

Texas A&M University—San Antonio
English 4394: Topics in Film Studies (fall 2025)
In-person class sessions: MW 9:30 – 10:45 am (Classroom Hall 206)

Instructor: Dr. Jackson Ayres

Office: Classroom Hall, room 314L (will update if/when changed)

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Phone: 210-784-2229

Office Hours: Mon, 11:00-12:00; Wed, 1:00-2:00pm; and f2f or virtual meetings by appointment

Course Description for Fall 2025

ENGL 4394 offers students the opportunity to study film based on a selected period, genre, nationality/language, or issue. For fall 2025, the class is a comprehensive introduction to film studies.

Course Goals

On completion of this course, students will:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of film studies, including its terminology; key concepts; theory, methods, and practices; history; among other aspects; and
- critically read and analyze a range of film texts, making note of the relationships between the texts and their theoretical, historical, and cultural contexts.

Transferable Skills

Skills practiced in this class that transfer to multiple contexts and circumstances include critical thinking and reading, persuasive writing, analytic writing, synthesis of information, and collaboration.

Required Texts

Ed Sikov, *Film Studies: An Introduction* (2nd edition)

Metropolis (1927) – available on Tubi, YouTube

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) – available on HBO Max, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Swank (Library)

The Matrix (1999) – available on HBO Max, MGM+, Swank (Library)

***Please, plan to screen the above films outside of class. I will also show clips from selected films during in-class discussions, but these three films constitute a primary text “reading list.” The Library Reserve Desk also has DVD copies (and DVD players) for short-term checkout.**

The Ungraded Classroom

This class is ungraded, so it relocates the focus and purpose of the classroom onto *learning*, not ranking. Students sometimes feel uncertainty or resistance to ungrading. A common reaction is a sense that the instructor is abdicating a responsibility. If there is no grading, how will students receive guidance and track progress? Rest assured that while there are no *grades*, we still have *assessment* in forms of feedback, and review – but, I am detaching these assessment activities from grading, a move that prevents a grade from overshadowing or distorting assessment, feedback, and review. Ungrading also accommodates a customizable educational experience, as you create your own individualized learning plan and proceed through the course in a way that makes it most meaningful to you and your goals.

Of course, the requirements of the university mean that I must submit a final grade. In the end, then, you do in fact receive a grade. However, you and I will collaborate to determine, in a qualitative and holistic way, your course grade. Throughout the semester, we will reflect on your work, process, and

learning goals. Your final reflective self-assessment asks you to decide your grade for the course. I will respond, and, in turn, you will either revise your grade or stick with it. This process has some caveats, identified later in this document, and I do retain a right to override; yet, I trust your judgment so I will only override a grade decision in select, rare circumstances – and it will not always be to lower a grade.

Assignments

Engagement Assignments

- Collaborative Google document contributions
- In-class discussions
- Capsule Review x3
- Project pitch, drafts and workshopping

Engagement assignments: regular, short assignments that are the building blocks of learning. These assignments allow you to explore our readings, brainstorm, make connections, and pose generative questions. They ask you to think through the ideas presented by our readings, clarifying your understanding of them and formulating critical responses, and extend our class conversations. In-class activities will occur on an ad hoc basis, and may include polls, peer review, free-writes, among others.

Impact on final self-assessment: you must identify, in Checkpoint writings, the Engagement Assignments you completed and persuasively explain how they supported your learning in the course.

Checkpoint Assignments

- Learning plan
- Process letters (2)
- Mid-Semester Reflection
- Final self-assessment

Checkpoint assignments undergird the ungraded pedagogical approach. The learning plan sets goals for the semester. Process letters and a midpoint reflection ask you to describe and comment on your learning methods and progress. A final self-assessment has you narrate and evaluate your learning experience and performance; as part of this task, you decide your grade and then consult me about it.

Impact on final self-assessment: completing fewer than half the required checkpoint assignments automatically limits your maximum final grade by one letter-grade. In other words, you must complete at least three of our Checkpoint assignments to avoid an automatic cap imposed on your final grade.

Depth Assignments

- Response Paper x3
- Critical Analysis

Depth assignments enable you to engage course material in sustained, focused, and substantive ways. These course content-based assignments grow out of our smaller, collaborative Engagement assignments. Our depth assignments align with our course's units. See schedule for submission dates.

Impact on final self-assessment: your maximum possible final grade automatically reduces by one letter-grade per incomplete Depth Assignment; so if you miss one, a B is your highest possible grade.

How to Submit Your Work

Submit assignments electronically to Blackboard. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the Blackboard system prior to submission / posting, and contact me if you have questions. Use MLA format.

Late Papers

I accept work after the recommended submission dates. In such cases, however, I may not have time to give full feedback, undermining ungraded benefits and outcomes. The Final Self-Assessment determining your grade, moreover, factors missed deadlines into a final grade. Please see the schedule for late submission cut-off dates. When appropriate, request an extension in advance.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

ENGL 4394 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center:

The Center provides writing support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges. Writing tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Students can schedule appointments with the Center in JagWire under the student services tab. The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center can be reached by emailing wldcc@tamusa.edu. Students can also make appointments with the Writing, Language, and Digital Composing under the Student Services tab in JagWire.

JAGS

Additional academic skill resources can be found in The JAGS (Jaguar Academic Guides to Success) Program. JAGS offers academic skill building strategies and can assist you in developing an effective academic success plan. If you are interested in the JAGS program, please contact the Student Academic Success Center at (210) 784-1352.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disability. If you believe you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the coordination of services. DSS is located at the Main Campus on the 2nd floor of the Central Academic Building in room 210. The phone number for DSS is (210) 784-1335 and email is dsupport@tamusa.edu.

Counseling Resources

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you or someone you know is experiencing life stressors, emotional difficulties, or mental health concerns at Texas A&M University – San Antonio, please contact the Student Counseling Center (SCC) located in Modular C, Room 166 (Rear entrance) or call 210-784-1331 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday – Friday. After-

hours crisis support is available by calling 210-784-1331. Please contact UPD at 911 if harm to self or harm to others is imminent.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free, confidential (to the extent permitted by law), and are not part of a student's academic or university record. SCC provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information, please visit www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Safer Spaces

We will work together to create a safer classroom for every student enrolled in this course. We will treat each other with common decency and respect. Derogatory or abusive comments made regarding race, class, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, size, appearance, age, religion, ethnicity, political orientation, or nationality are grounds for dismissal from the classroom community. I expect online civility. If you experience discomfort, please contact me and we will redress it.

Childcare Statement

Please note that if lack or an interruption to childcare occurs, I welcome children (or other family members and dependents) to join you in our classroom. I ask only that you prepare the guest in order to ensure that you may still fulfill typical course expectations.

Meeting Essential Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

Student Misconduct

Appropriate conduct is essential to the effective functioning of the University. University policy defines unacceptable conduct, both academic and non-academic misconduct, and penalties for such behavior in [The Student Handbook](#) and The Student Code of Conduct.

Academic Rights and Responsibilities

As a member in an academic community, students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education, be mature, be self-directed and be able to manage their own affairs. Students who are unwilling to abide by these basic expectations will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Students are expected to share in the responsibility and authority with faculty and staff to challenge and make known acts that violate the Texas A&M University-San Antonio Code of Conduct. For more information please [this site](#), which includes information on policies for the use of AI tools. Students, moreover, are expected to contend with the content of the course and the academic field from which that content emerges. Please refer to [the Student Handbook](#) for more information.

Texas SB17

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to

censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance

According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which includes class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving Federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have his/her aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may need to return a portion of his/her federal aid.

University Email Policy and Course Communications

All correspondence between professors and students must occur via University email accounts. You must have Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at sahelp@tamusa.edu or at 210-784-4357.

The Six-Drop Rule

Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Course Schedule

Week of August 25

MONDAY

Introductions 1: course documents and policies, ourselves

WEDNESDAY

Introduction 2: Ungrading practices and intentions, and why we study film

David Bordwell, ["Studying Cinema"](#)

Week of September 01

MONDAY (no class – Labor Day holiday)

WEDNESDAY (shortened session: meeting from 9:30 – 10:00am)

Introduction 3: our AI movie theme

Learning Plan due to Blackboard by 11:59pm on Friday

UNIT 1: Core Components of Cinema

Week of September 08

MONDAY

Sikov, chapter 1 and chapter 2

WEDNESDAY

Sikov, chapter 3

Before Monday 09/15, watch *Metropolis* (available on Tubi) and submit a capsule review.

Week of September 15

Discussion of *Metropolis* (focus on the screen image, camera movement, and cinematography)

Capsule review due at start of class

WEDNESDAY

Discussion of *Metropolis* (focus on the screen image, camera movement, and cinematography)

Week of September 22

MONDAY

No class session – Response Paper 1 due to Blackboard by 10:45am

WEDNESDAY

Unit 1 reflection and discussion

Process Letter #1 due to Blackboard by 11:59pm on Friday

UNIT 2: Film Suturing

Week of September 29

MONDAY

Read Sikov, chapter 4 and chapter 5

WEDNESDAY (shortened session: meeting from 9:30 – 10:00am)

Read Sikov, chapter 6

Before Monday, watch *2001: A Space Odyssey* (available on HBO Max, Prime Video, and Hulu) and submit a capsule review.

Week of October 06

MONDAY

Capsule review due at start of class

Discussion of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (focus on editing, sound, narrative)

WEDNESDAY

Discussion of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (focus on editing, sound, narrative)

Week of October 13

MONDAY

No class session – Response Paper 2 due to Blackboard by 10:45am

WEDNESDAY

Unit 2 and course reflection and discussion

Mid-Semester Reflection due to Blackboard by 11:59pm

SUBMISSIONS FOR UNITS 1 & 2 NO LONGER ACCEPTED AFTER FRI, 03/07

UNIT 3: Affinities and Affiliations

Week of October 20

MONDAY

Read Sikov, chapter 8 and chapter 9

WEDNESDAY

Read Sikov, chapter 10 and chapter 11

Before Monday, watch *The Matrix* (available on HBO Max and MGM+) and write a capsule review before class

Week of October 27

MONDAY

Discussion of *The Matrix* (focus on filmmakers, performance, genre, and special effects)

Capsule review due at start of class

WEDNESDAY

Discussion of *The Matrix* (focus on filmmakers, performance, genre, and special effects)

Week of November 03

MONDAY

No class session – Response Paper 3 due to Blackboard by 10:45am

WEDNESDAY (shortened session: meeting from 9:30 – 10:00am)

Unit 3 reflection and discussion

Process Letter #2 due to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Monday

UNIT 4: Critical Analysis

Week of November 10

MONDAY

Read Sikov, chapter 12 and chapter 13

WEDNESDAY

Read Sikov, chapter 14

Pitch proposal for Critical Analysis due to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday

Week of November 17

MONDAY

In-class workshop over pitch proposal – BRING COPY OF PITCH TO CLASS

WEDNESDAY

In-class workshop over introduction draft – BRING COPY OF DRAFT TO CLASS

Draft of Critical Analysis introduction (1 - 2 pages) due to Blackboard by 9:30am

Week of November 24

MONDAY

No class – Thanksgiving holiday

WEDNESDAY

No class – Thanksgiving holiday

Week of December 01

MONDAY

In-class workshop

Submit prior to class, and bring to class, a working draft (roughly 75% complete)

WEDNESDAY (shortened session: meeting from 9:30 – 10:00am)

Discuss self-assessment process

Q&A over final project

Final draft of Critical Analysis due to Blackboard by 11:59pm on Thursday

SUBMISSIONS FOR UNITS 3 & 4 NO LONGER ACCEPTED AFTER WED, 12/03

Final Period: December 06 – December 12

Self-assessment conferences (complete and submit Self-Assessment prior to appointment).