

FMP 405: The Oscars (Online) Fall A 2021 Syllabus (8/18/21)

Part 1: Course Information

Instructor Information

Instructor: Guillermo Reyes
Office: Dixie Gammage 229 – Tempe Campus
Office Hours: Available via email, most waking hours
Office Telephone: 480-965-0519
E-mail: Guillermo.reyes@asu.edu (preferred)

Course Description

This course introduces the student to the history, the founding, the legend and the practices of the Academy Awards or the Oscars as issued by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS.)

Prerequisite: ENG102, 105 or 108 with C or better.

Course Objectives

- Identify the major historical events of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
- Explain the annual practice of awarding of what came to be known as “The Oscars,” the reasoning behind the name, and other aspects of the ritual.
- Analyze how the Academy has shaped the American film industry and the making of past, current, and future films.
- Analyze how the award became identified with prestige, legendary status, and popular culture.
- Learn all the various aspects of Oscar trivia, winners and nominees, records of winnings, firsts and ground-breaking films.
- Analyze the sociopolitical trends and controversies that have shaped the history of the Academy Awards ever since the founding to the present.

Textbook & Course Materials

- *The Academy Awards: The Complete Unofficial History* by Gail Kinn and Jim Piazza
- (Black Dog and Leventhal 2014, **ISBN-10:** 1579129862)
- *All About Oscar* by Emanuel Levy (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003)
Note: This book is out of print, but the ASU Bookstore has cleared the copyright to make a copy of select chapters, which are available for purchase.

Course Requirements

Because this course is entirely delivered via the Internet, you are responsible for making sure that the computer you use to access all course materials meets or exceeds the specified computer minimum qualifications as listed on the course web site. In general, a computer purchased and in the last 3-5 years and continuously updated via updates from the operating system (Mac, Windows) vendor will suffice. Also, due to the high media content of this course, you will be required to set up and configure a media player that will consistently play the media files delivered via the course web site. Please note: You are highly encouraged not to enroll, or to drop immediately, if you do not have computer experience, or if you are not willing or prepared to assume the added responsibility of a computer-based course. Necessary required skills include downloading mp3s, surfing the net, conferring via email, and other intermediate computer knowledge.

HIGH-SPEED CONNECTION NOTE: A high-speed connection to the internet (cable, ISDN, fiber optic, etc.) is strongly advised. It may be possible to complete this course on slower connections, however Herberger Online will not be able to offer support should your connection be too slow to receive the course materials. Due to the nature of the course, the site is very media intensive. All exams and virtually all lessons include several media elements that may be slow or virtually impossible to download on a slower connection. In addition to exams, each lesson contains one or more media components. These require the ability to download or stream and listen to modern audio file types on your computer (mp3, mp4, m4a). You are required to have the Flash plug-in installed on your browser. Most browsers come with a Flash plug-in pre-installed, however if your browser does not have it, you will need to download and install it on your system. You can download the Flash plug-in for your browser at: <https://get.adobe.com/flashplayer>

The computer help FAQ document linked on the course website is required reading for this course. Read this document for additional technical information.

Course Structure

The course will consist of lectures that will lead the student towards a short quiz, then after each unit, towards a unit exam. Also, most (though not all) of the lectures will be accompanied by the viewing of a film chosen to address a topic of a lecture. The first three units will also require a short answer to a question given, related to the films watched, and Unit 2 will include two such questions. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to write a paper on a topic chosen from five topics given.

Online Resources

Familiarity with the Academy's website, www.Oscars.org, will also help you navigate through the information in the course

Part 2: Student Learning Outcomes

In this course, you will:

- Learn the history of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.
- Learn about the development of the award known as the Oscars and how it became an annual ritual.
- Learn about winners and nominees, record holders, “firsts” and categories.
- Learn the practice of choosing winners, who the Academy voters are and what type of films they award as best.

Learn about some of the more prominent years, controversies, and the development of legends, records, prominent performances, outstanding directors and screenwriters. Three special lectures will address a particular focus: Legends and Scandals, Outstanding Performances in Best Actor and Actress Categories, and Screenwriters. (Best Picture and Best Director will be the primary focus of the regular lectures.)

You will meet the outcomes listed above through a combination of the following activities in this course:

- Watch each lecture and read selected chapters in each book.
- Take quizzes and exams, and answer short topic questions.

Write a final paper on a topic chosen among five topics.

Part 3: Topic Outline/Schedule

Unit 1: The Foundations of the Academy, Opens August 19, 2021

- **Lecture 1: The Academy Today** (what is the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences? – the structure, branches and inner workings)
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz

- **Lecture 2: The Academy is Founded** (how it came into being and the various political pressures bearing down upon the film industry, and the creation of the MPAA along with the Academy)
 - Readings: All About Oscar, Chapters 1 and 2, pages 15-57
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
 - VIEWING #1: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930)

- **Lecture 3: The First Oscars** (how the Academy Awards came to be known as the Oscars, the practices and controversies accompanying the first years, and the making of the Hays Code)
 - Readings: Academy Awards, Piazza and Kinn, pages 9-49
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
 - VIEWING #2: *It Happened One Night* (1934)

- **Lecture 4: Best Picture Winners (1927-1938)** (The development of the “prestige” films that typically win the Oscars, among other trends)
 - No five-question quiz for this lecture (see discussion question below).
 - VIEWING #3: *Rebecca* (1940) or *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)

- **Discussion Question #1:**

- You have three out of four choices:

All the films watched—*All Quiet on the Western Front*, *It Happened One Night*, and *Rebecca* or *The Grapes of Wrath*—may share in common various elements in action, plot development, and style of filmmaking. Discuss what you feel determines their strengths and/or weaknesses. Also what makes a film Best Picture worthy? What elevates it from a regular film to make it special or memorable? If you choose to compare *Rebecca* and *Grapes of Wrath*, notice that one (*Rebecca*) won best picture while *Grapes* won Best Director for John Ford. This split between best picture and best director happens nowadays in particular. Why is one best director while the other is best picture? This is an on-going part of the discussion of how voters often split the difference between the two.

Due: August 30, 2021 (250 words minimum, 20 points)

- **Unit 1 Assessment:** 30-Question Exam

Unit 2: The Academy in the War Years and the Cold War (1940s-1950s), Opens August 31, 2021

- **Lecture 5: The Classic Films (1939-1943)**

- Readings: Academy Awards, Piazza and Kinn, pages 50-71
- Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
- VIEWING: *Casablanca* (1943)

- **Lecture 6: Special Topic: Oscar Myths, Legends and Scandals**

- Assessment: Five-Question Quiz

- **Discussion Question #2:**

Watch a series of YouTube videos that are available under the Discussion section regarding some memorable moments from the Oscars. Which of these moments stand out for you and why are they considered "classic" moments that Oscar watchers and commentators still talk about?

Due: September 13, 2021 (250 words minimum, 20 points)

- **Lecture 7: The Era of Television and the Blacklist (1950s)**

- Readings: Academy Awards, pages 84 and 114
- Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
- VIEWING: *On the Waterfront* (1954)

- **Lecture 8: Best Picture Winners (1943-1959)**

- Readings: Academy Awards, page 106-121
- VIEWING: *Skipping Ahead Classic Choice: The Godfather* (1973)

- **Discussion Question #3:**

Casablanca may be considered a classic film of the war era, but how do the films *On the Waterfront* and *The Godfather*, compare and contrast in their style of filmmaking and storytelling.

Due: September 13, 2021 (250 words minimum, 20 points)

- **Unit 2 Assessment:** 30-Question Exam

Unit 3: The Academy in the Age of Aquarius and Beyond (1960s-1990s), Opens September 14, 2021

- **Lecture 9: The 1960s and the End of the Hays Code**

- Readings: Academy Awards, pp. 139-179
- Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
- VIEWING: *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)

- **Lecture 10: The Visionary Directors (1970s and 1980s)**

- Readings: Academy Awards, 182-263
- Assessment: Five-Question Quiz
- VIEWING: *Network* (1976)

- **Lecture 11: Return of the Epic Films (1990s)**

- Readings: Academy Awards, 266-305
- VIEWING: *American Beauty* (1999)

- **Discussion Question #4:**

Midnight Cowboy, *Network* and *American Beauty* are not likely to have been made in the pre-60s Hollywood period. What do these films have to say about this new age of filmmaking in the context of a 60s cultural revolution that swept the sensibilities of filmmakers and filmgoers in the U.S.?

Due: September 25, 2021 (250 words minimum, 20 points each.)

- **Unit 3 Assessment:** 30-Question Exam

Unit 4: The Academy Up to Date and Two Special Lectures, Opens September 26, 2021

- **Lecture 12: Screenwriters and the Oscars**
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz

- **Lecture 13: The Academy in the Age of Diversity (the 2000s)**
 - Readings: Academy Awards, pages 307-354
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz

- **Lecture 14: Best Actor and Best Actress Awards**
 - VIEWING: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz

- **Lecture 15: The 2010s**
 - VIEWING: *12 Years a Slave* (2013)

- **Lecture 16: Updates for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2021**
 - Assessment: Five-Question Quiz for both Lectures #15 and #16

- **Unit 4 Assessment:** 30-Question Exam

Assessment: Final Paper, Opens September 26, 2021 (Due October 9, 2021)

Write a 5-6 double spaced paper on the following topics, approximately 1,500 words, using the films watched as points of discussion.

Note: While you're allowed to address other films you may have seen on your own as examples of your viewpoint, the questions are all geared towards a discussion of films primarily viewed in the class. If you don't address those films, you will lose major points. However, all the questions allow for some variation and for you to use contemporary examples you have seen in addition to the ones viewed in class.

Choose ONE from the following topics:

1. Best Performances

Actors form the most numerous (and therefore) most influential voting bloc of the Academy. In both films, "Network" and "A Streetcar Named Desire," the acting ensembles managed to win three out of four acting awards for the same film. Discuss how these two acting ensembles distinguish themselves. What are the themes of both films? How do they differ but also what do they have in common? Are there individual performances that stand out (note that both films won for Best Actress, for instance)? At the core of these films, what is it about them that allow the actors to stand out so prominently that the films went on to be honored with multiple nominations and awards for their acting?

Could you identify a recent award-winning performance that also compares to the acting in the films above? It could also be an ensemble film like the two above.

2. Big Budget vs. Independent Best Picture Oscars

The Academy used to be criticized for awarding big epic adventures and/or war films (i.e. expensive films) best picture through the years and becoming at times predictable in its deliberations. But among the various films that we saw, "smaller" films, independent or low-budget, also managed to make it through, particularly "American Beauty," "On the Waterfront," and "Midnight Cowboy" and recently, "Moonlight" and "Birdman." What makes these films special enough to beat back the bigger, more expensive films?

Recent Oscar winners, however, have also signaled that independent films have begun to predominate in the last twelve years or so. As a result, the Academy attempted to set up a new category called the "Popular Film" Award which ultimately was severely criticized and was not instituted. The theory behind that is that if the Best Picture winner is an independent film that critics love but audiences ignore then that trend is bad for the broadcast's ratings.

Can the Academy do both? Find a happy medium? The most recent winners, "Green Book" found an audience as a modest hit but was often criticized by critics for its retrograde attitude towards race. "Parasite" wasn't an epic film, but a Korean film on class structures. Are the epic and expensive films being eclipsed by smaller, more independent (even foreign) films?

3. Directors' Vision

Directors guide a film to completion and it is their vision that is usually realized on the screen. Some of them distinguish themselves through superior technique or sometimes the choice of material (which could be part of their technique.)

Choose among the variety of the directors who directed the various pictures we saw. Give examples from the various films (three minimum) and try to assess what creates great direction, in your opinion. Is it a vision? Is it superior ability to gather a great cast and match it with a great script? Is there a more recent Oscar-winning director who has impressed you?

4. Diversity

The issue of diversity has become a major focus of the Academy's mission in the 2010s. Using the New Yorker article provided in Unit 4, discuss the issues and how they affect the watching of major Oscar-winning films today. Analyze some recent winners such as "12 Years a Slave," or "Moonlight," "Green Book" or "The Shape of Water" and compare them to a couple of older films discussed in class that may show some aspects of diversity or lack thereof. You'll find films such as "Network" and "Casablanca" including some minority characters, not always in prominent roles.

This major contemporary topic can go in many different directions, so try to keep it focused on Oscar-winning films and the contrast between contemporary and older films. Most important is for you to engage with a major issue of today as it is being discussed right now in the Academy and how it affects your viewing of both current and classic films. More

recent winners, "Roma" and "Parasite," were foreign-language films, which added to the diversity issue. The 2020-21 Pictures such as "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Judas and the Black Messiah," "Minari," "A Night in Miami," "United States vs. Billie Holiday," populated the acting categories in what must be the most diverse year for Oscar nominees. Are these trends permanent?

5. For History Buffs: Legends and Controversies

Those of you who cherish the historical process might enjoy delving into a past of legends, scandals, controversies, embarrassments, and developments in the Academy's process.

Using some of the issues already covered in class, you might want to research further the various possibilities:

---A fascinating aspect of the Academy's past and how it reflects on the present.

---The historical development of the Academy with its various highs and lows, controversies, and scandals, including its origins in the 20s.

---Updating the process to cover more recent developments, including the pandemic's effects on the industry.

---Using Levy's chapter on how the Oscars reflect the "zeitgeist" of the times. What is the current zeitgeist compared to when it was founded. Recent winners may be pointing towards specific developments in filmmaking and moviegoer preferences.

5. Screenwriters

The various best picture winners we saw (and the two non-winners which were also best picture nominees) had in common strong screenplays. Who were the screenwriters and what themes and stories and characters did they bring forward? Were the screenplays adaptations of novels or stories? Discuss at least three of the films watched and analyze what made the writing stand out? You may also compare them to recent films with excellent screenplays that you've admired. (Don't forget screenwriters' names since this section is devoted to them.)

Don't hesitate to reach out and ask questions about these topics, especially if you need help in structuring a topic.

FINAL PAPER: 100 POINTS TOTAL

Summary of Units and Dates

Unit	Topic	Films Assigned	Discussion Questions and Paper Due Dates	Quizzes and Exams Due Dates
1: Opens August 19, 2021	The Foundations of the Academy	<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> <i>It Happened One Night</i> <i>Rebecca or The Grapes of Wrath (or both)</i>	Discussion Question #1 Due: August 30, 2021	Quizzes and Unit Exam are due as you go along or by October 8, 2021
2: Opens August 31, 2021	The Academy in the War Years and the Cold War	<i>Casablanca</i> <i>On the Waterfront</i> <i>The Godfather</i>	Discussion Question #2 and #3 Due: September 13, 2021	October 8, 2021
3: Opens September 14, 2021	The Academy in the Age of Aquarius and Beyond	<i>Midnight Cowboy</i> <i>Network</i> <i>American Beauty</i>	Discussion #4 Question Due: September 25, 2021	October 8, 2021
4: Opens September 26, 2021	The Academy Up to Date and Two Special Lectures (Best Actor/Actress, Best Screenwriters)	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i>	No discussion question for this unit	October 8, 2021
Final Paper opens September 26, 2021				Final Paper Due: October 9, 2021— To confirm, yes, you get an extra day for the final paper

A NOTE ON FILM AVAILABILITY:

Below you will find a list of the film titles in your course and the designated streaming outlets that carry them:

YT = Youtube
 AP = Amazon Prime
 IT = Itunes
 GP = Google Play
 NF = Netflix
 V = Vudu

All Quiet on the Western Front - YT, AP, IT, GP, V

It Happened One Night - YT, AP, IT, GP, V

Rebecca - YT, IT, AP, NF

The Grapes of Wrath, YT, AP

Casablanca - YT, AP, IT, GP, V

On the Waterfront - YT, AP, IT, GP, V

The Godfather - YT, AP, GP, V

Midnight Cowboy - YT, AP, IT, GP, V, MaxGo

Network - YT, AP, IT, GP, V, NF

American Beauty - YT, AP, IT, GP, V, NF

A Streetcar Named Desire - YT, AP, IT, GP, V

12 Years a Slave - YT, GP, IT, V, AP

Part 4: Grading Policy

Graded Course Activities

Visit the **Assessment** link in HOLMS for details about each assignment listed below. Click on **Assessments** to access quizzes and exams.

Points	Description
120	5-question Quizzes (each question worth 2 points; 12 quizzes total)
240	Four Unit Exams (2 points per question; 30 questions, 60 points each exam)
80	Four Discussion questions (20 points each)
100	Final Paper
540	Total Points

Course Assessments

Discussion Board Postings (20 points each.)

The discussion area of the course is the online equivalent of discussions that would typically occur in a face-to-face. There are several discussion topics throughout the duration of this course that are related to the unit and lesson material currently being covered. The discussions are designed to promote original thought, sharing of ideas and viewpoints, and

critical dialogue. To receive full credit for each discussion assignment you must post an original response to the instructor's prompt of at least 250 words.

Quizzes and Unit Exams

You need to have reliable access to the Internet on the assigned day of the quiz.

Quizzes/Exams can only be done online. Submission of quizzes via email or in printed form will not be accepted. No exceptions. The use of smart phones for taking a quiz is forbidden.

No other Web pages or tabs can be open while taking a quiz. The system logs all browser activity. Opening a new browsers or new browser tabs can invalidate your testing session. Do not give your unique course password to another person or allow another person to access the course to take the test in your name.

Submitting Online Quizzes/Exams

Online quizzes that have been submitted CANNOT be reset (see below). IF you experience computer or technical problems during an online quiz/exam DO NOT SUBMIT the quiz. For instance, if images fail to load, or the quiz itself seems incomplete. If you suspect technical error, exit the browser immediately and address the problem by trying to take the quiz again on a different computer, or by contacting technical support at HOLSupport@asu.edu. **Do not contact the instructor.** Submitted quizzes cannot be retaken. No exceptions.

Resets for Online Quizzes/Exams

A reset for an online quiz is an action usually taken by a student prior to contacting technical support. IF you experience a glitch during an online quiz, close your browser. When you attempt to restart the online quiz, the system will ask you to confirm the reset. Some important facts about resets:

- Only one online reset is allowed per each online quiz.
- In total, only two online resets on online quizzes are allowed in any given semester.

Written Assignments

The final paper for this course is a comparison of the various films we have watched in this course. You are given six different topics and you choose one according to your interests, in acting, directing, screenwriting, and two Best Picture topics. The paper must comprise at least 5 - 6 pages of main text plus a cover page or the equivalent of 1,500 words (shorter papers will get lower grades.) Make sure you turn in your paper by the due date indicated on the course website. If you miss the deadline your grade will be lowered. Do not e-mail me your papers. A digital copy of your paper needs to be submitted to the course website.

Late Work Policy

Be sure to pay close attention to deadlines—there will be no make-up assignments or quizzes, or late work accepted without a serious and compelling reason and instructor approval.

Viewing Grades in HOLMS (optional)

Points you receive for graded activities will be posted to the HOLMS Grade Book. Click on the My Grades link on the left navigation to view your points. Your instructor will update the online grades each time a grading session has been complete—typically three or four days following the completion of an activity. You will see a visual indication of new grades posted on your HOLMS home page under the link to this course.

Letter Grade Assignment

Final grades assigned for this course will be based on the percentage of total points earned and are assigned as follows, out of 540 total:

Letter Grade	Percentage	Performance
A+ (529 points and over)	98%	Outstanding work
A (507-528)	94-97%	Excellent Work
A- (486-506)	90-93%	Mostly Excellent Work
B+ (469-485)	87-89%	Very Good Work
B (448-468)	83-86%	Good Work
B- (432-447)	80-82%	Mostly Good Work
C+ (410-431)	76-79%	Above Average Work
C (378-409)	70-75%	Average Work
D (324-377)	60-69%	Below Average Work
E (below 324)	0-59%	Failing work

Part 5: Course Policies

Online Class

We open each unit at a given date and keep it open for you to pace yourself and to complete assignments at any given time. Once you complete the exam, your unit work is complete.

The Fall 2021 semester ends on October 8, 2021. The final paper is due the following day October 9, 2021 by 11:59pm.

Special Accommodations

To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the ASU Disability Resource Center (Phone: (480) 965-1234; TDD: (480) 965-9000). This is a very important step, as accommodations cannot be made retroactively. If you have a letter from their office indicating that you have a disability which requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to me no later than the end of the first week of the semester so we can discuss the accommodations that you might need in this class.

Technical Support

Please do not contact your instructor with technical questions. Herberger Online handles all technical questions and issues that may arise in this course.

Please contact the support team immediately if you encounter technical issues while completing an assignment and you are unable to resolve the problem and reset your work.

The Herberger Online support team is available to assist you 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You may reach them anytime at:

- holsupport@asu.edu
- 1-888-298-4117
- 480-965-3057 (International)

When contacting support, please provide:

- The full name of this course (ABC 123: Long Name)
- The title(s) of any assignment(s) you're having trouble with
- A brief description of the problem
- Detailed, step-by-step instructions to reproduce the problem

Complete Assignments

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through HOLMS unless otherwise instructed. Assignments must be submitted by the given deadline or special permission must be requested from instructor *before the due date*. Extensions will not be given beyond the next assignment except under extreme circumstances.

All discussion assignments must be completed by the assignment due date and time. Late or missing discussion assignments will affect the student's grade.

Course Withdrawal

If you wish to withdraw from this course, it is your responsibility to do so. Course registration changes are processed through MyASU: <http://my.asu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

All necessary and appropriate sanctions will be issued to all parties involved with plagiarizing any and all course work. Plagiarism and any other form of academic dishonesty that is in violation with the Student Code of Conduct will not be tolerated.

http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic_integrity.html

Do not share your course ID and password with anyone. Log out of the course website when you are finished with it. Do not allow another student to use the course website under your password, even if s/he is also in the course. Each student is fully responsible for all activity that takes place on the course website under his/her user ID.

Changes to the Syllabus

The syllabus is an implied contract between the instructor and the student. Consequently, it will not change in any significant way over the duration of the course. However, there are times when minor modifications need to be made. This being the case, the instructor will do everything in his power to keep changes to a minimum. If there are changes, students will be advised by email.

Important Note: Any form of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, may be reported to the office of student affairs.

Course policies are subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to check HOLMS for corrections or updates to the syllabus. Any changes will be posted in HOLMS.