In this course, we’ll flirt with, court, and maybe—just maybe—fall in love with the film genre of romantic comedy. We’ll examine romantic comedies, from early to recent cinema, to understand its powerful narrative machinery and unique social functions. What are the genre’s norms and structures? What variations can we trace within these? If we were to try and create a persuasive rom com, how could we work creatively within these rules?

To understand this genre world, we’ll attend to its careful aesthetic strategies and sensuous effects, and especially to its distinctive techniques for representing desirable faces, bodies, and voices. We’ll also consider how the genre’s comedic pleasure is involved in the way people fashion gender identities, sexualities, and marriages. And we’ll think about how successful rom coms imaginatively play with other aspects of identity, including ethnic, religious, racial, and class identities, as a part of their explorations of romance. Finally, we’ll consider the role of technology and artificial intelligence in rom com plots, which often explore passionate attachments at the edges of concepts of the human.

We’ll become rom com theorists, as well as aficionados. To sharpen our work, we’ll also explore the genre tension between rom com and films about broken or tragic marriages—the dark underbelly of the rom com worldview.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

**Required Texts:**
Course Reader [CR]
Assigned films available on LATTE

**Learning Goals**
- Develop the skills to describe the logic of a popular film genre and to analyze individual films as a function of its genre; to learn basic concepts in genre theory
• Develop the skills to interpret complex imaginative texts, in writing, in critical conversation with others in an interpretive community; to understand significant arguments in published criticism about specific films
• Ability to construct a plausible premise and plot for an entertaining romantic comedy, as a way to demonstrate facility with the possibilities and requirements of a genre
• Learn a major current within U.S. film history; consider how the genre of rom com evolved to engage its shifting cultural situations
• Ability to assess the implications of theoretical investigations into gender and sexuality for interpreting the cultural effects of rom com
• Ability to assess the genre’s imaginative engagement with several aspects of social identity, as these are at stake in romance; understand the genre’s representations of distinctions between public and private spheres, as these affect the formation of identities

Rights, Rules, and Requirements:
• Laptops may be used in class only with permission and for accessing relevant course materials. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes.
• All assignments must be completed and submitted to receive course credit. Late work will be penalized by one plus/minus for each day past the due date.
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
• If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.
• You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Written Assignments
Interpretive Essays: Two 5-7 page analyses of assigned films, with emphasis on formal and stylistic features that motivate original interpretive claims. Due 1/29 and 2/12. 20% each.
Genre Taxonomy: a research project into a romantic comedy sub-genre or niche group of rom coms, including a genealogy, taxonomy of defining features, and assessment of its cultural significance. Due 4/30. 30%
Film Treatment: pitch for an original rom com, as part of class competition with outside evaluator. Due 4/9. 20%
Movie Review: short review of current rom com, posted in public forum and intended to shape public opinion. Due 4/19. 10%

Discussion Sections
Discussion sections will take place on 1/25, 2/8, 2/15, 3/8, 3/15, 3/29, 4/19, rooms tbd.

Class Schedule
Wed 1/10
Introductions—What is romance?—What is comedy?—Opening pleasures—Initial suspicions—Reading rom com.

Thur 1/11
Reading rom com, cont.: quintessential scenes.

Mon 1/15: class cancelled for Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Unit I: The Rules of the Game

Wed 1/17
Howard Hawks, dir., Bringing Up Baby
Reading: Roland Barthes, “Adorable!,” “Atopos,” “The Other’s Body,” “Talking,” “Show me whom to desire,” “Thus” (18-21, 34-36, 71-72, 73-74, 136-137, 220-223)

Thur 1/18 [Brandeis Monday]
Howard Hawks, dir., Bringing Up Baby
Reading: Stanley Cavell, “Leopards in Connecticut” [CR]

Mon 1/22
Frank Capra, dir., It Happened One Night

Wed 1/24
Frank Capra, dir., It Happened One Night

Thur 1/25: Meet in Discussion Sections

Mon 1/29
*Essay One Due*
Preston Sturges, dir., The Lady Eve

Wed 1/31
Preston Sturges, dir., The Lady Eve, cont.
Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, dirs., I Love You Phillip Morris

Thur 2/1
Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, dirs., I Love You Phillip Morris
Reading: Roland Barthes, “Identifications” and “The Unknowable” (129-131, 134-135)

Mon 2/5
Howard Hawks, dir., His Girl Friday

Wed 2/7
Howard Hawks, dir., His Girl Friday
Reading: Stanley Cavell, “Counterfeiting Happiness” [CR]

Thur 2/8: Meet in Discussion Sections
Reading: Roland Barthes, “I Love You,” “Love’s Langour,” “The Love Letter” (147-159)

Mon 2/12
*Essay Two Due*
Stanley Donen, dir., Charade

Wed 2/14
Michael Showalter, dir., The Big Sick
Reading: Roland Barthes, “The Absent One,” “Waiting” (13-17, 37-40)

Thur 2/15: Meet in Discussion Sections

2/19-2/23: class cancelled for spring break

Mon 2/26: Matrimonial Tragedy, I: the end of the game
Mike Nichols, dir., Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf
Reading: Roland Barthes, “Making Scenes” (204-209)

Unit II: Falling in Love Again, or, Repetition and Desire
Wed 2/28
Harold Ramis, dir., Groundhog Day

Thur 3/1
Harold Ramis, dir., Groundhog Day
Reading: Roland Barthes, “This can’t go on” and “Ideas of Solution” (140-143)

Mon 3/5
Michel Gondry, dir., Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Reading: Roland Barthes, “Agony” and “Catastrophe” (29-30, 48-49)

Wed 3/7
Michel Gondry, dir., Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Thur 3/8: Meet in Discussion Sections

Mon 3/12: Matrimonial Tragedy, II: eternal return of the same
Alain Resnais, dir., Last Year at Marienbad

Wed 3/14
Alain Resnais, dir., Last Year at Marienbad

Thur 3/15: Meet in Discussion Sections
Reading: Roland Barthes, “Novel/Drama,” “Inexpressible Love,” “The Ghost Ship,” “And the night illuminated the night” (93-94, 97-103, 171-172)

Unit III: New Swerves, New Norms
Mon 3/19
Griffin Dunne, dir. Addicted to Love

Wed 3/21
Griffin Dunne, dir. Addicted to Love, cont.
Adrienne Shelly, dir., Waitress

Thur 3/22
Adrienne Shelly, dir., Waitress
Reading: Roland Barthes, “‘What Is to Be Done?,’” “‘No clergyman attended’” (62-64, 210-213)

Mon 3/26
Maria Maggenti, dir., The Incredibly True Adventure of 2 Girls in Love

Wed 3/28
Maria Maggenti, dir., The Incredibly True Adventure of 2 Girls in Love
Reading: Roland Barthes, “‘How blue the sky was…’” (197-199)

Thur 3/29: Meet in Discussion Sections

4/2-4/6: class cancelled for Passover

Mon 4/9
*Film Treatment Assignment Due*
Spike Lee, dir., She’s Gotta Have It

Wed 4/11
Spike Lee, dir., She’s Gotta Have It, cont.
Eric Schaeffer, dir., Boy Meets Girl

Thur 4/12
Eric Schaeffer, dir., Boy Meets Girl

Unit III: Posthuman Attachments
Mon 4/16
Craig Gillespie, dir., Lars and the Real Girl
Reading: Roland Barthes, “The World Thunderstruck” and “No Answer” (87-92, 167-168)
Wed 4/18
Craig Gillespie, dir., *Lars and the Real Girl*, cont.
Spike Jonz, dir., *Her*

Thur 4/19: Meet in Discussion Sections
*Move Review Assignment Due*

Mon 4/23
Spike Jonz, dir., *Her*

Brandeis Friday, No Class Wed, 4/25

Thur 4/26
Concluding

*Final Genre Taxonomy Project due Monday April 30, noon*