

CRIM/ITA 225

Organized Crime in Film & Society

Tim Robicheaux (trr10@psu.edu) 1005 Oswald
Michele Rossi (mur38@psu.edu) 44 Burrowes

Note: For our office hours (i.e., the times that we are available to meet with you), please see Canvas.

Course Materials

This course will include readings, worksheets, and films. All readings and worksheets will be handed out in class and/or posted to Canvas. These are going to be freely available for download. You do not have to purchase other reading material for the course.

We will also watch a series of films relevant to the course. Most will be placed in the library reserve (DVD format) for you to watch that way if desired. You can also access many of these through rental on Amazon and YouTube, and some are going to be available as part of a Netflix subscription. Most films are available for less than a \$4 rental. If you are having trouble accessing these films, let us know and we will try to find alternatives.

We will watch the following films for this course:

Scarface (1932) (Howard Hawks, Director)

The Godfather (1972) (Francis Ford Coppola, Director)

Mean Streets (1973) (Martin Scorsese, Director)

Scarface (1983) (Brian De Palma, Director)

Goodfellas (1990) (Martin Scorsese, Director)

Donnie Brasco (1997) (Mike Newell, Director)

The Sopranos –Pilot Episode

Possibly another episode of the *Sopranos*.

Course Description and Objectives

Organized Crime in Film & Society, examines the relationship between criminological and justice theories regarding organized crime and the portrayal of the mafia in popular Italian American film. The course follows two simultaneous threads of inquiry: an examination of historical and theoretical models of organized crime in the United States and the state and federal laws that address them; and an analysis of how such models, set within the Italian American context, are depicted in American films and television about the mafia.

By the end of the course, you will:

1. Gain **Key Literacy Skills** by identifying varied definitions of organized crime and distinguishing between structural models. You will simultaneously develop vocabulary to identify and discuss film techniques and elements of the gangster film genre and to interpret cinematic language. Participants in the course will also consider the socio-historical context of Italian American culture from the 19th Century through the present.
2. Sharpen **Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills** through written and spoken interpretations of films and the scholarly approaches to studying organized crime. Comparing real-world crimes, law enforcement practices and juridical outcomes to the artistic rendering of similar events, practices and outcomes will require a significant amount of reflection and observation that will lead to an analysis of how the film functions within its cultural context in relation to these real-world situations.
3. Be able to apply knowledge of the social scientific aspects of organized crime to guide observations of film and Italian American culture, thus refining **Integrative Thinking** across the humanities and social sciences. You will rely upon real-world examples to formulate comments and draw conclusions about the films and culture, thus continually working between the two disciplines throughout the semester.

Course Division

Weeks 1-6: Concept Gathering

The class will begin with a concept gathering unit. We will introduce four (plus one) broad course concepts with contributions from the humanities and from the social sciences. These include:

- Italian American history and culture and the central themes (humanities)
- General introduction to *reading* and analyzing film (humanities)
- Research-derived definitions of organized crime and structure of criminal organizations (social science)
- Criminological explanations for criminal behavior, emphasizing organized criminal behavior (social science)
- Historical events in Italian American organized crime (humanities and social science)

We will further discuss how these can intersect. For example, historical influences in Italian American culture can influence *why* some might engage in organized crime. Film demonstrates organized crime structure. Further, film can *shape* culture. During this section, you will view two films. We will watch *The Black Hand* in class, and you will watch *Scarface* on your own prior to class.

Weeks 7-15: Conceptual Application to Film

After your examination on the initial concepts, we will spend the rest of the course applying those concepts to the remaining films or episodes. In class, we will do this through brief lectures, in-class viewing of select scenes, and in-class discussion. Outside of class, we will do this through a series of short papers described below. All of this is practice for your final paper, also described below.

Grading

Your final grade in the course will be determined on the following scale:

A = 95-100	A- = 90-94.9	B+ = 87.7-89.9	B = 83.3-87.6
B- = 80-83.2	C+ = 75-79.9	C = 70-74.9	D = 60-69.9

These grades will be based upon the following points:

Assignment/Assessment	Grade Weight
Concept Exam	23%
Film Quizzes	10%
Scene Analysis	8%
Cultural Analysis	8%
Structure Analysis	8%
Theory Analysis	8%
Final Paper	20%
Participation	10%
Attendance	5%

Assignment Descriptions

Concept Exam: A competency in the initial concepts is a necessity for course success. We will conclude the first unit of the course with a **Concept Examination** that covers the key concepts from the initial part of the semester. This exam is going to be a mixed-format examination with a combination of multiple-choice and short answer questions. You will complete the examination across *two days* in the classroom. Do not let the format scare you—it will allow you to focus your studying.

Film Quizzes: Watching films *prior to* class discussion is critical to get the most out of this course. Failing to view these films hurts *all* students because it limits class discussion. You will have brief in-class quizzes prior to each film. If you really *watched* the film, these should be fairly easy. They are a combination of multiple-choice, short answer, or true and false questions. You will generally have 10-15 minutes for these. They are given at the beginning of class, so do not be late. There are no makeups for these quizzes, but the **lowest grade will be dropped.**

Attendance: Class participation constitutes an important part of your final grade (see below), and you cannot participate in class unless you are present. You are not permitted to miss class with the exception of absences due to officially documented, university-approved curricular and extracurricular activities. 4 late arrivals (or two late arrivals of 15 minutes or more) are equivalent to one absence. You are responsible for all material covered in class, regardless of whether you are present. If you do miss class, you should get in touch with your instructor or a classmate as soon as possible to find out what assignments you missed. Absence from class is NOT an excuse for the late submission of work; it should be recognized that not all work can be “made-up” and that absences can affect student performance in a class. If an evaluative event will be missed due to an unavoidable absence, you must contact your instructor as soon as the

Assignment Descriptions Continued

unavoidable absence is known to discuss ways to make up the work. An instructor might not consider an unavoidable absence legitimate if you do not contact the instructor beforehand. Students will be held responsible for using only legitimate, unavoidable reasons for requesting a make-up in the event of a missed class or evaluative event (Policy 42-27). Requests for missing class or an evaluative event due to reasons that are based on false claims may be considered violations of the policy on Academic Integrity (Policy 49-20). **You are required to provide verification from University Health Services or outside clinicians for significant prolonged illnesses or injuries resulting in absences from classes.**

Extended Absences: During your enrollment at Penn State, unforeseen challenges may arise. If you ever need to miss an extended amount of class in such a circumstance, please notify your professor so you can determine the best course of action to make up missed work. If your situation rises to a level of difficulty you cannot manage on your own with faculty support, reach out to the Student Care & Advocacy office by phone at (814-863-2020) or email them at StudentCare@psu.edu. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Participation: You are expected to attend class and to participate in class discussions. There are different ways to participate, such as through asking questions, bringing up a point, cooperating in team activities, or even writing down a question before class. These are easy points and worth 10% of your total grade in the course.

Final Paper: The final examination requires you to truly integrate humanistic and social scientific thinking by combining the previous analyses into a general paper (with a bit of a twist that will come up later in the semester). You will have feedback on earlier assignments.

[continued on next page]

Concept Analyses (Four Total: Scene, Culture, Structure/Definitions, Theory): You will apply the initial course concepts to the films we view for course through a series of four brief (~2 page) concept analyses. These will cover the four broad concepts we discuss in the concept-gathering part of the course. You will have more detailed instructions later in the semester. You must choose a *different* assigned film for *each* assignment. You cannot choose *Scarface* or *The Black Hand*. You have specific due dates for analyses, but you can complete them in any order you choose.

- *Scene Analysis:* You will choose a single scene from any of the films and analyze it using cinematic language.
- *Italian American Culture Analysis:* You will analyze a scene, or a film as a whole, in the context of Italian American culture. You will discuss each of the (four) common themes discussed by Dana Gioia in *What is Italian American Poetry*.
- *Structure/Definitions Analysis:* You will apply a social scientific understanding of the organization of the crime as depicted in the given film. You will explain *why* the film depicts organized criminal activity and discuss the structure of that criminal organization, distinguishing between the hierarchical and network models.
- *Theory Analysis:* You will consider the film in the context of social scientific theory. Although in social science, the theory typically precedes any analysis. However, for this assignment you will engage in some post-hoc theorizing, examining what theory is *best demonstrated* by the film you chose. You will analyze the film and justify your selection.

Tentative Calendar

The full calendar will be uploaded to Canvas. These dates are tentative for exams and assignments:

- *October 2 and October 4: Concept Examination*
- *Analyses Due Dates*
 - *October 18*
 - *November 1*
 - *November 15*
 - *December 4*
- *Quiz dates for film will be announced during the semester, but you can expect them on Mondays for most weeks after the midterm (and one in the second week of class).*

Administrative Details

Disability access: The Pennsylvania State University welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS), located in 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments. You need to be proactive in dealing with this.

Counseling and Psychological Services: Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395

Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

There are also numerous other mental health providers in the community. CAPS is especially geared to deal with crisis situations. Do not hesitate to use these resources.

Educational Equity/Report Bias Statement: Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage.

Academic Integrity: If you violate the University's policy on academic integrity in this class, you will be sanctioned. In nearly all cases the recommended sanction is an "F" in the course (if we [not you] consider the violation to be "minor" then we will consider a lesser sanction). You should also note that you cannot drop a course once you are suspected of academic dishonesty; if you do drop it then the Registrar's office puts you back in—it's kind of awesome how seriously they take this stuff. First, let us give you the university suggested statement for course syllabi, which applies to this class:

Penn State defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts (Faculty Senate Policy 49-20). Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and will be reported to the University's Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

If you would like further information on the academic integrity policy, including student resources, further explanations, etc. please let us know. **Ignorance of the rules is NOT an excuse for breaking them.** Also, we will seek academic sanctions for the course if we discover that you were academically

dishonest any time before the final grade is submitted (and *any time after that*, as allowed by the University). As an example, let's say that you turn in work throughout the semester and it is graded as though it is *your* work but we later discover that cheating took place. We will still seek academic sanctions despite already grading your work. Yes, even if we told you that you did an awesome job—because when we grade, we do so with a presumption that it is *your* work. Do not upload any class material to any place online. You can share *class notes* with other students, but do not discuss the examinations, post information about the examination, print quizzes, otherwise share quizzes, etc. One, this is academic dishonesty. Two, this is theft of intellectual property that can lead to University and civil sanctions. There are a few websites that we monitor...don't use them.

Note: Syllabus Subject to Change

This class will likely adhere to the information outlined in the syllabus and calendar, but adjustments may be made based on what actually transpires during the term. Be sure to check with a classmate after an absence to see if activities and/or assignments have changed. Remaining in the course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes and responsibility for being aware of them.