In this seminar, we will examine how major Hollywood films tell us stories about ourselves. We will start with the premise that even (or perhaps especially) blockbuster films are more than simply entertainment and that they communicate normative ideas about how we are and should be (as a man, a woman, a nation). As a class, we will examine how films tell their stories (narrative theory) and how they encourage us to respond to those stories (through the genre of the film itself, identification, and the language of film). We do so in order to ask the central question of the course: what are the underlying ideological, cultural assumptions communicated in this film? We’ll also consider how or if these assumptions (or narratives) have changed over the years. For example, is the idea of masculinity in Die Hard (1984) different than in Casino Royale (2006)? Has the story of the warrior or the idea of war itself changed (We Were Soldiers (2002), Black Hawk Down (2001), Hamburger Hill (1987), Taxi Driver (1976))? And what about serial killers (Monster, 2003; Shadow of a Doubt, 1943) and love (Bonnie and Clyde, 1967; Brokeback Mountain, 2005), hmmm?

Films may include those mentioned above, as well as Casablanca (1942), Monster (2003), Watchmen (2009), The Dark Knight (2008), First Blood (1982), Rocky (1976), The Godfather I (1972) & II (1974), Traffic (2000), Syriana (2005), The Last Samurai (2003), and others.

No previous coursework in rhetoric or film required. You should like to watch and talk about films, of course. Popcorn may be provided.