

*“What is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?” -Bertolt Brecht*

*“The hold-up film deserves credit for having revealed, as Thomas de Quincey so tastefully did long ago, the aura of art and beauty that any human activity may assume, no matter it’s morality.” -Roland Lacourbe*

## **FILM 390/490 ADVANCED TOPICS IN CINEMA: THE HEIST FILM**

DePaul University | Winter Quarter 2020

Thursdays | 1:30PM - 4:45PM | CDM Center Room 708

Instructor: Eric Marsh | [marsh@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:marsh@cdm.depaul.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8AM-10AM, 12PM-1PM, by appointment only

**Course Description** - This course explores cinematic robbery. Focusing on the heist (or ‘caper’) film, the class will trace the history and trajectory of this unique and flexible genre from its origins in film noir and gangster films of classic Hollywood to its explosive emergence in the post-WWII era in Europe and beyond. Students will examine the narrative and stylistic conventions of the heist film, its evolving relationship with audiences over time through revision and variation, as well as its function as social commentary. Additionally, students will create their own projects and explore the heist as allegory for the filmmaking process: an imaginative and creative collaboration involving ideas and vision, planning and preparation, action and execution, and, ultimately, the production of an artistic or poetic work.

**Textbook** - All readings will be provided by the instructor and posted to D2L.

The Heist Film: Stealing With Style by Daryl Lee (2014)

The Best Laid Plans: Interrogating the Heist Film ed. by Jim Leach (2017)

American Film Genres by Stuart Kaminsky (1973)

A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre by Rick Altman (1984)

+ various supplemental readings will be assigned for group projects

## **Basis for Evaluation**

|                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| GROUP PROJECTS .....             | 60%  |
| FINAL PROJECT .....              | 20%  |
| ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION ..... | 20%  |
| TOTAL .....                      | 100% |

A = 100 – 94, A- = 93 – 90, B+ = 89 – 88, B = 87 – 83, B- = 82 – 80, C+ = 79 – 78, C = 77 – 73, C- = 72 – 70, D+ = 69 – 68, D = 67 – 63, D- = 62 – 60, F = 59 – 0.

### **CLASS SCHEDULE & COURSE OUTLINE**

|         |      |   |
|---------|------|---|
| WEEK 1  | 1/9  | INTRODUCTION  |
| WEEK 2  | 1/16 | DEFINING THE HEIST FILM                                   |
| WEEK 3  | 1/23 | ECONOMIC SENTIMENTS                                       |
| WEEK 4  | 1/30 | THE ART OF FAILURE  |
| WEEK 5  | 2/6  | CONCLUSIONS: THE 50s NOIR HEIST & ITS SATIRE              |
| WEEK 6  | 2/13 | THE HEIST ADAPTS ITS MESSAGE                              |
| WEEK 7  | 2/20 | MELVILLE & MINIMALISM                                     |
| WEEK 8  | 2/27 | MANN & MASCULINITY  |
| WEEK 9  | 3/5  | FIN DE SIÈCLE: DEATH AND REBIRTH                          |
| WEEK 10 | 3/12 | THE 21st CENTURY HEIST                                    |
| FINALS  | 3/19 | FINAL PROJECT SCREENINGS & PRESENTATIONS (11:30AM-1:45PM) |

**Content & Schedule Changes** – The course schedule is subject to change depending on class progress, time constraints, and material availability. The overall workload, however, will not change. Make sure you pace yourself accordingly. You will be notified of any changes in the syllabus in a timely fashion.

**Screenings** - In addition to in-class screenings, you will be assigned films to watch at home. We will discuss these films in class and they will factor into your research and projects. All films will be made available to stream on D2L. Here is the (subject-to-change) list of what we will be watching:

*The Asphalt Jungle*, 1950, Huston, USA, 112 min

*The Lavender Hill Mob*, 1951, Chrichton, UK, 81 min

*The Killing*, 1956, Kubrick, USA, 85 min

*Cruel Gun Story*, 1964, Furukawa, Japan, 87 min  
*Du rififi chez les hommes*, 1955, Dassin, France, 115 min  
*Bob le Flambeur*, 1956, Melville, France, 102 min  
*The Ladykillers*, 1955, Mackendrick, UK, 97 min  
*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958, Monicelli, Italy, 111 min  
*Assault on the Pay Train*, 1962, Farias, Brazil, 102 min  
*How To Steal a Million*, 1966, Wyler, USA, 123 min  
*Le Cercle Rouge*, 1970, Melville, France, 140 min  
*Thief*, 1981, Mann, USA, 123 min  
*Heat*, 1995, Mann, USA, 170 min  
*Reservoir Dogs*, 1992, Tarantino, USA, 99 min  
*Ocean's 11*, 2001, Soderbergh, USA, 117 min

### **Assignment Breakdown & Due Dates**

All projects in this course will be done collaboratively, in groups, aka CREWS. CREWS will be randomly assigned for each group project. Each crew will receive INSTRUCTIONS from me (aka things to read, watch, research) and work together to formulate both a paper and presentation detailing and synthesizing their ideas and findings.

#### **GROUP PROJECT #1: THE HEIST IN THE 1950s (20%)**

Crews will research and present on a wide variety of heist films from the 1950s.  
Due 2/6

#### **GROUP PROJECT #2: THE HEIST ADAPTS ITS MESSAGE (20%)**

Crews will research and present on a wide variety of heist films from the 1960s and 1970s.  
Due 2/20

#### **GROUP PROJECT #3: DEATH AND REBIRTH (20%)**

Crews will research and present on the state of the heist film in the 1980s and 1990s.  
Due 3/5

#### **FINAL PROJECT (20%)**

Students will have the opportunity to form their own crews and create a project inspired by our journey through the heist genre. This may be a film, research paper, video essay, etc; Process and methodology will be up to the students.  
Due 3/19

**Course Policies** - In addition to the DePaul University course policies (see student handbook), the following policies apply to this course:

**Weekly Email** – Within 24 hours of our weekly class meeting I will send an email detailing the class business for the week: assignments, readings, screenings, etc. If you want to keep up with the course, you *must* read these e-mails and make sure you're on track. **No excuses.**

**Attendance** - Each class consists of lecture, discussion, and screenings; **attendance is mandatory.** Class time is most productive when everyone arrives promptly and comes prepared to discuss that week's topic (whether a reading, film, etc). Clips and short films shown in class may not be available outside of class, and you are responsible for all of the class material. All absences will result in a reduction of the participation grade unless excused. Excused absences are handled through the Dean of Students Office after completing an Absence Notification Form [here](#). Note: Every situation will be handled according to individual circumstances at the instructor's discretion. Absolutely no consideration will be given to those who request special treatment without advanced notice or a doctor's note.

**Group Evaluations** - For group projects, each team member is required to turn in a written evaluation of their experience. If all evaluations are uniformly positive, all group members will share the grades evenly. If evaluations are negative, the grades of the group members will vary (and not in a good way).

**Class Discussion** - Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to **ask questions** and **offer comments** relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the topic, reading, screening, etc. Students must keep up with the readings and screenings to participate in class discussion.

**Attitude** - A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise, a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such issues.

**Civil Discourse** - DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be [Socially Responsible Leaders](#). It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

**NO ELECTRONICS** - This course involves a mixture of lecture, discussion, as well as screenings and as such, it requires your full attention (we watch movies with our eyes, ears, and minds!). **There will be no phones, computers, etc, allowed during class.** Exceptions will be made on an individual basis. If you bring a phone to class it *must* be on silent mode or

turned off. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and the professor, texting, tweeting, snapchatting, instagramming, etc, is *never* allowable in class.

**Reading Assignments** - Reading assignments are *mandatory*. The textbook readings supplement and inform the lectures and discussions and will be crucial in a broad understanding of cinema as well as writing your responses. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. *Supplemental readings will also be assigned & discussed in-class.* They will be available on D2L.

**Academic Policies** - All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found [here](#)

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

**Online Course Evaluations** - Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

**Academic Integrity** - Plagiarism is dishonest behavior and therefore violates collegiality as well as University policy. Any cases of plagiarism will automatically receive a zero and be reported to departmental and University officials for disciplinary action. You should familiarize yourself with behavior that constitutes plagiarism by reviewing the University's policy regarding academic dishonesty at:  
<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/Resources/Students/index.html>

**Special Needs** - Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).  
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