Practical Approaches to Teaching Film

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Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

For my parents

[G]ood teaching rests neither in accumulating a shelfful of knowledge nor in developing a repertoire of skills. In the end, good teaching lies in a willingness to attend and care for what happens in our students, ourselves, and the space between us. Good teaching is a certain kind of stance, I think. It is a stance of receptivity, of attunement, of listening.
—Laurent Daloz, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring*

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INTRODUCTION

RACHEL RITTERBUSCH

Much has been written about the art of motion pictures since its invention in the mid 1890s. Early theorists of the 1920s, such as Louis Delluc and Émile Vuillermoz, were primarily concerned with getting cinema recognized as a "legitimate" art form on a par with literature. Vuillermoz, for example, argued that cinematography can be used to transform reality in a way similar to a writer's pen. However, instead of ink, the director uses lighting, framing, color, etc. to create his *cinégraphie*. The same idea was championed by Alexandre Astruc in the late 1940s in his essay "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," where he declared that cinema was entering into a new age, that of the *caméra-stylo*, in which the distinction between author and director loses all meaning: "The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen."[1]

It is interesting to note that these early advocates of moving pictures were not theorists by trade, but rather directors and critics. Not until the 1960s did cinema become the purview of academia. Since that time, film theory has continued to develop and evolve, influenced by the dominant theoretical movements of the times: structuralism, semiotics, feminism, Marxism, psycho-analysis, deconstructionism, post-colonialism, queer theory, etc. This ferment gave rise to a vast number of publications about film ranging from general histories to single-film studies, from works exploring the cinematic output of a particular nation to ones focusing on a particular genre, from star studies to sociological analyses of audience reception.

Undoubtedly, many of the scholars who write about film teach it as well. Yet only recently has film pedagogy begun to receive the same attention as film theory. The heightened interest in teaching is due in large part to increased enrollment in film-based courses at both the secondary and post-secondary level. Consider, for example, the Teaching Film and Media Studies series recently developed by the British Film Institute (BFI), which includes titles such as *Teaching Women and Film* (2004), *Teaching TV Drama* (2006), and *Teaching Film Censorship and Controversy* (2007).[2] As series editor Vivienne Clark explains, the revision of the

post-16 qualifications (AS and A2 Level) in the UK in 2000 resulted in a significant increase in the number of students taking A level film and medias studies courses. This in turn led to a pressing demand for more teachers. However, given the relatively recent appearance of both subjects in British schools and the limited availability of post-graduate teaching courses focusing on film, teachers from other disciplines must often teach cinema courses without the necessary background. The BFI series attempts to remedy that situation by providing up-to-date resources for teacher preparation.

The same phenomenon is observable in the United States, where the number of books and articles dealing with film instruction has surged in recent decades. Some of these texts, such as William Costanzo's *Great Films and How to Teach Them* (2004), offer teachers practical advice about film selection, AV technology, on-line resources, and student projects, while volumes such as *Film Study in the Undergraduate Curriculum* (1983) focus more on defining the position of film studies within the humanities curriculum. As in the UK, this attention to classroom practice is no doubt related to increased enrollment in film courses.

However, another contributing factor might be the recent attempt to broaden the definition of scholarship. As Ernest Boyer notes in his *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), all too often the standards used to measure academic prestige are very narrowly defined: a successful professor is one who presents papers and publishes, not one who innovates in the classroom or spends time advising students. Furthermore, within the realm of research, not all publications are valued equally. Preference is clearly given to what Boyer terms "the scholarship of discovery," which contributes in a substantial way to the stock of human knowledge.[3] Other types of scholarship—such as the scholarship of integration (fitting one's own research or that of others into larger intellectual patterns) and the scholarship of teaching (such as writing a textbook)—are typically dismissed as sub-standard or lacking in rigor.

In the conclusion of his book, Boyer calls for institutions of higher education to reconsider the meaning of scholarship and to take into account a broader range of writing when assessing faculty. Redefining scholarship in this way is essential, for it allows professors to be teacher-scholars rather than scholars who teach. This new attitude towards scholarship is evident not only in the growing number of publications about teaching, but also in the proliferation of pedagogy sessions at professional meetings. For example, at the 2002 convention of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (RMMLA), several special topic

panels on teaching were introduced, including "Practical Approaches to Teaching Culture" and "Practical Approaches to Teaching Literature." Sessions like these attest to the value currently placed on excellence in the classroom, as do publications such as the current volume, whose title (and many of its contributions) comes from the RMMLA panel "Practical Approaches to Teaching Film."

Practical Approaches to Teaching Film examines the teaching of film in various settings ranging from an introductory film class to a 200-level Women's Studies course. Drawing on their experience in the classroom, contributors to this volume show how movies can be used to promote critical thinking, create an awareness of the male gaze, challenge dominant ideology, and unmask the constructedness of film.

This volume is divided into two sections. The three essays in the first section focus on using movies to promote critical thinking and writing in the classroom, while the four essays in the second section explore ways of using films to strengthen students' grasp of film criticism and theory. Common to all these essays is the belief that, if used judiciously, film can be a valuable pedagogical tool. This point of view contrasts starkly with the way films have often been (and unfortunately still are being) used, i.e. more as a social event and emotional diversion than as an intellectual experience. Indeed, as Barry Grant notes, in many cases teachers substitute films for books and lectures, counting on the visual appeal of the cinema to keep students interested.[4] It is this kind of "movies instead of teaching" approach that the current volume wishes to counteract.

I: Promoting Critical Thinking and Writing

In "Double Dipping: Teaching English Composition and Introduction to Film in the Same Course," Dominique Hoche describes a college composition course in which film functions as a springboard for developing writing skills. "Double dipping" in this fashion helps address the problem of student retention. As Hoche notes, "Research is not fun. . . . [It] is a time-consuming, detailed effort, requiring focus and analytical consideration" (3). As a result, many students dread taking a research-based writing class. However, Hoche gets students "hooked" by using films such as *The Da Vinci Code* and *Fight Club* and having them read the plays and novels upon which the films are based. Questions raised in class discussion become the basis of research papers; and since students are writing about topics that interest them, research seems more like an adventure than a chore.

Hoche provides excellent suggestions regarding textbook selection, in-class activities, and assessment for a film-writing class. She also offers a word of caution based on ten years experience with such hybrid classes. Trying to combine an introduction to research with an introduction to film is a difficult pedagogical balancing act. One must make certain that both sides of the course are woven tightly together, producing "a seamless learning experience" (8). The best way to do this is by cross-assigning skill sets, i.e. designing activities that simultaneously develop students' writing skills and their understanding of film. This technique constitutes the heart of "double dipping."

Although Hoche's article focuses on using movies in the composition classroom, film can be a valuable resource for many other disciplines. For example, Edward Halper of the University of Georgia uses films such as *Blade Runner* and *The Thirteenth Floor* to examine philosophical themes in his freshman seminars. Similarly, Jane Nickerson of Gallaudet University regularly incorporates movies into her English Literature courses because "[f]ilms can bring ideas into focus for students as they analyze, discuss, and write about the literature they have read."[5] In addition, film can be used to provide insight into a different culture or time period, for example in a history or a cultural studies classroom. In an American history course, one might choose to contrast documentary footage of the Great Depression with John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), while in a course on Francophone Africa, one could screen a variety of films focusing on colonialism and its effects, such as Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) and Brigitte Roüan's *Overseas* (1990).

In "Teaching Scene Analysis through Remakes," Sarah Hurlburt presents a strategy for increasing the effectiveness of scene analysis as a pedagogical tool. The cinematic equivalent of a close reading, scene analysis requires students to describe the composition, shot angles, and transitions of a short sequence and then show how these technical aspects combine to create meaning. Scene analysis is thus an excellent means of familiarizing students with the basic vocabulary of shot construction. However, as Hurlburt notes, this process has its limitations because it does not always succeed in breaking the illusion of reality created by classical cinema: "In other words, the process of analyzing a single scene teaches the 'how' of scene construction more effectively than it teaches the 'why'" (19). Using a remake pair to teach scene analysis can remedy this weakness, since comparing identical scenes from a film and its remake shows students that a very small difference can have a very big impact and that everything in a given shot is indeed there for a reason.

In addition to helping students perceive the constructedness of motion pictures, such a remake comparison assignment can lead to a fruitful discussion of issues of authorship, originality, and cultural and linguistic adaptation. In this context, Hurlburt raises the following questions: Is the remaking of foreign films in the USA an economic or a cultural question? What exactly constitutes a remake? What is the difference, if any, between the film adaptation of a novel and the cinematic remake of a previous film?

After exploring these theoretical issues, Hurlburt explains how to implement a remake-based scene comparison. Particularly helpful are the French-American remake pairs provided by the author: *Pépé le Moko* (1937) and *Algiers* (1938); *Trois hommes et un couffin* (1985) and *Three Men and a Baby* (1987); and *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *Point of No Return* (1993). For each film, Hurlburt supplies a list of matching scenes for shot analysis, several longer scenes for in-class discussion, plus a selected bibliography of secondary sources for the films in question. This material, together with the sample shot breakdown at the end of article, should provide instructors with the confidence needed to try this technique in the classroom.

In "From the Page to the Screen: The Process of Film Adaptation," Rachel Ritterbusch reflects on the introductory film course. What should constitute its content? What are the desired outcomes, and how should they be assessed? These questions can be answered in a variety of ways, none of them "right" or "wrong" as long as they achieve the educational goals of the instructor. Ritterbusch makes this clear when talking about the first introductory film course she taught. Unsure about what to emphasize and what to leave out, she let the textbook decide for her. Similarly, since she did not have a clear idea of what she wanted students to know by the end of the course, she adopted the close reading approach endorsed by the textbook's author. Course content was delivered in a didactic, teacher-centered fashion, while assessment alternated between factual recall (reading quizzes) and higher-level synthesis (short essays, response papers). Despite its many shortcomings, this film course elicited very positive feedback from students on end-of-semester evaluations.

Before the course was offered again, Ritterbusch changed it substantially in order to increase student involvement and promote critical thinking. For example, she shifted from breadth of coverage to depth of understanding by focusing on a single topic (film adaptation) for the duration of the semester. She also decided to supplement the textbook with a reader of primary theoretical texts that students discussed in class and drew upon when writing responses. In addition, she designed a peer-

teaching project that made students responsible for presenting (and sometimes challenging) key concepts from the textbook, a change which resulted not only in more energy in the classroom but also in better retention and recall of facts than the reading quizzes used previously.

The core of the redesigned course was a series of hands-on projects that turned students into screenwriters, set designers, costume designers, and cinematographers. Each project began with the careful analysis of a literary text: Edgar Allan Poe's "A Cask of Amontillado," Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons*. Students then collaborated to take the story from the page to the screen, keeping in mind key issues encountered in the theoretical essays. After presenting the results of their collaborations, students looked at the film scripts and resultant adaptations developed by real-life creative teams to see how they met the challenges posed by the pre-text.

II: Exploring Film Criticism and Theory

In "Teaching Film to Trouble Verisimilitude," Joanne Klein also addresses the question of content in an introductory film course. For her, students' knowledge of film history and technical vocabulary matters less than their ability to think critically about film. Indeed, because motion pictures are so lifelike, it is all too easy for naïve / untrained viewers to forget that what they are seeing on screen is not a direct reproduction of reality, but rather a carefully constructed facsimile. Consequently, Klein's goal is to "und[o] the various technologies and apparatuses that mask the labor, choices, materiality, and ideologies that propel the making and watching of movies" (86), thus enabling students to realize that screens are not windows to the world but rather made objects.

Everything in Klein's introductory course serves to further this goal. Instead of following a historical chronology or proceeding by theme, her syllabus focuses on key issues of production, *texte*, and reception. Students' awareness of film's seductive illusionism increases as they move through the four units of instruction: Re-Presenting "Real": Production (an examination of films as made objects); Practices of Looking: Reception (an examination of address and reception); Production and Reception of Disruption (an examination of attempts to foreground production and reception by making them manifest); and (Be)Coming Attractions (a brief examination of the origins and current trajectories of film and media cultures).

Klein extends the discussion of films and readings beyond the classroom through creative use of Blackboard, an on-line platform used by educators

for course delivery, content management, and outcomes assessment.[6] Blackboard offers several collaboration tools that enhance student engagement and provide opportunities for social learning. Chief among these is the Discussion Board, which enables Klein's students to express their ideas at a time that suits them and in a way that seems "safer" than face-to-face debate. In addition to using this on-line forum to facilitate communication, Klein uses it to trap students by eliciting their ideologically saturated readings of films and images. For instance with regard to Errol Morris' documentary *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), students recurrently fall into the trap of complaining that the film is biased in favor of Randall Adams, the drifter accused of murdering a Dallas police officer—an observation that allows Klein to point out that all documentary films are biased, whether they flaunt it or not, and that there is no requirement of "fair and balanced" in any definition of documentary film.

     At the end of her essay, Klein offers suggestions about unmasking technologies of production and reception when film is taught as incidental, i.e. in a theater studies or a women's studies course. For example, Spike Lee's film about phone sex, *Girl 6*, is well-suited for use in an Introduction to Gender Studies course because of its narrative focus on issues of gender and sexuality and its reflexive foregrounding of film and media as forces in the construction of those practices:

> Nothing is more instructive than asking duped students where in the film they see evidence that Girl 6 "falls" or that a "legitimate acting career" is an improvement over the phone sex industry. Their ideologically inflected readings of the film unravel when tested against the counter-hegemonic ingenuity of Spike Lee's filmmaking. (95)

Klein's article thus offers a wide range of advice for instructors hoping to shift their students' responses to film by making them aware of the constructedness of the cinematic world.

     In "Film, Foucault, and the Fringe: Outcasts of Contemporary French Film," Mariah Devereux Herbeck presents a course focusing on recent French-language films that portray characters marginalized by society or by their own accord. These films confront students with a variety of situations frequently far removed from their own, such as that of the young vagabond in Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* or that of the bank robber in Patrice Leconte's *L'homme du train*. Each film provides a springboard for discussing issues of socio-economic, racial / ethnic, or gender-motivated marginalization. Herbeck's syllabus is divided into five units that group the films according to the manner in which the characters are perceived as marginal: 1) Women at the Margins, 2) Sexual Identity in Flux, 3) Buddy

Films, 4) Immigrant / Foreigner Status, and 5) Life on the Outskirts. In each unit, students observe how, "despite attempts at curbing or eliminating 'aberrant behavior' by governments or by 'normal' individuals, life at the margins of society not only persists, it often prospers" (106).

Both the subject matter of this course and the questions it raises can make students feel uncomfortable. For example, when Herbeck first offered the class in 2004, a student naively burst forth with the question, "Why are we watching all these films about bums?" Indeed, it quickly became apparent that many students who registered for the class had no experience with (and perhaps little interest in) marginalization. As a result, Herbeck decided to begin subsequent courses with a theoretical work that would provide students with a point of departure: Michel Foucault's "Panopticism" from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975).

According to Foucault, discipline exists as a political tool to ensure that individuals serve what is perceived as the greater good of society. Although one might wish to equate discipline with a particular institution or apparatus, Foucault insists that it is "a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power" (109), an omnipresent gaze that sees all. If an individual refuses to play his or her role, if the system of discipline is not respected, punishment ensues. To provide a visual illustration of how discipline functions, Foucault summarizes the work of Jeremy Bentham regarding the Panopticon (1785) and applies it to the working of contemporary society. In the Panopticon—a large structure with rooms, or cells, that form a circle around a central tower with windows overlooking them—a supervisor can observe anyone in any cell and thereby ensure that the desired behavior is obtained. Thus, in a panoptic society, vision is the ultimate tool for ensuring obedience.

In addition to creating a common point of reference and vocabulary to describe representations of marginalization in the films, this text by Foucault also "provide[s] students with the possibility of separating their own insecurities / prejudices regarding the topic—should they exist—from the topic at hand by way of a third party's language and ideas" (107). However, since the writings of Foucault can prove challenging even for experienced scholars, one can imagine the difficulties faced by undergraduates reading *Discipline and Punish* in the original French. Yet Herbeck explains how to make this text accessible to the layperson. After showing how Foucault's ideas on discipline and vision can be extrapolated to film, Herbeck lists several questions inspired by his "Panopticism" that can be posed during the discussion of any film portraying marginalized characters, e.g., In the fictional world of the film, where is the center of the

society portrayed? Where are the margins? How does the center of the society monitor the margins? Who is looking, at whom and for what purpose? Does the act of looking imply a power structure? Does it resemble or put into question that of the Panopticon?

The article ends with a brief synopsis of six of the thirteen films viewed in Herbeck's course, showing how Foucault's panoptic theory can be used to interpret each one. By making the abstract concrete in this way, Herbeck encourages instructors to follow her lead and integrate more theoretical texts into their undergraduate film courses.

Like Herbeck, Cindy McLeod uses film to illustrate a theoretical framework based on the power of the gaze. However, in "*Malena* as Mulvey: Deconstructing the Male Gaze," McLeod focuses on the relationship of the gaze to visual pleasure rather than discipline. Specifically, she demonstrates how Giuseppe Tornatore's film *Malena* (2000) can help students understand the arguments presented in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). In this groundbreaking article, Mulvey used Freudian psychoanalytic theory to argue that the visual pleasure of classical Hollywood cinema is based on voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking. Because of the ways these looks are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies with the male protagonist in the narrative, and thus which his objectification of the female figure via the male gaze. The construction of woman as spectacle is built into the apparatus of dominant cinema, and the spectator position produced by the film narrative is necessarily a masculine one regardless of the sex of the actual moviegoer.

As McLeod notes, one of the challenges when working with Mulvey's text is making students aware of the male gaze: "Because it is so pervasive in American society, the male gaze is normative and hard to notice. . . . Students simply cannot single it out because it is all around them as a part of their everyday life" (124). One way to sensitize students to the phallocentric nature of classical cinema is by screening a film in which the bearer of the gaze (be it the camera or a male protagonist) clearly fetishizes the female form. This strategy would work well with any number of films that cater to male visual pleasure, from Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu… créa la femme* (1956) to Paul Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct* (1992). McLeod chose *Malena* because it brings the concept of "woman-as-object" to life in a highly visible way: "[Malena] is both a spectacle for the men and women of the community to watch and a screen onto which they project their own desires and prejudices" (124–125).

McLeod guides us through the film, anchoring her interpretation with quotations from Mulvey's article. She ends the article by describing an

assignment that challenges students to go beyond recognition of the male gaze to the creation of a viable alternative. After viewing and discussing *Malena*, students are asked to imagine how the story would change if it were geared toward the viewing pleasure of women rather than men. Specifically, they must rewrite a scene from a movie of their choosing, changing the setting, characters, plotline, actresses and actors, shot framing, etc. so that it embodies a female gaze. This type of creative activity builds on the understanding of the gaze gained through viewing *Malena* as Mulvey and thus helps students to challenge their complicity with the voyeurism inherent in all spectatorship.

Miranda Sherwin's "*Female Perversions* in the Classroom: The Pedagogical Applications for Susan Streitfeld's Film in Gender Studies Courses" provides another example of how film can be used to explore selected theoretical issues. In this case, Sherwin uses *Female Perversions* (1996) to explore contemporary theory about sexuality, identity, and gender in her women's studies class. This non-linear, densely opaque film tells the story of Eve Stevens, a successful lawyer who seems to have it all: she drives a nice car, has a handsome architect boyfriend, wears expensive clothes, and, having just won a high-profile case, is up for a judgeship. But under the surface, Eve is haunted by debilitating self-doubt, masochistic fantasies, and recurring nightmares. Surprisingly unknown in academic circles, Streitfeld's drama deserves more critical attention, for it presents a wide spectrum of subjects central to women's and gender studies, including but not limited to the beauty myth and women's self-image; the male gaze and the objectification of women; sexuality, both heterosexual and lesbian; butch / femme dynamics; female masochism; balancing work and family; the glass ceiling and other problems faced by working women; and women's relationship to consumer culture and to food.

In class, Sherwin guides students through the film, helping them solve its many enigmas. Consider, for example, the title of the film. Initially, viewers may assume that the word "perversion" refers to some kind of (sexual) aberration. However, the film's epigraph from Louise Kaplan's eponymous book makes it clear that the perversions referred to in the title are located in strict, stereotypical gender roles, not in any of the "deviant" behaviors that the film depicts. As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that Kaplan's text provides the key to understanding *Female Perversions*, just as Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" helps unlock the meaning of *Malena*. In this case, however, the theoretical framework is incorporated directly into the fictional universe:

> [E]xcerpts from Kaplan's text appear throughout the film transcribed onto random objects such as park benches and magazine spreads; as with the epigraph, this technique of juxtaposing opaque images and confusing plot elements with transparent interpretive cues provides an explicitly psychoanalytic and feminist framework within which to analyze the action as it unfolds. (142–143)

These quotations function as "textual signposts," guiding the viewer to a deeper understanding of Eve's troubled psyche.

Another visual element that provides insight into Eve's character is the dream sequence that unfolds during the opening credits. The camera pans across a woman (later revealed to be Eve), partially naked, partially draped by a toga. On one side of her is a man and on the other a woman, both touching her suggestively. Eve, bound by a rope that encircles her ankles and wraps around her, is struggling to maintain her balance on a tightrope as she is accosted by two masked figures resembling the king and queen of a deck of cards. What is the viewer to make of this? Although the meaning of the dream initially seems obscure, once students solve this "mystery," they realize that this sequence contains all the elements necessary to understand the rest of the film, for the dream recurs repeatedly, changing each time in ways that reflect crucial changes in Eve's life.

The essays in this collection are meant to provide teachers with inspiration and guidance for using films in a wide range of classroom settings. To facilitate the implementation of the activities described here, each essay is accompanied by materials such as syllabi, writing assignments, suggestions for further reading, etc. In addition, a glossary of film terms is provided at the end of the volume to clarify technical expressions that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

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Notes

[1] Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," in *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*, ed. Timothy Corrigan (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 161.

[2] http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/teaching/tfms/

[3] Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 17.

[4] Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Study in the Undergraduate Curriculum* (New York: MLA of America, 1983), viii.

[5] Jane Nickerson, "Teaching Literature and Film: Create Enriching Experiences for Students," *The English Record* 56, no. 2 (2006): 7.

[6] http://www.blackboard.com/Teaching-Learning/Overview.aspx

Part I:

Movies in the Classroom:
Promoting Critical Thinking and Writing

CHAPTER ONE

DOUBLE DIPPING:
TEACHING ENGLISH COMPOSITION
AND INTRODUCTION TO FILM
IN THE SAME COURSE

DOMINIQUE HOCHE

Purpose

Most students are familiar with the term "double dipping," meaning "being able to take one class and having it count in two subjects for credit towards graduation." Composition teachers also "double dip", but in their case the term means "covering the basics of a composition class while teaching another subject." My purpose here is to provide an example of a syllabus and schedule that allows composition teachers to teach composition and introduction to film at the same time, in the most focused, clutter-free and timely way possible.

Audience

Who is my audience for this particular classroom technique? The target audience is instructors who teach a minimum of four courses each semester, of which at least two must be General Education composition classes (although many of us are given three composition classes and only one class in our field of specialization). If we have three of the same type of class, then we must make only two lecture preps per teaching day—if we're lucky. Usually, we're not. Therefore, this technique is geared towards those who work at teaching institutions.

Problems

Why do I find this particular syllabus useful? Because it addresses several problems and campus issues:

- Many institutions are facing retention problems, and the best way to overcome that is to provide classes that (a) the students find to be interesting and (b) will fit easily into their schedules.
- The first problem—that students tend to drop out of classes they find boring—poses a real challenge, since research classes like English Composition 201 are inherently not interesting. It's a point that is hard for us to admit, but it's true. Research is not fun. Students actually have to go to the library, or use the library indices. Research is a time-consuming, detailed effort, requiring focus and analytical consideration, not to mention that it cannot be left to the last minute by procrastinators, or memorized, or tested away on a multiple choice or essay exam. It takes work! So the best thing for instructors is to help students find interesting research subjects.
- The second problem—to provide a class that will fit easily into a student's schedule—is difficult to solve if an instructor does not have control over scheduling, or can only teach classes that meet for one hour, three days a week. If so, then this syllabus may not be the best solution for your problems. I have taught this class as a MWF 50-minute course, but such time constraints reduce its effectiveness. However, if an instructor can request a different schedule, then this syllabus will work.

Solutions

The solutions are not overly complex, but they do take some pre-semester planning:

- To pique student interest, I offer a composition class that shows movies. Many students sign up for the class thinking "Oh, she just shows movies;" and, before they know it, they find themselves doing the research work because they are interested in the classroom discussion about the films.
- To give students a film / composition class that fits easily into their schedules, I offer it as a night class. This solves two sub-problems. First, it satisfies the school's need for evening classes, thus adding to the offerings of an adult or non-traditional student education program. (This often makes the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences very happy.) Second, having the class as an evening class one day a

week—or possibly a long-block Tuesday / Thursday schedule—makes it easy to give a quiz, have a discussion, and show a film all on the same evening. My current class, for example, meets Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9:20 PM, and I always have a waiting list at the beginning of the semester.

- To get students to read, I offer a "Literature to Film" class where I choose movies that are made from books or plays. For example, I have chosen *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *Casablanca*, and *Heart of Darkness* (but I show the film *Apocalypse Now*). In the past, I have taught *The Lion In Winter, A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Timeline*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and next semester I am considering replacing *The Da Vinci Code* with *Fight Club*. Are these novels and plays paragons of great literature? For the most part—*no*. Are they works that the average 20-year-old will be interested in reading? The answer is—*yes*.

- To get the students to write about film, I use Richard Barsam's *Looking at Movies*.[1] It is an introduction to the technical side of film without a lot of technical language which comes with a very useful DVD of film clips. The last chapter (or in the second edition, a booklet that comes with the packet) discusses the fundamental techniques of writing about movies, including note-taking, writing descriptively, developing a thesis, making an argument, and incorporating research sources. The linear structure of the book makes it very easy for the instructor to develop lectures, as each point is accompanied by several examples and pictures from movies.

     An alternative text is Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*,[2] a text that is oriented more towards a literary angle and less towards the more technical side of film. Another alternative is Stephen Prince's *Movies and Meaning*,[3] a work that focuses more on the technical and theoretical side of film, and less on writing film criticism.

Sounds easy enough? Well, it does get more complex. One textbook does not do it all, and I have to add a style guide to cover MLA or APA formatting, grammar, and punctuation. In addition, using the form of *Introduction to Film* while teaching composition provides some unusual challenges: a teacher must not only cover the practical necessities of *Composition 201: Introduction to Research*, but must also cover the basics of *Film 101: Introduction to Film*, and so the pedagogy of the class may often be pulled in opposing directions. You don't ever want to lose the

balance—or to have students think this is just a film class, or just a composition class.

Classroom Steps

To keep the balance, you should have both film and composition assignments due at the same time, and you should **cross-assign the skill sets**.

- What does this mean, to **cross-assign the skill sets**? It means that we have to make the exercises and essays count twice towards developing the students' writing skills and their understanding of film.
- For example, when studying and researching *Timeline*, the students have two preparatory assignments: CTE (or Critical Thinking Exercise) #2 and a Response Paper. (See Appendix A and B).
- The critical thinking assignment asks students to follow and complete very specific tasks to learn how to use quotations, and the quotations must be taken from the novel. The students should have at this point read the novel; or, if they have not, this assignment forces them to read critically in order to find quotations.
- The response paper, due a week later, requires them to analyze the film, processing it through the points regarding film form discussed in Barsam's second chapter. The result is that the students have to read the novel critically, watch the film critically, read the textbook critically, and follow the rules for citation.
- This technique constitutes the heart of "double-dipping." Reading the novel counts not only as a skill-set exercise, but also as a part of the critical analysis for the research paper. Critically viewing the film is used for another skill set, that of a written technical analysis, plus the research paper. And the textbook supports the technical analysis and the more literary side of learning to write about film.

Now that you have seen an example of cross-assigning skill sets, let's look at the syllabus schedule itself. (See Appendix C).

- The schedule is divided into days, weeks, in-class activities, and reading/writing assignments. It is normally color-coded so that the different films have different colors. I use one color for each film, one color for the CTE assignments, and bold black for the discussions and research paper assignments.
- The process is the same for each film, even though the CTEs reflect different skill sets. For example, for *Bridget Jones's Diary*: Students read the book > the film response is assigned > students take a quiz and discuss the book > students see the film, and discuss the elements of the assignment during the film > students' response is due the following week.
- The pattern continues, even during the days devoted to discussion of *Looking At Movies*. For Chapters 4–7, I rely on my own collection of films (very mainstream action-adventure, romance, and science fiction movies, mostly bought at large retail stores) to provide additional 5-minute examples because I cannot always rely on students watching what is on the textbook DVD.
- For those who are familiar with teaching composition skill sets, the challenge is adding in the film skill set. The solution is to create overhead or PowerPoint presentations that address and summarize the most important points of a given chapter. I simply type up a low-tech word document, upload it to the class website, bring it to the classroom overhead and read it out loud as part of my lecture. The students can either take notes during the class session or (and I see this with the academically advanced students) print off the lecture beforehand and take notes in the white spaces.

I suspect that if an instructor wants to do this syllabus but has no experience teaching film, the additional preparation for the film lecture could be time-consuming. Fortunately, Barsam's textbook does not presume its audience knows anything about movies except that they enjoy watching them, and the lectures I give take me no more than an hour or two to prepare (if even that).

Evaluation

The result of this class—that is, how we evaluate what the students have learned—comes from the Critical Thinking Exercises, the response papers, the in-class discussion of the novels and the movies, and from two carefully guided research papers.

- I take considerable time preparing the students for the first research paper; and it is worth it, since the skill sets are duplicated for the final research paper and I don't have to repeat myself.   The first research paper, the **Criticism Analysis Assignment**, has very carefully guided steps. (See Appendix D). In it, I have students research what the critics say about liking or disliking a particular movie and have them compare and contrast the criticism. They then have to evaluate why the critics came to such a conclusion about the film and are allowed to end the paper with their own critical analysis.   In sum, it is an analysis-argument essay masquerading as a comparison-contrast essay.
- The second research paper, the **Non-Fiction Research Paper**, is a technical analysis in which the students research what the critics have to say, but focus on technical comments rather than opinions. (See Appendix E). Many of them decide to focus on an analysis of a director's work or become interested in film design or the financial aspects of the movie industry. For theatre majors, this paper provides an excellent opportunity to discuss acting techniques.
- The challenge for the students is that they cannot rely on standard library sources. They cannot run to books, nor can they depend solely on major film criticism sources. They have to find where the critics hide, and what academic scholars have said about the films. They have to find newspaper sources like Lexis/Nexis and understand how full-text databases function. *Citation information* quickly becomes a key word in their vocabulary; and because newspaper articles and film reviews are not lengthy, students are forced to piece together many reviews and abstracts. I also allow them to use non-academic sources such as the Movie Review Query Engine and the Film Literature Index.
- The difficulty of finding academic and professional sources forces students to evaluate the quality of their sources, a point that is one of the inherent goals of teaching research. It also forces them to understand that while critics may have the same professional credentials, they can come to completely opposing conclusions. Thus, the difficult and complex idea of *scholastic dialogue* is transmitted and learned quickly and easily within the first hour of research.

Caveats

The goal when "double-dipping" is to have both sides of the course woven tightly together, producing a seamless learning experience. What can go wrong?

Violence and Sex – Consider *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The book prompted bewilderment and cultural disorientation among students, while the movie triggered even stronger reactions, including shock, hostility, revulsion and confusion. Consequently, in addition to being mainstream enough to provide students with sufficient written criticism to construct an argument, the books and films you choose must also be palatable enough to not create culture shock. (For several years I resisted my students' requests to teach *Fight Club* because of the violence and language, but after exploring their reasons for wanting to see and discuss the film, I have been persuaded. This may prove to be a mistake, but then I thought *The Da Vinci Code* would be a mistake, and it was a resounding success.)

Foreign Films – Even easy-to-understand foreign films like *Amélie* (2001) or *Life is Beautiful* (1997) pose a problem, not because of subtitles and captioning, but because of the difficulty of finding critical sources. In a 200-level composition class I would avoid non-Hollywood films because they require a lecture on the history of film and a discussion of how cultural or national styles affect film theory.

Skill Assumptions – MLA citation format, basic thesis skills, and standard college essay structure all need to be touched on in class lectures and workshops but are not the focus of this class, as English Composition 101 is a prerequisite for the course. I do rely on the library staff to assist on research days and to give library material and database orientations.

Disability Issues – Students with hearing problems can function in the class because of the closed-captioning of movies, but students with a visual disability face considerable challenges. I have worked with a visually-impaired student by giving the Disability Office copies of the films, and the advisors in the office would play the film and describe what was on the screen. The final result in terms of critical analysis was not what I wanted, but the student said in her end-of-semester responses that she was satisfied with the help she had in the class. However, I have worked with other visually-impaired students who have no problem discerning what is happening on the screen, so I have found that the