

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

Film 2159B (001)
Disney Dream Factory
Winter 2026

Instructor: Taylor Tomko
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Antirequisites: Film Studies 2196A/B, if taken in 2016-2017.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll 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.

Course Description



Since the 1930s, Disney animated short films and features have been a staple of global childhood (and adulthood for “Disney Adults”). The company has commodified original and adapted storylines into what Michael Real calls the “Disney universe,” which Janet Wasko has since expanded into the “Disney multiverse,” referring to rapid expansion in the 2000s and the acquisition of several entertainment franchises, including 21st Century Fox, Lucasfilm, Marvel, the Muppets,

and Pixar. The Walt Disney Company, alongside film production and the six Disney resorts around the world, is involved in extensive retail and merchandise licensing, publishing, video games and interactive experiences, operates a cruise line, and owns a range of cable networks, including ESPN sports and over one hundred Disney-branded channels. Given this infiltration into every corner of media and entertainment, the influence of Disney on how many of us understand the world, and each other, cannot be understated.

In this course, we will consider the pedagogical role of what Richard Schickel has termed “the Disney version” of the narratives presented in Disney animated features, from Disney’s first feature release (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937) to recent films such as *Strange World* (2022). This course will take a cultural studies approach to the Disney canon; topics covered will include Disney’s representation of gender, race, sexuality, the environment, animals, and colonialism with attention to the evolution of animation technology from Disney’s multiplane camera to digital animation. Each week, students will be required to stream one film accompanied by critical reading.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Understand the reciprocal relationship between Disney content and American history and the role of Disney as propaganda
- Practise the application of critical scholarship to students' own writing
- Analyse Disney content for pedagogical impact and messaging surrounding a variety of topics
- Deploy enhanced critical reading and argumentative writing skills

Course Materials and Technical Requirements

1. A subscription to Disney+ is **helpful but not required** (\$8.99-15.99/month)
2. Additional required readings will be posted on UWO Brightspace. Please refer to the course calendar for the reading schedule
3. A stable internet connection for film streaming; films must be streamed in your own time
4. Brightspace access for readings and other course materials
5. A UWO Login to access [Audio-Cine](#) for streaming the films for the course (free)

Note: **supplementary readings** will be provided in the “supplementary readings” folder on UWO Brightspace. These readings are optional and there to serve your interest in the topic or film we are discussing. These readings will not be required material for the final exam.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Attendance: 5%

Midterm 25%-- February 11

Annotated bibliography: 15%-- due March 4

Research paper/creative critical project: 30%--due April 1

Exam: 25%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Discrimination Policy and Collegiality Guidelines

The goal of the classroom space is to create a challenging, while comfortable, space in which to share and develop ideas. Any forms of disrespectful behaviour— including those of a homophobic, transphobic, sexist, ableist, ageist, or racist nature— will not be tolerated.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

As a class, we will be encountering art and media that refers to the culture, history, and stories of a variety of different groups, some of which may have experienced or actively experience violence, oppression, discrimination, or genocide. It is our responsibility to meet these experiences with humility and recognize our own roles, however unintentional they may be, in upholding these structures. We should also always be aware that the way we learn about the world and its history is biased towards Western dominance and that the university is an inherently colonial structure.

Further, we as a group must commit to upholding the collegiality guidelines above, as we do not know the lived experiences of our fellow classmates, whom we strive to meet with compassion and respect at all times.

Email Policy

My email hours are between 10am-6pm on weekdays. Please do not expect a response in the evenings or on weekends. When emailing myself *and/or your TAs*, please allow for a timeline of at least 48 hours before following up. This includes emails in advance of assignments, so please plan accordingly. Please exercise collegial courtesy in all email discourse.

If your absence qualifies for academic accommodation, please contact your academic counsellor. Reasons for accommodation include, but are not limited to, medical emergencies, compassionate groups, and religious obligations.

24-Hour Policy and Grade Review

I implement a 24-hour policy upon the return of assignments. I ask that you wait at least 24 hours after a graded assignment has been returned to you before emailing myself or any TAs about the grade. This is to prevent emotional responses to marks and to process feedback. After this point has passed, I encourage you to come to me or a TA with questions about your grade, though a conversation does not constitute a grade change. If you wish to have the grade reconsidered by the instructor, please be aware that the instructor's grade stands, which might mean a reduction from the original grade.

Late Penalties

Late assignments will result in a 1% penalty per day late for up to 5 days of the assignment deadline. After this point, late assignments will no longer be accepted without official accommodation documentation from the Academic Counselling Office.

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the final essay **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and 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: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: / for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Additional Writing Support

- Western Writing Support Centre
<https://writing.uwo.ca/index.html>

Academic Integrity

All assignments must be written by the submitting student, in their own words. The use of AI technology in the generation of academic work is an academic offence, as is plagiarism or use of another person's ideas without proper attribution. **All assignments must be submitted in MLA formatting and include in-text citations and a works cited page.**

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative artificial intelligence is strictly prohibited in this course and will be treated as a plagiarism offense. **You** are responsible for providing proof of drafts or other means of proof of authenticity in the case of AI suspicion.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking

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. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Attendance (5%)

All students are expected to attend lectures having watched the assigned films and completed the assigned reading. Class participation is encouraged and this course will try to foster an environment in which critical discussion is safe and valued. **Attendance will be taken daily throughout the semester, but will not be graded on the midterm date or the first class.**

In-Class Midterm (25%): February 11

We will have an in-class midterm consisting of **one shot analysis and one essay question**. These responses will be graded on your close reading, attention to mise-en-scène details, and analysis of the shot/issue at hand. **You will be given 1.5 hours to complete the midterm**, allowing time for setup. This midterm will not be graded for spelling and grammar. **We will be**

keeping the paper copies of this exam for the rest of the term; you will receive a grade and comments via Brightspace. If you wish to see your exam after marking, please reach out to your TA.

The purpose of this assignment is to have a writing sample to be compared against your final essay, especially in the case of AI suspicions. AI is not worth it. ☺

Research Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (15%): due March 4

100-150 words per annotation

The purpose of this assignment is to begin thinking about the research project and to build the foundation for this future assignment. **This assignment is required regardless of whether you intend to do the podcast project or research essay.** While you are welcome to change your topic between the proposal/bibliography and the paper, you will benefit from having the feedback from this assignment as you move into the research project. *We will be reviewing how to effectively use the UWO library and samples of annotations in advance of the assignment.*

The **short research project proposal** should include a 5-7 description of the topic you plan to undertake for the research project, **indicating whether you will be undertaking a research essay or a pair/group podcast (and who you are partnering with).** If you are creating the podcast in a pair/group, each of you should have a different thesis that will be put into conversation in the podcast. Alongside this description should be a provisional thesis you plan to argue. Provisional means just that: this thesis does not have to be perfect and is expected to change as you move forward with your project.

The **annotated bibliography** must include three critical, peer reviewed sources. This can be an article or a chapter from an academic monograph. Only one of these can be from the course reading list (including supplementary readings); **you will be responsible for using the library to find two of these sources.** The assignment should include full MLA citations for each source, along with annotations for each source that are 100-150 words in length and include a summary of the piece's argument and methodology, and describe how this piece will be useful to building your argument.

Final Project: Research paper OR podcast episode (30%): due April 1

(deadline for group confirmation is March 9)

Research paper length: 2000 words

Podcast response length: 1000 words

For the research paper option, write a 2000 word essay engaging with one of the topics below.

You can choose whether your paper focuses on one or two films. You are also able to write on a topic of your choosing, with permission from the instructor. **Your paper is required to have a thesis statement and engage with three critical sources** (these need not all be the same as those you included in your annotated bibliography).

OR

Your other option for the final assignment is to create a podcast-style recording in either **pairs or groups of three**. No need for bells and whistles: we simply need an audio file that can be played on the computer (mp3 or mov). The podcast needs to accommodate for **approximately ten minutes of speaking time per person**, so 20 minutes for a pair and 30 for a group of 3. The podcast should be posed as a discussion/light debate, in which each of you pose unique perspectives (your thesis) on the same topic. Each member of the group must also **submit a 1,000 word response** on the experience of recording the podcast and the different perspectives of your group-mates. **Between the podcast script and reflection, each member must engage with three critical sources** (these need not all be the same as those you included in your annotated bibliography). **While this is a group project, this assignment will be graded on an individual basis. We expect that your contribution to the podcast reflects your own efforts.**

Final Exam (25%): during April exam period

The final exam will consist of short answer and essay-type questions, with multiple choices to select from in each section. Students are asked to not analyse a film in-depth more than once on the exam and to not discuss the film(s) used for your essay/podcast at length in the exam. There will be a 5% penalty for repetition.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Below is the screening, reading, and deadline schedule for the term. **All readings will be available in the “Course Readings” folder on Brightspace. All films, with the exception of *the Song of the South*, can be streamed on [Audio-Cine \(AC\)](#). This reading schedule is subject to change. Supplemental readings are also available in course readings; they are marked with the “supplemental” tag.**

January 7: Class Introduction + Screening of Disney Shorts

Reading: Ayres, “The Wonderful World of Disney: The World That Made the Man and the Man That Made the World” (in extra course readings on BS)

January 14: Film screening: *Snow White* (1937), [Disney’s multiplane camera](#); Reading:

Furniss, “Disney’s New Aesthetic,” (From *Interpreting and Experiencing Disney and A New History of Animation*)

January 21: Film screening: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996); Reading: Norden, “‘You’re a Surprise from Every Angle:’ Disability, Identity, and Otherness in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*” (from *Diversity in Disney Films*)

January 28: Film screening: *Song of the South* (1946); Reading: Stein, Daniel. “From ‘Uncle Remus’ to ‘Song of the South’: Adapting American Plantation Fictions.”

February 4: Film screening: *The Princess and the Frog* (2009); Reading: Turner, “Blackness, Bayous and Gumbo: Encoding and Decoding Race in a Colourblind World” (from *Diversity in Disney Films*)

February 11: **In-class Midterm**

February 25: *Wall-E* (2008), Reading: Whitely, “Introduction,” *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation-from Snow White to WALL-E*.

March 4: Film screening: *Strange World* (2022), [Pop Culture Detective, “In Defence of Disney’s Strange Solarpunk World” \(YouTube\)](#).

Deadline for group project confirmation and annotated bibliography due.

March 11: Film screening: *Pocahontas* (1995); Reading: Naidu Parekh, “*Pocahontas*: The Disney Imaginary” (from *The Emperor’s Old Groove*)

March 18: Film screening: *Moana* (2016); Reading: Anjirbag, Michelle Anya. “Mulan and Moana: Embedded Coloniality and the Search for Authenticity in Disney Animated Film.”

March 25: Film screening: *Mulan* (1998); Reading: Limbach, “‘You the Man, Well, Sorta:’ Gender Binaries and Liminality in *Mulan*” (from *Diversity in Disney Films*)

April 1: Film screening: *The Little Mermaid* (1989); Reading: Putnam, “Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films,” Lloyd, “Unruly Ariel: Not Born but Made a Woman” (from *Diversity in Disney Films* and *Disney and Philosophy*) **Research paper/critical creative project due.**