



Vesalius College
Brussels

Course Syllabus CMM 262G

TOPICS IN EUROPEAN FILM HISTORY

Number of ECTS credits: 6

Contact Details for Professor

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Course Description

This course reveals Europe at its edgiest. It is impossible to understand European culture without experiencing its cinema. Groundbreaking and thought-provoking films from Europe pioneered genre-filmmaking (fantasy, comedy, the epic, horror, thriller, cult, documentary and animation), and defined aesthetic concepts such as 'realism', and 'surrealism' that have become key inspirations for cultural production around the world.

This course contains thirteen in-class sessions. Each session departs from a recent development (a genre, a style, a politics, ...), and uses a contemporary or (post)modernist film to trace its origins and tentacles into the past, thereby uncovering the intrinsic inter-connections between all of Europe's filmmaking traditions.

Each session will also showcase a key filmmaker (such as Godard, Hitchcock, Polanski, Haneke, or the Dardennes) and interrogate their artistic obsessions by linking them to the social and cultural contexts of their times, in order to offer a broad overview of European film art, with the intent to unlock the core of the 'European Imagination'.

Finally, the course emphasizes the 'experience' of European film art through a selection of screenings in Brussels (including the Royal Cinematek) and guest chats with key industry agents (directors, producers, distributors). In doing so, this course offers students first-hand access to the European film industry.

Course Prerequisites (if any)

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Learning Objectives

This course's learning objectives are in line with the following Discipline Learning Outcomes for the Bachelor in Communications Sciences as ratified by the NVAO: DLO 1, DLO 2, DLO 3, DLO 7, DLO 8, DLO 10 and DLO 11.

Acquired Knowledge:

- A profound understanding of European film culture and its function in today's European society.
- A sharpened ability to critically assess various forms of European film and art, historically and contemporary in the light of its social and political contexts.
- Insight into the most common methodological principles and conceptual tools for researching art and culture.

Applying Knowledge:

- Excellence in the accurate assessment, and advising on, the value and roles of cinematic art and culture.
- Augmented skills to participate successfully and persuasively in cultural debates and discussions.
- Advanced capacity to use visual materials and technology for the critical interpretation and evaluation of screen culture.
- Increased competence in the independent design, composition and delivery of original reports and research papers in various formats.
- Competence in using information from archives and research sources (including online sources), and the accurate referencing of those sources.
- Enhanced ability to employ interpretive, discursive and rhetorical strategies effectively in written and oral assignments.

Attitude:

- Develop critical and historical writing skills, as well as time management skills.
- Have trust in one's own competence and performance, as well as acknowledgment of one's own limitations.
- Be conversant and develop expertise in sensitively addressing cultural diversity.
- Be open but critical towards one's own domain specific background.

Course schedule

There will be 7 weeks (6x2 sessions of 4 hours [2x2], and one exam week), with 7 special events (some embedded during class time).

WEEK 1: 23 – 27 MAY: French Cinema, Fantasy and Revolutionary Aesthetics

Session 1:

1. **French Cinema and Fantasy** : this session introduces students to the origins of cinema through a discussion of the ‘classical dichotomy’ between the ‘realism’ (represented by the Lumière-brothers documentary reels) and the ‘fantastic’ cinema of Georges Méliès. The session focuses on the origins of fantasy and encompasses a screening of *The Extraordinary Voyage* (2011), a documentary by Serge Bromberg – Eric Lange, followed by a discussion of French pioneers of cinema (with a focus on Georges Méliès *Trip To The Moon*, *Voyage dans la lune* (1902). This session also brings the exploration of influences on the fantasy cinema to today’s French cinema, through a discussion of the films of Marc Caro & Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*Délicatessen*, *City of Lost Children*, *Amelie*), as it aims to address the question of the role of fantasy today: does it continue to serve as a metaphor for understanding society? The session also includes discussions of Martin Scorsese’s *Hugo* (2011) and Luc Besson’s *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adele Blanc-Sec* (2010).

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 11-27.

Recommended Reading: Tom Gunning, ‘the cinema of attractions’
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/film/gaines/historiography/Gunning.pdf>

Dudley Andrew: ‘Amélie, or Le Fabuleux Destin du Cinéma Français’, *Film Quarterly* 57: 3 (Spring 2004), pp. 34-46.

Museum visit + screening:

This opening week of the course also includes a visit to the filmmuseum and filmarchive. We will view films about Brussels in the Belle époque.

Session 2

2. **French Cinema and Revolutionary Aesthetics:** this session explores one of the most fundamental course directions in film aesthetics. Next to an overview of the New Wave’s role as an accelerator of European film, and its key figures (Godard, Charbol. Rohmer, Resnais, ...), this session will concentrate on the seminal figure of François Truffaut, especially his *Day for Night*, *La nuit américaine* (1973).

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 439-451.

Recommended Reading: Andrew Asibong, (2005), ‘Meat, Murder, Metamorphosis and the Transformational Ethics of Francois Ozon’, *French Studies* 59:2, 203-215.

WEEK 2: 30 MAY – 3 JUNE: Italian Cinema, Urbanity, and Cinema of Excess.

Session 3

3. **Italian Cinema and the City of Rome:** starting with *The Great Beauty, La Grande Bellezza* (2013) by Paolo Sorrentino, this week we will examine the role of urban legacies, through a focus on the city of Rome in Italian film. We will use *Dear diary, Caro diario* by Nanni Moretti, as a particular case study, influential for its mix of geography politics, and humour. this session also traces the role of urban legacies, and the examination of the importance of the city of Rome in Italian film further into the past. Our focus in this session will be the tradition of Neo-Realism, with its near-documentary style and aesthetics, and the Italian postwar arthouse film (Antonioni, Fellini, Pasolini, Rosi ...). We will use *La dolce vita* by Federico Fellini, *Mamma Roma* by Pier Paolo Pasolini and *Rome, Open City, Roma, città aperta* by Roberto Rossellini as case studies.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 353-369.

Recommended Reading: Rosa Barotsi (2009) *The Personal and the Political: the Cinema of Nanni Moretti*, (with Pierpaolo Antonello) in Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (eds.), *Postmodern impegno: Post-hegemonic approaches to ethics and socio-political engagement in contemporary Italian culture*, Oxford: Peter Lang.

David Forgacs (2008), *Rome, Open City* (BFI Classics).

Guest activity + screening:

Tonight we will apply our focus on urban legacies to Brussels, a city under intense international scrutiny lately. Through a screening of a film about Brussels, and a guest session with director Peter Van Goethem (currently directing a film on the city of Brussels) we will examine the importance of filmic representations of diverse urbanity.

Session 4

4. **Italian Cinema and Epic Excess:** departing from *I am Love, Io sono l'amore* (2009) by Luca Guadagnino, this session investigates Italian cinema's exploration of aesthetics of politics, excess, and epic historiography. The session includes a close examination of Italian epic cinema in the run-up to World War I (in particular *Cabiria*), as well as the peplum (the Roman Empire epic, predating *Ben Hur*), and the Spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone (*Once Upon a Time in the West*). This session will also discuss, in-depth, Italian epic cinema as a modernist allegory of the nation state, and a reflection on both 19th Century opera and 20th Century disintegration. We will concentrate on the films of Luchino Visconti (*The Leopard, The Damned, Ludwig* and *Death in Venice*) as interpretations of Europe's struggles with radical, reactionary, and fascist ideologies.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 276-281, 366-371 and 451-454.

Recommended Reading: The essays by Michele Lagny and Christopher Wagstaff in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds) (1992), *Popular European Cinema*. 163-180 and 245-262.

Henry Bacon (1998), *Explorations of Beauty and Decay* Cambridge UP. excerpts

WEEK 3: 6 – 10 JUNE: European Cinema, Taboo and National Mythologies

Session 5

5. **Scandinavian Cinema and Taboo:** European cinema has always had the reputation of being amongst the most daring in the world. What does that mean? Using a recent film by Lars von Trier (*Nymphomaniac*, 2013, *Antichrist*, 2009, or *The Idiots*, 1998), this session will interrogate Scandinavian cinema's obsession with transgression. Case studies will include the Dogme 95 manifesto, and the provocative cinema of masters of the imagination such as Viktor Sjöström, Carl Theodor Dreyer, and Ingmar Bergman.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 384-385, 419-422, 703-718.

Recommended Reading: Anne Jerslev (2002), 'Dogma 95, Lars Von Triers' *The Idiots*, and the Idiots Project', in *Realism and 'reality' in Film and Media* (Museum Tusulanum Press). 41-55.

Screening:

Tonight we will contextualize our focus on taboo cinema through a screening of Lars Von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009), a film currently under censorship review in several European countries.

Session 6

6. **Small Nations Cinema: Identity and National Mythology** : Through a discussion of *Two Days, One Night, Deux jours, une nuit* (2014) by the Dardenne brothers (including a comparison to historical documentaries such as *Misère au Borinage* and *Les Enfants du Borinage*), and a contrasting case study of Belgian, Dutch and Irish animation (including *Harpya*, *Song of the Sea*, and *The Paradise*) this session examines how the social and political documentary traditions of Europe, and its evocative styles of film animation both exemplify the continent's nations' search for national identity and mythology.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 303-307, 477-483, 579-602 and 710-713.

Guest activity + screening

For the Small Nations session we will invite, during class time, the young animation film director, Laura Vandewynckel, to talk about the role and struggles of animated cinema in Europe, and discuss her work.

WEEK 4: 13 – 17 JUNE: British Cinema, Politics, Class and Imagination

Session 7

7. **British Cinema: Politics, Ideology and Class**: Departing from *The Selfish Giant* (2013) by Clio Barnard, this session builds on the previous in using ideologies of 'identity' to explore the legacy of British cinema's documentary tradition (Grierson), Free Cinema, and the 'realist' generation of Ken Loach, Stephen Frears & Mike Leigh

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 239-244, 454-458, 694-701.

Recommended Reading: John Hill (2001), 'British Cinema as National Cinema', Robert Murphy's *The British Cinema Book* (BFI)

Guest activity + screening

We will aim to illustrate the topic of British Cinema with the screening of one of Alfred Hitchcock's English thrillers at the cinematek. The film in question will be the legendary *The Lodger* (1927), one of the first films in the 'thriller' genre.

Session 8

8. **British Cinema and the Unshackled Imagination**: Flipping the coin, this session discusses cinema of pure aesthetics, exemplified by Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) and fellow British directors operating within the regimes of European co-productions (Nicholas Roeg, Derek Jarman, Ken Russell,...).

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 606-618.

Recommended Reading: Vernon Gras and Marguerite Gras (eds) (2001). *Peter Greenaway: Interviews* (University of Mississippi Press), excerpts, especially pages 60-66.

WEEK 5: 20 – 24 JUNE: German Cinema and Hollywood-Europe

Session 9

9. **German/Austrian Cinema: Trauma and Memory**: Starting from the enigmatic and stark *The White Ribbon, das Weisse Band*" (2009) by Michael Haneke, this session investigates how a crucial part of Europe's cinema is preoccupied with the visualization of (imperfect) memory, especially of traumatic events. We will also showcase Germany's Neue Welle cinema (Rainer W. Fassbinder, Wim

Wenders, Volker Schlöndorff,...) – crucially important in exposing national trauma.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 456-458, 562-576.

Recommended Reading: Roy Grundmann (ed) (2010), *A Companion to Michael Haneke* (Wiley), pages 591-607.

Screening:

Tonight we will screen Roman Polanski's *Carnage* (2011) as an illustration to 'exile' European cinema. Our aim will be to frame it as a 'European' film through the lenses of Polanski's directorial vision Yasmina Reza's screenplay, and the performances of Kate Winslett, and Christoph Waltz.

Session 10

10. **Hollywood Europe:** this session will study the global influences of Europe's filmmaking through case studies of émigré directors working in Hollywood (examples include Milos Forman, Roman Polanski, and Krzysztof Kieslowski, ...). We will use Polanski's *Carnage* (2011) as a starting point for a journey that links old émigré directors such as Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, and Alfred Hitchcock to younger expats such as Roland Emmerich, Paul Verhoeven, and Sam Mendes.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 104-118, 224-228 and 623-631.

Recommended Reading: Noah Isenberg and Rob White (2012), 'Carnage and all: a Discussion', *Film Quarterly*, 65:3 (Spring), 44-48.

Peter Kramer (2000), 'Faith in Relations between. people': Audrey. Hepburn,. *Roman. Holiday* and. European integration,' in Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (eds), *100 Years of European Cinema* (Manchester UP)

WEEK 6: 27 JUNE – 1 JULY: European Experimental and Cult Cinema

Session 11

11. **European Avant-Garde and Experimental Cinema:** Europe's cinema is the laboratory of global cinema. This session will use Jean-Luc Godard's groundbreaking *Goodbye to Language Adieu au langage* (2014) as a premise for a travel into Europe's most impossible cinema, with special attention for the dadaist, surrealist, expressionist, and montage experiments of nearly a century ago that still dazzle viewers.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 88-99, 102-110, 317-322, 446, 589-595.

Recommended Reading: Paul Dallas (2014), 'Interview with Fabrice Arago, Cinematographer of *Goodbye to Language*', *Film Comment* (November 2014), <http://www.filmcomment.com/article/fabrice-arago-interview/>

Jonathan Romney (2014), 'Goodbye to Language', in *Film Comment* (October 2014): <http://www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-of-the-week-goodbye-to-language/>

Guest activity + screening

We will use this week's theme to apply it again to the city of Brussels, this time through the controversial, and cult-like film *Black*, a Tarantino-like study of gang violence in Brussels (a representation of current cultural tensions in the city). Our guest will be the film's producer Kobe Van Steenberghe.

Session 12

12. **European Cult Cinema:** The last session is an excavation of Europe's most stylish 'dirty secrets'. We will examine Europe's exploitation cinema, and its outlandish underground filmmaking via the controversial mockumentary *Man Bites Dog* (1992) and the feminist vampire film *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), to discover how disreputable films often tell a harsh truth about Europe's identity.

Core Reading: Bordwell and Thompson, pages 88-99, 102-110, 317-322, 446, 589-595.

Recommended Reading: Mathijs, Ernest (2005), 'Bad Reputations: the Reception of Trash Cinema', *Screen*, 46 (4), 451-472.

WEEK 7: 4 – 8 JULY: EXAM WEEK

13. During this week the final exam will be held

Course Materials

Textbook:

Bordwell, David & Kristin Thompson (2009). *Film History: an Introduction* (3rd edition). McGraw-Hill.

Additional materials are as listed in the course schedule.

Films:

Films listed as 'opening' films for sessions will be made available to students via the Vesalius office (it remains to be determined if these films can be loaned, or viewed on-site). It is recommended students watch these films prior to the class sessions.

Case Studies and Additional Sources:

Students are encouraged to frequently use the following sources when preparing for classes, assignments, and activities:

Cinematek (aka the Royal Film Archive of Belgium): www.cinematek.be This institution's library and archive are the envy of the world. More than 100,000 holdings, and up-to-date subscriptions of all major film magazines in the world. Visits by appointment (in Dutch and French only)

The internet movie database (IMDB): www.imdb.com. The largest online database of past and current cinema, with a focus on the most recent cinema. Extensive and (mostly) complete crew and cast lists, and information about production and distribution. Owned by Amazon.

Open Culture: this website compiles 750+ free films for public consumption, with a decided focus on European cinema. <http://www.openculture.com/freemoviesonline>

The British Film Institute (BFI): www.bfi.org.uk. one of the oldest and most prestigious archives, libraries, and collections in the world. Publishers of the seminal magazine *Sight and Sound* (since the 1930s).

Offscreen: <http://www.offscreen.be> one of the most important (and eccentric) film societies in Brussels, and hugely important for exposing audiences to films outside the mainstream. Highly knowledgeable.

Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/chif20/current> one of the most important journals to cover the history of cinema.

Course Assessment

Students will be evaluated on the basis of their performance in the following assessments and activities:

Report of 2 guest sessions and activities	20%
Mid-term home assignment	30%
In-class participation	10%
Final exam	40%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale of Vesalius College

Vesalius College grading policy, in line with the Flemish Educational norms, is now as follows:

Letter grade	Scale of 20	Scale of 100
A	17.0-20.0	85-100
A-	16.1-16.9	81-84
B+	15.3-16.0	77-80
B	14.5-15.2	73-76
B-	13.7-14.4	69-72
C+	13.1-13.6	66-68
C	12.3-13.0	62-65
C-	11.5-12.2	58-61
D+	10.7-11.4	54-57
D	10.0-10.6	50-53
F	0-9.9	0-49

Description of activities and Grading Criteria (only general grading criteria in this section)

ASSIGNMENT 1: Report of Guest sessions and activities

This assignment requires students to summarize critically two of the special events that this course offers. The goal is to make students sensitive to issues of cultural production, distribution and reception in Europe, in particular cinema, while retaining brevity and poignancy. The emphasis is on accurate reporting, and instant insight. This assignment has a running deadline (with submissions accepted throughout term). Each report should be 2 pages long. Specific grading criteria are listed below.

ASSIGNMENT 2: MIDTERM HOME ESSAY

This assignment aims to assess students' critical understanding of the institutional and aesthetic perspectives that govern European cinema, viewed through a historical lens, applied to a pertinent case study (one significant film). The assignment addresses issues of media concentration, heritage, funding, production, critical reception, taste, and ideology. Key foci of the assignment will be on encouraging students to identify 'salient moments' in films as opening points for thorough discussions of film culture, providing solid factual backgrounds (historical and cultural), demonstrate a knowledge of existing literature on the subject, and excel in providing persuasive argumentation. For more specific guidelines about the kinds of questions that should underlie this assignment, students are directed to the introductory chapter of the textbook. In 'Introduction: Film History and How It Is Done', Bordwell and Thompson outline in detail the methodologies that regulate writing about film. The deadline for this assignment is early in week 5, 20-24 JUNE (specific date to be communicated). This assignment has a 2,000 word requirement and limit (Times New Roman 12 double spaced, regular margins and indentation). Specific grading criteria are listed below.

FINAL EXAM

The final exam assesses students' ability to summarize effectively a comprehensive body of factual information and manage to construct interpretative argumentations with relation to key areas in European film, media and culture. It aims to push students from being conversant about Europe's cultural legacy of film to display expertise in it, with the aim to put this to use in professional circumstances. For the exam, students are to rely on notes from the lectures and activities, and on specifically identified materials from the textbook. The exam will contain 3 short questions that require one-paragraph answers (usually 2-3 sentences), and one 400 word essay question (which students can select from 3 pre-circulated questions). The key touchstones for the essay question are a profound display of factual knowledge about European film culture, an ability to use examples from films to demonstrate detailed insight, and a capacity to link these examples and that knowledge to wider European cultural contexts. The duration of the exam will be 2 hours. The date of the exam is during the 4-8 JULY week. Specific date and location will be communicated to students. . Specific grading criteria are listed below.

PARTICIPATION

European film requires lively debate, and in-class sessions will prompt students to contribute, at various levels, to the ongoing assessment of cultural legacies by asking them to speculate, interrogate, and evaluate issues of cultural importance in Europe through cinema.

Further description of assessment activities

The following criteria will be applied in assessing your written work:

Grading form for ASSIGNMENT 1

<p>CMM 289, Summer Term 2015-2016 Assignment 1: Event Report</p> <p>Marking Sheet</p> <p>Your assignment has been marked according to the criteria below. Remember that your final mark isn't the result of just adding separate indicators together. Your overall achievement also plays an important role.</p> <p>Student name:</p> <p>Topic: .....title of event.....</p>	
-stay within boundaries of assignment range (2pages, <i>stay on topic</i>)	/2
-discussion of event's context format of the event	/1

audience reactions	/1
-discussion of event's key importance	/3
-reference to concepts from textbook or class	/1
-clarity of writing and composition of critical statement	/2
Total:	/10
Comments:	
Expect +/- 15 to 200 words of comments and feedback	
Marking in the Department is governed by guidelines which can be found on the University's website	

Grading form for ASSIGNMENT 2

Mark Sheet CMM 289 Mid-Term Home Essay (Summer Term, 2015-2016)

Your work has been marked according to the criteria below. Remember that your final mark isn't the result of simply adding separate indicators together. Your overall achievement also plays an important role.

NAME: ...

TITLE:

excellent good satisfactory weak fail

HOW WELL HAVE YOU DONE THE FOLLOWING:

1) Selection of an appropriate film/group of films	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
2) Use of general reading and specific reading	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
3) Analysis: film reception	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
4) Analysis: salient elements o/t film	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
5) Analysis of the historical context o/t film	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
6-7) Addressing approaches and issues raised by the course	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Address of cultural concept 1:	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Address of cultural concept 2:	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
8) How well do you integrate your remarks into convincing arguments?	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
9) How much independence do you display in finding resources	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
10) How well presented are your arguments	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

Mark

Lateness Penalty

Final Mark

COMMENTS (continued overleaf if necessary):

Expect 15-200 words of feedback.

Marking in the Department is governed by guidelines which can be found on the University's website

Grading form for FINAL EXAM

CMM 289, Summer Term 2015-2016
Final Exam Date 4-8 JULY

Marking Sheet

Your exam has been marked according to the criteria below. Remember that your final mark isn't the result of simply adding separate indicators together. Your overall achievement also plays an important role.

Student name:

Short questions:	++	+	+/-	-	--	
Question one:	...	...	...	...	...	.../5
Question two:	...	...	...	...	...	.../5
Question three:	...	...	...	...	...	.../5
Pre-circulated Essay Question:	++	+	+/-	-	--	
<i>-keeping within the answer range</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/2
<i>-coherence and depth of argument</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/4
<i>-use of European film history knowledge</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/5
<i>-use of examples from films</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/5
<i>-reference to significant cultural concepts</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/5
<i>-clarity of writing and composition</i>	...	...	...	...	...	/4
Mark:						/40
Comments: Expect 15-200 words of feedback						

Marking in the Department is governed by guidelines which can be found on the University's website

Additional Course Policies

Attendance:

Regular attendance is mandatory. Punctuality is essential. Regular absences will be reported.

Late submissions:

Assignments not submitted by the due date will receive a penalty of 10% for the first 24 hours, 20% for a 48 hour delay. No submissions will be accepted more than 3 days after the deadline, unless arrangements have been made with the instructor (for extensions under exceptional circumstances, apply to the course instructor).

Personal Technology:

Please turn cell phones off during class. Laptops may be used for notetaking, however social networking, e-mailing, surfing the Internet, playing games, etc. are absolutely forbidden during class. Any student caught doing the aforementioned activities during class will be asked to turn off their cell phones and/or computers. Repeated violations of this rule after the first warning will result in the student being marked absent for the day and permanently losing their laptop privileges. Be respectful; the use of personal electronic devices during class is limited to academic purposes.

Contesting a grade:

If students wish to contest a grade they must make an appointment to do so in person. The student should contact the instructor with any concerns within ONE week of receiving the grade. The student must also demonstrate that they have read the comments accompanying the grade by presenting a brief written statement specifying why the grade does not reflect the quality of the work. It is at the discretion of the instructor to decide whether the work and the student's request warrants any increase *or decrease* in the grade. Students should retain a copy of all submitted assignments and feedback (in case of loss) and should also retain all their marked assignments.

Academic Honesty Statement

Academic dishonesty is **NOT** tolerated in this course.

Academic honesty is not only an ethical issue but also the foundation of scholarship. Cheating and plagiarism are therefore serious breaches of academic integrity.

Following the College policy, cheating and plagiarism cases will be communicated in writing to the Associate Dean for Students and submitted to the Student Conduct Committee for disciplinary action.

If you refer to someone else's work, appropriate references and citations must be provided. Grammar, spelling and punctuation count, so use the tools necessary to correct before handing in assignments.