



Film Studies 2156F (570)  
Winter 2026  
Crime On Screen

**Course Information:**

**Calendar Description:** Addressing the ways the media create, shape and distort our perceptions and imaginings of crime. The cinema has long given moviegoers a rich vocabulary about lawbreaking and moral transgression. Television and new media will also be examined in terms their fictional and non-fictional negotiations of crime.

**Prerequisite(s):**

**Anti-requisite(s):**

**Extra Information:** 2 lecture hours; 3-hour screening

**Course Weight:** 0.50      **Breadth:** Category B

**Subject Code:** FILM

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary pre-requisites.

## **FILM 2156F 570**

### **Crime On Screen**

**2025-26**

**Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts**

Office Hours: By appointment

Email: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Criminal justice and criminology have become key areas of scholarly interest in recent years, producing an array of insights concerning the human condition and our encounters with law and punishment. This course maps the vital ways the media create, shape and distort our perceptions and imaginings of crime. The cinema has long given moviegoers a rich vocabulary about lawbreaking and moral transgression, with imaginings of figures as diverse as the mobster, the hard-boiled detective, the serial-killer and the super-villain. Television will also be examined in terms of both its fictional (TV dramas) and non-fictional negotiations (news and true-crime documentary) of crime. Finally, we will look at how new media have changed the landscape, creating new cultures of transgression (dark webs, hacking, identity compromise) and judgement (shaming/whistleblowing, leaks etc.). In keeping with a media literate approach to crime and transgression, screenings, lectures, discussions and writing assignments are geared toward critique and theoretical interpretation.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

- To inform students of ways the media create, shape and distort our perceptions and imaginings of crime.
- To familiarise students with ways the cinema has imagined criminality and law-breaking, through the deployment of narration, characterisation and genre.
- To familiarise students with the ways media have changed conceptions of criminality and transgression.
- To convey the ways that television negotiates the boundaries of fictional and non-fictional approaches to crime.
- To examine debates surrounding the representation of crime in popular culture, particularly through the filters of sensitisation and habituation.

#### **Assessment Structure**

- Midterm exam - multiple choice and short answer questions. (25%)
- Course essay: assessing students' ability to compare and contrast approaches to crime afforded by specific media forms and platforms. (30%)
- Final Exam. (40%)
- Participation/Attendance (5%)

## READINGS

Available on OWL under Resources

## Fall Schedule

Date	Topic	Screening	Readings
Sept 10	Introduction:	<i>The Great Train Robbery</i> (dir, Edwin S. Porter, 1903, US)	<b>ALL ON OWL</b>
Sep 17	<b>Unit I: Crime Genres</b> The Great Detectives: Narrative Principles	'Columbo' (TV Series, 1971-2003) <a href="https://archive.org/details/5.5NowYouSeeHim">https://archive.org/details/5.5NowYouSeeHim</a>	David Bordwell – “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures” in Philip Rosen (ed.), <i>Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader</i> . Columbia University Press. pp. 17--34
Sept 24		<b>NO CLASS - RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY</b>	
Oct 1	Film Genre I: The Gangster Film	<i>King of New York</i> (dir. Abel Ferrara, 1990, US)  Optional viewing: <i>The Godfather</i> (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1972, US)	Barry Langford 'The Gangster Film: Genre and Society' in Langford, <i>Film Genre</i> , (OPTIONAL but helpful on “American Dream”, Ronald Strinati, <i>Hollywood Narrative and Film Genres</i> , 26-34.  David Bordwell, ‘The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice,’ in Braudy & Cohen, eds. <i>Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings</i> , 716-724
Oct 8	Film Genre II: Film Noir	<i>Double Indemnity</i> (dir. Billy Wilder, US)	Place, J. “Some Visual Motifs in Film Noir”, “Women in Film Noir”
Oct 15	Film Genre II: Neo Noir	<i>Brick</i> (dir. Rian Johnson, 2005, US)	Paul Schrader ‘Notes on Film Noir,’

Oct 22	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>		
Oct 29	Film Genre III: The Revisionist Western	<i>Pat Garret &amp; Billy the Kid</i> (dir. Sam Peckinpah, 1973, USA)	Thomas Elsaesser, The Pathos of Failure, American Films in the 1970s
FALL READING WEEK			
Nov 5	<b>Unit II: Criminal Minds</b> The Super Villain	<i>Joker</i> (dir. Todd Philips, 2019, US)	Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in <i>Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History</i> , ed. Nick Browne
Nov 12	"Mind Games"	<i>Memento</i> (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2000, USA) <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991, US)	Thomas Elsaesser, 'Contingency, causality, complexity: distributed agency in the mind-game film', <i>New Review of film and Television Studies</i> , 2018 vol. 16, No. 1, 1-39
Nov 19	Horror Bodies	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991, USA)  Plus selected examples (CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera) O.J. Simpson, Johnny Depp	Elsaesser & Buckland, Studying Contemporary American Film, Ch. 9
Nov 26	<b>Unit III: Crime and Media Cultures</b> Television and media flow:  <b>Course Essay Hand-In</b>	<i>Gamer</i> (dir. Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2009, US),  Plus selected examples (CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera) O.J. Simpson, Johnny Depp	Lewis, J., 'Democratic or Disposable? 24-Hour News, Consumer Culture, and Built-in Obsolescence, in Cushion, Lewis & Lang, <i>The Rise of 24-hour News Television: Global Perspectives</i> , NewYork: Peter Lang, 81-98  Steven Shaviro, Post-Cinematic Affect, p. 64-92

Dec 3	Crime and Surveillance Hacker culture	<i>Southland Tales</i> (dir. Richard Kelly, US, 2006)	Steven Shaviro, Post-Cinematic Affect, p. 93-130
TBA	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>		



### **Faculty Office Hours:**

Faculty office hours can be found on King's homepage under the menu heading Current Students (<http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/courses-enrolment/planning/faculty-office-hours/>) and are also posted on the bulletin board across from the Administrative Assistants Office on the second floor of Dante Lenardon Hall.

### **Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:**

([http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)). Student Medical Certificate (SMC)

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

### **Tests/Examinations:**

Students are responsible for seeking accommodation with appropriate documentation, prior to writing tests/examinations, if they are of the view that their performance may be affected by extenuating circumstances.

### **Support Services:**

Students who are in emotional/mental health distress should refer to Mental Health@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

University Students Council provides many valuable support services for students (including the health insurance plan) <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

Information about Counselling and Student Development, including Accessibility Services (formerly Services for Students with Disabilities) at King's is available at <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/who-we-are/administrative-departments/dean-of-students/>

For emotional/mental health assistance see: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

The website for Academic Services at King's University College is <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-support/>

### **Statement on Use of Electronic Devices:**

Use of Electronic Devices:

You are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Use of Laptops in the Classroom:

King's University College at The University of Western Ontario acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of laptop computers can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of laptops by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using laptops for purposes not directly related to the class

may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct. See [https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/studentLife/conduct/code\\_of\\_conduct\\_2003.pdf](https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/studentLife/conduct/code_of_conduct_2003.pdf)

Inappropriate use of laptops [or smart phones] during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.”

**Statement on Academic Offences:**

King’s is committed to Academic Integrity.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://turnitin.uwo.ca/>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

**Copyright re: Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright . Faculty Members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a Faculty Member. Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member is interested in posting a student’s answers or papers on the course web site he/she should ask for the student’s written permission.

(Commercial use of Course material - <http://umd.edu/legal/commercial.html>)

**Mailbox re Submission of Late Essays/Assignments ONLY:**

Only late essays/assignments not handed in at class may be dropped off in the drop box, located between the inner doors of the Cardinal Carter Library. Please inform your students that essays dropped into the mailbox will be picked-up twice per day: once in the morning (9:30 a.m.) and in the afternoon (4:00 p.m.). All essays dropped off after 4:00 p.m. on a Friday will be date-stamped the following Monday. Essays should be placed in an envelope addressed to the professor with the course code and student number clearly indicated.

**Class Cancellations:**

All reported class cancellations are posted at: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/outages-service-interruptions/>

## 2025-2026

### 1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

#### Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

#### Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses\\_enrollment/exams\\_and\\_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf](https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

[https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/academic\\_consideration\\_Sep24.pdf](https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf)

#### Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a "Multiple Exam Situation" (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

#### Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

## 2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:  
[https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)

Academic Support Services at King's University College:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

### GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing [Care@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:Care@kings.uwo.ca) or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

## 3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

**Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom:** King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

#### **4. Statement on Academic Offences**

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It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see [https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html](https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality_Reports_-_TurnItIn.html).

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

#### **5. Copyright of Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

#### **6. Use of Recordings**

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

#### **7. Policy on Attendance**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due

warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.