *not* the same. A film review in a newspaper or magazine typically attempts to describe for the reader the story line of the movie, the quality of the acting, writing, and direction, and other similar information that might affect the reader's decision to see the movie. The critiques you will be writing, in contrast, are *not* concerned with the dramatic aspects of the movie (whether Tom Cruise or Julia Roberts does a good job in the film is simply not relevant for these assignments) but instead should focus in some way on the sociological content of the film. Since the sociological aspects of a movie are rarely foremost in the minds of the film maker, they may not always be immediately apparent. Rest assured, however, that all of the films included on our syllabus have been chosen because they contain, among other issues, some pertinent sociological theme or situation.

All papers should be typed and double-spaced and must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Since each of these critiques is relevant to a particular class meeting, I cannot accept late papers. Guidelines for writing these critiques appear at the end of this syllabus. Each film critique counts 10% of the final course grade. One of the critique grades will be dropped, for a total of 30% of the course grade. I'll have more to say on the film critiques in class.

### *Integrative Essays.*

Students will answer two take-home essays, each of which is worth 10% toward the final grade. These essays will involve an integration of required readings with several of the films on the syllabus. The first essay will be posted on the WebCt page on Friday evening, June 13<sup>th</sup>. These will be collected at the beginning of class on Monday, June 16<sup>th</sup>. The second essay will be

posted on Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, and collected the following day on Tuesday, June 24<sup>th</sup>.

### *Class Participation*

Class participation includes attendance, contribution to class discussions, and willingness to answer questions posed about the readings and films. I expect everyone to be in class for every class meeting, prepared and willing to take part in our discussion of the assigned readings and films. We all know that courses in the social sciences and humanities in which no one participates are almost invariably dull. This course, even more than others, depends upon your willingness to take part in the discussion of the films and to learn and apply the sociological perspective.

Part of our class work in this course is the discussion of required readings. I should emphasize that the success of class discussions depends at least as much on the active listening and participation of the audience as it does on the introduction to the discussion that I will provide. Students who are reluctant to respond to the questions are not actively participating. Class participation is weighted 15% of the final course grade. Of the 15 participation points, five are earned simply through attendance (5 points = 0-1 absences; 4 points = 2-3 absences; 3 points = 4-5 absences; 2 points = 6-7 absences; 1 point = 8-9 absences; 0 points = >9 absences. Remember that each day during the short summer session counts as **two** classes. I will take attendance at the beginning of class and then again after the break.

If any student is participating in a sponsored school activity that requires periods of time away from campus, please see me **during the first week of the semester during office hours** so that we may discuss the ways in which missed classes will be made up. Concerning any other absence, I always presume, unless convinced otherwise, that there is a good reason for a student's having missed class. For this reason, then, I do not need to see excuses for class absences.

### *Final Exam.*

The final exam for this course will include essays and short-answer questions. The exam counts 35% of the final course grade.

Final grades for the course are based on the following scale:

A	≥93	C+	77-79.9
A-	90-92.9	C	73-76.9
B+	87-89.9	C-	70-72.9
B	83-86.9	D	60-69.9
B-	80-82.9	F	<60

### **Miscellaneous Policies**

1. Academic Honesty. All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. Everything you do in this class must be done within the letter and spirit of the UGA academic honesty policy. In particular, I expect everyone to abide by the student honor code (section 7 of the honesty policy). Cheating or assisting someone who cheats is serious; penalties are severe, and ignorance is not an

acceptable excuse. A link to more detailed information about academic honesty can be found at: <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>

2. Grievances. Any student who feels that he or she has not been treated in a fair or professional manner should follow the Department of Sociology grievance procedures, the first step of which is to discuss the matter with the professor.

3. Classroom Behavior.

Please be in your seat prior to the start of class. More important, ***if you come to class stay until the end.*** It is distracting for everyone when individuals leave class while it is still in progress. Use common sense in this regard. If you become suddenly ill, by all means leave the room.

Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class. Note: This prohibition applies to laptop computers as well.

### Course Structure

In this course we will view and discuss films in six different areas (either a film genre or a sociological concept). One film from each section will be shown during class and a second film will be viewed outside of class. Students will be assigned to Outside Viewing groups in order to increase the number of films included in our class discussions and also to increase access to the outside films. Each group will be assigned one of the out-of-class films to view and discuss for each section of the course. I suggest that you cooperate with other members of your group to assure that everyone has a chance to view the film before class. I will place a copy of most of the out-of-class films on reserve (7<sup>th</sup> floor of the library). Students may choose to view the film in the library or to rent the film from a local video store or other video source.

### Class Calendar

Date	Topics & Agenda	Viewings	Readings
Thursday, June 5	<b>Introduction, Overview, etc.</b>	Films to be discussed: <i>Dead Poets' Society</i> <i>A Few Good Men</i>	
Friday June 6	<b>Introduction (cont.) The Romance Genre</b>	Films to be discussed: <i>Falling in Love</i> <i>The Horse Whisperer</i> <i>Roman Holiday</i> <i>Sabrina</i> <i>Love is a Many- Splendored Thing</i>	Dowd, James J. 1999. "Waiting for Louis Prima: On the Possibility of a Sociology in Film."

Monday June 9	<b>Romance</b>	In-class viewing: <i>Atonement</i>	Wasko, Janet. 2008. “Financing and production: Creating the Hollywood film commodity.”
Tuesday June 10	Discussion of <i>Atonement</i> , the out- of-class romance films, and the Dowd & Pallotta reading .	Out-of-class Romance films: <i>Message in a Bottle</i> <i>You’ve Got Mail</i> <i>Bridges of Madison County</i> <i>The English Patient</i> <i>Pretty Woman</i>	<b>Impt.:</b> <i>Film critique #1 due today.</i> This critique is required of all students.  Dowd, James J. and Nicole R. Pallotta. 2000. “The End of Romance: ... .”
Wed. June 11	<b>Social Class and Social Mobility in the Movies.</b> Discussion of the Wartenberg reading.	Films to be discussed: <i>An Officer and a Gentleman</i> <i>A Brief Encounter</i> <i>White Palace</i> <i>Junebug</i>	Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1995. “An unlikely couple: The significance of difference in <i>White Palace</i> .”
Thurs. June 12	In-class viewing	<i>Chinatown</i>	
Friday June 13	Discussion of <i>Chinatown</i> , the out- of-class social class films, and the Dowd reading on social mobility.	Out-of-Class Films Social Class films: <i>Mrs. Miniver</i> <i>Good Will Hunting</i> <i>Lady and the Tramp</i> <i>Maid in Manhattan</i> <i>The Savages</i>	<i>Film critique #2 due today.</i>  Dowd, James J. 2007. “Practical Consciousness, Deep Culture, and Popular Film: ... .”
Monday June 16	<b>Gender Issues</b>  Discussion of the Giroux reading on <i>Fight Club</i> .	Films to be discussed: <i>Love Story</i> <i>Five Easy Pieces</i> <i>Thelma and Louise</i> <i>Fight Club</i>	Take-home essay #1 due today.  Readings: Giroux, Henry A. 2002. “Brutalized bodies and emasculated politics: <i>Fight Club</i> , ... .”
Tuesday June 17		In-class viewing: <i>Something’s Gotta Give</i>	

Wed. June 18	Discussion of <i>Something's Gotta Give</i> ; the out-of-class gender films and the paper, "The Grip of Tradition."	Out-of-class Gender films: <i>Mulan</i> (or, <i>G.I. Jane</i> ) <i>Kramer v. Kramer</i> <i>The Contender</i> <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> <i>Bridget Jones' Diary</i>	<i>Film critique #3 due today.</i>  Reading: Sadie Wearing. 2007. "Subjects of rejuvenation: Aging in postfeminist culture."
Thursday June 19	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> Discussion of the Wartenberg reading; and issues of race and ethnicity.	Films to be discussed: <i>Heading South</i> <i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner</i> <i>Starting Out in the Evening</i>	Reading: Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1999. "Politics and race in <i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?</i> "
Friday June 20		In-class viewing: <i>The Human Stain</i>	
Monday June 23	Discussion of <i>The Human Stain</i> ; the Denzin reading, "A Grand Canyon;" and the out-of-class ethnicity films,	Out-of-class Ethnicity films: <i>Crash</i> <i>Smoke</i> <i>Grand Canyon</i> <i>Do the Right Thing</i> <i>Jungle Fever</i>	<i>Film critique #4 due</i>  Reading: Denzin, Norman K. 2002. "A Grand Canyon."
Tuesday June 24	<b>Alienation in Contemporary Society</b>  Discussion of the concept of alienation, and the Suzanne Leonard paper.	Films to be discussed: <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> <i>The Graduate</i> <i>Hannah and Her Sisters</i> <i>Little Children</i>	Take-home essay #2 due today.  Suzanne Leonard. 2007. "'I hate my job, I hate everybody here:' Adultery, boredom, and the 'Working Girl' in 21 <sup>st</sup> century American cinema.
Wed. June 25		In-class viewing: <i>Ghost World</i>	

Thurs. June 26	Discussion of <i>Ghost World</i> , the out-of-class alienation films and the Dahms reading on <i>The Matrix</i> .	Out-of-class alienation films: <i>American Beauty</i> <i>Five Easy Pieces</i> <i>Lost in Translation</i> <i>About Schmidt</i> <i>The Good Girl</i>	<i>Film critique #5 due today.</i>  Reading: Dahms, Harry. 2005. "The Matrix Trilogy as Critical Theory of Alienation: Communicating a Message of Radical Transformation."
Friday June 27	<b>The War Film genre</b>  Discussion of the Auster reading.	Films to be discussed: <i>Glory</i> <i>Apocalypse Now</i> <i>Flying Leathernecks</i> <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> <i>Jarhead</i> <i>Saving Pvt. Ryan</i>	Reading: Auster, Albert. 2005. "Saving Private Ryan and American triumphalism."
Mon. June 30		In-class viewing: <i>In the Valley of Elah</i>	Reading: McCrisken, Trevor B. and Andrew Pepper. 2005. "Hollywood's post-Cold War history: ... ."
Tues. July 1	Discussion of <i>In the Valley of Elah</i> , the out-of-class war films, and the reading, "Patriotic gore."	Out of class war films: <i>The Deer Hunter</i> <i>Sands of Iwo Jima</i> <i>Black Hawk Down</i> <i>Three Kings</i> <i>Courage under Fire</i>	<i>Film critique #6 due today</i>  Reading: Dowd, James J. 2008. "Patriotic Gore: War Movies and the American Flag."
Wed. July 2	Final Exam. 2:15-4:30		

### Required Readings

All readings are available at the reserve desk in Main Library, through e-reserve, or through JSTOR. The password to access the on-line versions of these readings through GIL is *filmsummer*.

Auster, Albert. 2005. "Saving Private Ryan and American triumphalism." Pp. 205-213 in Robert Eberwein (ed.) The War Film. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press.

- Dahms, Harry. 2005. "The Matrix Trilogy as Critical Theory of Alienation: Communicating a Message of Radical Transformation." Transdisciplinary Journal of Emergence. 3 (1) 2005: 108-24.
- Denzin, Norman K. 2002. "A Grand Canyon." Pp. 47-63 in Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence. Sage.
- Dowd, James J. 2007. "Practical Consciousness, Deep Culture, and Popular Film: Understanding social mobility through the movies." Forthcoming in Kathryn Feltey and Jean-Anne Sutherland (eds.) Teaching through Film. Sage.
- Dowd, James J. 1999. "Waiting for Louis Prima: On the Possibility of a Sociology in Film." Teaching Sociology. 27 (Oct.): 324-342.
- Dowd, James J. 2008. "Patriotic Gore: War Movies and the American Flag." Cultural Sociology. In press.
- Dowd, James J. and Nicole R. Pallotta. 2000. "The end of romance: The demystification of love in the postmodern age." Sociological Perspectives. 43 (Winter): 549-580.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2002. "Brutalized bodies and emasculated politics: *Fight Club*, Consumerism and Masculine Violence." Pp. 258-288 in Breaking in to the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics. Blackwell Publishers.
- Leonard, Suzanne. 2007. "'I hate my job, I hate everybody here:' Adultery, boredom, and the 'Working Girl' in Twenty-First-century American cinema. Pp. 100-131 in Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Eds.) Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Duke Univ. Press.
- McCrisken, Trevor B. and Andrew Pepper. 2005. "Hollywood's post-Cold War history: The 'righteousness' of American interventionism." Pp. 187-210 in American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1999. "Politics and race in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*." Pp. 111-130 in Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1995. "An unlikely couple: The significance of difference in *White Palace*." Pp. 161-179 in Philosophy and Film, edited by Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg. N.Y.: Routledge.
- Wasko, Janet. 2008. "Financing and production: Creating the Hollywood film commodity." Pp. 43-62 in Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Eds.) The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry. Blackwell.

Wearing, Sadie. 2007. "Subjects of rejuvenation: Aging in postfeminist culture." Pp. 277-310 in Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Eds.) Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Duke Univ. Press.

### **Film Critiques.**

The four required film critiques are not intended to be term papers but, rather, exercises to help organize your thinking for class discussion. Each critique should be 2-3 typed pages and organized around one or two key questions. Although you may choose any sociological issue as a theme for your film critique, here are some questions you might consider:

1. What central social or cultural issues does the film raise? If the film seems to emphasize psychological over social themes, does it also attempt to place the psychological issue within a broader social or cultural context?
2. Is social class a factor in the movie, either as part of the story of the movie or as part of the overall tone of the movie?
3. Are gender roles a factor in the movie, either as part of the story of the movie or as part of the overall tone of the movie?
4. What does the film suggest about the cultural mood of the time in which the story was set?
5. In order to analyze this film, what about the context of the times in which the film is set must the viewer understand?
6. Are the issues raised by the film similarly relevant within American culture today?
7. Does the film contain any apparent ideological or utopian themes?
8. Does the film contain any apparent political biases?
9. Are the central themes in this movie similar to – or different than – the themes of any of the other films from this era?
10. Are the central themes in this movie similar to – or different than – the themes of other films in this *genre*?