

“AND THE OSCAR GOES TO. . .”: THE HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY AWARDS
OLLI at Illinois – Spring Semester 2020

Mondays, 1:30-3:00 p.m. – January 27 through March 16

Osher Classroom

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The first Academy Awards were presented a little more than 90 years ago, recognizing artistic and technical achievements of a Hollywood film industry on the precipice of a “golden age.” This course will trace the history and significance of the Academy Awards through the years, from the formation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the determination of the categories it would recognize to the impact that the awards have on the careers of those who have won them. We will look at the ceremonies, hosts, winners and losers, landmark broadcasts, surprising moments, and changing fashions. Academy membership, voting eligibility and guidelines, and award categories have changed over time, as has the film industry itself. But the anticipation of the annual Oscar contest remains a focus of movie fans and industry insiders alike. What do the voters, nominees, winners, and also-rans tell us about the state of the film industry and the broader culture in any given year? What is the impact of awards when artistic quality is inherently subjective? And what can we expect from the 2020 awards when they are announced on February 9?

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 27 – The Academy and the Awards

We will trace the path of the Oscars from the formation of the Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and its goals to the development of an annual awards ceremony.

February 3 – The Rules of the Game

This session will examine membership in the Academy, the rules of voting, and the award categories – including how (and why) they have changed through the years.

February 10 – The Televised Ceremony

We will begin with a brief review of the 2020 Academy Awards - and devote the rest of the session to a history and overview of the awards as a televised event and cultural milestone.

February 17 – Best Picture

We will look at the biggest award of the ceremony and what it means for a film to be named Best Picture. We will also examine the relationship between Best Picture and other categories (including Director and Screenplay); and the role of critics’ and other awards, release date, and other factors in a film’s potential success in the Oscar race.

February 24 – The Acting Categories

This session will offer an examination of the stars who have been nominated and those who have won Oscars – and the sometimes surprising list of those who have never won Oscar gold.

March 2 – Did They Get It Right?

We will look at contentious decisions and omissions through the years – and what the results can reveal about the Academy, the industry, and the time period.

March 9 – Beyond the Major Awards

This session will provide an overview of the craft awards, music categories, science-technical awards, and honorary awards – and a look at other film-related projects that are supported by the Academy.

March 16 – The Oscars, The Film Industry, and Society

What do the Oscars tell us about film and what is considered “quality” filmmaking in a given year? And where do subjective awards fit into a changing industry and a changing world? We will look back on the history of the awards and where they might be headed in the years to come.