

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism

**SPMT 322**  
**Football and American Culture**

DAY/TIME:	M 7:20-10:00pm	LOCATION:	Robinson Hall B228
PROFESSOR:	Dr. Steven Pope	EMAIL ADDRESS:	<a href="mailto:popesteve@ymail.com">popesteve@ymail.com</a>
OFFICE LOCATION:		PHONE NUMBER:	304-290-4755
OFFICE HOURS:	By Appointment	FAX NUMBER:	703-993-2025

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an examination of the role of football in American culture. The course studies football as a cultural and social institution in the United States over the past 150 years.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** The student will be able to:

- Understand the role of football in American culture.
- Understand the operation of football as a cultural institution.
- Understand the historical development of football in America.
- Critically analyze football themed film and literature.
- Reflect on his/her relationship to football.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

The learning experiences in this course are afforded through film, readings and completion of assignments. Some films will be completed by the student outside of class time. These films can be rented from major outlets. Hard to find films will be viewed in class. After films and discussions, students complete written unit assignments.

**HONOR CODE**

The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code's provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

**STUDENT SUPPORT**

Any eligible student with an exceptionality documented through George Mason University's Disability Resource Center must notify the instructor so that suitable accommodations can be implemented.

**EXPECTATIONS**

All assigned reading should be completed before submitting written assignments.  
All written assignments must be typed (computer word processing is recommended) and submitted via email.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

John Grisham, *Bleachers*

Michael MacCambridge, *America's Game*

## **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*

Ronald Smith, *Sports & Freedom*

John Watterson, *College Football*

John Carroll, *Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football*

Murray Sperber, *Shakedown the Thunder*

Craig Coenen, *From Sandlots to the Super Bowl*

Michael Oriard, *King Football*

Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL*

Charles Ross, *Outside the Lines*

William Baker, *Playing with God*

## **REQUIRED FILM VIEWING:**

**High School:** *School Ties; Remember the Titans; Friday Night Lights*

**College:** *Knute Rockne: All-American; Rites of Autumn: The Story of College Football; The Junction Boys; We Are Marshall; The Program*

**Pro:** *The History of Pro Football; Leatherheads; North Dallas Forty; Monday Night Mayhem; Any Given Sunday*

All films readily available in video stores, Netflix, Amazon, etc. as well as many being in the Library or will be shown in class.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Unit assignments: 84% (6 units at 14 points each). Final Exam: 16% (12/19/11)

Grading scale is the standard Mason grading scale for undergraduate work.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Class meetings are scheduled Monday nights from 7:20-10:00pm. Written work can be completed as Units are completed during the semester. All written work for Units 1-3 should be submitted by October 24 and for Units 4-6 by December 5.

### **UNIT ONE: The Rise of Football as an American Institution and the Preeminence of College**

**Football to the 1960s** Assignment: Watch the *Rites of Autumn* and participate in class meetings that examine the emergence of college football as an American institution during the Autumn months of each year. Complete the following essay question in 2-3 pages:

What factors led to the rise of football as an American pastime? Why was football first located in colleges of the northeast? How and why did it expand to be a national game by the early 1900s? What factors led to the popularity of college football? What key changes took place in the game between 1900 and the 1960s? How did those changes impact the sport and its wider cultural following?

### **UNIT TWO: Professional Football on the Margins**

Assignment: Watch *The History of Pro Football* and *Leatherheads*. Complete the following essay in 2-3 pages:

How, why and where did professional football first emerge? Why it was not treated with the same seriousness as college football before the 1960s? What role did Red Grange play (see similar character in *Leatherheads*) in legitimizing professional football? Why was the 1958 NFL Championship so important to the emergence of pro football from the shadow of college football?

### **UNIT THREE: Football, Masculinity and American Culture**

Assignment: Watch *The Junction Boys*, *Knut Rockne: All-American* and read *Bleachers*. Complete the following in essay format in 2-3 pages:

Many social theorists have examined violence and masculinity in society. The famous French theorist Michel Foucault discusses this in works such as *Discipline and Punish* and discusses how formal institutions such as the military, prisons, and schools create order in society. Others talk about things like “the ritual sacrifice of human energy” as a need in society that is manifested particularly in sports. In football, abuse of young men and their bodies is accepted in ways that would not be accepted in wider society outside of the military or prison. How and why did it become acceptable for young men to be pushed to the limit in football and why do we continue to accept it in our society? Why are boys and girls bodies treated differently? Have there been changes in training since the days of Rockne and of Bear Bryant?

### **UNIT FOUR: Football, Race and Ethnicity**

Assignment: Watch *School Ties*, *Remember the Titans*, *Friday Night Lights*, and refer to relevant sections in *Rites of Autumn* and other films. Complete the following in essay format in 2-3 pages:

Why was ethnicity such an important factor at elite schools up to the 1960s? Did football help to change attitudes? What role did football play in race relations in high school football in the South in the 1970s and 1980s? What factors led to the end of segregation in football?

### **UNIT FIVE: “Winning is the Only Thing”: Football and American Capitalism**

Assignment: Watch *North Dallas Forty*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Friday Night Lights*, and *The Program*.

Complete the following in essay format:

Why did baseball thrive in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s? Why was NYC regarded the capital of baseball in this period? What new dynamics emerged in baseball in this era that changed the shape of the game and made it truly “national” at last? What role did television play in this transformation?

### **UNIT SIX: Football, Tragedy and Redemption**

Assignment: Watch *We Are Marshall*, *Remember the Titans*, *Friday Night Lights* and read *Bleachers*.

Address the following:

Football demands so much of its adherents, players, coaches, and fans. Why does football generate such powerful emotions from those involved with it? How do teams and communities respond to adversity in and through football? Has the culture of America and football changed from that of the 1950s through 1990s?