

Syllabus

English 464: The Reel Aztlán: The U.S./Mexico Borderlands in Film

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Hollywood cinema has long been fascinated with the border between the United States and Mexico. This course will examine representations of the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos/as in both Hollywood films and independent media. We will consider how positions on nationalism, race, gender, identity, migration, and history are represented and negotiated through film. We will begin by analyzing Hollywood "border" films before approaching Chicana/o-produced features, documentaries, and experimental work. This course will explore issues of film and ideology, genre and representation, nationalist resistance and feminist critiques, queer theory and the performative aspects of identity.

A Note on the Reading Requirements: All of this course's reading requirements will be made available on **Canvas, course reserves**, or in class. Please note that in order to fulfill the participation requirement for this course, you must purchase a three-ring binder to collect and organize all of this reading material, a nice alternative to expensive textbooks! I will begin checking for binders during the second week of class.

Course Requirements:

IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS/PARTICIPATION: You can expect a lot of in-class writing and reading work, which you will complete at times on your own and at other times (most of the time) in small groups. Missing more than three in-class assignments, including the small group exercises, negatively impacts your final grade.

FILM RESPONSE PAPERS (FRP): The purpose of these short papers is to challenge you to think about our films and think through what they're doing. To prepare for writing, I suggest you take notes during the screenings and write down your thoughts about the films immediately after they screen. Please be sure each short response paper has a basic thesis statement (however initial or tentative) and an argument that organizes your observations about the film and/or readings for the week. You should use these papers to develop your ideas about the films we see, to prepare for our class discussions by thinking through the issues raised by the films, and to examine the insights offered by our assigned readings and exploring their relationships to the films we see. Your papers should not review class notes, but you can use our classroom discussions as a jumping off point for your own

explorations. You may write a response to either the main or supplemental film with one exception: on the week that you are presenting on the supplemental film, please write your FRP on the required film.

WEEKLY NEWS ARTICLE: Every Monday you are required to bring into class a news or magazine article related to the U.S.-Mexico border. Although not all students may get a chance to speak each week, you should nonetheless come to class prepared to talk about your article. Questions to consider include: What message does the article relay to the reader? Why is this message important? In other words, how does this article contribute to the ongoing discussion of the U.S.-Mexico border? Are there any images attached to/embedded in the article and if so, what are they and how do they relate to the article? How does the article speak to past class discussions? What key concepts or ideas does the article address? Etc.

FILM ANALYSIS PRESENTATIONS (Groups): Groups will present a reading of the week's supplemental film, which each group member must watch on his/her own time as we will not be screening them as a class. Presentations can focus on a single scene, sequence, or motif/element. Presentations must avoid excessive summary and must incorporate the use of one critical, theoretical, or historical source (a critical essay; historical research into the film; a film theory piece). Presentations will begin on the third week of the quarter. I will include a presentation rubric on Canvas before the first presentation.

FINAL PAPER: Students will write one 8-10 page research paper that employs visual analysis of (a) film(s) and uses contextual evidence to engage with current debates in film theory and criticism. You will submit a 1-page topic description and an annotated bibliography (of at least 8 sources) and after that I will meet with you individually to give you feedback on your proposal. You will write drafts of this final paper and we will workshop these drafts in class. Final papers will be due on Friday of exam week.

EVALUATION:

- In-Class Assignments: 10%
- Film Analysis Presentations (Groups): 10%
- Film Response Papers 30%
- Final Paper: 50%

Additional Course Policies:

- Attendance: Students are expected to attend class regularly. **More than three absences – excused or otherwise – will compromise your final grade.** Please know that I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences: an absence, for whatever reason, counts as an absence. Therefore, you do not need to go to the trouble of getting physicians' notes. Students are also expected to arrive promptly and stay for the duration of the class.
- Reading Material: You are absolutely required to bring the day's reading material to class. This includes any shorter reading assignments I distribute in class or post to Canvas. Failure to bring the day's reading material will count as a partial absence.
- Late Assignments: I will accept most late assignments with the exception of those done directly in class; however, any assignment turned in late (regardless of why) will not receive full credit. There are absolutely no exceptions to this policy.
- Technology: I do not allow laptops in class, although I do make exceptions for students with documented disabilities. The reason for this policy is that I believe laptops erect barriers between students and work against building a collaborative atmosphere conducive to group discussion. Similarly, texting or any other cell phone use in class is totally unacceptable. If I

notice you doing this I will stop class and ask you to continue in the hallway. It is both rude and distracting.

- Plagiarism: Plagiarism can lead to an automatic fail. Please see me if you're having trouble with an assignment so that you don't resort to this.
- If you wish to contest your grade you must do so in writing no later than two weeks after the quarter ends. I will respond early the next quarter.