

COURSE SPECIFICATION DOCUMENT

Academic School / Department: Communication and the Arts

Programme: Study Abroad

FHEQ Level: 5

Course Title: Superhero Cinema

Course Code: FILM HIST 5601

Total Hours: 120

Timetabled Hours: 45

Guided Learning Hours: 0

Independent Learning Hours: 75

Credits: 12 UK CATS credits
6 ECTS credits
3 US credits

Course Description:

This course investigates the cultural, political, historical and industrial development and contexts of superhero film, television and media. Students will examine issues critical to the superhero genre, beginning with mythological archetypes and Hollywood heroes found in Westerns, Science Fiction and Action-Adventure. The course expands beyond Western-centric contexts by exploring established and emerging superheroes of India, the Middle East, China and Japan as well as key anime forms. Covering eight decades of film history, a study of film criticism and theory will engage with topics including identity politics and Capitalist values. The course explores the idea that cinematic superheroes invoke contemporary zeitgeists, providing an opportunity for students to better understand the evolving topicality of these film and television franchises and products.

Prerequisites:

40 Credits

Students will not be able to take the four-credit version of this course if they had previously taken this three-credit course.

Aims and Objectives:

This course aims to explore central questions in the study of mainstream superhero cinema such as: How do superhero films develop? What does superhero cinema reveal about society's identities, ideologies and fears? What are the significant approaches to examine the form and grammar of superhero films? Students will in turn explore: a critical understanding of the theoretical approaches to the study of mainstream superhero cinema; develop a range of skills to research and assess varying source materials as they relate to the superhero genre; synthesize available information and develop academic arguments and reasoned judgments and appreciate superhero films in their cultural contexts; gain the ability to critically analyse a range of superhero media; develop a range of practical skills in relation to critical writing and clear communication, the ability to link theory, evidence and social issues, and effectively manage time and independent study.

Programme Outcomes:

A5I, II

B5II

C5I, II

D5I, II

A detailed list of the programme outcomes is found in the Programme Specification. This is maintained by Registry and located at: <https://www.richmond.ac.uk/programme-and-course-specifications/>

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Develop a detailed understanding of major distinctive conventions of the superhero genre as well as engage with the major thinkers, debates and paradigms involved in the study of superhero cinema.
- Develop a detailed understanding of how the superhero genre is consumed and embedded in everyday life.
- Demonstrate the ability to formulate and synthesize arguments cogently regarding mainstream superhero cinema and express them effectively in writing.
- Demonstrate the ability to deliver the work with limited direction and supervision, whilst considering and evaluating the work using justifiable criteria.

Indicative Content:

- Historical and Mythological Origins of the Superhero Genre.
- Definitions, Conventions and Genre Hybridity of the Cinematic Superhero.
- Identity Politics of Ethnicity, 'Race', Gender, Sexuality, Class, Ableism, Faith and Nationality represented in the Superhero Film.
- Genre Ideologies and Political Economics of Capitalism, Globalisation and Protectionism championed by the Superhero Archetype.
- Comic, Cinematic and Animated/Anime Forms, Adaptations and Visual Effects that constitute the 'Form and Grammar' of Superhero Media.
- Transmedial Storytelling of Superhero Movie Franchises and Television Streaming Platforms.
- Hollywood versus Non-Hollywood Industry and Cultural Contexts of Superhero Productions.
- Topicality of the Contemporary Superhero Cultural 'Zeitgeist'.

Assessment:

This course conforms to the University Assessment Norms approved at Academic Board and located at: <https://www.richmond.ac.uk/university-policies/>

Teaching Methodology:

The course includes screenings of extracts from feature films as well as short films.

These will be followed by weekly lectures and class discussions. There will be additional assigned films to watch outside of class time. For some assignments in particular, students will be asked to seek out and analyse films of their own choosing as active researchers.

Students should complete all the set readings for each week beforehand in order to participate fully in class discussion.

Student work is assessed through a variety of ways using both formative and summative approaches. Feedback is intended to help improve student approach to learning and achieve better results.

Indicative Texts:

Brinker, F. (2024) *Superhero blockbusters: seriality and politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Brown, J. A. (2017) *The Modern Superhero in Film and Television: Popular Genre and American Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Gray, R. J. II and Kaklamanidou B. (2011) *The 21st Century Superhero: Essays on Gender, Genre and Globalization in Film*. London: McFarland.

Hassler-Forest, D. (2011) *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Neoliberal Age*. Australia: Zero Books

Hatfield C., Heer J., Worcester, K. (2013) *The Superhero Reader*. USA: University Press of Mississippi.

Kirkpatrick, E. (2023) *Recovering the radical promise of superheroes: un/making worlds*. New York: Punctum Books.

Journals:

Journal of Popular Film & Television
The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship

Websites:

Popular Cultural Resource *Superhero Hype* available at www.superherohype.com (Accessed: November 2024).

See syllabus for complete reading list.

Change Log for this CSD:

Nature of Change	Date Approved & Approval Body (School or AB)	Change Actioned by Registry Services
First Edition	Nov 2024	