



A level Film Studies

Who is this course for?

This course is for anyone who has a keen interest in Film and wants to understand how the film industry works, how to analyse films, and how films 'work' for audiences.

Film is essentially an optical illusion, and yet we react very strongly to it, expressing laughter, fear, shock and happiness; and the emotions which films can generate often remain strong in our memory. We know it's not real, and yet we react as if it is real. How do films manage to have such an effect on us?

Why do audiences identify with characters? How does the film industry design films which attract certain audiences?

This course will be of interest to anyone who enjoys the cinema but wants to know far more about the aesthetic qualities of film: the narrative structure, and the use of cinematography, editing, light and sound, and how all these different elements combine to create meaning and generate a strong emotional response.

This course will also be of interest to anyone who wants to develop their skills of analysis and learn to think critically. Film Studies is a subject intended for those who like to become involved and learn through active participation. Lastly, for all these reasons, Film Studies complements a range of other subjects very well, such as English Literature, Media Studies, Psychology, Sociology, and Art and Design.

What are the entry criteria?

It is expected that students will have satisfied the standard entry requirements for the College for advanced level study. This is an academic subject with an element of practical production work. Students need to be visually literate, but they also need to be able to write effectively and at length to communicate their ideas and analyses in a detailed and convincing manner.

NB: all students will be referred to HoS at the enrolment interview.

The Film Studies Department

The Film Studies Department consists of two highly experienced members of staff: Trevor Ryan (Head of Department), and Tim Anderson (Head of Media Studies).

Exam Board:

WJEC Consult www.wjec.co.uk/Film for the full specification

All Film Studies students are issued with an AS or an A2 textbook, together with a substantial body of additional learning materials (printed notes, study guides, stimulus materials, essay plans, revision exercises, etc). All these additional learning materials, together with supplementary learning resources, are available for students to access on the college intranet. The Film Studies Department also has a substantial library of books on cinema, particular directors, specific genres, etc, together with DVDs, and copies of Sight and Sound, for students to use. Film Studies staff provide additional support for those students who need further guidance regarding their written or creative work, and more generally for students who wish to discuss issues arising from the topics which they have been studying.

What does the Course involve?

AS Film Studies

Unit 1 Film Language

This unit covers the key elements of Film Language: narrative structure, cinematography, editing, sound, and light. We are concerned here firstly with the underlying structure of films: films usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order. The order in which a film unfolds affects the way in which audiences become involved with the story. Secondly we consider how the director can use composition and lighting to tell the story visually rather than through dialogue; and how editing and sound add further layers of meaning and also heighten audience involvement.

Unit 2 The British and American Film Industries

This unit explores the production, distribution and exhibition of mainstream films. We analyse how films are financed, designed, marketed, and screened; and we consider the impact new technologies have had on how films are marketed and consumed. We also investigate how the British film industry works in comparison with

Hollywood, and the problems it faces having to compete with Hollywood products. We look at specific films relating to each industry. In each case we analyse the production context of these films, their genre characteristics, their themes, and their stylistic features.

Assessment

Unit 1 is assessed through coursework. One piece involves an analysis of a short sequence from a film chosen by the candidate; the second consists of a creative exercise in which the candidate produces a digital storyboard of 25 frames for a sequence from an imagined film.

Unit 2 is assessed by means of a written exam, consisting of essay questions on the film industry, and specific British, and American films. The exam takes place at the end of the academic year. Unit 1 is worth 40%, and Unit 2 60% of the marks.

A2 Film Studies

Unit 3 consists of coursework. One piece involves a small scale research project, where the candidate investigates the films of a particular director, or developments in a particular genre. The second piece requires the candidate to produce their own five minute fiction film. This creative exercise gives the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate their creative abilities as writer, director, cinematographer and editor.

Unit 4 is divided into three sections. One section involves study of developments in World Cinema (eg: Mexican New Wave Cinema). A second section focuses on 'Spectatorship' – on how directors use narrative structure, cinematography, etc, to generate a strong emotional response in the audience. The third section involves a critical study of a single film – an in-depth analysis of a film scene by scene, looking at the director's style, and the themes the director was trying to explore.

Assessment

For Unit 3, one piece of coursework is completed in the first term, and the other in the second term. For Unit 4, there is a written exam, divided into three sections, and candidates answer three essay questions, one from each section. The exam is taken at the end of the academic year. The two units are of equal value.

How is the course delivered?

Every Film Studies class is taught by two teachers, so that students benefit from different teaching styles and approaches. Each Film Studies class takes place in a dedicated Film Studies classroom, with the resources appropriate to the course

immediately to hand. Teaching and learning combine presentations and discussions, with film analysis, group work, research exercises, skills-based activities, and practical work drawing upon student creativity. We expect students to be actively involved and encourage independent learning and critical thinking.

Departmental Enrichment

Over the years the Film Studies Department has taken Film Studies students to the National Media Museum, to special screenings during the National Schools Film Week, to screenings at the Hull Film Festival, and to the New York Film Academy in New York. Film Studies students are able to take part in the Digital Video Production enrichment course, which provides training in film production and editing. Film Studies students also have full access to the range of equipment and facilities available for Film and Media students to use in the Editing Suite adjacent to the Film and Media classrooms.

Student success

With 100% pass rate for A2, and 97% pass rate for AS, and over 30% of our students gaining A and B grades at A2, the Film Studies Department has helped many students excel in the subject.

Some A2 Film Studies students who left in June 2011, and where they are now:

Billy Harrison, studying **Fashion** at Lincoln University (C grade in Film Studies)
Louis Cochran, studying **Film & Television Production**, Westminster University (A)
Jack Fisher, studying **Criminology**, Leeds Metropolitan University (D)
Arron Bass, studying **Journalism** at the University of Sheffield (A)
Ruth Ollerenshaw, studying **English and American Literature** at Hull University (C)
Katie O'Connell, studying **Film and Moving Image Production** at Leeds Met (B)
Jared Costa, studying **Film and Television Studies**, Trinity College, Leeds University (D)
Jennifer Dixon, studying **Film and Moving Image Production**, Leeds Met (B)
Adam Amini, studying **Film Production**, Middlesex University (A)



What does this course lead to?

The media industries in this country employ over half a million people, and contribute enormously to the UK economy, bringing in vast revenues from overseas sales of British products. Consequently, there are substantial career opportunities for those with a background in Film Studies.

Because this course combines academic study with the practical and creative elements of film production, it provides an excellent foundation for those who wish to go on to study various academic subjects at university, such as Film Studies and Media Studies, but also to those who prefer to study practical/vocational degree courses such as Film and Media Production, Film and Television Production, and Broadcast Media Production. Moreover, because of the aesthetic, design and marketing elements of the course, and its focus on the analysis of set texts, Film Studies complements a variety of other subjects, for example: English Literature, Sociology, Psychology, and Art and Design.

The subject provides more than just knowledge: it provides training in analytical thinking, and develops a variety of transferable skills. Industry and commerce want people who can think for themselves, absorb a lot of information, ask critical questions, analyse problems, research information, present reports and communicate clearly. All these skills can be acquired through the study of Film.

Consequently, the study of Film is suitable for students intending to pursue a broad range of careers in, for example, journalism, broadcasting, the law, marketing, the heritage industry, the leisure and tourism industries, and publishing. It is also highly appropriate for students intending to pursue business or managerial careers.

Finally, for students wanting a career in the film and television industries, there is a considerable range of career paths available: producer, director, editor, cinematographer, sound engineer, production design, set design, general researcher, location research, lighting engineer, legal department, marketing, script development, etc.

Details for careers for Film Studies graduates can be found at:

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/industries_media_overview.htm

<http://www.studyin-uk.com/e/studyuk-film/>

Most universities also provide lists of the career destinations of their graduates, by degree subject.

What can I do now that would help prepare me for this course?

Firstly, find out what the 'classic Hollywood narrative structure' was, and apply it to two or three recent films which you have enjoyed. Secondly, choose your favourite genre (horror, romantic comedy, thriller, etc), and identify the key characteristics of the genre. Consider

how far some recent films you have seen conform to this pattern. Can you think of any films which are genre hybrids? Thirdly, try watching something which is very different from the usual Hollywood output – Hong Kong cinema, French cinema, Spanish cinema. Films such as Delicatessen, Pan's Labyrinth and Chungking Express show that cinema does not have to rely on stars, high-tempo action and massive marketing, and does not need to conform to the Hollywood narrative formula or the Hollywood genre formula. Lastly, try and go to a film festival to see an independent film. The more varied your experience of cinema, the stronger your critical analysis of cinema will become.