

FILM STUDIES 2156F (570)
CRIME ON SCREEN
Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts
Email: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Course Information

Mode of Instruction: In-person.

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):

Antirequisite(s): Film Studies 1020E.

Extra Information: 5 hours including screening.

Course Weight: 0.5

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 enrol 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 prerequisites.

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2026

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts

Office Hours: By appointment

Email: cburnet6@uwo.ca.

Course Description

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

- Test 1: short answer questions (10%)
- 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. (25%)
- Final Exam. (30%)
- Participation/Attendance (10%)

READINGS

Available on OWL under Resources

Policy on AI (Important)

Within this course, generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are permitted exclusively for: information-gathering and preliminary research purposes; development of an essay outline.

Students must acknowledge use and state how the tool was used. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline. Unauthorized use means any attempt to use AI tools in the full-text composition of a course essay.

Fall Schedule

Date	Topic	Screening	Readings
Sept. 9	Introduction:	Excerpts from <i>The Great Train Robbery</i> (dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903, US) & <i>Birth of a Nation</i> (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915, US)	ALL ON OWL
Sep 16	Unit I: Crime Genres The Great Detectives: Narrative Principles	'Columbo' (TV Series, 1971-2003) https://archive.org/details/5.5No wYouSeeHim	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 23	The Gangster Film	<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.

Sept 30		NO CLASS: NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION (non-instructional day)	
Oct 7	Film Noir Test 1 (30 minutes)	<i>Double Indemnity</i> (dir. Billy Wilder, US)	Paul Schrader 'Notes on Film Noir,' Place, J. "Some Visual Motifs in Film Noir", "Women in Film Noir"
FALL READING WEEK - Oct 10 to Oct 18			
Oct 21	Unit II: Contemporary Forms "Mind Games"	<i>Joker</i> (dir. Todd Philips, 2019, 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
Oct 28	MIDTERM EXAM starts at 10am	No screenings or readings, study for exam.	
Nov 4	Horror Bodies	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991, USA)	Elsaesser & Buckland, Studying Contemporary American Film, Ch. 9
Nov 11	True-Crime Documentary	<i>A Toxic Love Story</i> (dir. Alexandra Lacey, 2026, US)	Bill Nichols, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i> , pp. 46.65 (Chapter 2)
Nov 18	Unit III: Auteur Study I: Quentin Tarantino	<i>Pulp Fiction</i> (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1994, US)	John Beebe, 'Pulp Fiction', <i>The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal</i> , Vol.13, No.3, 1994 Pages 77-80
Nov 25	Unit III: Auteur Study II: Alfred Hitchcock Course Essay Hand-In	<i>Rear Window</i> (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954, US)	John Belton, "Dexterity in a Void: The Formalist Esthetics of Alfred Hitchcock," <i>Cineaste</i> , 10, No. 3. (Summer 1980).

Dec 2	Unit III: Auteur Study III: Martin Scorsese	<i>Killers of the Flower Moon</i> (dir. Martin Scorsese, 2-23, US)	TBA
Dec 9	Course Review		
	FINAL EXAM (scheduled by college)		

Please note, Friday Make-Up Exams can only be written with the instructor's consent.

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (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](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this assessment.
- If instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs. (For example, if students need to submit X of Y assignments, this flexibility already provides consideration.)
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:
<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

Western’s Mental Health Services site provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's by emailing 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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, is posted at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

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 to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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>.

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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.