

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**  
**School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism**  
**SPMT 322**

**Football and American Culture**

DAY/TIME:	M 7:20-10:00pm	LOCATION:	West 108
PROFESSOR:	Dr. Matt Gilchrist	EMAIL ADDRESS:	<a href="mailto:Mgilchr1@gmu.edu">Mgilchr1@gmu.edu</a> MTGilchrst@aol.com
OFFICE:	Meeting by Appt.	PHONE:	703-861-9642
		CREDITS:	3

**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:

1. Understand the role of football in American culture.
2. Understand the operation of football as a cultural institution.
3. Understand the historical development of football in America.
3. Critically analyze football themed film and literature.
4. 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 will be housed at Campus Library or can be rented. 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:**

1. All assigned reading should be completed before submitting written assignments.
2. All written assignments must be typed (computer word processing is recommended) and submitted in Hard Copy (emailed only in extreme circumstances).

3. Students must abide by the Honor Code, guided by the spirit of academic integrity.

**Class Attendance/Participation:**

It enhances your academic success to be in class; therefore, you should attend ALL scheduled class meetings in accordance with George Mason policy. Students will be penalized for absences or excessive tardiness, after two class periods missed. Any student who attends fewer than 60% of the classes will not pass the course. Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

**REQUIRED TEXT:**

John Grisham, *Bleachers*.

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*; Michael Oriard, *King Football*; Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL*

**REQUIRED FILM VIEWING:**

*Rites of Autumn: The Story of College Football (IC)*

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

**College:** *Knute Rockne: All-American; The Junction Boys; We Are Marshall; The Program*

**Pro:** *The History of Pro Football; Leatherheads; North Dallas Forty (IC); 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 (IC).

NOTE: All films readily available in video stores, Netflix, Amazon etc as well. Rare films will be shown in class.

**ASSESSMENT:**

Unit assignments: 84% (6 units at 14 points each). Grading scale is the standard Mason grading scale.

Final Exam 16%.

Class attendance/participation may also be factored in due to excessive absences (see above).

**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. Submission dates and formal meeting dates listed below. Email discussions will also be conducted.

### **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 was it 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? How do people react when a girl wants to play football? 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:

Masculinity and violence are integral parts of American football culture as we have seen. Why is violent behavior so central to measuring success in modern American culture? Why are players willing to sacrifice their health and even their lives for the sake of success in football? What limits are there to this and what changes can you see to the violent nature of football culture in recent times? How much of this is related to the “selling” of football as a commodity?

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

Assignment: Watch *We Are Marshall*, *Remember the Titans*, *Friday Night Light*, *Invincible* 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?

**UNITS 1-3 DUE IN HARD COPY ANYTIME BEFORE 7:20 pm OCTOBER 15.**

**UNITS 4-6 DUE IN HARD COPY ANYTIME BEFORE 7:20 NOVEMBER 26.**

GRADING: ***There will be NO extra credit!!!***

Cumulative Points	Percentage %	Letter Grade
244 - 250	100 – 98	A+
234 – 243	97 – 94	A
224 – 233	93 – 90	A-
214 - 223	89 – 86	B+
204 - 213	84 – 82	B
196 - 203	81 – 79	B-
189 - 195	78-76	C+
179 - 188	75-72	C
174 - 178	71-70	C-
149 – 173	69-60	D
< 148	59% & Below	F

The instructor is solely responsible for assigning grades. As such, the instructor reserves the right to assess student performance in each of the categories identified in the ASSESSMENT section of this syllabus. Student non-compliance with stated academic, honor, attendance, or participation expectations will result in a ‘0’ for the associated evaluation.

COURSE OUTLINE: (Mon- 7:20-10 pm)

Day	Date	Tentative Topics Covered	&	Readings/Films Due:
Monday	8/27	Intro- History of Football <b><i>Rites of Autumn (Disc 1)</i></b>		
Monday	9/3	<b>LABOR DAY- NO CLASS</b>		
Monday	9/10	Unit 1: College Football- <b><i>Rites of Autumn</i></b>		
Monday	9/17	Unit 2: College Football- <b><i>Knute Rockne- All-American</i></b>		
Monday	9/24	Pro-Football- <b><i>History of Pro Football</i></b>		
Monday	10/1	Unit 3; <b><i>Junction Boys</i></b>		
Monday	10/8	<b>COLUMBUS DAY- NO CLASS</b>		<b><i>Leatherheads</i></b>
Monday	10/15	Discuss <b><i>Bleachers; Friday Night Lights</i></b>		Complete <b><i>Bleachers</i></b> SUBMIT UNIT 1-3 Assignment
Monday	10/22	Unit 4: Racism in Football- <b><i>School Ties</i></b>		
Monday	10/29	Unit 4: Racism- <b><i>Remember the Titans</i></b>		
Monday	11/5	Unit 5: Winning & Capitalism- <b><i>The Program</i></b>		
Monday	11/12	Unit 5: Capitalism <b><i>Any Given Sunday</i></b>		
Monday	11/19	Unit 5: <b><i>Monday Night Mayhem</i></b>		
Monday	11/26	Unit 6: Remdemption & Tragedy- <b><i>We are Marshall</i></b>		<b><i>Invincible</i></b>
Monday	12/3	Unit 6: Redemption: <b><i>Invincible</i></b>		SUBMIT UNIT 4-6 Assignment
Monday	12/10	<b>READING DAY- NO CLASS</b>		
Monday		<b>FINAL EXAM (7:20)</b>		

\*Any circumstance arising that is not explicitly addressed in this syllabus, or by George Mason University policy, is implicitly governed under the auspices of common sense and will be dealt with using the instructor's discretion.