

# Film Journalism/2021



## **Course ID**

SS1: JOUR-UA 202

## **Albert Course Number**

5997

## **New York University**

Summer Journalism

## **Class Schedule**

Tuesdays/Thursdays: 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

May 25 to July 1, 2021

## **Instructor**

Craigh Barboza

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Office hours: Thursdays: 11 a.m. to noon & 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

## **Course Description**

This “supercalifragilisticexpiali(*dope!*)ciously intense” course is designed for students with a serious interest in writing about movies for print and digital media, and a sense of humor. Students practice various forms of film journalism, from hard news to profile writing. They also develop a critical understanding of the art form through screenings and close readings of important works by celebrated and contemporary writers: Pauline Kael, François Truffaut, Donald Bogle, Brooks Barnes, Stephanie Zacharek and the Internet. This course equips students with a working knowledge of the film journalism landscape, as well as an understanding of major film movements and artists. Students attend and cover the 2021 Brooklyn Film Festival. Other planned class trips include Film at Lincoln Center, the nonprofit organization that is home to the New York Film Festival and offices of *Film Comment* magazine. We do lots of classwork and hot takes, writing exercises, topic-inspired lessons, presentations and pop-up workshops on journalism skills and ethics. Guest speakers will offer guidance on specific topics like reporting techniques, film programming and criticism. By the end of the course, students will have raised their cinema I.Q. and completed several publishable articles.

## **Learning Objectives**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the film industry and how it is covered by the press
- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Report from and about a film festival

## **Grading System**

This class uses letter grades, which will be based on the following criteria:

- 30% final project
- 40% papers and assignments
- 20% class participation and in-class assignments
- 10% familiarity with the assigned readings

Grades can be lowered for unmet deadlines, lateness or absence from class. Plagiarism, invented sources or other ethical breaches can result in an automatic F.

The following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A (100% to 94%) — Outstanding work, publishable as is

A- (93% to 90%)

B+ (89% to 87%)

B (86% to 83%) — Good work, in need of minor revision

B- (82% to 80%)

C+ (79% to 77%)

C (76% to 73%) — Ordinary work, needs significant revision

C- (72% to 70%)

D (69% to 65%) — Major problems with facts, reporting, writing

F (64% to 0%) — Issues with plagiarism, etc.

### **Disability Disclosure Statement**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or [mosecsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosecsd@nyu.edu)) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

### **Diversity Statement**

The Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an anti-racist learning environment that embraces diversity, complexity, and honesty. We are an intellectual community enriched by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, sex, gender identity, class, ethnicity, sexualities, abilities, religion, and culture. Our student body is excitingly international. We welcome a multiplicity of perspectives. We acknowledge that listening to other perspectives on some of these issues may be personally challenging, and we accept that challenge. We further acknowledge that our profession, journalism, and our home, New York University, have participated in the systemic racism that underpins U.S. history. We are committed to teaching and practicing fair, rigorous, and engaged journalism that helps all our communities move toward justice and equality.

### **Scene 1/Rehearsals**

Introduction to the class and syllabus review. Getting to know each other through a writing exercise. Screen and analyze a clip from a film classic about a newspaper baron then go deep on the year in movies and media coverage of Hollywood. *Homework — Read & Response Assignment: chapter on film history from “Looking at Movies” and chapter on the birth of the new avant-garde from “The French New Wave.” Students write a pocket guide to a film movement of their choice.*

### **Scene 2/Establishing Shot (How to Think & Write About Movies)**

A brief class discussion of the reading homework. Student presentations: pocket guides. A survey of Hollywood beat reporting with guest speaker Brooks Barnes of *The New York Times* who will also provide a lay of the land, and offer insider tips on navigating the film industry. (Who knows who’s being hired, or who’s being fired, and how much films cost? What are the major talent agencies and guilds? How do you handle story tips?) An in-class writing exercise on journalism elements and story formats, including the hard news story. *Homework — Read & Response: Packet of box-office reports. Research and write a box-office report (approximately 350 words) based on that weekend’s results, using at least one source.*

### **Scene 3/INT: BROOKLYN FILM FESTIVAL -- DAY**

A primer on the film festival circuit and how to cover it from guest speaker Dennis Lim, who is the New York Film Festival chief and director of programming. Screen and analyze a movie clip from a cynical period drama about a corrupt reporter followed by a discussion of journalism ethics. (Heard any good cautionary tales? Can I accept freebies? What constitutes a conflict of interest?) Student presentations: box-office reports. *Homework — Attend and cover the 2021 Brooklyn Film Festival (approx. 350 to 500 words).*

### **Scene 4/Dialogue**

Lecture on the nuts and bolts of interviewing. (How do I request and conduct fruitful interviews? Who are good secondary subjects? When do I ask the tough questions?) In-class exercise on interviews. *Homework — Read & Response: “The Art of the Interview.” Prepare questions for our next guest speaker Malcolm Lee.*

### **Scene 5/The Big Picture**

Guest speaker Malcolm Lee, whose directing credits include *Girls Trip* and *Undercover Brother*, answers questions about his movie career and upcoming blockbuster *Space Jam 2*, starring LeBron James and Bugs Bunny. A review of story basics and detailed discussion of the writing process. (How do I organize my material? What are some ways to add variety and texture to writing? Where do I go to fact-check my story?) *Homework* — *Read & Response: chapter from TBD. Write Malcolm Lee Q&A (approx. 300 words)*

### **Scene 6/The Protagonist**

A brief class discussion of the reading homework. An A to Z guide to film coverage and resources. (What's the difference between *Cineaste* and *Comscore*? How do I track down a contact for the costume designer on the new big-screen version of *West Side Story*?) We will screen and analyze a clip from a recent comedy about a successful magazine writer with commitment issues and talk story pitching. In-class exercise on query letters. *Homework* — *Read & Response: Molly Haskell's "From Reverence to Rape" and Donald Bogle's "Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks."* *Research and pitch two possible subjects for your final profile.*

### **Scene 7/Pre-Production: The Profile**

Student presentations on Haskell and Bogle. A brief history of film viewing and in-class exercise on how to infuse your writing with a sense of place and mood to bring characters and situations to life. Workshop on developing and researching the profile. *Homework* — *Read & Response: a crushing profile of a major actor from The New Yorker. Research and report final profile.*

### **Scene 8/The Cast & Crew**

Track the evolution of movie acting. A peer review of the profile outlines. Watch a documentary on cinematography and breakdown the art and craft of moviemaking. *Homework* — *Students write rough draft of profile and submit it with a "profile master folder" (annotated transcripts, model articles, research). Read & Response: One group will read a Pauline Kael essay on the downright staleness of Hollywood, another an interview with French director Francois Truffaut.*

### **Scene 9/Now Playing**

In-class assignment on film criticism. Screen a new big-studio release for review. *Homework* — *Read & Response: chapter on criticism from “Cineaste on Film Criticism, Programming and Preservation in the New Millennium.” Prepare questions for Stephanie Zacharek.*

### **Scene 10/Everyone’s A Critic**

A brief class discussion of the homework. *Time* magazine’s chief film critic Stephanie Zacharek, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, talks about her career and work. (How do you capture the quality of an actor’s performance? How did movie reviewing change between *The Great Train Robbery* and *The Old Guard*? As a critic, how much should political sympathies or being a person of color or a woman shape my work?) A primer on influential film critics in history. *Homework* — *Report and write second draft of final profile (approx. 2,000 words).*

### **Scene 11/Flashback**

Student Presentations: profile intros. Screen and discuss movie clip from a period melodrama that tells the story of the rise, fall and possible comeback of a Hollywood boy genius. An introduction to obituaries and in-class exercise on summarizing someone’s life and accomplishments. Guest speaker Tom Lent, a veteran copyeditor (*Miami Herald*, *USA Weekend*) offers tips on grammar, syntax and punctuation. *Homework* — *Write and polish final draft of profile (approx. 2,000 words).*

### **Scene 12/Wrap Party**

Closing statement. A review of the work we produced and lessons learned in class. Student presentations: advance obits. Screen a clip from the holy grail of journalism films and discuss how the craft of filmmaking gels with the act of reporting.