

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
College of Education and Human Development  
School of Sport, Recreation and Tourism Management  
SPMT-322 – 001 —Football and American Culture (3)  
Fall 2019  
Monday- 7:20-10:00pm- Hanover Hall L003- Fairfax

PROFESSOR: Dr. Matt Gilchrist                      EMAIL ADDRESS: [Mgilchr1@gmu.edu](mailto:Mgilchr1@gmu.edu)  
OFFICE LOCATION: Hanover Hall L003, Fairfax                      PHONE NUMBER: 703-861-9642  
OFFICE HOURS: Mon 7:20-10 pm or by apt

**PREREQUISITES/COREQUISITES:** None

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Designed for the student to gain an understanding of the past and present role of football in American culture. Focuses on the development of college, professional and high school football over the past 120 years and contemporary issues in football culture are analyzed such as debates over racial symbols and mascots, the question of professionalizing division one college football, and tailgating and televisual football cultures.

**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/streamed. Hard to find films will be viewed in class. After films and discussions, students complete written unit assignments.

**COURSE DELIVERY METHOD**

This course will be delivered using a lecture format. This course will include in class and out of class film viewings, as well as discussion. Weekly attendance is expected, along with participation in class discussions.

**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.

**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.

**PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR:** Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

**REQUIRED TEXT:**

Grisham, John (2003). *Bleachers*. New York: Bantam Dell.

**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(IC); Leatherheads; North Dallas Forty ; Monday Night Mayhem; Any Given Sunday, Draft Day, Concussion..*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).

**COURSE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

This course will be graded on a point system, with a total of 100 possible points. All written work should be submitted in hard copy by 7:20 pm, on the dates they are due.

	<b>Points</b>
Requirements	
Written Assignments	
#1 Units 1-3 (13 points each)	39
#2 Units 4-6 (13 points each)	39
Final Exam Presentation	16
<i>Participation</i> -Students must attend class in order to participate in the discussions generated by the readings/films. Contribution will be evaluated based on number and quality of questions asked or answered and opinion provided when asked.	<u>6</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

**Grading Scale**

A = 94 – 100	B+ = 88 – 89	C+ = 78 – 79	D = 60 – 69
A- = 90 – 93	B = 84 – 87	C = 74 – 77	F = 0 – 59
	B- = 80 – 83	C- = 70 – 73	

**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.

**Sport Management Events:**

*September 5* Welcome Week social The Pilot House (behind Hampton Roads dorm)

4:00-6:00pm Food, drinks, meet with faculty, staff and students

*September 9* Sport Psychology Symposium Merten Hall 1204 6:30-8:30pm

Pizza and great discussion about athletes and motivation in today's internet age

*September 27* GMU Day at Nats Park Washington Nationals v Cleveland Indians

Panel discussion for the School of Sport, Recreation and Tourism Management 5:30pm Game at 7:05pm

\*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.

*Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary.*

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

Day	Date	Tentative Topics Covered	Readings/Films Due:
Monday	26-Aug	Intro- History of Football <i>Rites of Autumn (Disc 1)</i>	
Monday	2-Sept	<b>LABOR DAY- NO CLASS</b>	
Monday	9-Sept	Unit 1: College Football- <i>Rites of Autumn</i>	
Monday	16-Sept	Unit 2: College Football- <i>Knute Rockne- All-American</i>	
Monday	23-Sept	Pro-Football- <i>History of Pro Football</i>	<i>Watch Leatherheads</i>
Monday	30-Sept	Discuss <i>Bleachers</i> ; Unit 3; <i>Junction Boys</i>	<b>SUBMIT UNIT 1-2 Assignment</b> Complete <i>Bleachers</i>
Monday	7-Oct	<b>COLUMBUS DAY- NO CLASS</b>	<i>Watch Friday Night Lights</i>
Monday	14-Oct	CTE- Effects of Football- Watch <i>Concussion</i>	
Monday	21-Oct	Unit 4: Racism in Football- <i>School Ties</i>	
Monday	28-Oct	Unit 4: Racism- <i>Remember the Titans</i>	
Monday	4-Nov	Unit 5: Winning & Capitalism- <i>The Program</i>	<b>SUBMIT UNIT 3-4 Assignment</b> <i>Watch Any Given Sunday</i>
Monday	11-Nov	Unit 5: Capitalism <i>Draft Day</i>	
Monday	18-Nov	Unit 5: <i>Monday Night Mayhem</i>	
Monday	25-Nov	Unit 6: Redemption & Tragedy- <i>We are Marshall</i>	<i>Watch Invincible</i>
Monday	2-Dec	Unit 6: Redemption: <i>Invincible/FINAL EXAM PRESENTATION</i>	<b>SUBMIT UNIT 5-6 Assignment</b>
Monday	9-Dec	<b>READING DAY (NO CLASS)</b>	
Monday	16-Dec	<b>FINAL EXAM (7:30)</b>	

**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 3-4 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*, *Knute Rockne: All-American & Concussion*, 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?

Can you argue that based on new medical evidence, that perhaps the costs of playing the game are greater than the rewards? Given the effects of CTE and other means of damaging one’s body, what, would you predict, may be the long-term effects of the game in the future?

### **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*, *Monday Night Mayhem*, *Draft Day* 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 Lights*, *Invincible*, *Draft Day* 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? How has today’s media/social media affected the sport of football, and how organizations may be run?

**FOR EACH UNIT, YOU SHOULD ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THOROUGHLY, USING EXAMPLES FROM EACH OF THE REQUIRED SOURCES. EACH UNIT SUBMISSION SHOULD BE APPROXIMATELY 3-4 PAGES.**

**UNITS 1-2 DUE IN HARD COPY ANYTIME BEFORE 7:20 pm SEPTEMBER 30<sup>th</sup>.**

**UNITS 3-4 DUE IN HARD COPY ANYTIME BEFORE 7:20 pm NOVEMBER 4<sup>th</sup>.**

**UNITS 5-6 DUE IN HARD COPY ANYTIME BEFORE 7:20 DECEMBER 2.**

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## Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

## GMU Policies and Resources for Students

### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to [tk20help@gmu.edu](mailto:tk20help@gmu.edu) or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu>.