

History 481: Producing Film Histories
Team-Research Course, Fall 07/Spring 08

Taper 111
Thursday, 2-4:50

Instructors:

Vanessa Schwartz, Fall, 170 SOS, vschwart@usc.edu
Office Hours: Th, 10:30-12 and by appointment
Victoria Cain, post-doctoral Fellow, Spring 08 instructor

This two-semester undergraduate course is part of the College's special "Team Research Seminars" and it focuses on how film "produces" history. We will begin by thinking about the relation of film and history and will then consider ways that Hollywood has recorded and narrated the past, especially its own. We will focus on the production history of particular films and on Hollywood moments of retrospection, celebration, preservation and collapse. We will consider everything from how Steven Spielberg "created" an archive which became the Shoah Foundation to how the Academy Library and the American Film Institute were founded. As a group we will attempt to select individual topics that will add up together to make a broader argument about Hollywood's relationship to its past and to "the past" in general.

In the first semester, students will define a problem, locate research materials and write a project proposal. During the second semester, under the direction of Dr. Cain, students will write a twenty-five page paper and produce a visually narrated version of the research paper in PowerPoint, film or web format. If students have especially strong visual preparation, they will be permitted to opt out of the written paper but their presentation must be the visual equivalent of a twenty-five page research paper which will be determined by Professor Schwartz. To provide the core research materials, we will make several visits to local archives such as Herrick Library, American Film Institute, UCLA and USC special collections and the Shoah Foundation.

This course is also open to students in the History Major, who may complete the two semester course as their honors thesis.

Class Organization and Requirements: This course meets once a week for 3 hours and is designed as research seminar. I expect that everyone will have completed and thought about the week's assignment before the seminar. Each student will be responsible for posting the week's assignment on Blackboard in the discussion section by 10pm on the Wednesday before the seminar meeting on Thursday unless indicated otherwise.

Watching Visual Assignments: Most weeks will have readings, screenings and archival time. It is the student's responsibility to obtain the DVD materials unless otherwise noted.

Written Requirements and Grading: The semester will include several tasks and assignments that must be completed as scheduled. Because they are posted electronically does not mean that they should be anything other than well-written papers. Your written work will “culminate” in a final written 10 page research paper proposal. Each student will also make a formal oral presentation of his/her project.

Weekly attendance is mandatory. All work must be your own. Any violations of the academic integrity code such as plagiarism will not be tolerated. They will result in automatic failure and be remanded to the Dean’s Office.

Your grade for the semester will be based upon the following combination: Class participation 30%, written tasks: 30% and final proposal: 40%.

Statement for Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with the Disability Services Program (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number is 213-740-0776.

Books Available for Purchase:

Wasson, *Museum Movies*

Polan, *Scenes of Instruction*

Harmetz, *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*

Some additional readings will be posted on the Blackboard under “Course Materials.”

Also, please purchase:

The Wizard of Oz. Three-Disc Collector’s Edition

That’s Entertainment!

Week One: August 30

Introduce the goals of the class and discuss the pre-circulated Schwartz essay.

Assignment for next week: Screen “That’s Entertainment!” and then spend at least two hours in the USC library trying to find materials about the film. Post at least one review of the film from a periodical and scan at least three other documents from the research materials you found on the Blackboard by midnight Tuesday.

Week Two:

Class on September 5 at the Herrick Library at 10:00 am if possible. Meeting with Barbara Hall, Archivist. Description of Materials Available in the collection. Also

goal is to consider how and why the Motion Picture Academy has a library. 333 S. La Cienega just North of Olympic. <http://www.oscars.org/mhl/>.

Assignment for next week: each student posts to the Blackboard at least two paragraphs describing what sort of general research sources the trip to the Herrick made them realize existed. Return to the Herrick by class on the 13th and do more research on two projects: “That’s Entertainment!” and the MGM auction held in 1970. Divide the research tasks amongst yourselves so you are not doing the same thing. This means meeting or discussing via email what you will each do. By class on Thursday bring all the research materials you have. If you can scan them onto our blackboard by class time this would be ideal.

Week Three: September 13: We will review the process of getting these materials and discuss how you find and how you use research materials. Discussion of taking notes, how to decide what material is worth finding, using, knowing.

Reading Assignment for Next Week: Reading: Polan, *Scenes of Instruction*, p.1-32 and 175-236 and Sontag, “The Decay of Cinema” see link on Blackboard. Screen “That’s Entertainment Parts II and III.”

Week Four: September 20: Discussion of readings and screenings. How have scholars have come to study film and how have filmmakers represented/documentated film’s history with “That’s Entertainment!” as the example.

Assignment for next week: Read Houston on the Blackboard and Wasson, *Museum Movies*. Post a response to the readings and three questions about it on the blackboard by Wednesday, midnight.

Week Five: September 27: Discussion of readings. What are the problems related to archiving and cataloguing filmed materials?

Week Six: October 4: Visit to the Academy Film Archive: 2:30pm-5:00pm
1313 N Vine St. <http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/index.html>

Assignment to be completed during the next two weeks and posted by October 17: Return to either the Academy Film Archive or the AFI and spend four hours doing research on a topic that we have discussed individually. By Wednesday, October 17, please post the following: a three-page report that describes what you did and where you went and a two-page interpretation of a group of documents or a single document. Please scan and post these documents on the Blackboard as well.

Week Seven: October 11: Visit to AFI: The AFI Campus is located in the hills overlooking Los Angeles, at 2021 N. Western Avenue. From the Golden State Freeway (I-5): Exit Los Feliz Boulevard West. Drive approximately two miles on Los Feliz past Griffith Park until Los Feliz curves sharply to the left before becoming Western Avenue.

The AFI entrance is the first driveway on the right. If you pass Franklin Avenue, you have gone too far.

Week Eight: October 18: Visit to USC Special Collections; general description and then use of the Freed Collection. Work with Ned Comstock.

For next week's class, screen all the materials in the Special Edition of the "Wizard of Oz" including the Film and then read, Harmetz, *The Making of the Wizard of Oz* and Fordin materials about the "Wizard of Oz" posted on the blackboard. Pay careful attention to how each presents the production history of the film, as this will be the object of your post on the board.

Week Nine: October 25: Class Discussion: Research experiences and results and the relation to the issue of "production" history. What did you learn not just about how the film was made but also how its making is narrated? What is the "making of" category all about?

Week Ten: November 1: Visit to UCLA Special Collections: details to follow.

Assignments for next two weeks:

- 1) Find any materials about "The Making of" books and movies using any of the libraries we have visited. Meet before class and sort through what you found and then post a bibliography and research report on the blackboard by Thursday morning, November 15.
- 2) Screen "Schindler's List" if you haven't seen it by November 1.
- 3) Preliminary Proposal for your major research paper due on the blackboard by Wednesday, midnight.

Week Eleven: November 8: Meet in Class for an hour to discuss your preliminary proposals and then we will visit the Shoah Foundation Archive in the Library.

Assignment for next week: Return to at least one of our archives and write a two-page research report of the materials you looked at now related to your research topic. Prepare and post this and a two-page bibliography of articles and books related to your proposed topic.

Week Twelve: November 15: Discussion of your projects and description of how to write a research proposal.

Assignment for next class: You need to start carefully reading the secondary literature. By Tuesday, November 27 at midnight, you will have to have posted a five-seven page essay about "the state of the literature" that also underscores to what problem in the literature your proposed research will provide the answer, keeping in mind that "producing film history" is our subject. Each student will also have a critic that uses "track changes" to edit their person's proposal and I will do so for all students. All critical corrections need to be posted by midnight Wednesday, November 28.

Thanksgiving: November 22: NO CLASS

Week Thirteen: November 29: Discussion of proposals and critiques.

Week Fourteen: December 6: Oral Presentations (no more than 20 minutes each) done at my house, followed by dinner. Class meet at 3:30. 1208 Marguerita Avenue in Santa Monica. Presentations will be also include powerpoint that presents the archival base and lays out the goals of the project.

Final 10 page proposal is due via email by Monday, December 10 at 11pm.