

# PLS422: Film and Politics

Summer I 2016  
Michigan State University

## Instructor Information

### Instructor

Emma Slonina

### Email

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### Office Hours

Online 10am-12pm (EDT) Tuesdays, or by appt.

## General Information

### Description

Film and politics have a reciprocal relationship that makes each important for understanding the other. This writing seminar will focus on watching and analyzing films with explicit and implicit political content, then examining them within the broader context of politics generally.

Students will have a choice of films to watch in each thematic section. Topics will vary from domestic to international politics, general political problems, and the politics surrounding Hollywood.

### Goals and Expectations

Students will learn to watch films critically, think about the politics in and surrounding film, and write clear and concise analyses about these films.

Students are required to complete short writing assignments each week and one larger final writing project, with an emphasis on revising and expanding upon an earlier draft.

This class is only 7 weeks long and conducted online, so self-motivation, accountability, and timeliness are particularly important. Assignments have been set so that no work has to be done over weekends, but this arrangement requires conscientiousness during the week. “Computer problems” as an excuse for not completing work will be viewed as suspect, and only verifiable emergencies will be taken seriously. If you are having *any* problems, I expect you to let me know as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements.

## Course Materials

### Required Materials

- Access to films – e.g. Netflix, Amazon Instant, Google Play, iTunes – please see film availability spreadsheet on D2L, and more information below
- Word processor
- Internet connection (duh)

### Required Texts & Media

Required readings will be posted as PDFs on D2L each week. These will consist of articles and book excerpts, found under each week’s subpage on D2L.

You are also required to watch at least one film each week from the list of approved films on D2L. See below for more information (“Additional Information and Resources”, page 4).

**Course Schedule** (all due dates/times given in Eastern Daylight Savings Time – the time zone East Lansing is in; traveling outside of the time zone is not an excuse for late work)

Week	Topic	Exercises
Week 1 - 5/18	Film, Politics, and Writing: An Introduction	1) Introduce yourself on D2L by <b>Wednesday, May 18</b> 2) Take plagiarism quiz by <b>Friday, May 20</b> at 11:59pm 3) Short paper #1 due <b>Friday, May 20</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 2 - 5/25	American Political History	Short paper #2 due <b>Friday, May 27</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 3 - 6/1	American Political Institutions	First draft of research paper <b>OR</b> Short paper #3 due <b>Friday, June 3</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 4 - 6/8	Revolution and Dissent	First draft of research paper <b>OR</b> Short paper #3 due <b>Friday, June 10</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 5 - 6/15	Utopias, Dystopias, and Alternative Politics	Short paper #4 due <b>Friday, June 17</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 6 - 6/22	International Relations	Short paper #5 due <b>Friday, June 24</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)
Week 7 - 6/29	Politics of Film: The Conclusion	Research paper due <b>Thursday, June 30</b> by 11:59pm (EDT)

## Assignments

### Introductions

In this first week, you should introduce yourself by submitting an introduction to the designated D2L dropbox that includes the requisite material. Details will be on that assignment page.

### Plagiarism Quiz

As noted below, plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. Many students, even at the college level, do not always understand what constitutes plagiarism, however. To remedy this, and to ensure that you understand plagiarism will result in penalties, you must complete an online quiz, found here:

<https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

**To complete the assignment, you must submit a copy of the completion certificate to the designated Dropbox (do not email me) or, if you cannot pass the quiz, you must instead submit evidence (using screenshots, for instance) that you have correctly answered 10 practice test questions. Passing the quiz is highly preferable.**

## Weekly 2-pagers

For five of the seven weeks of this course (listed above), you are required to watch **at least one** of the listed films for that theme and write a short, 2-page analysis of the film in response to that week's question. These papers should **not** be summaries of the films, but rather critical analyses. They should have a clear thesis and connect the films and their politics to politics at large.

## Research Paper

Since this is a writing seminar, the goal is for you to produce a significant piece of writing for your final project. Part of this process involves creating an initial draft, then revising and submitting it for your final project. The paper should be 7-10 pages long and provide an in-depth analysis of at least one of the films **or** one of the themes (involving several films) in this class, as it relates to politics.

In this paper, you should be able to synthesize visual and written media, incorporating others' scholarly work into your own critical analysis of the film/theme of your choice. Revising a paper does not involve simply fixing your spelling/grammar mistakes and changing a few sentences. It involves serious rethinking, reworking, and rewriting. Papers that do not actually revise the initial project will not receive a passing grade.

I will have seen two of your short papers prior to seeing the first draft of your research paper, so I will already have a good idea of your writing style and skills. Writing a purposefully bad first draft in order to “fix” it later will also not receive a passing grade.

The first draft of this paper is due by **Friday, June 3 OR Friday, June 10 at 11:59pm.**

I will return the drafts with comments to you by **Friday, June 10 OR Friday, June 17** (one week from when you submit your draft).

Your final paper is due **Thursday, June 30 at 11:59pm.**

I have to submit your grades to the registrar by **Tuesday, July 5**. For this reason, it is imperative that you submit your final paper on time. Late papers will have points docked on a sliding scale, depending on their lateness. See D2L for the specific point breakdown.

## Grading

### Final Grade Breakdown

Plagiarism Quiz	5%
Short papers	50% (10% each)
Research paper draft	20%
Research paper final	25%

### Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Point
A/A+	93-100	4.0
B+/A-	87-92	3.5
B-/B	80-86	3.0
C+	77-79	2.5
C-/C	70-76	2.0
D+	67-69	1.5
D-/D	60-66	1.0

F	59 and under	0.0
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## Additional Information and Resources

### Where to find films

Fortunately, most films are only a click away these days. I have posted an Excel spreadsheet on the D2L page that lists which films are available from which sources (Netflix, Amazon Instant, Google Play, iTunes).

Many of the films available on Netflix are only available on DVD. If you have a Netflix account already, **you can add a DVD plan for as little as \$4.99/mo. but the first month is free.** This class is only 7 weeks, so you could easily use the free plan for the first four weeks then cancel it, or only pay \$7.99 for an additional month to get access for the rest of the class. This is by far the best deal – much cheaper than buying/renting on Amazon, Google, or iTunes.

You can also start a free trial of Amazon Prime, which allows you to stream some movies for free. This trial lasts a month as well, but it is far more expensive if you do not cancel it before the free trial runs out.

You are also always welcome to join fellow students and watch these films together. I will open chat boards on D2L if you would like to meet up with other students in the class to have screening parties.

Finally, [www.openculture.com](http://www.openculture.com) has an excellent database of 700 free movies, as well as links to other free movie sites. While it may have very few of the assigned movies, this is an excellent resource for movies with which you can supplement your final paper.

### Plagiarism

I will not tolerate plagiarism and other academic dishonesty. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course (unless you get explicit permission from me beforehand). All students at Michigan State University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (**failing this class**) and non-academic sanctions (**including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion**).

For more information, please see the following: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>

### Disabilities Accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodation. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities.