SYLLABUS: The Law in Film
FIL 3930H. Spring 2016

Class hours and location: Thurs. Noon-2:50. Credit hours: 3

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Objectives/Goals:

In this seminar we will view about 10 films that highlight various aspects of the law as an institution and as a profession. We will focus on each film in terms of the law while considering its cultural, historical and aesthetic dimensions. Through lectures and discussions, viewing films and reading, we'll compare and analyze these films to answer such questions as:

1. What does this film have to say about the law as an institution?
2. What does this film have to say about the legal profession?
3. How and what does this film communicate, specifically through narrative structure (plot), characterization and performance, point of view, cinematography, music, setting, pacing, tone, imagery and theme?
4. What do these films have in common? What are their major differences?

Texts:

There is no required text as such for this seminar. However, required readings include reviews from *The New York Times,* which you can find online, for each of the films we will study. Also, chapters from the book by Michael Asimow and Shannon Mader, *Law and Popular Culture* (Peter Lang, New York, NY, 2013), will be assigned and made available on Webcourses for five of the films we use in class.

Occasional readings may be assigned from these supplemental texts, which will be on reserve in the library:

Chase, Anthony. *Movies on Trial: The Legal System on the Silver Screen* (2002)
Levi, Ross D. *The Celluloid Courtroom: A History of Legal Cinema* (2005)
Kamair, Orit. *Framed: Women in Law and Film* (2006)
Greenfield, Steve and Guy Osborn, Peter Robson. *Film and the Law* (2010)
Denvir, John. *Legal Reelism: Movies as Legal Texts* (1996)
Sarat, Austin and Lawrence Douglas, Martha Merrill Umphrey. *Law on the Screen* (2005)

Films:

The Paper Chase (1973, selected scenes). Legal education.
Legally Blonde (2001, 96 m.). Legal education.
Reversal of Fortune (1990, 111 m.) The client.
12 Angry Men (1957, 96 m.). The jury.
Chicago (2002, 113 m.) Criminal law.
The Verdict (1982, 129 m.) The attorney.
The Rainmaker (1997, 135 m.) The trial.
Erin Brockovich (2000, 131 m.) Tort reform and class action suits.
Philadelphia (1993, 125 m.). Discrimination.
To Kill a Mockingbird (1962, 129 m.) Discrimination.

Website & Webcourses:

A useful website is imdb.com. You are required to check Webcourses for Announcements before each class.

Electronic etiquette

Turn off – *and put out of sight* – all cell phones, tablets and other electronic devices. Computers must be turned off and not used to take notes. No texting during class.

Assignments:

We'll begin with a general introduction to key aspects of film and the law. In-class discussions and assignments will help develop your sensitivities to viewing. We'll read and discuss supplemental material as we view the films to which they relate.

In class discussions and presentations, as well as in writing assignments, you will be asked to frame and develop critical examinations of the films. The nature of the written responses will vary: Students should be prepared to write essays, reviews and other forms of expository prose. All work must be original (i.e., written by you for this course).

The seminar will culminate with a final paper that will compare and analyze films and their themes.

Grades:

Final grades will be based on five short papers (60 percent of the grade), a final paper (25 percent) and class participation (15 percent).

1. Short papers: Five two-to-three-page essays, double-spaced, each responding to a film or films. *The first short paper must be turned in no later than Feb. 19.* (An oral report or a video may be substituted for one short paper.)

2. Final paper: One longer paper, six pages, double-spaced, that focuses on a theme found in three films. An oral report must be presented *along with* the final paper.

3. Class participation: In-class writing assignments, participation in discussions and attendance.

Plus and minus grades are part of the grading system for this class. Grades on papers will reflect your ability to respond fully to the prompts, demonstrate an understanding of the films and points of law that we study, express your ideas clearly, follow rules of grammar and spelling, and follow the “tip sheet” guidelines for writing papers.

Most work must be submitted as a paper “hard copy” to Prof. Boyar. (Work submitted late must be sent to him by email and will lose one letter grade for each day late.)

If you miss a class, you still must complete the reading, viewing and writing assignments for that session. If you miss more than two sessions, your class participation grade for this semester will be a full letter grade lower than it otherwise would have been for each absence after those first two. Tardiness is also a factor in grading.

Sensitivity:

Some films and texts used in this class may be offensive to you. Nevertheless, watching and reading them is required. Students with any questions about this should speak with Prof. Boyar after the first session to determine whether to remain in class.

CHANGES: Everything in this syllabus, including assignments and requirements, is subject to change by the professors. Other viewing, reading and writing assignments may be added as appropriate.

Class Schedule

1/14. Introductions. Distribute and discuss the syllabus. Lecture: pop culture and the law.

1/21. Tips for writing papers. Intro to *The Paper Chase*. View and discuss scenes from *The Paper Chase* (1973). Reading: Asimow Ch. 6 and NYT review of *Legally Blonde*.

1/28. First paper assigned. Lecture: Legal education. Intro to *Legally Blonde*. View *Legally Blonde* (2001, 96 m.). Discuss *Legally Blonde*. Reading: NYT review of *Reversal of Fortune*.

2/4. First paper due. Second paper assigned. Lecture: the client. Intro to *Reversal of Fortune.* View *Reversal of Fortune* (1990, 111 m.). Immediate reactions to *Reversal of Fortune*. Reading: Readings: Asimow Ch. 9 and NYT review of *12 Angry Men*.

2/11. Second paper due. Third paper assigned. Discuss *Reversal of Fortune*. Lecture: The jury. Intro to *12 Angry Men*. View *12 Angry Men* (1957, 96 m.). Reading: NYT review of *Chicago*.

2/18. Third paper due. Fourth paper assigned. Discuss *12 Angry Men*. Lecture: Criminal law. Intro to *Chicago*. View *Chicago* (2002, 113 m.).

2/25. Fourth paper due. Discuss *Chicago.* Workshop papers. Readings: Asimow Ch. 4 and NYT review of *The Verdict*.

3/3. Fifth paper assigned. Lecture: The lawyer. Intro to *The Verdict*. View *The Verdict* (1982, 129 m.).
Reading: NYT review of *The Rainmaker*.

3/10. Spring Break. No classes.

3/17. Fifth paper due. Lecture: the trial. Discuss *The Verdict*. Lecture: tort reform and class-action suits. Lecture: International law.

3/24. Sixth paper assigned. Intro to *The Rainmaker.* View *The Rainmaker* (1997, 135 m.) Reading: NYT review of *Erin Brockovich*.

3/31. Sixth paper due. Seventh paper assigned. Intro to *Erin Brockovich*. View *Erin Brockovich* (2000, 131 m.). Readings: Asimow Ch. 13 and NYT review of *Philadelphia*.

4/7. Seventh paper due. Eighth paper assigned. Discuss *Erin Brockovich*. Lecture: discrimination. Intro to *Philadelphia*. View *Philadelphia* (1993, 125 m.). Final paper proposals.

4/14. Eighth paper due. Discuss *Philadelphia.* Final paper proposals. Readings: Asimow Ch. 3 and NYT review of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

4/21. Ninth paper assigned. Intro to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. View *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962, 129 m.). Final paper proposals.

4/28, Final Exam period. Final paper due. Ninth paper due. Discuss *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Additional discussion. Goodbyes.