

City in Fiction & Film

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: CP

Course number: 4040

Section: NG

CRN (you may add up to five):
31603

Instructor First Name: Emily

Instructor Last Name: Lasser (Smith)

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

The "Cinema and City" course explores how cinema uses the urban scene as a landscape of the imagination. The assumption underlying this effort is that films help structure our understanding of urban affairs, influence public perception, and reflect our collective societal attitudes toward city life. Movies can tell us much about our urban pasts, presents, and futures and provide insights into our collective hopes, fears, fantasies, and phobias. The course focuses on a number of complementary and competing images of our cities in cinema over the last century.

Course learning outcomes:

- Analyze film through the lens of specific urban themes and develop a framework for understanding how cinema shapes our perception of cities
- Contextualize urban cinema within its historical and social framework while considering the cultural, political, and economic factors that influence urban representation
- Develop critical writing skills through regular reflection and structured analysis of cinematic elements
- Connect cinematic representations to real urban challenges and solutions, drawing parallels between fictional portrayals and actual urban issues
- Synthesize insights across multiple films to identify patterns in urban representation and evaluate how these patterns evolve over time

Required course materials:

All films will be screened in class. Additional readings and context materials will be provided through Canvas one week before each screening.

Grading policy:

Course Requirements:

Success and your grade are dependent on the following: attending lectures; providing thoughtful commentary in class and on discussion boards; and demonstrating your acquired knowledge through written assignments.

Pre-class Research Assignments: 5%

For each film, students will identify and analyze 5 significant facts that provide historical, social, or cultural context. These assignments are due by midnight on Tuesdays before the film screening. Come to class prepared to discuss your facts.

Weekly Film Reflections: 70%

After each screening, students will submit a 1-2-page written reflection. Reflections are due by Saturday at midnight.

Final Reflection: 20%

Students will complete a comprehensive analysis of urban representation across three films from different decades, examining how portrayals of urban life and issues have evolved over time. Due April 30 at midnight.

Class Participation and Attendance: 5%

Class participation and attendance will help you to get the most of this course! It will make the content more meaningful, help with comprehension, and make the course more enjoyable. You **may miss 1 class** without penalty. With that said, ***please do not come to class sick***. If you are sick and miss more than 1 class, please email me, and we will find a way to make up the class. Institute-excused absences should be communicated to me at least 48 hours ahead of time via email.

Missed or Late Assignments

Assignments will be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise indicated. Pre-class research is due by midnight on Tuesdays and reflections by Saturday at midnight. I do not accept missed or late assignments unless there are extenuating circumstances (sickness, death in the family, etc.) and you have let me know PRIOR to the assignment being due.

Your Grade

Grades are regularly posted throughout the semester. If you have concerns about your grade, please contact me by the 10th week of classes. There are plenty of ways in which you can earn an A in the class. Your grade is up to you.

A = >90%

B = 80 - 89.99%

C = 70 - 79.99%

D = 60 - 69.99%

F = <60%

Attendance policy:

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Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence