

Department: Modern and Classical Languages

Course No: 3261W [281 W]

Credits: 3

Title: German Film and Culture

Contact: Roger Travis

ContentArea: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Course Information: A survey of German film from the silent period to the present. Students learn to appreciate the symbolic language that films from this cultural sphere use to address socio-historic phenomena. Students draw comparisons between this cultural tradition to others, e.g. Hollywood Cinema.

b. Two midterms that ask students to apply the terminology of cinematography to the films they have watched; 10-20 pages of readings per week providing the theoretical background of film analysis and information on the historic background of the films in question; three papers of about five pages each that discuss one particular film: students are asked to formulate a thesis about the film's symptomatic meaning and to back up the thesis by an investigation of formal and content related elements; papers will be revised based on comments by the instructor.

c. The specifics of cinematic language vs. other modes of symbolic expression; German history as expressed in cinematic language; Weimar film as compared to early Hollywood film; continuity editing vs. other models of editing in film; classic Hollywood studio productions vs. independent film making and the New German Cinema.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: (Numbers refer to the numbered goals of gen. ed.:)

1) Students learn to articulate arguments in support of a thesis they have formulated and

3) to base aesthetic judgements on a critical assessment of the cultural artifacts they discuss rather than on using the prevalent "thumbs up or down" approach.

5) Students learn about their own era, society and its traditions of cultural expression by contrasting it with that of another culture, thus

6) they will be able to appreciate their own cultural tradition as one among other equally valid modes of expressing human experience.

CA1 Criteria: (numbers refer to the goals for Group 1 courses as defined in the GEOC document)

1) The course investigates historic developments in Germany using films from the beginning of the 20th century to the present and contrasts the events represented with those in US history of the same time period.

Specifically, films representing the effects of the economic crisis preceding Hitler's rise to power, propaganda films of the Nazi period, and post-War films reflecting on this period will help students understand an era that has shaped both US and European society in ways still perceptible today. The German films reflecting on events right before and after 1989 help students understand the shift in world politics from Cold War rhetoric to a more global view that shifts attention away from the two (former) superpowers and brings into focus regional problems such as labor migration and terrorism.

3) The course enables students to understand the specific symbolic language of film and to experience that appreciating films means learning this language.

While German 284 presents students with a synchronic view of film genres by contrasting films from different cultures but of the same genre and the same time period, German 281 is a diachronic investigation into the development of film style in Germany with particular attention to its attempts to rival the Hollywood productions of each time period in question. Through the contrast of film styles students will be able to appreciate that film is a symbolic language that relies on certain codes which in turn are tied to the cultures from which they originate. In particular, the diachronic view of film style in this course shows students that this symbolic language was formed over time and is thus not only culturally specific but also an artificial construct. Such an investigation of the history of film style helps students understand that audiences had to learn to decipher this symbolic language and its changes over time. The German films give students examples of alternative modes of filmmaking to those dominant in US film history, such as montage in Weimar film vs. Hollywood's early sound cinema, the auteur mode of film making vs. the big studio productions, as well as independent filmmaking vs. films produced according to strictly economic considerations.

CA4 Criteria: numbers refer to the goals for Group 4 courses) 1) The course emphasizes that there are varieties of human perceptions of socio-historic events by comparing films from one cultural tradition (German) to that of another (US). 2) A thorough investigation and comparison of two modes of filmmaking help students understand that perceptions of historic and social processes are culturally constructed. They understand that parallel historic developments are perceived differently from one culture to the other.