

**LBST 2101.339**  
**Western History and Culture:**  
**RACE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE AMERICAN HORROR FILM**  
**Tues./Thu., 12:30-1:45**  
**Friday 1**

**Kent L. Brintnall**  
**kbrintna@uncc.edu**  
**Office Hours: Tue., 2:00-3:00, and by appointment**

“Monsters are meaning machines.”  
– Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Horror films have historically been obsessed with cultural anxieties regarding difference, the foreign, the Other. Their images of the inhuman, the monstrous and the terrifying, by negative implication, construct an image of normative identity. In this course, we will examine a range of American horror films from the early twentieth century into the past decade to investigate how America has understood racial, gender and sexual identities as well as how it has managed its anxieties relating to them. To do this, we will pay careful attention to the film texts themselves, to the historical context of their production and reception and to theoretical writings about them. A major goal of the course is to help students understand American cultural struggles with difference.

*Note: The films viewed in this course contain graphic violence and some sexual content. If you are uncomfortable watching, discussing and analyzing such material, you should not be in this class.*

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Weekly readings are available through electronic course reserve.

*Please bring the relevant readings to each class session.*

## **GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY**

*I want every student to succeed in this class.* In selecting readings and films, crafting assignments, setting a schedule and articulating expectations, I have tried to create a framework that will enable this. In presenting material and responding to assignments, I strive to be clear. I will not, however, hunt you down, or pester you, to make sure you are doing the required work.

*To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.* This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or my expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if my teaching style is not working for you, *please* let me know. I will do what I can to help, but I am completely unable to remedy the situation if I do not know there is a problem.

## **SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS**

Students are expected to (1) attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings; (2) read attentively all assigned readings prior to the Tuesday session of the week for which they are assigned; (3) view carefully all assigned films by the Thursday session of the week for which they are assigned; (4) participate actively and productively in discussions of the assigned material; (5) familiarize themselves with the syllabus; (6) take responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of the course; and (7) check their 49er Express e-mail accounts regularly for course-related communications from the instructor.

Students are **NOT** expected to have prior experience with film analysis, but are expected to demonstrate a willingness to engage the course materials carefully, critically and creatively. Students are **NOT** expected to be “horror fans,” but are expected to pay close attention to the film texts. Students are **NOT** expected to agree with the views expressed by the instructor, the course materials or other students, but are expected to manage any disagreements respectfully.

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Consistent with the University’s commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus.

## **ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services ([www.ds.uncc.edu](http://www.ds.uncc.edu)).

## **ATTENDANCE**

Students are expected to attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings. *Every absence after two, for whatever reason, will result in a three-point deduction from your final grade. Every two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as one absence.* If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting copies of any lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this rule is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide me with written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the classes you will be missing for this reason no later than **Tuesday, January 25.**

## **FILM VIEWING**

Students are expected to view carefully all assigned films by the Thursday session of the week for which they are assigned.

All films for the course will be made available on reserve in the library. Films marked with an asterisk (\*) will be available throughout the semester. All others will be put on reserve by the Thursday prior to their discussion in class. For example, *Blacula* will be available by Thursday, February 3rd. Many of the films are also available through Netflix, Blockbuster and other rental services.

I reserve the right to administer unannounced for-credit quizzes or short, in-class writing assignments to check whether students are, indeed, viewing the films.

*Because watching the films is an essential component of the course, you will need to commit the necessary time and attention to viewing them prior to discussing them in class. If you think this will be a problem or a hardship for you, you should not take this course.*

## **CLASS DECORUM**

(1) Be on time for class. If you must come in late or leave early, please do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Cell phones must be turned off prior to class. If your cell phone rings, or if I observe you text-messaging during class, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course. (3) Computers may be used to take notes. If I observe you doing work unrelated to the course, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course. In addition, if I observe any student doing work unrelated to the course on their computer, I will reconsider letting any student use their computer for note-taking.

## **E-MAIL COMMUNICATION**

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using the 49er Express e-mail system. You are responsible for checking this e-mail account and responding promptly to any e-mail requests.

## SCHEDULE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.11 Syllabus Overview

Clips from *American Nightmare* (Adam Simon, 2000)

#### 1.13 Orientation to Film Analysis

*Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932)

Optional Reading: Kent L. Brintnall, "The Moral Demand of the 'Loving Cup': The Presence of the Abject Body in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and the Christian Eucharist," *Golem* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2006), [www.golemjournal.org/Spring06\\_issue.htm](http://www.golemjournal.org/Spring06_issue.htm) (students can access on the Web).

#### 1.18 Overview of Course Themes

Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Planks of Reason*, ed. Barry K. Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 107-41.

#### 1.20 Introduction to Research and Writing

Bring your copy of Turabian's *Manual for Writers* to class.

***Absences on this day will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade.***

### UNIT ONE: Race

- 1.25 Joshua David Bellin, "Killing the Beast: *King Kong* in Black and White," in *Framing Monsters: Fantasy Film and Social Alienation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2005), 21-47.

***\*\*\*Assessment Essay, Part I, due by noon.***

- 1.27 *King Kong* (Merian Cooper & Ernest Schoedsack, 1933) (104 mins)\*

- 2.1 Kendall Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films & American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 81-101.

- 2.3 *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) (96 minutes)\*

- 2.8 Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African-American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 69-111.

- 2.10 *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972) (93 minutes)

- 2.15 Elspeth Kydd, "Guess Who Else is Coming to Dinner? Racial/Sexual Hysteria in *Candyman*," *Cineaction* 36 (1995): 63-72.

2.17 *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992) (99 minutes)

## **UNIT TWO: Gender**

2.22 John Berks, "What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at *The Cat People*," *Cinema Journal* 32, no. 1 (1992): 26-42.

\*\*\**Unit One Papers due by noon.*

2.24 *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942) (73 minutes)\*

3.1 Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20 (1987): 187-228.

3.3 *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) (83 minutes)  
*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003) (98 minutes)

3.8 **SPRING BREAK – No Class**

3.10 **SPRING BREAK – No Class**

3.15 Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty," *Journal of Film and Video* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 33-44.

3.17 *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) (98 minutes)\*

3.22 Thomas Doherty, "Genre, Gender, and the *Aliens* Trilogy," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender in the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 181-99.

3.24 *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) (154 minutes)\*

## **UNIT THREE: Sexuality**

3.29 Elizabeth Young, "Here Comes the Bride: Wedding Gender and Race in *Bride of Frankenstein*," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 403-37.

\*\*\**Unit Two Papers due by noon.*

3.31 *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935) (75 minutes)\*

4.5 Barbara Klinger, "Psycho: The Institutionalization of Female Sexuality," in *The Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Dentelbaum & Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa University Press, 1986), 332-40.

- 4.7 *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) (109 minutes)\*
- 4.12 Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 61-93.
- 4.14 *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) (112 minutes)
- 4.19 Kendall R. Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 163-70.

Optional Reading: Kent L. Brintnall, "Re-building Sodom and Gomorrah: The Monstrosity of Queer Desire in the Horror Film," *Culture and Religion* 5, no. 2 (2004): 145-60 (on-line course reserves).

- 4.21 *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) (111 minutes)\*
- 4.26 Anna Bean, "Teeth," *Bust* 48 (December 2007/January 2008): 102.

Stephen Holden, "Things They Don't Teach in Any Dental School," *New York Times*, January 18, 2008.

Tammy Oler, "The Brave Ones," *Bitch Magazine* 42 (Winter 2009): 30-34.

Isabel Stevens, "Teeth," *Sight & Sound* 18, no. 7 (July 2008): 78-79.

- 4.28 *Teeth* (Mitchell Lichtenstein, 2007) (94 minutes)

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- 5.3 Clips from *New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994)

**\*\*\*Unit Three Papers due by noon.**

**FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD, May 12, 11-1:30PM**  
Assessment, Part II

## ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit all assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). If I am unable to open your attachment, I will notify you as soon as possible. If you do not submit a readable version of the assignment within 24 hours of my notification, it will be graded at my discretion. *No late papers will be accepted.*

All assignments should be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs.

Your papers will receive two scores—one for content (70%), one for mechanics (30%). They will be averaged together to establish your overall grade. *This means that roughly a third of your grade in the course will be based on your attentiveness to grammar, spelling, proofreading and citation form.*

*You should familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University's Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.*

### Unit Analysis Papers (90%, 30% each)

You must write a 4-6 page paper for each unit of the course. *At least one of these papers must analyze a film not viewed in class.*

Papers on Unit One (“Race”) are due by noon, **Tuesday, February 22**; papers on Unit Two (“Gender”) are due by noon, **Tuesday, March 29**; papers on Unit Three (“Sexuality”) are due by noon, **Tuesday, May 3**.

These papers should provide a careful analysis of a single film in relation to the readings from class as well as the historical contexts and interpretive themes presented in class. Although a strong paper could limit its discussion to a single scene, you should try to discuss the film more expansively. At the same time, you cannot discuss every element of the film in a 4-6 page paper. You should select one or two scenes from the film that you can discuss in sufficient detail in relation to the themes, questions and ideas of the course. *When analyzing the film, you should remember that you are not writing about a novel, painting or play. Your writing should reflect, in some way, attention to the specific meaning-making capacities that are uniquely available to film.*

You are expected to consult resources outside of those assigned for class for these papers. Any good analysis is always in dialogue with the broader, relevant scholarly conversation. The films we are viewing in class, as well as the themes we are discussing, have generated significant scholarly analysis. Your paper must engage and incorporate at least *three scholarly sources*—i.e., book chapters or journal articles. At least two of these must be from outside of the course. Movie reviews (newspaper, magazine or on-line) will only count for “half” a source.

**Assessment Essay** (10%)

You must write two essays in response to following:

*The idea that “All men are created equal,” coupled with the idea that this human equality is considered “inalienable,” has been an aspiration that defines what it means to be part of the so-called Western tradition. Although not all members of a given society would necessarily agree on whom equality should be extended to nor whether the goal has been achieved, the issue of equality has been fundamental to society and culture in the West. Discuss at least two specific historical examples to make your case and relate those to an example of contemporary significance. In addressing this prompt you should a) discuss aspects of the history of Western society b) show how those historical roots affect our present and c) critically explore the concept of equality. A considered response is likely to require at least two full paragraphs, about one page of typewritten text.*

The first essay is due by noon, **Tuesday, January 25**. The second will be written during the final examination period on **Thursday, May 12**.

This assignment is intended to help the University assess the effectiveness of Liberal Studies courses in meeting their curricular goals. After I give you credit for completing the assignment, your name will be removed and the essays will be forwarded to be read and reviewed by a committee responsible for assessing the effectiveness of Liberal Studies courses.

Although this assignment will not receive a letter grade, you will receive credit for doing it as long as you submit the assignment on time and demonstrate some effort in seriously engaging the question. (Part II must demonstrate some evidence of reconsidering the question in light of having been in the course.) ***Failure to complete both parts of the assignment, with some sufficient degree of effort, will result in no credit for this assignment. This is the equivalent of a letter grade deduction in the course.***



## GRADING CRITERIA

In grading your Unit Analysis papers, I will use the following criteria (listed in order of importance): (1) Does the paper demonstrate an understanding of the questions, issues and approaches discussed in class? (A paper can demonstrate an excellent understanding of class material without agreeing with that material.) (2) Does it give close, careful attention to the details of the relevant texts—cinematic and written—to support its general observations? (3) Does it have a clear thesis? Is the writing clear and well-organized in support of that thesis? (4) Does it select the most relevant elements from the film and the written texts to support its thesis? (5) Is the paper free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? (6) Does the paper provide adequate and accurate citations for its sources? (7) Does the paper engage a sufficiently wide range of sources?

You should privilege depth over breadth in your writing. ***It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially.*** I do not expect you to be *exhaustive*, but merely to provide sufficient detail to flesh out generalizations and to show some mastery over the topic(s) on which you choose to write. Most importantly, your writing should be *accurate* and *thoughtful*. ***Remember, you will not be in the room when I am reading your paper, so what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.***

Your writing should be free of spelling, grammatical and typographical mistakes. Failure to correct writing mistakes I note in one assignment in subsequent assignments will have severe negative consequences on your grade. ***I want to spend my time engaging your ideas, not copy-editing your prose.*** I will rely on Kate L. Turabian's *Manual for Writers* (7th edition) to resolve questions about punctuation, grammar and style. If you have questions in these areas, please consult part III of Turabian's *Manual*.

Your writing should include accurate and adequate citations. ***All citations must conform to the guidelines set forth in Turabian's Manual for Writers.*** The Department of Religious Studies' writing guidelines ([www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm](http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm)) provide sample citation forms. (You can also use the citations in this syllabus as a guide, but please note that I have used the footnote form for the syllabus citations.) You may use footnotes (Turabian, chapters 16 & 17) or parenthetical citations (Turabian, chapters 18 & 19), but make sure you use your chosen form properly and consistently. Your paper must include a bibliography as well as footnotes/parenthetical citations.

## **GRADE DESCRIPTIONS**

- A** Exceptional work. Shows very close attention to the films and the readings. Attends to the unique ways that visual texts make their meaning. General observations supported by specific details from the film under analysis. Selection of the most relevant and intriguing moments from the film and the texts. Contains a strong and clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative above and beyond class materials and discussion. Clear and well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Consideration of sufficient range of materials.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the details of the film and the readings. Conversant with the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an obvious main point around which the entire paper is organized. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence from the film. Selection of scenes from the film or ideas from the texts well-chosen. Clear and well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. May fail to pay attention to the film as a whole or to specific narrative details. May fail to show comprehension of the themes, questions and issues of the course. May have an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may proceed at too general a level or fail to attend to the film as a visual text. Writing may be unclear in places, lack a clear organizational structure or have numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Minimal consideration of outside resources.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis most likely proceeds at a very general level or only discusses the narrative events of the film. Analysis may get significant details wrong or ignore issues that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion may fail to engage the readings from the course or issues raised in class discussion. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of errors noted in prior papers. No consideration of outside resources.
- F** Unacceptable work.

**Given these standards, most students get B-range grades on most of their papers, especially those submitted near the beginning of the course. A handful of students will do A work, and another handful of students will do C work. Only rarely do students submit work that merits a D or F. *If you show up to class, work hard and improve over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.***