

HISTORY: Films on Thursday

Utica University has had a film series of one kind or another from its earliest days as Utica College in Oneida Square. The first known reference to a film series appeared on page 3 of the October 20, 1950, issue of the *Utica College Tangerine*. The article informed students that “All Quiet on the Western Front” would be screened at 3:00 PM on Sunday, October 22, in the campus’s Little Theater.

In November of 1963, eight students including sophomore and chairman Jurij Savycky formed a movie committee under the auspices of the Strebel Planning Board. Plans were announced to screen a feature film and a short film every three weeks, beginning at 7:00 PM on Sunday November 24 in the auditorium. The 1949 documentary, “The Quiet One,” along with the 9-minute short, “Dream of the Wild Horses” (“Le Songe Des Chevaux aux Sauvages”) were slated to begin the series but were later cancelled, and the series was officially launched on Sunday, December 8 featuring the 1954 classic, “On The Waterfront,” and the French short film, “In The Park,” featuring Marcel Marceau. Following Savycky’s graduation in 1966, Richard Pertz became chair until 1969, after which the series went on hiatus with occasional films being shown by various campus organizations from 1969 to 1974.

In September of 1973, Assistant Professor of English Scott McDonald announced a series of experimental films to begin on the Friday the 28th at noon, with George Kushar’s short film, “Hold Me While I’m Naked.” Peter Kubelks’ “Our African Journey,” and Ed Enshwiller’s “Thanatopsis,” were scheduled for the following alternate Fridays. McDonald had previously offered a series of several films over the course of two weeks in October and November of 1972 in connection with his Film 20 course, including

Chris Marker's "La Jetee," and the Hollywood classic, "Stagecoach." Screenings took place at 7:00 PM on Monday evenings in the Library Annex Auditorium (room 327). He then announced a film series in January 1975 as part of a Thursday evening course which featured nine films by Luis Bunuel plus "The Exterminating Angel," "Nazarine," "Un Chien Andalou," "Simon of the Desert," "Belle du Jour," "The Milky Way," and "Tristana."

When Dr. McDonald retired in 1999, after hosting a regular Thursday night film series for two decades, a group of assistant professors: me (Communication Arts), Mark Metzler (History), Linda Zee (Spanish), and John Swanson (History), with assistance from Associate Dean Jerry Cartwright, assumed responsibility for the series. Dr. Metzler and I offered an Asian film series in the spring of 1999 (the first film, which I chose, was "Chungking Express," screened on January 28) and the following fall the series was rebranded "FILM@UC" under my direction ("The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" was screened that semester on Oct. 28). We even survived the pandemic – the spring 2020 series ended just before the lockdown and we returned in person with social distancing and masks for the fall. This semester marked my twenty-sixth year programming the campus film series – renamed "Films on Thursday" in 2022 – to which I brought an international focus with films from over seventy countries and territories.

The late film critic Roger Ebert wrote, "Film is an empathy machine."