Texas A&M University
Core Curriculum
Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum

Foundational Component Area: Creative Arts

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Creative Arts. Courses in this category focus on appreciation and analysis of creative artifacts and works of human imagination. Courses involve the synthesis and interpretation of artistic expression and enable critical, creative, and innovative communication about works of art.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

FREN/FILM 425 introduces students to the history of French cinema through the study of individual directors and films. While the course unfolds chronologically, students will be provided with conceptual tools: exposure to the technological origins of cinema, critical concepts specific to the study of film as an art form, and a survey of pre-WWII classics. The majority of the course focuses on works produced after 1945. Topics include: French decolonization, class and race conflicts in suburban housing projects, responses to cultural Americanization, and the arrival of minority and women cinematographers. A successful student will be able to identify major French directors and cinematic schools, be familiar with sociopolitical issues, and be proficient in formal and thematic film analysis. These analytic and interpretive skills will be honed through a variety of communicative forms, including class discussion, weekly online written reflections, group project, quizzes, and written exams.

Core Objectives

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

The approach is two-pronged: explore the evolution of film as an art form with its own techniques and visual "language"; and explore the evolution of French society as it undergoes one of the fastest and most far-reaching transformations of its 1,000-year history in the decades following the 1950s. Critical thinking on both portions of this curriculum is fostered through students' multi-faceted, active engagement with the films, supplemental readings, study guides, and group work. On the formal level, students will learn to detect how cinema creates its effects (camera placement and movement, editing, staging, visual narrative vs. screenplay, casting, technological gadgetry, etc.). On the content level, students will explore how French national and cultural identity was renegotiated on nearly every significant relational level: urban vs. rural; changing roles for women and thus for men; an emergent youth culture challenging older generations; the arrival of new immigrant cultures; the retreat of major Institutions such as the church, traditional political parties, and the army; and reconfigurations of social classes. Students thus are led to use these films to reflect upon nearly all of the effective cornerstones of a contemporary society. Students have weekly analytical questions to complete in writing, which provides an opportunity to apply concepts and arrive at an articulate, critical expression of their reactions. Study guides for each of the exams help identify and organize key areas of reflection on exams which require synchronic and diachronic comparisons. The exams open with an identification section that tests their mastery of specific concepts before moving to essay questions which require an application of said notions.
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

The course enhances students' skills in written, oral, and visual communication, through in-class discussions, written answers to weekly analytical questions, written examinations, and group debate projects (defense or critique of a given film). Course materials include films and supplementary historical, technical, and theoretical readings.

Teamwork (to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal):

Students are given group work. The composition of the groups changes regularly to enable students to collaborate with the greatest variety of students possible. Group work consists of two steps: building a speculative response to analytical questions provided by the instructor; and transforming these individual responses into a critical argument demonstrating the film's success or failure in achieving its artistic goals. Students thus are led to develop their interpersonal skills as they work toward a common goal, as each improves on their public speaking. The groups are not graded upon their opinion but on their ability to express that opinion articulately and to provide concrete evidence for their position. The first stage (building a speculative response in writing) allows the instructor to monitor how they arrived at their collective interpretation of the film; the class presentation and ensuing debate allow other students to see strategies applied by their peers.

Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

The changes in French society after the 1950's are unusual for their speed and depth. New models of social ethics are thus devised for nearly every key element of daily existence—family, workplace, community identity, sexuality, race relations, France's historical mission, etc. These films explore a broad spectrum of responses to these sociopolitical challenges, and enhance students' intercultural competence through a sort of layering effect (as we address the same questions decade by decade). A constant backdrop is the students' growing awareness of how the French respond differently to problems experienced by American society as well—our historical trajectories and cultural models lead us to develop new paths. Successful students thus come to re-examine their own social expectations while developing a more nuanced awareness of what is specific to French society. Social responsibility is also broached through exploration of film as a medium, one which has completely revolutionized how our culture sees itself and represents itself. Having discussed the sociohistorical content of the narratives, we turn our attention to what we term "lessons in looking"—the analysis of specific portions of a given film to show how a viewer is led to react a particular way to a scene or character (i.e., spotting what position we are assigned as viewers, use of speed or close-ups to hamper critical distance, etc.). The objective is to heighten an awareness of how visual media can seek to manipulate audiences. Class discussions, weekly questions sheets, written exams, and group debate projects are used to assess students' development in these areas.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.