This class provides a rigorous introduction to the critical study of western films from an historical perspective. We will study how the genre’s art and performance have helped create and subvert popular understandings of western history, and how the genre’s consistent popularity attests to its flexibility in interpreting complex historical relationships between freedom, violence, race, gender, and social inequality. So too, we will explore how imaginations of the American West as a “wild” place have opened possibilities for understanding nonhuman actors such as animals, the weather, or the earth itself as significant agents in historical transformations, a characteristic of western films that can powerfully disturb and naturalize viewers’ cultural and political expectations. Students will learn to uncover, identify, and analyze from a critical perspective the meta-narratives of western history that have framed these historical visions in both past and present.
Hollywood and the Wild West

PROFESSOR MICHAEL D. WISE
EMAIL: michael.wise@unt.edu
OFFICE: Wooten Hall 259
HOURS: Tuesday, 1:00-3:00 PM

NUMBER/SECTION: HIST 4261.005
LOCATION: Wooten Hall 219
TIME: Tuesdays, 6:30-9:20 PM

Required Texts (available for purchase in the bookstore)

Philip Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004).


Grading Criteria
Attendance and Participation 10%
Written Discussion Responses 15%
Comparative Review Essays 45%
Weekly Film Journal 30%
100%

Blackboard
Lecture notes, reading assignments, and other electronic course materials will be available as PDF files on the Blackboard Learn website. Grades will also be available on the blackboard site.

Attendance and Participation
Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to complete reading assignments and other assigned coursework before class. Because this class meets only once per week, I will enforce a strict attendance policy. Only one absence is permitted, and two or more absences will result in an F.

Class Format
Class sessions will consist of a mixture of lecture and discussion along with film viewing. Under these circumstances, a glowing laptop or smartphone screen is distracting to your peers, so please refrain from using electronic devices during class.
PART ONE
Classic Westerns

January 19
Course Introduction
Film: Cecil B. DeMille, The Squaw Man (1914).

January 26
The Backlot Western
Film: Stuart Heisler, Dallas (1950).
*Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).

February 2
On Location
Film: John Ford, The Searchers (1956).
Read: Phil Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places, 3-108.

February 9
Small Group Discussion #1
No Film

PART TWO
Violence and Freedom

February 16
Black History Month Lecture (Exact Time and Location TBD)
Sanderia Faye, author of Mourners Bench (2015)

February 23
Revisionist Westerns
Film: Sergio Leone, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)
DUE: Comparative Review Essay #1
March 1
Revising the Spaghetti Western
Film: Quentin Tarantino, *Django Unchained* (2012)
Read: Three reviews, write down their titles and the publication in which they appeared, and the name of each reviewer, and one or more of your favorite sentences from each review.

March 8
The Awkwardness of Guns
Film: Jim Jarmusch, *Dead Man* (1995)

March 22
Wild West Rolls East
Film: Dennis Hopper, *Easy Rider* (1969)

March 29
Small Group Discussion #2
No Film
Read: *Slavoj Zizek, On Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), excerpts TBD.

PART THREE
Sex, Family, and the Settler Society

April 5
The View from Behind a Bonnet

April 12
The Gayness of Manly Work
DUE: Comparative Review Essay #2
April 19
Multigenerational Western History
Film: John Sayles, Lone Star (1996).

April 26
Small Group Discussion #3
No Film
Read: James Welch, Winter in the Blood, all.

May 3
The Past and the Self
Film: Alex Smith and Andrew Smith, Winter in the Blood (2013)
No Reading
DUE: Weekly Film Journals

May 10
DUE: Comparative Review Essay #3