Spanish Cinema and Cultural Identity
ARTS-3060 (3 credits)

Spain: Choose Your Track—Climate, Psychology, Economics OR Cinema

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Spanish cinema has emerged as one of Europe's most innovative and internationally recognized film industries, producing directors like Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Amenábar, and Icíar Bollaín who have gained global acclaim. This course examines how Spanish cinema reflects and shapes cultural identity, exploring the nation's complex history through the lens of film from the Franco dictatorship through the democratic transition to contemporary Spain. Students will analyze how Spanish filmmakers have used cinema to negotiate questions of national identity, regional autonomy, gender roles, and Spain's place in a globalized world. Using Seville as a living laboratory—a city that has served as both setting and inspiration for numerous Spanish films—students will engage with Andalusian film culture, attend screenings at historic theaters, and explore how southern Spanish identity has been represented in national cinema. The course emphasizes how cinema functions as both artistic expression and cultural document, revealing the tensions and transformations that have shaped modern Spain, with particular attention to Andalusian perspectives and the representation of southern Spanish culture.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- **Analyze** Spanish cinema within its historical, political, and cultural contexts, from the Franco era through contemporary democratic Spain
- **Apply** film theory and criticism to Spanish cinema, understanding cinematic language, genre conventions, and auteur theory as applied to Spanish directors
- **Evaluate** representation in Spanish film, examining how cinema constructs and challenges national identity, gender roles, regional differences, and social hierarchies
- **Compare and contrast** different periods and movements in Spanish cinema, understanding key directors, stylistic developments, and industrial changes
- **Examine** Andalusian identity in Spanish cinema, analyzing how southern Spanish culture, history, and landscapes have been represented in national and international film productions

- **Develop** analytical writing skills through film analysis that connects Spanish cinema to broader cultural and historical themes

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualization*, and *active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Required Texts

See the course schedule for a full list of reading assignments.

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence -- such as illness -- must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further

requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1. **In-Class Participation and Field Engagement (10%):** Active participation is essential for learning in this course. Students are expected to engage meaningfully in class discussions, film screenings, field activities, and interactions with guest speakers from the Spanish film industry. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their contributions, critical thinking skills, respectful engagement with diverse perspectives, and ability to connect field experiences to theoretical concepts.

2. **Spanish Cinema Digital Storytelling Project (30%):** Students will create a 10-12 minute digital multimedia presentation exploring a specific aspect of Spanish cinema through innovative format options (students will choose one): (1) **Film Tourism Map**: Interactive digital map of Seville's cinematic locations with embedded video analysis, historical context, and interviews with locals about filming in their neighborhoods; (2) **Cinema Podcast Series**: 2-episode podcast examining a Spanish director's work, including, when possible, interviews with film scholars, critics, or industry professionals; (3) **Virtual Exhibition**: Curated online exhibition on a theme (e.g., "Women Behind the Camera," "Andalusian Cinema Through the Decades") with multimedia displays, film clips, and interactive elements.

3. **Spanish Cinema Research Project (35%):** Students will conduct in-depth research on a specific aspect of Spanish cinema (director, movement, theme, or period) and present findings through both written work (2000-2500 words) and oral presentation. Projects should include primary source research, film analysis, and engagement with Spanish film criticism.

4. **Seville Film Culture Portfolio (25%):** Students will document their engagement with Seville's film culture through a curated portfolio including reviews of current Spanish films, exploration of the city's role as a filming location (from *Lawrence of Arabia* to contemporary productions), analysis of local film programming, and reflection on visits to key cultural sites. This assignment emphasizes experiential learning and includes a walking tour component exploring Seville's cinematic geography, from the historic Alcázar (featured in numerous films) to contemporary filming locations.

Grading Scale

94-100% A 90-93% A- 87-89% B+ 84-86% B 80-83% B- 77-79% C+ 74-76% C 70-73% C- 67-69% D+ 64-66% D below 64 F

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student isn't here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with

the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program

- Submit assignments on time: SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field- based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

- Bring your curiosity: Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions, and your inquiries might help others in class who have similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.

- Maintain academic Integrity: As members of a learning community, we all want to submit work that reflects our own ideas and efforts. Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism can have serious consequences. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself these questions:

    o Did I reference ideas, quotes, phrases, or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
    o Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
    o Did you answer "yes" to any of the above questions? If so, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment

- Principled Disagreement: Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs, affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage brave spaces were principled disagreement is encouraged rather than avoiding difficult conversations. *This is challenging work, and we will inevitably make mistakes.* Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for principled disagreement.

- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a brave space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.

- Our social identities – Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and more – shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.

- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.

- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.

Course Schedule

Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Social and Historical Revisions: From Franco to Democracy

This foundational module examines how Spanish cinema served as both propaganda tool and site of resistance during the Franco dictatorship, then transformed into a vehicle for historical memory and democratic expression. Students analyze early Francoist cinema, the emergence of opposition voices, and the explosion of creative freedom following democratization. The module introduces film analysis techniques while exploring how cinema reflects and shapes collective memory. Class sessions may include visits to Seville's historic cinema venues, exploration of Civil War memorial sites that have appeared in Spanish films, meetings with local film historians and critics, and workshops on analyzing cinematic techniques for political messaging.

Films:

- *Bienvenido Mister Marshall* (Luis García Berlanga, 1953)
- *Muerte de un ciclista* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955)
- *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1988)

- *El espíritu de la colmena* (Víctor Erice, 1973)

Readings:

- Colmeiro, J. (2009). Nationalising Carmen: Spanish cinema and the spectre of Francoism. *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, *15*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2009.9649900
- Lénárt, A. (2015). Ideology and film in the Spain of General Francisco Franco. *Öt Kontinens*, *2013/2*, 323-336. ELTE.
- Paz, M. A. (2003). The Spanish remember: Movie attendance during the Franco dictatorship, 1943–1975. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, *23*(4), 357-374. https://doi.org/10.1080/0143968032000126645

Module 2: The Recuperation of Historical Memory in Democratic Spain

This module examines how post-Franco Spanish cinema has grappled with recovering suppressed histories and traumatic memories. Students analyze documentaries and narrative films that challenge official versions of the past, exploring how cinema serves as a space for collective memory work. The module investigates the tension between historical accuracy and artistic interpretation, examining how filmmakers navigate between entertainment and historical responsibility. Sessions may include visits to historical archives and memory centers, meetings with documentary filmmakers and historians working on historical memory projects, screenings with community discussion at local cultural centers, and workshops on the ethics of representing historical trauma in film.

Films:

- *La lengua de las mariposas* (José Luis Cuerda, 1999)
- *El laberinto del fauno* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006)
- *El silencio de otros* (Almudena Carracedo and Robert Bahar, 2018)
- *La niña de tus ojos* (Fernando Trueba, 1998)

Readings:

- Labanyi, Jo. "The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Spain." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008): 119-125.
- Feenstra, P. (2011). New mythological figures in Spanish cinema: Dissident bodies under Franco. Amsterdam University Press. Pg. 25-65.

Module 3: Filming the Margins - Gender, Identity, and Sexual Diversity

This module investigates how Spanish cinema has represented women, LGBTQ+ communities, and marginalized identities, examining both progressive representations and problematic stereotypes. Students analyze how directors like Pedro Almodóvar and Icíar Bollaín have used cinema to challenge traditional gender roles and explore questions of identity, sexuality, and domestic violence. The module examines cinema as both artistic expression and social activism, exploring how film can serve as therapy, testimony, and tool for social change. Sessions may include visits to women's organizations and LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, meetings with filmmakers working on gender and identity issues, screenings at feminist film festivals or cultural centers, and workshops on applying feminist film theory to Spanish cinema analysis.

Films:

- *Te doy mis ojos* (Icíar Bollaín, 2003)
- *Volver* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2006)
- *Dolor y gloria* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2019)
- *20,000 Species of Bees* (Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren, 2023)

Readings:

- Feenstra, P. (2011). *New mythological figures in Spanish cinema: Dissident bodies under Franco*. Amsterdam University Press. Pg. 66-126.
- González-Cortés, M. E., & García-Borrego, M. (2024). Cinema and LGBT community: Evolution of the representation of sexual minorities and reception of the specialised press. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, *15*(2), e26753. https://www.doi.org/10.14198/MEDCOM.26753

Module 4: Contemporary Colonized Subjects - Immigration and Internal Diversity

This final module examines how contemporary Spanish cinema addresses questions of immigration, cultural diversity, and Spain's colonial legacy. Students analyze how films represent immigrant communities, regional differences within Spain, and the lingering effects of colonialism both abroad and at home. The module explores how cinema reflects Spain's transformation from a country of emigration to immigration, and how regional identities like Andalusian culture are represented in national cinema. Sessions may include visits to immigrant support organizations and cultural associations representing different communities, meetings with filmmakers from Latin American and North African backgrounds working in Spain, exploration of neighborhoods with significant immigrant populations and their cultural institutions, and screenings of transnational co-productions with community discussions.

Films:

- *Flores de otro mundo* (Icíar Bollaín, 1999)
- *También la lluvia* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010)
- *Ocho apellidos vascos* (Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, 2014)
- *Alcarràs* (Carla Simón, 2022)

Readings:

- Barnes, J. C. (2019). Immigrants and national anxieties in 21st-century Spanish film. *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, *43*(2), Article 6. https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl/vol43/iss2/6/
- Stanley, M. T. (2019). Seeing (as) the eroticized and exoticized other in Spanish im/migration cinema: A critical look at the (de)criminalization of migrants and impunity of hegemonic perpetrators. *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, *43*(2), Article 7. https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl/vol43/iss2/7/
- Feenstra, P. (2011). New mythological figures in Spanish cinema: Dissident bodies under Franco. Amsterdam University Press. Pg. 193-273.