

Term offered changed to "S-even-numbered years" per 3/1911 catalog revisions from Jean Wolski, Theatre Arts

The course was designated writing intensive, effective Fall 2007 (10/25/07 CAA.)

Theatre Arts Department
Proposal for General Education Course: American Theatre on Film

1. Catalog Description:

THA 3754-G. American Theatre on Film (3-1-3). S. AMER THA/FILM. Analysis of significant American plays and film versions thereof. The object is to understand and appreciate similarities and differences between film and theatre as art and to gain insights into aspects of American society, as reflected in the works. Outside viewing assignments required. Prerequisites: ENG 1001G and ENG 1002G. Writing active.

2. Student learning objectives:

- a. Learning objectives designed to help students achieve one or more of the following goals:
 - Demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively
 - The course is writing active. Students will write response, analysis, or comparison/contrast papers on each or most of the plays or films studied/viewed. In all cases, papers will be evaluated on mechanics, usage, structure, and content.
 - The course is a discussion course, not a lecture course. In the early days of the course, students are presented with theory and technique; but as the course progresses, students are expected to discuss what they have seen/read and to compare/contrast—or comment upon the playwright or filmmaker’s intentions. Exchange of ideas is encouraged. Through this, students are encouraged to speak effectively.
 - Demonstrate the ability to think critically
 - All of the written assignments are geared toward developing and sharpening skills in critical and analytical thinking. For example, in several assignments, students must state what they feel the author’s purpose or “message” might be. This is accomplished through analyzing the text or the film.
 - In other assignments, students must explore the various ways the film version departed from the original theatrical version of a play—then offer reasons why the departures were more (or less) effective than the original.
 - Other assignments ask students to identify or to comment upon critical issues in American society, as reflected in film(s) or play(s). These comments may take the form of a written assignment or a discussion in class. Through these means, students are asked to think critically and analytically.
 - Function as responsible citizens
 - Works to be studied serve “double duty”. First, the works must be recognized as excellent examples of dramatic literature, and the filmed versions must be worthwhile examples of film art. Otherwise, there is little reason to study them. But, second, works should also contain some trenchant social issue worth examining. Through viewing/reading the works, students are asked to comment upon the plays’/films’ social critique, and they also are invited to make comparisons between American society of the Past and the Present. (See examples below.)

- Examination of important social issues and events in recent American history helps students “function as responsible citizens” because too many of today’s students have only a scant knowledge of recent American history. Study of issues and events such as the Civil Rights Movement, the McCarthy Era, the Scopes Trial, the Depression, etc., strengthens their understanding of contemporary America.
- b. Additional learning objectives designed to help students achieve the goals of the course and/or a particular discipline or program.

The course helps students achieve the goals of the Fine Arts requirement through the following means:

- 1) By exposing students to masterpieces of American drama through reading and discussing playscripts and through viewing motion picture versions of these plays.
- 2) By helping students appreciate the fundamental similarities and differences between live theatre and motion pictures, thereby deepening their understanding of two vibrant art forms.
- 3) By sharpening students’ awareness of the problems faced by diverse social and cultural groups within American society, both past and present, by reading and viewing works that address those problems.
- 4) By focusing attention on socio-cultural reasons film versions are frequently less controversial—or, at least, less penetrating—than the playscripts on which they are based (not the least of which is “box office considerations”).

3. Course outline

The following material will be covered in the equivalent of 15 weeks of 30 seventy-five-minute class periods—with a one-hour lab per week for viewing the films. At appropriate times during the semester, the entire class period will be devoted to watching the film. The one-hour lab is supplemental viewing time needed for watching the film uninterrupted.

- I. Introductory Matters (1 week)
 - A. How to read a play: How play scripts differ from novels and other printed forms (discussion of handout).
 - B. How to *see* a film: What to look for besides stars, SFX, and plot.
 - C. Review of some fundamental writing techniques
 - D. Discussion of *artistry* inside of entertainment: What *is* “entertainment”, anyway? What is “artistry” in film and theatre?
 - E. Student survey: Number/type of film, theatre, or other dramatic forms experienced during the past year.
- II. Artistic Techniques: Live theatre versus motion picture (3 weeks)
 - A. Brief survey of the development of theatre and the birth and development of the motion picture.
 - B. Basic techniques of theatre and film:

1. Theatre: live actors, live audience, shared space, the “long scene”, fixed locale, finite space, few or limited special effects, seen at a distance; actor and director manipulate audience perception; means of composing space and of focusing attention include area of stage, plane, level, body position, contrast in body position, triangles, direct and indirect focus, movement, lighting, color, etc.
 2. Film: “shadow play”, fixed or “canned” experience, short scenelets edited together (montage); camera cuts and changes, infinitely flexible locale, infinite possibilities for camera tricks and special effects. Kinds of camera moves/shots: medium, close-up, long shot; shot and sequence; pan shot, tilt shot, dolly shot, crane (boom) shot, etc. Camera manipulates audience perception.
 3. Similarities between the two: plot, characters, dialogue, motivation, theme, symbols, dramatic structure, suspense, rising level of interest, climax, denouement; shared genres; use of visuals (line, shape, color, texture, weight, mass, height, depth, etc.) to achieve effects.
- II. The Artist and American Society (3 weeks)
- A. Read and study theatrical version of Robert Sherwood’s *The Petrified Forest* (1935)
 - B. View film version and discuss similarities and differences
 - C. Topics for discussion and writing:
 - ❑ Place of the artist in American society (alienation, displacement, lack of worth)
 - ❑ Views of the artist
 - ❑ Portrayal of “non-artists”
 - ❑ Significance of the artist’s suicide/sacrifice
 - ❑ The petrified forest as symbol of the artist and of the individual in contemporary (1930’s) society
 - ❑ Role of the Depression in both versions
 - ❑ Why a gangster? Function in the play and as social commentary
 - ❑ Why an ex-football player?
 - ❑ Role of stars in perceptions of play/film
 - ❑ Changes from stage to film and why.
- III. The Black Family and American Society in the Civil Rights Era (3 weeks)
- A. Read and analyze Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)
 - B. View and analyze film version
 - C. Discussion of both versions
 - D. Topics for discussion and writing:
 - ❑ Portrayal of American black family life in both versions
 - ❑ Views of the black husband and wife: hopes, problems, frustrations, dreams
 - ❑ Views of the children: generation gap
 - ❑ Black Matriarch: human or stereotype?
 - ❑ Racial stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and how different characters handle the problems (especially different generations)
 - ❑ Changes from stage to screen: a softened message for a mass white audience?
 - ❑ Reception of play versus reception of film (also conditions under which play/film were produced)
 - ❑ Overall evaluation of the transition from playhouse to movie theatre
- IV. The Individual Versus Himself (3 weeks)

- A. See and discuss film version of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (The 1958 Elizabeth Taylor/Paul Newman version)
- B. Read Williams' original 1955 script
- C. Discuss the vast differences between the two
- D. Topics for discussion:
 - ❑ The effect of the changes on Williams' original intention
 - ❑ The changes in characters from the original to the film
 - ❑ Why these changes (discuss, among other areas, the Hollywood Production Code, in effect since the mid-1930's)
 - ❑ Attitudes toward homosexuality then and now
 - ❑ Why an ex-football player?
 - ❑ Why the South? Why not Michigan or Oregon or Delaware? (What does the Southern locale suggest about the action and characters?)
 - ❑ What changes, if any, would need to be made to the original play script if it were made into a movie today?

(Other possible plays/films for study/viewing—as substitutes for the above: Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's *Inherit the Wind*, Marsha Norman's *Night, Mother*, Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End*, Howard Sackler's *The Great White Hope*, and newer films/plays, as they become available.

- V. Time set aside for other activities and topics (2 weeks)
 - A. In-class writing (2-3 meetings)
 - B. In-class examinations (1-2 meetings)
 - C. Other germane topics (approx. 1-2 meetings):
 - ❑ The motion picture industry: How pictures get produced and why
 - ❑ The live theatre industry: How plays get put on and why
 - ❑ The business end of both
 - ❑ Where both may be headed in the near future
 - ❑ Summation: Film and theatre as similar but different art forms, each with its own strengths and limitations; review and preparation for final essay exam

4. Evaluation of Student learning

a. Sample List of Assignments and Grading

- 1) At least 3 quizzes over plays-----10%
- 2) EIU production analysis paper
(a theatre techniques “exam”)-----10%
- 3) Film techniques exam-----10%
- 3) Shot List Assignment-----10%
(making a shot list)
- 4) Analysis papers*-----50%
- 5) Final essay exam-----10%

b. How the course qualifies as “writing active”

- 1) Writing will be “frequent”, as seen from the list of assignments above. Each reading and viewing assignment entails some form of written response—ranging from quizzes to impromptu responses written in class.
- 2) Writing will be “brief” in that few assignments exceed 4-5 pages.

3) Analysis papers “assist students in mastering course content” in that the purpose of the papers is to encourage students to notice and to think about what they have seen/read. Since a major part of the course is understanding how film and theatre function, the students must reflect upon course content.

5. Rationale

a. Segment of the general education program:

This course is to be placed in the Arts and Humanities component of the General Education curriculum.

b. Justification of course level and prerequisites:

- 1) The course is best taught at the upper-division level because the writing component, the course content, and the expectations presuppose a junior-senior level of maturity and experience in critical/analytical thinking and writing.
- 2) Because of the above, ENG 1001G and ENG 1002G are appropriate prerequisites.

c. Similarity to existing courses, courses to be deleted, etc.

This course does not duplicate current offerings.

d. This course is not required of anyone in any program; no majors or minors will be affected.

6. Implementation

- a. Jerry Eisenhour, Christine Joern, Jean Wolski
- b. Texts: Play scripts as indicated above. Some are available in TRS anthologies, some may have to be purchased @ \$5.00. Publication dates vary. Supplementary materials: Instructor-generated handouts/study guide, Library-owned video tapes.
- c. Purchase of one or two plays not anthologized. Not to exceed \$20.00
- d. Spring 2001.

7. Community College Transfer

A community college course may not be judged equivalent to this course.

8. Date approved by the department: 4/3/00

9. Date approved by the college curriculum committee: 4/12/00

10. Date approved by CAA _____

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