

**THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**  
**Course Outline**

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**Part I**

<b>Programme Title</b>	: All Full-time Undergraduate Programmes
<b>Programme QF Level</b>	: 5
<b>Course Title</b>	: Biographical films: Arts, Societies and Human Development
<b>Course Code</b>	: GEI4005
<b>Department</b>	: Literature and Cultural Studies, FHM (Hosting) Social Sciences and Policy Studies, FLASS (Participating) Curriculum and Instruction, FEHD (Participating)
<b>Credit Points</b>	: 3
<b>Contact Hours</b>	: 39
<b>Pre-requisite(s)</b>	: Completion of any GE Breadth Learning Strands 1~3 (GELS) or Positive and Values Education course (PAVE) (No Pre- requisite for Senior Year Entrants)
<b>Medium of Instruction</b>	: English
<b>Course Level</b>	: 4

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**Part II**

The University's Graduate Attributes and seven Generic Intended Learning Outcomes (GILOs) represent the attributes of ideal EdUHK graduates and their expected qualities respectively. Learning outcomes work coherently at the University (GILOs), programme (Programme Intended Learning Outcomes) and course (Course Intended Learning Outcomes) levels to achieve the goal of nurturing students with important graduate attributes.

In gist, the Graduate Attributes for Sub-degree, Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate, Professional Doctorate and Research Postgraduate students consist of the following three domains (i.e. in short "PEER & I"):

- Professional Excellence;
- Ethical Responsibility; &
- Innovation.

The descriptors under these three domains are different for the three groups of students in order to reflect the respective level of Graduate Attributes.

The seven GILOs are:

1. Problem Solving Skills
2. Critical Thinking Skills
3. Creative Thinking Skills
- 4a. Oral Communication Skills
- 4b. Written Communication Skills
5. Social Interaction Skills
6. Ethical Decision Making
7. Global Perspectives

## 1. Course Synopsis

Biographical film, or “biopic” in short, is a film genre which depicts a real and “important” person’s life, past or present. Usually, a biopic represents glories and failures, happiness and displeasures in a real person’s life trajectory, demonstrating how he/she grows up or survives under certain social circumstances. Why studying biopics? On one hand, compared to documentary, it is much more entertaining; on the other hand and compared to other film genres, the biopic allures audiences to believe that it is by no means a frivolous and irresponsible entertainment because it is based on a true story. As a result, the biopic becomes an ideal object of interdisciplinary study since social and psychological issues depicted in biopics are often real issues in our real lives. This course, thus, invites students to learn about biopics from three distinct-yet-related approaches: aesthetics, social ethics and psychology. Accordingly, our methodologies are twofold: (1) form (how to represent?): We will study general narrative skills and filmic techniques to understand the biopic’s aesthetic dimension; (2) content (what to represent?): We will analyse characters’ psychological development and the issues of social ethics involved in their life stories. Only by scrutinising both the form and content of a film in a holistic vision, can we get a fuller understanding of an art form.

## 2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

*Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:*

- CILO<sub>1</sub> Demonstrate understanding of definitions and aesthetic characteristics of the biopic;
- CILO<sub>2</sub> Analyse how the biopic reflects social issues and problems;
- CILO<sub>3</sub> Identify and elucidate how the biopic depicts human development; and
- CILO<sub>4</sub> Integrate different disciplinary perspectives and show how these perspectives can supplement or complement one another in the process of representing an individual’s life story.

## 3. Content, CILOs and Teaching & Learning Activities

Course Content	CILOs	Suggested Teaching & Learning Activities
<b>Lesson 1: Introduction</b> (taught by all three lecturers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Film genres</li><li>• Definitions of biopic</li><li>• Research values</li></ul> <b>Frequent Subjects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Historical figures</li><li>• Celebrities</li><li>• Artists</li><li>• Sports persons</li></ul>	CILO <sub>1,2,3,4</sub>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lectures</li><li>• Film playing</li><li>• In-class/online discussions</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientists</li> <li>• Politicians</li> <li>• Business persons</li> <li>• Criminals</li> <li>• Minor groups</li> </ul> <p><b>“Ordinary-yet-important” people Methodologies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form: how to represent? (Lecturer from FHM)</li> <li>• Content: what to represent? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The issues of social ethics (Lecturer from FLASS)</li> <li>➤ The issues of psychology (Lecturer from FEHD)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>The introduction of feature movies which will be analysed by aforementioned methodologies throughout the course.</b></p>		
<p><b>Lesson 2-4: Aesthetics</b> (taught by Lecturer from FHM)</p> <p><b>Narrative structures</b> <b>Formats and Styles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• casting and performance</li> <li>• settings</li> <li>• costumes and make-ups</li> <li>• lighting</li> <li>• lens</li> <li>• film editing and sound effects</li> </ul>	<i>CILO<sub>1,4</sub></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lectures</li> <li>• Film playing</li> <li>• Self-Made Mini Video Playing</li> <li>• In-class/online discussions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lesson 5-7: Social Ethics</b> (taught by Lecturer from FLASS)</p> <p><b>Social issue I:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict of values: e.g. political expedience vs. moral decency; loyalty to friends vs. individual integrity</li> </ul> <p><b>Social issue II:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple forms of power and resistance;</li> <li>• The power of the powerless</li> </ul> <p><b>Social issue III:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple conceptions of good life;</li> <li>• The fear of freedom</li> </ul>	<i>CILO<sub>2,4</sub></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lectures</li> <li>• Film playing</li> <li>• In-class/online discussions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lesson 8-10: Psychology</b> (taught by Lecturer from FEHD)</p>	<i>CILO<sub>3,4</sub></i> (etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lectures</li> <li>• Film playing</li> </ul>

<b>Topic 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope and strength</li> <li>• Purpose in life</li> </ul> <b>Topic 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love and purpose</li> <li>• Triangular theory of love</li> <li>• Power and subjective group dynamics in social psychology</li> </ul> <b>Topic 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in interpersonal power and behavior from a psychological perspective</li> <li>• Stereotypical beliefs and identity</li> <li>• Psychology of prejudice</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class/online discussions</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 11: Conclusion</b> <b>(taught by all three lecturers)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate how to integrate three methods together within one film</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lectures</li> <li>• Film playing</li> <li>• In-class/online discussions</li> </ul>

#### 4. Assessment

Assessment Tasks	Weighting	CILOs
<b>(a) Individual Film Review:</b> Every student chooses one biopic and write a film review on it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,500 – 1,800 words</li> <li>• among the three topics in this course (aesthetics, social ethics and psychology), at least two should be debated</li> </ul>	60%	<i>CILO<sub>1,2,3</sub></i>
<b>(b) Group Film Proposal:</b> Students will be divided into groups, and each group designs a film proposal which is composed of a poster and a two-page sheet. These questions should be answered in both the poster and sheet: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you choose this person? Is this person real and “important”? Why?</li> <li>• Which actor/actress will you invite to perform the role? Why?</li> <li>• What is your film’s narrative structure?</li> <li>• What social issues does this person’s life story reflect and debate?</li> <li>• What psychological struggles or growth has this person undergone throughout the biopic?</li> <li>• What are your film’s distinct cinematic styles to</li> </ul>	40%	<i>CILO<sub>1,2,3,4</sub></i> (etc.)

depict the issues of social ethics and/or the character's psychological struggles?		
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## 5. Use of Generative AI in Course Assessments

Please select one option only that applies to this course:

☐ **Not Permitted:** In this course, the use of generative AI tools is not allowed for any assessment tasks.

☒ **Permitted:** In this course, generative AI tools may be used in some or all assessment tasks. Instructors will provide specific instructions, including any restrictions or additional requirements (e.g., proper acknowledgment, reflective reports), during the first lesson and in relevant assessment briefs.

## 6. Required Text(s)

Cheshire, E. (2014). *Bio-Pics: A Life in Pictures*. New York: Columbia University Press.

## 7. Recommended Readings

### Filmography:

*A Man for All Seasons* (Fred Zinnemann, 1966)

*Center Stage* (Stanely Kwan, 1992) 《阮玲玉》(關錦鵬)

*Florence Foster Jenkins* (Stephen Frears, 2016)

*Forever Enthralled* (Chen, Kaige, 2007) 《梅蘭芳》(陳凱歌)

*Gandhi* (Richard Samuel Attenborough, 1982)

*JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991)

*La Peintre* (Huang Shuqin, 1994) 《畫魂》(黃蜀芹)

*Marathon* (Jeong Yoon-cheol, 2005)

*The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper, 2015)

*The Golden Era* (Ann Hui, 2014) 《黃金歲月》(許鞍華)

*The Grandmaster* (Wong Kar-Wai, 2013) 《一代宗師》(王家衛)

*The Iron Lady* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011)

*The Lady* (Luc Besson, 2011)

*The Last Emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987)

*The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk* (Corey Yuen, 1993) 《方世玉》(元奎)

*The Lost Bladesman* (Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2011) 《關雲長》(麥兆輝、莊文強)

*The Man of La Mancha* (Arthur Hiller, 1972)

*The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010)

*The Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese, 2013)

*Victoria and Abdul* (Stephen Frears, 2017)

### Biopic studies:

Bingham, D. (2010). *Whose lives are they anyway?: The biopic as contemporary film genre*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Custen, G. F. (1992). *Bio/pics: How Hollywood constructed public history*. New

- Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Epstein, W. H., & Palmer, R. B. (Eds.). (2016). *Invented lives, imagined communities: The biopic and American national identity*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: SUNY Press.
- Minier, M., & Pennacchia, M. (2016). *Adaptation, intermediality and the British celebrity biopic*. London: Routledge.
- Robé, C. (2009). Taking Hollywood back: The historical costume drama, the biopic, and popular front US film criticism. *Cinema Journal*, 70-87.
- Vidal, B., & Brown, T. (2013). *The Biopic in contemporary film culture*. London: Routledge.

### **Genre, narrative, format and style studies:**

- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2013). *Film art: An introduction*. New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill.
- Butler, J. (2010). *Television style*. New York: Routledge.
- Chatman, S. B. (1980). *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press
- Giannetti, L. D. (2011). *Understanding movies*. Boston, Mass.; Hong Kong: Allyn & Bacon, 2011.
- Hornaday, A. (2017). *Talking pictures: How to watch movies*. New York: Basic Books.
- Langford, B. (2005). *Film genre: Hollywood and beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Verstraten, P., & Lecq, S. (2009). *Film narratology*. Toronto; Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press.
- 徐岱. (2010) : 《小說敘事學》, 北京, 商務印書館。
- 黃愛玲、潘國靈、李照興、香港電影評論學會 (2015) : 《王家衛的映畫世界》, 香港, 三聯書店。

### **Social Ethics:**

- Duncan Bell, "Political realism and the limit of ethics," in Duncan Bell (ed.) *Ethics and World Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Michael Walzer, "Political action: the problem of dirty hands," in Marshall Cohen et al. (eds.) *War and Moral Responsibility*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Max Weber, "Politics as a vocation," in Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.) *Max Weber: essays in sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*.
- Hugo Adam Bedau (ed.) *Civil Disobedience in focus*, New York: Routledge, 1991
- Vaclav Havel, "The power of the powerless," in *Open Letters: selected writings 1965-1990*, New York: Vintage Books, 1992.
- Steven Lukes, *Power: A radical view*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

### **Human development and psychology:**

- Boyd, D., & Bee, H. (2015). *Lifespan development (7th Ed.)*. Essex, UK: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Burrell, T. L., & Borrego Jr, J. (2012). Parents' involvement in ASD treatment: what is their role?. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 19(3), 423-432.
- Coon, D., Mitterer, J., Talbot, S., & Vanchella, C. (2010). *Introduction to psychology: Gateways to mind and behavior (12th ed.)*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Fiske, S. T. (2017). Prejudices in cultural contexts: Shared stereotypes (gender, age) versus variable stereotypes (race, ethnicity, religion). *Perspectives on Psychological*

- Science*, 12(5), 791-799.
- Krueger, J. (1996). Personal beliefs and cultural stereotypes about racial characteristics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(3), 536.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370.
- Mast, M. S. (2010). Interpersonal behaviour and social perception in a hierarchy: The interpersonal power and behaviour model. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 21(1), 1-33.
- McKnight, P. E., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Purpose in life as a system that creates and sustains health and well-being: An integrative, testable theory. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(3), 242-251.
- Smith, E. J. (2006). The strength-based counseling model. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 34(1), 13-79.
- Sowa, M., & Meulenbroek, R. (2012). Effects of physical exercise on autism spectrum disorders: a meta-analysis. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6(1), 46-57.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological review*, 93(2), 119.

## 8. Related Web Resources

Nil

## 9. Related Journals

*Cinema Journal*  
*Journal of Popular Film and Television*  
*Screen*

## 10. Academic Honesty

The University upholds the principles of honesty in all areas of academic work. We expect our students to carry out all academic activities honestly and in good faith. Please refer to the *Policy on Academic Honesty, Responsibility and Integrity* (<https://www.eduhk.hk/re/uploads/docs/000000000016336798924548BbN5>). Students should familiarize themselves with the Policy.

## 11. Others

Nil

14 August 2025