

# Charlie Don't Surf

## The Military, War, Film, and Teaching

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### Abstract

This article advances insight for military and war films in teaching and learning, and strategies and techniques for employing film in college teaching. Literature on teaching and learning with film is reviewed with specific focus on the disciplines of leadership, management, psychology, and sociology. Discussed is the military and war film genre, and cadet tastes and preferences are highlighted. Five specific uses and applications of film are provided: movie referencing, short films, film scenes, full-length films, and an entire film course built around the military and war film genre.

*You can't handle the truth!*

—Col. Nathan Jessep (Jack Nicholson), *A Few Good Men* (1992)

**A**uguste and Louis Lumière decidedly made one of the first films a military training film in the 1890s titled *A Cavalryman Mounting and Dismounting from His Horse in the Acceptable Military Style* (Mast, 1981). Cinema has since evolved with the Armed Forces, as thousands of military and war films have followed—for example, J. Stuart Blackton's *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* (1998), the first American war movie; D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915); Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935); *Private Benjamin* (1980) and *Courage Under Fire* (1996), the first gender-and-military movies; Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); and *Three Kings* (1999), the first film set during the Persian Gulf War (Langman & Borg, 1989). Military films remain popular today. At the outset of the 21st century, the Global War on Terrorism inspired no abatement of films based on past and present wars—especially fictional accounts and documentaries as well as the intersection of the two with films such as *Thank You for Your Service* (2017); *American Sniper* (2014); *A War* (2015); and *War Machine* (2017)—perhaps making the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan into the most visually documented in history (Ender, 2007). The American public and students, especially military students, are rabid consumers of these films.

War and military films are quite revealing in any contemporary social and cultural climate. Substantively, what makes teaching and learning via film both novel and valuable is the concern for the oft-neglected social science; the military institution is the least studied social institution in sociology. In this case, the largest and one of the most significant social institutions in American society—the military—and the historical periods that are sometimes treated as anomalies in our social history—wars—are clearly influenced by the larger society in which they are embedded. Yet, they do not completely reflect the larger sociocultural environment. Wars are moments of extremity in our sociocultural history and, as novel periods, are often overlooked until organization, indeed social life, returns to normal.

Students today clearly connect with films. Films as pedagogical instruments, particularly at military academies, military-related teaching institutions, and civilian schools with courses interested in matters military, provide insight into the vibrant social institution that is the military and into moments of significant change such as wars or similar deployments involving soldiers and sailors. Further, films can serve as avenues of illustration for teachers to highlight social and behavioral phenomena in their courses. Similar to teaching poetry and history to soldiers, this article offers insight to undergraduate tastes and preferences for films as well as strategies and techniques for employing film in college teaching, drawing on examples from the military and war (Samet, 2002).

### Teaching with Film

Films are ubiquitous as teaching aids for the mass class such as Introductory Sociology (Goldsmid & Wilson, 1980). Next to books, and increasingly computers, films may be the most widely used teaching devices. Films offer a number of advantages in teaching. They allow witness to the historical and the unfamiliar,

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events and people, relationships, interaction, social settings, institutions, organizations, and social structures. For the student, films are multisensory devices—familiar, novel, fun, and interesting. Goldsmid and Wilson (1980) note that film is especially pedagogically fruitful in courses involving human issues (p. 263). For example, leadership, management, psychology, and sociology lend themselves especially to the human dimension through film. First, film action can be enlarged, focused, slowed, or sped up by instructors. Second, the unobservable is observable on screen. Third, films heighten human interaction through dramatic extremes. Fourth, movies juxtapose human experience technologically via editing or with scene selections. Further, a few short film minutes can compress a great deal of human interaction that can be unpacked in classroom applications and discussions. Instructors should be aware, however, that films overdramatize social life, and even nonfictional and documentary style films may misrepresent facts.

Goldsmid and Wilson (1980) also offer seven strategies for using film:

- ◆ Use only films clearly appropriate for clearly stated instructional goals.
- ◆ Introduce the film with appropriate questions and suggestions for things to look for.
- ◆ Design follow-up activities.
- ◆ Integrate the film with other aspects of the course—readings, lectures, etc.
- ◆ Alert students to the fact that most films have points of view and then capitalize on that for instructional purposes.
- ◆ Show only the necessary portions of a film.
- ◆ Use the stop-action (pause) capability of films. (pp. 263–264)

Overall, instructors should preview all films used and become familiar with some nuances of the film. The Yale Film Studies Center (<https://web.library.yale.edu/film>) maintains an archive of films in a range of formats. The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) provides cataloged information about thousands of films. The website Rotten Tomatoes (<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>) is a clearinghouse of print and online media reviews of films. The overall key to successful use of film is introduction (preparation) and follow-up (reflection).

## Teaching Leadership with Film

Courses in leadership have relied on films to depict dimensions of leader and follower concepts and styles. Examples include the use of *The Lion King* (1994) to highlight basic leadership concepts, leadership and counseling theories via *Good Will Hunting* (1997), and leadership and power with *Aliens* (1986). Leadership; management and diversity; effective leadership; ruthless leadership and leadership development; self, moral, and transformational leadership styles; student affairs leadership; and leadership styles are visible in popular films such as *Schindler's List* (1993), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005), and *Twelve O'Clock*

*High* (1949). Leader-follower relations are evident in the 1989 film *Henry V* (Comer, 2001; English & Steffy, 1997; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Harrington & Griffin, 1989; Bumpus, 2005; Graham, Sincoff, Baker, & Ackermann, 2003; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004; Clemens & Wolff, 2004; McMahon & Bramhall, 2004; Rosser, 2007; Roth, 2005; Bogнар, 1998; Warner, 2007). More recent films and leadership topics include *The Dark Knight* (2008) for toxic leadership and *Iron Jawed Angels* (2004) for authentic leadership (Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward, & Wood, 2015; Scott & Pennington Weeks, 2016).

### Teaching Psychology with Film

Psychologists have adopted films for teaching particular topics in novel ways. Examples of this include Monty Python films for cognitive psychology; animated films for personality and social development; and feature-length films for bridging psychology and law as well as teaching about social development, madness, aggression, personality theories, and the application of general social psychology concepts (Conner, 1996; Kirsh, 1998; Anderson, 1992; Boyatzis, 1994; Fleming, Piedmont, & Hiam, 1990; Davidson, 1990; Paddock, Terranova, & Giles, 2001; Lakin, & Wichman, 2005). Bluestone (2000) offers an excellent review of the use of feature-length films related to the examination of particular topics from a psychological perspective including LGBT and racism. Social psychology courses are especially amenable to empirical assessment and the use of film clips (D. Roskos-Ewoldson & B. Roskos-Ewoldson, 2001). Film clips and segments inform and are useful in an Experimental Design course, and *12 Angry Men* (1957) has proven successful as a capstone tool for Introductory Psychology (Sterlan, 2018; S. Blessing & J. Blessing, 2015).

### Teaching Management with Film

Management courses are agreeable to the use of film for teaching and learning as well. Three examples include a particular auteur's vision and the study of social institutions, management, and life lessons from *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and corporate leadership in Michael Moore's 1989 documentary *Roger & Me* (Scherer & Baker, 1999; Serey, 1992; Bateman, Sakano, & Fujita, 1992). Specific courses have relied on films as well. Films can effectively be used in courses on organizational behavior, organizational psychology, sport management, and business ethics (Champoux, 1999; Casper, Champoux, Watt, Bachiochi, Schleicher & Bordeaux, 2003; O'Bannon, & Goldenberg, 2008; Williams, 1998). Likewise, management theory can come alive via film (Lee & Lo, 2014).

## Teaching Sociology with Film

Films have enhanced teaching and learning in a variety of sociology courses (Papademas, 1993). Mitchell (2004) offers an excellent guide for connecting films to specific social issues. Emory Burton (1988) identified 167 films under 37 sociological topics ranging from adolescence to war. Tolich (1992) adopted films for sociology of work, organizations, and industrialization courses. Scholars have documented the use of film in a range of sociology courses, including introductory sociology, theory, popular culture, stratification, social problems, race and ethnicity, ageism, social movements, and medical sociology (Berg, 1992; Bickford Tipton & Tiemann, 1993; Fails, 1988; Groce, 1992; Demerath, 1981; Dressel, 1990; Hannon & Marullo, 1988; Lee & Lo, 2014; Papademas, 1993; Mitchell, 2004; Emory Burton, 1988; Tolich, 1992; Loewen, 1991; Valdez & Halley, 1999; Anwary, 2003; Fisher, 1992; DeFronzo, 1982; Dagaz & Harper, 2011; Livingston, 2004; Tan & Ko, 2004; Pescosolido, 1990). Hood-Williams (1986) used soap operas to put “recognizable flesh” (p. 14) on a Sociology of Family course, and Smith (1973) provides empirical support for the utility of film to be equal to the lecture format in learning sociology. Dowd (1999) argues that a Sociology of Film is possible if the sociologist considers and helps the student appreciate the perspective of the director—what some call auteur theory. Films can stimulate critical thinking among students—a major learning objective of social science courses (Bassham & Nardone, 1997; Remender, 1992). Prendergast (1986) developed a community film series to encourage making connections between private troubles and public issues, otherwise known as sociological imagination. More recently, popular crime films can be useful to deconstruct myths about the criminal justice system (Kadleck & Holsinger, 2018).

## The Military and War Film Genre

The war film genre in particular has gained attention in recent years with most scholarship centered on American experiences in specific U.S. military involvements. Resources for films about the different wars include the World War I film *Hollywood's World War I Motion Picture Images* (Rollins & O'Connor, 1997). For an insight into social science topics and World War II films, there are *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*; and *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros.'s Campaign against Nazism* (Doherty, 1997; Birdwell, 2000). Rollins (1997) provides a useful book list of World War II-related films. Evans (1998) provides a review of films from the Cold War in *Celluloid Mushroom Clouds: Hollywood and the Atomic Bomb*, and Jeffords (1994) catalogs the reinvention of the military through film during the Reagan administration. For Vietnam, there are two excellent edited volumes: *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television* and *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (Anderegg, 1991; Dittmar

& Michaud, 1991). Indeed, much is made of the perception of Vietnam veterans and the Vietnam experience through film (Adams, 1989; Katzman, 1993). Kellner (1991) provides a critical perspective on live television and the first Persian Gulf War. A comprehensive resource for background on military films is *Guts and Glory* by Lawrence Suid (2002; see also Ender, 2003b). His voluminous book contains detailed and anecdotal information on hundreds of military and war films dating back to 1911. The strength of this volume is the coupling of encyclopedic knowledge with interviews and reviews in an essay format. Suid also has a volume exclusive to naval films (Suid, 1996). Niemi (2018) narrows the focus to 100 “great” war films by examining the realism depicted in each movie and including recent films such as *Lone Survivor* (2013), *American Sniper* (2014), *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), and *Dunkirk* (2017). A more critical analysis of the relationship between war and the military and the co-opting of the film industry includes Wasson and Grieveson’s (2018) edited volume, *Cinema’s Military Industrial Complex*.

Researchers have conducted examinations of particular military topical representations in film. Examples are published in scholarly journals and include descriptions of military culture, perceptions of military leaders, the “leaving no soldier behind” creed in two highly popular films—*Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001)—uniformed heroes in a bureaucratic context, military propaganda films, and representations of military children in films (Harper, 2001; Samet, 2005; Lee & Paddock, 2001; Springer, 1986; Ender, 2005).

### Knowing Students: West Point, Cadets, and Film

Established in 1802 as the first institution of higher education in engineering, the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, began offering courses in psychology, management, and leadership immediately after World War II. Introductory Sociology was first offered in 1963, and a Military Sociology course came the following year (Ender, Kelty, & Smith, 2008).

The overall mission of the United States Military Academy is to “educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets.” It is a four-year-long intensive military science, physical education, character, and academic undertaking. While curriculum reform has been the norm over the past 217 years since establishment, the academic program remains highly structured and rigorous relative to most civilian universities. Coupled with training in military science (character development) and physical education, cadets must take academic courses in humanities, social sciences, math, science, and engineering to complete their “professional major”—this is in addition to their disciplinary specialty major (e.g., sociology, history, or English). As directed by Congress, upon successful completion of the program, all cadets receive a Bachelor of Science degree.

The academic program at West Point has an overarching educational goal and specific academic program goals. The overall educational goal, updated in June 2018, states: “Graduates integrate knowledge and skills from a variety of disciplines to anticipate and respond appropriately to opportunities and challenges in a changing world” (*Educating Army Leaders*, 2018, p. 7). The program goals meet the educational goal. The learning approach involves active and applied pedagogical strategies.

All classrooms and cadet living quarters at West Point are high-tech equipped and include classroom Smart Boards, and many on-campus departments and centers including the library have an extensive military films selection. Moreover, cadets have Netflix and Hulu accounts and regularly access films online. Therefore, films are easily available for instructional uses and are used as pedagogical tools to stimulate interest around a specific lesson objective. However, given the limited time of classes (55 and 75 minutes) and limitations on cadet time, opportunities to view full-length feature films in class for academic purposes require creative means. Examples include creating an evening film series or creating exception-to-policy courses blocked for two or more hours.

## **Favorite Films of West Point Cadets**

Film clips are popular among both cadets and instructors at West Point. A stroll through the major academic building of Thayer Hall during instructional periods guarantees to reveal a handful of darkened classrooms with cadets and instructors glued to some film clip and a robust audio system perhaps featuring a scene from *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Braveheart* (1995), or the 1980 classic *The Big Red One* (Ender, 2004). At the risk of sounding cliché, a two-minute clip can often illustrate a thousand words of lecture.

Teaching and learning involve embracing the cadet’s perspective. This allows the teacher to meet cadets where they are and determine their interests. One should ask, do cohorts of cadets have specific tastes and preferences in films? To answer this question, I informally queried first-year cadets over a five-year period (the graduating classes of 2006 to 2011—keeping in mind these cadets would be senior captains or majors today). Affectionately known as plebes, the roughly 1,000 cadets participated in my 55-minute enrichment class titled Resocialization and Military Film as part of the first-year Introductory Psychology core (required) course. The cadets self-selected into one of seven enrichment classes for this lesson based on personal interest. I typically asked them for feedback on the lesson and for their top three general film favorites and top three military film favorites.

Cadets identified 318 different films as their top general film favorite. The list includes films as diverse as *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946) to *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003), and *300* (2006).

Of note is that military films are clearly favorites among cadets—even in the general film category. The top three films listed under general films are *Gladiator* (2000), *Braveheart*, and *Boondock Saints* (1999). The next three favorite include *The Matrix* (1999), *The Lord of the Rings* (2001), and *Fight Club* (1999).

For military films, cadets similarly listed hundreds of military films. They identified 94 different ones as personal favorites—the top three are *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002).

In terms of general films, the number one and outstanding film for female cadets was *The Notebook* (2004) followed distantly by *Gladiator* and *The Lord of the Rings* (female cadets equaled roughly 15% of the Corps of Cadets during the 2000s). The next three favorite films included *Dirty Dancing* (1987), *Remember the Titans* (2000), and *Old School* (2003). While male cadets chose *Gladiator* and *The Lord of the Rings*, neither *Dirty Dancing* nor *The Notebook* made their top three.

Female cadets reported a number of general films not mentioned by male cadets. Many of the films fell into the classification of male-female relationship films such as *Corrina, Corrina* (1994); *Casablanca* (1942); *Pretty Woman* (1990); and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, among others. Female cadets also identified films featuring a strong, independent female lead in an occupational context such as *Legally Blonde* (2001), *A League of Their Own* (1992), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Given these differences, instructors should be conscientious about taste and preference gaps when using films in the classroom.

In sum, knowing students' tastes and preferences can create a student-centered approach to using films in the classroom. Military films obviously work well at West Point—there is a collective identification and interest, and cadets appear to gravitate around specific war films—especially contemporary blockbusters. Such films should also work well at other military schoolhouses. However, when we transgress the military or war film genre, we may need to be more conscientious about tastes and preferences. Overall, cadets differ on their consumption of more general films, and the differences show more nuance along gender lines. Other demographic differences in the classroom could include ethnicity, race, nationality, and age, and may show even further digressions in tastes and preferences for films.

### Case Studies in Film Lengths

This section highlights the various uses of film in teaching, learning, and some student gratifications. Five uses of film are discussed: (1) movie referencing, (2) short clips (two minutes or less in length, e.g., Mel Gibson's Wallace speech in the 1995 *Braveheart*), (3) film scenes (two minutes or more in length, e.g., the death notification of the next-of-kin in the 1998 *Saving Private Ryan*), (4) full-length films

(e.g., the classic 1949 *Twelve O'Clock High*), and (5) an entire film course around a film genre (e.g., Cinematic Images of War and the Military). Each use has multiple dimensions for a range of classroom dynamics.

This section provides a nontechnical discussion designed to highlight the use of film and the logistical dimensions of adopting films in the classroom. Four pedagogical goals are differentiated in the uses of films: attention getter, discussion generator, point illustrator, and application tool. The techniques cross a range of disciplines including leadership, management, psychology, and sociology, and are employable in virtually any instructional context. The techniques include the use of film for specific concepts, discuss films as a genre, and provide examples from specific courses. Some of the material is available through publication.

**Film referencing.** Military films are popular with military audiences. Instructors can quickly survey their particular students about their familiarity with a specific genre or type of film. When all students are familiar with a film, the instructor can reference the film to describe a particular scene, character, or outcome associated with the film to illustrate their point. For example, a lesson on death and dying that focuses on the U.S. Army casualty affairs and memorial operations process can utilize a popular film clip familiar to students. Returning to films that virtually all cadets have seen, I might describe the scene in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) when the officer and the chaplain notify Mrs. Ryan on the death of three of her sons (the fourth is Pvt. Ryan, played by Matt Damon). Alternatively, I might channel the scene in *We Were Soldiers* (2002) where the taxi driver bungles the death notification he must deliver to a U.S. Army wife. If a handful of students are not familiar with a particular film, instructors can use it as a teaching moment. Allow a student to describe the film succinctly to others and concomitantly encourage the student to apply material from the course to the situation. While it is difficult to assess the pedagogical success of this technique, cadets do want to discuss observations they have from the scene, and this provides additional opportunities to expound on course content. Notably, it draws the class together by engaging and applying material through temporary “student teaching assistants.”

**Film clips.** A short film clip, less than two minutes in length, provides an attention getter, a discussion generator, or a point illustrator. As an attention getter, use a short clip at the beginning of class or with a change in topic to rapidly gain the students’ attention and focus them on the upcoming topic or class. This technique often will focus and engage the students, and it sets the agenda of what will follow. Some colleagues in my department shared their open-ended, anonymous course evaluations with me. In PL300: Military Leadership, a leadership course required of all junior cadets at West Point, over 75% of students positively evaluated the film clips used and called for more clips. When asked what is going well in the classroom, one cadet wrote, “Video clips at the beginning of each class are nice” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.).

Similarly, a short clip can generate thoughts and ideas as a warm-up exercise for forthcoming topics. Through student-centered discussions of a short clip and with a little guidance from the instructor, the students will informally and intuitively reach conclusions and achieve the insights that the instructor has set as objectives quicker and with deeper understanding than simply being fed the facts. One cadet wrote, “Videos are relevant and make for good discussion” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.). Learning this way allows a student to take ownership and impute his or her own meaning into the learning process. Many times after covering a concept, a short film clip illustrating the just covered point illuminates and helps cement the concept in the students’ minds. Another cadet wrote on the evaluation, “Videos are nice. They helped me understand the material” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.). Often, an abstract concept becomes concrete once a student sees the concept in action in a familiar and recognizable situation. One cadet wrote, “Applying theory to real life (movies) helps flesh-out ideas for me” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.). In terms of ownership, another student offered the following recommendation to the instructor: “Instead of you picking a movie with examples of material from the course, have us bring in a clip with course material in it” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.).

**Film scenes.** A particular scene or a medium-length film clip, two minutes or more in length, serves as another technique for applying course content to film. In meeting the goal of coaching students to apply theory or concepts to a given situation, instructors can employ a medium-length film clip across a wide spectrum of content. Once the stage is set with pre-class reading, instructors can employ film clips to generate some or all of the following: (a) in-class discussion, (b) out-of-class reflective homework assignments, and (c) written products for evaluation.

The film can also be combined with a visit to the scene of the film clip or a staff ride of a battlefield, as our history department does with an exploration of Col. Joshua Chamberlain’s actions at Little Round Top in the film *Gettysburg* (1993)—a few hour’s drive south from West Point. We have also invited a guest speaker to accentuate key points in the film scenario. For example, in our junior-level core course titled Military Leadership, course directors focus on cohesion and leading diverse groups. They screened the film *Remember the Titans* (2000) and invited Coach Herman Boone, played by Denzel Washington, to discuss his leadership styles. Any of these application methods, or a combination of methods, will assist a student as he or she attempts to “apply” theory or concepts to a given situation. Critics might argue films are purely entertainment and have no education value. The key issue is to ensure maximizing the educational value of the film (or film scene) as a pedagogical tool that enables students to meet the lesson, course, and institutional goals and objectives. A cadet wrote on an anonymous end-of-course survey, “The movies helped bring the concepts to the real world better than reading about them” (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.).

**Feature films.** A full-length film provides similar teaching moments in the same way as short film clips or medium-length films. However, one might select full-length films as innovative ways to review the material in a module, major section, or conventional course before an examination. This is an effective way to allow students to process the information acquired in class. Using a film for review permits students to demonstrate not only their knowledge of course concepts but also their ability to apply what they have learned. For example, *12 Angry Men* (1957), arguably one of the most popular leadership films in existence, is utilized at the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Command and General Staff College, and several corporations and consultants. West Point makes use of it to process theories and concepts for two courses: Group Dynamics and Introductory Sociology.

Teachers of sociological theory across academe are quick to note that the topic is difficult to teach, and undergraduates perceive it as “dry,” abstract, lacking relevance, and limited in application in the real world (LeMoyne, 2001). To curtail these misgivings, many professors have moved toward a more applied approach to teaching the course. Since 2004, West Point sociology has successfully integrated full-length feature films into the Sociological Theory course required for all sociology majors (Hajjar & Ender, 2005).<sup>1</sup> The course content is traditional; however, the process and structure are atypical. For each major set of theories, there are four lesson modules: two lecturer lessons focused on theory, an outside-of-class film viewing, and a cadet-led direct application of the material. For example, two classes cover Karl Marx’s classical conflict theory, followed by a class period for a viewing of the classic *Modern Times* (1936) featuring Charlie Chaplin, and last, a fourth class applying the content material to the film. In my open-ended written comments on an online survey at the end of the semester asking about the best feature of the course, cadets were unanimous about the use of films to apply their learning of the material. A typical response included, “I liked how we applied each [theory] module to a movie and I thought that class participation helped generate new thoughts and ideas.”

A midterm examination in Military Leadership at West Point utilized the film *When Trumpets Fade* (1998)—a film set in World War II Germany, with an American Army private traumatized by war (because his platoon was devastated) and seeks a discharge but remains in the Army to serve the new platoon sergeant. Cadets receive instructions to view the film on their own time prior to the examination. They then receive an in-class examination that includes multiple choice, short answer, and essay-type questions covering the spectrum of Bloom’s Taxonomy (lower knowledge level, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). The examination includes questions dealing with such leadership topics as emotional intelligence, authentic leadership, bases of power, self-serving bias, the leader growth model, the fundamental attribution error, and single and double loop learning among others. For example, an open-ended essay question states: “How did Manning grow and develop as a leader throughout the film? Use and apply course concepts or theories in

depth to support your answer.” Cadet evaluations are highly positive (PL300 Course Director, personal communication, n.d.). Typical responses from cadets include: “I like watching a movie for a test”; “movies for a case study test, now that is cool”; “I feel that more movies of leadership situations would help. I learned more from studying and watching the movies for the midterm than not”; and another, “I like the way the mid-term was [constructed]: saw the movie and then tested on it.”

**Film course.** Cinematic Images of War and the Military is a three-credit film-centric course taught at the United States Military Academy since 2003 (Ender, 2003a, 2009). It began as a special topics course of mostly seniors and juniors drawing cadets from sociology, psychology, leadership, engineering psychology, and management majors. Today, the course is a core requirement for all sociology majors and an elective for nonmajors. In this course, we examine the military as a social institution in the United States and in other countries from the perspective of film. With the help of the sociological orientation, and a weekly focus on social topics such as humor, violence, masculinity, and race and ethnicity among others, we analyze societal relationships between the military and cinema beginning with the early 20th century to the present. For example, we view full-length films for each topic as well as clips such as *A Soldier's Story* (1984) for race, *G.I. Jane* (1997) for gender and sex, *The Great Santini* (1979) for the military family, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) for resocialization, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) for death and dying, and *Three Kings* (1999) for moral dilemmas. The course design provides a forum for analysis. Thus, a deeper, more thorough study of the military, war, and cinema are gained through a sociological lens. The course takes an interdisciplinary approach as well including historical, political, cultural, and feminist perspectives.

Through specific course goals, we can represent expectations for cadets and facilitate their successful completion of course requirements. Complete understanding of the course goal is critical as it contains the evaluation criteria for students. The major goal in the course is to provide the intellectual background so that given an existing film related to the Armed Forces, war, civil-military relations, diversity, values, morality, culture, or social justice, the student serves as an emerging professional, a highly informed consumer of popular culture, and an informed citizen.

In addition to specific course goals, West Point has seven areas cadets are expected to pursue in their education. We emphasize these in the course that includes gaining (1) cultural and (2) historical perspectives, understanding (3) human behavior and interaction, developing (4) written and oral communication skills, instilling (5) an orientation to life-long learning, and highlighting (6) creative and (7) critical thinking (*Educating Future Army Officers*, 2007). Finally, there are elements of self-awareness and the Warrior Ethos embedded into the course as well as reflecting perspectives on the West Point leader development philosophy for cadets (U.S. Corps of Cadets, 2002).

The grading of student work in this course assumes that learning is most effective as well as most enjoyable when student evaluation occurs against a known

objective standard rather than in comparison to one another. In putting this philosophy into action, the largest part of the process embeds in the structure of the course. The syllabus and course guide contain all of the learning activities for which the student is responsible (Ender 2003a, 2009). The course is thus an independent study undertaken collectively. The instructor provides the resources and experiences; the cadet assumes the responsibility for learning the material. Evaluative elements of the course include (a) intensive reading and writing assignments with total writings including the final examination ranging between 43 and 77 typed pages; (b) book and article re-

views; (c) film reviews including comparing and contrasting, synthesizing, describing, predicting, creating, and evaluating films dealing with sociological topics in war and the military; and (d) a final examination. The final examination comes with the course guide, and it is a self-report of cumulative knowledge. Expectations reside with students who write elaborate essays reporting detailed learnings that synthesize course and outside readings and the viewing of films.

**Table**  
*Course Calendar and Outline for Cinematic Images of War and the Military*

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topic/event</b>	<b>Requirement</b>
Week 1	Course introduction	Reading
Week 2	Sociological perspective	Reading
Week 3	Postmodern theory	Reading/writing
Week 4	(Re)socialization	Reading/writing
Week 5	Masculinity	Reading
Week 6	Sex and gender	Reading/writing
Week 7	Military families	Reading
Week 8	Race and ethnicity	Reading
Week 9	Death	Reading/writing
Week 10	Humor	Reading/writing
Week 11	Perception	Reading/writing
Week 12	Military academies	Reading
Week 13	Moral dilemmas	Reading/writing
Week 14	Cross-cultural	Reading/writing
Week 15	Global war on terror documentaries	Reading
Week 16	Futuristic	Reading/writing
Week 17	Final examination	Writing

Table by author

The course is an experiment in distance and self-paced learning. Students are responsible for reading the books, chapters, and articles; for viewing films; and for keeping meticulous notes. Attendance, preparation, attentiveness, and participation are essential elements of the course. The course has topical weeks. The outline in the table (on page 66) shows the themes for each week.

Ninety-five percent of cadets having taken *Cinematic Images* have strongly agreed with major learning outcome statements used for the end-of-semester course evaluations. This is considerably higher than other courses taught in the Sociology Program, the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, and across West Point. Cadets responded almost unanimously that they strongly agreed with the following statements related to learning regarding the film course: “My motivation to learn and to continue learning has increased because of this course”; “In this course, my critical thinking ability increased”; and “I have the ability to apply the material learned in this course to be a more effective leader.”

### Conclusion

This article has reviewed the higher education literature on the pedagogical uses of film in courses focused on human dimensions, offered insight to undergraduate tastes and preferences for films, and provided some strategies and techniques for employing film in college teaching by drawing on examples from the military and war. Films lend themselves to the teaching and learning of the human sciences—in particular, sociology, psychology, leadership, and management. Military and war films as a genre provide a particularly fruitful area of application of concepts, theories, and models for these disciplines. Five types of strategic pedagogy are available for classroom purposes. West Point has successfully adopted general films and the military and war film genre specifically. Military-oriented undergraduates appear oriented toward the genre. Instructors should note that general film and military film genre tastes and preferences may vary among even a homogeneous group of students and can diverge even further the more heterogeneous their students become.

The future of film appears diffuse. For teaching, films, much like books, are readable text and can continue to serve as instructional tools. Students continue to consume films, and digitization has democratized digital equipment where students can create their own moving images (Butler, 2016).<sup>2</sup> Many amateurs can now create clips and post them on YouTube and other web-based venues. Indeed, some have argued that cinema studies is perhaps the new Master of Business Administration in not only marketing and other commercial fields but also far afield including law, politics, and the military (Van Ness, 2005). More evaluation and assessment of teaching via the diverse venues of film need to be undertaken. Professors simply need to be cognizant of the varied deployments of film outside of the classroom and bring them in. ☞

## Author's note

“Charlie don’t surf” is a quote from Robert Duvall’s character, Lt. Col. Kilgore, in the author’s all-time favorite film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). It is also a song of the same name on the *Sandinista* (1980) album by the Clash. The author would like to thank Kathleen Campbell, Bill Caruso, and Jamie Efav for contributing to the earliest iterations of this study. This research benefitted in part from a Faculty Research Grant through the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. An earlier version of this manuscript, titled “Teaching and Learning with Film,” was presented at the Teaching and Learning Effectively Using New Technologies (TALENT@WEST POINT) Conference, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 5 April 2003. Readers should be aware that the views are the author’s and do not purport to reflect the position of the United States Military Academy, the Army Research Institute, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

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### Notes

1. The course is available for download: Ender, M. G. (2012, 25 October). PL384: *Sociological theory through film*. Teaching Resources and Innovations Library of Sociology (TRAILS). Retrieved from <http://trails.asanet.org/pages/resource.aspx?resourceid=12642>. The course was recognized as among the top 10 most downloaded resources on TRAILS for 2013.
2. Jack Butler, an undergraduate at Washington College, under the faculty advisement of military sociologist Ryan Kelty, created a documentary about women in the military during his senior year, 2015–2016. See “The Modern Athena: Full Gender Inclusion of the United States Military” online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7\\_-XFoVl8g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7_-XFoVl8g).