# Spring 2024

# COM 434: Film Festival Management and Curation

School of Communication, Illinois State University

9:35am to 10:50am (Fell 158), Tue/Thu

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Office Hours: Fell 428 / Tuesdays and Thursdays 11am-noon, or by appointment.

# Course Description:

This course is designed to provide an introduction to film festivals. We will focus both on the business and art of film festival management as well as the complicated processes of evaluation and judgement involved in curating a festival lineup. On a practical level, this course gives you the unique opportunity to get hands-on experience with curation in order to produce festival programming. The course thus allows you to develop practical skills in film festival management while also encouraging you to think critically about the art of curation as a form of creative practice and social engagement in the local community.

This course serves two functions: First, it will instruct students in the nuts-and-bolts of how festivals are organized and what role they play in the media industry. We will pay careful attention to the politics and practice of evaluation (How do we decide what films are worthy of inclusion or not? What standards and metrics do we create ahead of time to assist in this evaluation?). Second, the course will give students direct experience with curation, including the screening and evaluation of films.

# The learning objectives for this course are:

* Understand the historical, theoretical, and practical aspects of film festivals and their role in the media industry.
* Describe and differentiate between different methods of evaluation and judgment in visual media across genres including documentary, animation, and experimental film.
* Critically analyze questions of knowledge production, power, politics, diversity, and economics that are central to film festival analysis and organization.
* Evaluate and debate the merits of films submitted to our local film festival.
* Practice effective collaboration to organize and curate a film festival to be held later in the semester.

# Required Text

Wong, C.H. (2011). *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

**ISBN-10:** 0813551218 / **ISBN-13:** 978-0813551210

Additional readings will be available electronically on ReggieNet or are available via a link listed below. You are expected to have done the readings before the start of each class.

# Grade Breakdown

100 points – Midterm Exam (20%)

100 points – Graduate-Level Festival Research Project (30%)

200 points – Social Media Projects and Short Assignments (40%)

50 points – In-Class Participation and Attendance (10%)

50 points – Foxtail Festival Review (10%)

Total: 500 points

450 – 500 points: A

400 – 449 points: B

350 – 399 points: C

300 – 349 points: D

000 – 299 points: F

# Coursework

**Midterm Exam (20%):** There will be an open-notes midterm exam. This exam will ensure that we are prepared for the second half of the course, in which we actively apply what we learned to evaluating films for the local film festival. The exam will be conducted in class and will be worth 100 points.

**Graduate-Level Festival Research Project (30%):** Your final project will involve conducting research into a unique topic in film festival management, curation, and distribution in detail. This project will result in a final 15-20 page research paper and a short presentation accompanied by slides (I would suggest 3-5 slides). Further guidance on research expectations (number of sources, formatting, etc.) will be provided later in the semester. If you have any concerns about your ability to meet the requirements of this course, please come and see me to discuss your concerns.

**Social Media Projects and Short Assignments (40%):** Throughout the semester, you will create a variety of content to be used to promote the Foxtail Film Festival through our social media channels and will be asked to complete other short assignments. Specific details for each assignment will be discussed in class and due dates are included in the course schedule below.

**In-Class Participation and Film Screening (10%):** This course relies on active and prepared discussion from all of us, particularly when it comes to evaluating submissions for the film festival. Your attendance is essential for your own success as well as for the contributions you will make with your fellow students. When in class, be engaged with the discussion. Turn off your cell phones. Laptops are to be used for notetaking only. The class also requires you to regularly screen and evaluate films both on your own and in the classroom. The festival depends on timely screening of all film submitted, so your work here is essential to putting on a successful event!

# Course Policies

**Student E-Mail:** Students will be expected to have a working e-mail account and to regularly log into ReggieNet. Weekly course information will be available to all students via ReggieNet so it is essential that your account is current and that you access it regularly. Inability to use or have access to ReggieNet may compromise your success in this class.

**Assignment Due Dates:** Deadlines are firm and non-negotiable as they would be in the professional world. Clear deadlines are essential to the fair treatment of students who do complete assignments on time. Assignments are happily accepted early.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to be honest in all academic work. A student’s placement of his or her name on any academic exercise shall be regarded as assurance that the work is the result of the student’s own thought, effort, and study. Students who have questions regarding issues of academic dishonesty should refer to the University regulation that outlines unacceptable behaviors in academic matters. It is the student and faculty’s responsibility to uphold the principles of Academic Integrity. Academic Integrity is an important part of this University and this course. Academic Integrity is required of you the student and myself as the instructor. Academic Integrity should be used in preparation of this course, in class time, regarding exams, and with regard to written assignments. In certain circumstances (such as cheating or plagiarism) faculty may be required to refer a student(s) to Community Rights & Responsibilities for a violation of Illinois State University’s Code of Student Conduct (Quoted from “Community Rights and Responsibilities at Illinois State University”).

**Absences due to Student Bereavement**: Students who experience the death of an immediate family member or relative as defined in the University Student Bereavement Policy will be excused from class for funeral leave, subsequent bereavement, and/or travel considerations. Students are responsible for providing appropriate documentation to the Dean of Students office and for contacting the instructor as soon as possible to make arrangements for completing missed work. More information is available in the Student Bereavement Policy at <http://policy.illinoisstate.edu/students/2-1-27.shtml>

**Student Access and Accommodation Services**: Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website: [www.StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://www.StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu)

**Mental Health Resources:** Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at [www.Counseling.IllinoisState.edu](http://www.Counseling.IllinoisState.edu) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

**Campus Safety and Security:** Illinois State University is committed to maintaining a safe environment for the University community. Please take a few moments to make sure you are signed up for ISU Emergency Alerts at [www.security.illinoisstate.edu/emergency\_alert](http://www.security.illinoisstate.edu/emergency_alert). Also, note the information posted in each classroom about emergency shelters and evacuation assembly areas (both are indicated on stickers inside every classroom). Additional safety information is available on the Campus Safety and Security website, [www.security.illinoisstate.edu](http://www.security.illinoisstate.edu).

# Important Dates

**Midterm Exam: Thursday, March 7**

**Festival Research Project: Tuesday, April 16**

**Foxtail Film Festival: Thursday, April 27 to Sunday, April 30**

**Festival Review: Thursday, May 2**

# Course Schedule

[\*readings may be subject to change; if a reading is changed, I will let you know in advance.]

**Week 1: Introduction**

T (1/16): Syllabus and Course Expectations

TH (1/18): Reel Shorts Film Festival, “[How Do We Evaluate Films?](https://reelshorts.ca/2016/01/programming-process-part-ii-how-do-we-evaluate-films/)”

Watch: [*The Ten Steps*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY9EVnyd2t8)(2004)

[*Pioneer*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ9g5xaNfeM)(2011)

**Week 2: Guiding Concepts in Festival Curation**

T (1/23): Bosma, P. “Curating Film Festivals,” in *Film Programming: Curating for*

*Cinemas, Festivals, Archives* (2015): 68-81.

**Film Evaluation Questionnaire Due [20 points]**

TH (1/25): Excerpts from Gann, J. *Behind the Scenes: Programmers Reveal How Film*

*Festivals Really Work* (2012).

**Week 3: Guiding Concepts in Festival Management**

T (1/30): [British Film Institute, “How to Set Up a Film Festival.”](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-how-to-set-up-a-film-festival-2001.pdf)

[“How to Get a Job as a Film Festival Programmer,”](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2023-01-20/explaining-hollywood-how-to-get-a-job-as-a-film-festival-programmer) *Los Angeles Times.*

**Social Media Quotes Due [10 points]**

TH (2/1): Wong, “History, Structure, and Practice in the Festival World,” in *Film Festivals:*

29-64.

Grad: Ross, M. “The Film Festival as Producer: Latin American Film and Rotterdam’s

Hubert Bals Fund,” *Screen* 52(2): 261-267.

De Valck, M. “Sites of Initiation: Film Training Programs at Film Festivals,” in

*The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia.*

**Week 4: The Art and Business of Film Festivals: Part 1**

T (2/6): Wong, “The Films of the Film Festivals,” in *Film Festivals:* 65-99.

**Short Film Evaluation Due [10 points]**

TH (2/8): Wong, “Film Festivals and Film Industries,” in *Film Festivals:* 129-158.

**Week 5: The Art and Business of Film Festivals: Part 2**

T (2/13): de Valck, M. “Film Festivals, Bourdieu, and the Economization of Culture,”

*Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 23:1 (2014): 74-89.

Peranson, M. “First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of

Film Festivals,” in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* (2009): 23-37.

**Late Submission Posts Due [20 points]**

TH (2/15): Loist, S. “The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and Circulation,”

in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016): 49-64.

Grad: Zielinski, G. “On Studying Film Festival Ephemera: The Case of Queer Film

Festivals and Archives of Feelings,” in in *Film Festivals: History, Theory,*

*Method, Practice* (2016): 138-158.

**Week 6: Film Festivals and Their Publics**

T (2/20): Wong, “Festivals as Public Spheres,” in *Film Festivals:* 159-189.

**Collaborator/Partner Emails Due [20 points]**

Grad: Lee, T. “Being There, Taking Place: Ethnography at the Film Festival,” in in *Film*

*Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016): 122-137.

TH (2/22): Zielinski, G. “[On the Production of Heterotopia, and Other Spaces, in and around](http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/gerZelinskiFestivals/index.html)

[Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals](http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/gerZelinskiFestivals/index.html),” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 54 (2012).

Grad: Burgess, D. and B. Kredell, “Positionality and Film Festival Research,” in *Film*

*Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016): 159-176.

**Week 7: Film Festival Topographies and Curatorial Activism**

T (2/27): Derrett, R. “Festivals & Regional Destinations: How Festivals Demonstrate a

Sense of Community and Place.” *Rural Society* 13:1 (2003): 35-53.

Prentice, Richard, and Vivien Andersen. “Festival as Creative Destination.”

*Annals of Tourism Research* 30:1 (2003): 7–30.

**Individual Film Evaluations Due [20 points]**

TH (2/29): Lyell Davis, “[Not Only Projections in a Dark Room: Theorizing Activist Film Festivals in the Lives of Campaigns and Social Movements](https://framescinemajournal.com/article/not-only-projections-in-a-dark-room-theorizing-activist-film-festivals-in-the-lives-of-campaigns-and-social-movements/),” *Frames Cinema Journal* Issue 13 (2018).

Sonia Tascón, “Watching Others’ Troubles: Revisiting ‘The Film Act’ and Spectatorship in Activist Film Festivals,” in *Activist Film Festivals* (2017): 21-37.

Grad: Reilly, M. “What is Curatorial Activism?” in *Curatorial Activism: Towards an*

*Ethics of Curating* (2018): 16-33.

Iordanova, D. “Film Festivals and Dissent: Can Film Change the World?” in *Film*

*Festivals and Activism, Film Festival Yearbook* (2012): 13-25.

**Week 8: Curatorial Activism (Cont.) and Midterm**

T (3/5): Rastegar, R. “Seeing Differently: The Curatorial Potential of Film Festival

Programming,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016): 181-

195.

Umayyah Cable, “Cinematic Activism: Grassroots Film Festivals and Social

Movements in Pandemic Times,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and*

*Media* Volume 62, Number 2 (2021): 298-316.

Grad: Czach, L. “Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming,” in *Film*

*Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016): 196-208.

**Festival Promotion Slides for Classes Due [20 points]**

TH (3/7): **In-Class Midterm Exam [100 points]**

**SPRING VACATION (Saturday, March 9 to Sunday, March 17)**

**Week 9: Evaluating Film and Programming / Part 1**

T (3/19): Collectively screen films for competitive film lineup.

TH (3/21): Continue screening films.

**Acceptance and Rejection Emails Due [20 points]**

**Week 10: Evaluating Films and Programming / Part 2**

T (3/26): Continue screening films.

TH (3/28): Continue screening films and assembling them into programming blocks.

**Social Media Promotion for Festival / Trailers Due [20 points]**

**Friday, March 29: Notification Date for Filmmakers**

**Week 11: Evaluating Films and Programming / Part 2**

T (4/2): Screen regional films and decide on top competitive films for awards.

TH (4/4): Continue screening regional films and turn in draft of film synopses.

**Film Synopses Due [20 points]**

**Week 12: Evaluating Films and Programming / Part 3**

T (4/9): Continue screening regional films and assembling them into programming blocks.

TH (4/11): Continue screening, building programming blocks, and complete final film synopses.

**Film Lineup Assignment Due [20 points]**

**Week 13: Film Festival Presentations and Final Planning**

T (4/16): Film Festival Presentations

TH (4/18): Film Festival Presentations (continued) and work on final stages of festival planning, including assembling programming.

**Festival Research Project Due [100 points]**

**Week 14: Festival Week**

T (4/23): Hands-on help with event planning for festival.

TH (4/25): Continued planning and attendance at festival.

**FOXTAIL FILM FESTIVAL!! (Thursday, April 25 to Sunday, April 28)**

**Week 15: Post-Festival Debrief and Preliminary Planning for Next Festival Year**

T (4/30): Discussion and debrief about festival.

TH (5/2): Brainstorm ideas/revisions for next year’s festival.

**Festival Review Due [100 points]**