

Introduction to Film and Media Production

Course Description:

This course introduces the equipment, software, techniques, strategies, and technical know-how central to the creative and collaborative practice of film and media production. In learning basic skills required for planning, lighting, shooting, editing, and distributing films and videos, you will become familiar with the Panasonic DVX-100 video camera; the Bolex, Krasnagorsk, and Arri S 16mm film cameras; the Marantz sound recorder; Lowell lighting kits; Bogen tripods; the Sekonic light meter; and Final Cut Pro editing software. You'll apply what you learned in Introduction to Film Analysis to the creation of original media projects and to the collaborative process of critiquing others' work. In addition to technical readings, we'll look at essays by and interviews with filmmakers, cinematographers, sound designers, and editors, and we'll analyze film and video clips across genres, nationalities, and eras. Along with group activities throughout the semester, you will produce three individual projects, culminating with a short video piece of your own design and execution. We will screen our final projects publicly.

Course Texts:

Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus, *The Filmmaker's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age*, **third edition** (New York: Plume, **2007**).

Assorted PDF printouts [please give these texts equal priority].

Requirements and Grades:

3 in-class quizzes (weeks 4, 9, and 13) [*each is **10 percent** of your final grade*]

3 individual projects

due week 5: Single-shot video piece [***15 percent** of your final grade*]

due week 9: Found-footage edit with Final Cut Pro (everyone will create an original short video using the same source material) [***15 percent** of your final grade*]

due week 15: Final Project (short video piece of your own design, edited with Final Cut Pro and compressed both for dvd and for upload to the web) [***30 percent** of your final grade*]

Productive participation in semester-long class activities and small-group activities, including discussions of written texts and film clips and critiques of others' work [***10 percent** of your final grade*]

Course Plan:

Week 1: Introductions

questions to answer today: What are the aesthetic possibilities of the moving image? What are the tools with which we can realize those possibilities? What is exciting about today's media landscape in particular? What will we learn in this course? What will we do and make in this course?

in-class screening: *Camera* (David Cronenberg, Canada, 2000, 6 min.) (dvd)
Fog Line (Larry Gottheim, USA, 1970, 11 min.) (16mm)

in-class activity: Discover the light meter.

1. As a class, learn how a Sekonic light meter works and what we can do with it.
2. In groups, map out the classroom's light patterns and brainstorm potential shots.

Week 2: The Video Camera's Nuts and Bolts

***First individual project assigned today: single-shot video**

questions to answer today: What is a video camera? How does it work? What types of video cameras are there? What types of recording formats are there? What is the history of the video camera? What are video cameras used for (and what are they not used for)? How do we operate the Panasonic DVX-100?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 1: "Introduction to Video and Film Systems"
The Filmmaker's Handbook, ch. 4: "The Lens"
Dziga Vertov, from *Kino Eye* [pdf]

in-class screening: *Man with a Movie Camera* [clips] (Dziga Vertov, Soviet Union, 1929, 68 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Familiarize ourselves with the video camera, Part 1.

1. As a class, learn the basic operations of the Panasonic DVX-100.
2. In groups, design and shoot a video about the English alphabet. Groups are free to interpret this activity at their own discretion!

Week 3: The Video Image

questions to answer today: What is resolution, what are pixels, and what can we do with them? How do we control exposure, contrast, gamma, and white balance on a video camera? What is timecode and what is it for? What is focal length, what is depth of field, and how do they apply to video cameras?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 2: "Before You Begin Production"
The Filmmaker's Handbook, ch. 5: "The Video Image"
review DVX-100 Operating Instructions [pdf]
review Depth of Field handout [pdf]

in-class screening: *I am Cuba* [clip] (Mikhail Kalatozov, USSR/Cuba, 1964, 141 min.) (dvd)
Sky Blue Water Light Sign (J. J. Murphy, USA, 1972, 9 min.) (16mm)

in-class activity: Learn how to use the Bogen tripod.
Familiarize ourselves with the video camera, Part 2.
1. As a class, learn advanced operations of the Panasonic DVX-100.
2. In groups, design and shoot a single-shot video with available light.

Week 4: Lighting, Part 1

***In-class quiz today:** multiple-choice + short-essay questions about the video camera and the video image

questions to answer today: How does light help determine the signifying power of an image? How do we describe light? What is exposure? What is tonal range? How does light translate in video? How do we work with lighting equipment safely?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 12: "Lighting"
Electricity and Lighting Safety handout [pdf]

in-class screening: *Visions of Light* [clips] (Todd McCarthy, 1992, 92 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Learn lighting, Part 1.
1. As a class, familiarize ourselves with lighting safety and lighting basics, and experiment with different lighting setups.
2. In groups, design an interview set with three-point-lighting.

Week 5: Lighting, Part 2

***First individual assignment due today: single-shot video**

questions to answer today: What is the basic science behind light and optics? What is color temperature and how do we control it? How can we use light creatively with advanced techniques?

read for today: Light and Optics handout [\[pdf\]](#)
review Joel Schlemowitz, "Steps for Taking an Incident Light Reading" [\[pdf\]](#)

in-class activity: Learn lighting, Part 2.

1. As a class, experiment with filters, clamps, barndoors, softboxes, etc. Screen and critique first individual assignments.

Week 6: Editing, Part 1

***Second individual project assigned today: found-footage sequence edit**

questions to answer today: What does nonlinear editing mean and what can we do with it? How do we control attention, create meaning, and build tension with editing? What are the key editing terms that guide our editing decisions (montage, graphic match, match on action, jump cut, nondiegetic insert, cheat cut, etc.)?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 13: "Picture and Dialogue Editing"
Walter Murch, interview [\[pdf\]](#)
"How a Basic Sequence Works" [\[pdf\]](#)

in-class screening: *Fist Fight* (Robert Breer, USA, 1964, 9 min.) (16mm)
Raging Bull [clip] (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1980, 129 min.) (dvd)
The Black Imp (Georges Méliès, France, 1905, 4 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Familiarize ourselves with Final Cut Pro, Part 1.

1. As a class, learn the workspaces and basic operations of FCP (log and capture, organize footage in bins, create and organize sequences, use the razor blade, etc.)

Week 7: Editing, Part 2

questions to answer today: How can we use editing to intensify, alter, and/or fine-tune our raw footage? How does editing set the moving image arts apart from all other arts?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 16: "Sound Editing and Mixing"
Spike Lee and Lisa Jones, "Storyboards," in *Do the Right Thing* [pdf]
Hal Landen, "Color Bars and How To Use 'em" [pdf]

websites to consult for additional FCP tutorials: lafcpug.org/tutorials.html
kenstone.net
discussions.apple.com/community/professional_applications/final_cut_studio

in-class screening: *Sabotage* [clip] (Alfred Hitchcock, UK, 1936, 76 min.) (dvd)
2 or 3 Things I Know about Her [clip] (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1966, 84 min.) (dvd)
Study in Choreography for Camera (Maya Deren, USA, 1945, 4 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Familiarize ourselves with Final Cut Pro, Part 2.
1. As a class, learn some advanced operations of FCP (sound editing, video effects, video generators, color correction, transitions, superimpositions, etc.)

Week 8: Sound Recording

questions to answer today: What is the signifying power of sound in the moving image arts?
What relationships between sound and image can we create?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 10: "Sound Recording Systems"
The Filmmaker's Handbook, ch. 11: "Sound Recording Techniques"
Robert Bresson, "Notes on Sound" [pdf]
Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises" [pdf]

in-class screening: *Abraham Lincoln* [clip] (D.W. Griffith, USA, 1930, 93 min.) (dvd)
Mouchette [clip] (Robert Bresson, France, 1967, 81 min.) (dvd)
Apocalypse Now [clip] (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1979, 153 min.) (dvd)
The Sacrifice [clip] (Andrei Tarkovsky, Sweden et al., 1986, 145 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Learn sound.
1. As a class, familiarize ourselves with Sennheiser omni-directional, cardioid, shotgun, and lav microphones, and with digital sound recorders.

2. As a class, familiarize ourselves with sound recording accessories (boom pole, xlr cable, Rycote Softie, etc.).
3. In groups, take field recordings with the following theme in mind: "the campus sounds we all hear but rarely listen to."

Week 9: Second Individual Project Critiques

***In-class quiz today:** multiple-choice + short-essay questions about editing and sound

***Second individual assignment due today: found-footage sequence edit**

in-class activity: Screen and critique second individual projects.

Week 10: The Film Camera's Nuts and Bolts

questions to answer today: What is a film camera? How does it work? What types of film cameras are there? What types of film formats? What is the history of the film camera? What are film cameras used for (and what are they not used for)? How do we operate a 16mm non-sync camera?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 6: "The Film Camera"
Nestor Almendros, from *A Man with a Camera* [pdf]

in-class screening: Early Paper Prints (USA, 1901-1906, 35 min.) (16mm)
H2O (Ralph Steiner, USA, 1929, 13 min.) (dvd)
Days of Heaven [clips] (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978, 94 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Learn the film camera(s), Part 1: nuts and bolts

1. As a class, introduce, inspect, and familiarize ourselves with the Bolex, Krasnagorsk, and Arri S.
2. In groups, practice loading dummy rolls of film into the cameras.

Week 11: The Film Image

questions to answer today: What types of film stocks are there and what are their properties? What are the relationships among the film stocks, lights, and lenses that we use? How do we maintain as much control as possible over the film image we capture/create?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 7: "The Film Image"
review the Kodak Motion Picture Product Catalog [pdf]
review the Kodak Cinematographer's Field Guide [pdf]

in-class screening: *New World* (Kodak product demonstration and technical demonstration for black & white reversal 16mm film stocks, 2003, 10 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Learn the film camera(s), Part 2: lenses

1. As a class, discuss focal length and identify different lenses.
2. As a class, discuss exposure index and color temperature and identify different film stocks (color, black & white, reversal, negative).
3. In groups, shoot 100 feet of group and individual portraits with zoom lenses and short-, medium-, and long-focal-length prime lenses, on Tri-X reversal film stock.

Week 12: Shooting Narratives

questions to answer today: What is the difference between story and plot and how can we manipulate them? What is the relation between film style and film narrative? What is genre? Why make a genre film? What is the difference between a script and a shooting script? How do we follow the 180-degree rule? Who comprises a narrative film crew and what does each crew member do? How can we use Final Cut Pro to organize our stories?

in-class screening: *The Cat Came Back* (Cordell Barker, Canada, 1988, 7 min.) (dvd)
It Happened One Night [clips] (Frank Capra, USA, 1934, 105 min) (dvd)
The Life of an American Fireman (Edwin Porter, USA, 1903, 6 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: As a class, form a film crew and remake the "I coulda been a contender" scene from *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954).
Screen our 16mm portraits from Week 11 and learn how to thread a projector.

Week 13: Workflow and Distribution

***In-class quiz today:** multiple-choice + short-essay questions about lighting, film cameras, film lenses, and the film image

questions to answer today: How do we compress projects for the web? for dvd? How do we embed video within a web page? What are our options if we shoot on film and want to edit on video? What does a film lab do and how do we communicate with the people who work there?

read for today: *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, ch. 17: The Film Laboratory
The Filmmaker's Handbook, ch. 18: Film and Digital Transfers

in-class screening: *Winter's Bone* [clips, including the 'behind the scenes' extra feature] (Debra Granik, USA, 2010, 100 min.) (dvd)

in-class activity: Introduce compression and web publishing software.

1. As a class, familiarize ourselves with Final Cut Pro's compression utility, Compressor.
2. As a class, briefly introduce Final Cut Pro's film conversion utility, Cinema Tools; the DVD-authoring software DVD Studio Pro; and the web publishing software Dreamweaver.

Screen and critique final project footage.

Week 14: Futures in Film

questions to answer today: Where do we go from here? What classes do we take? What internship opportunities do we seek out? What careers in film and media production might we consider? What is the future of the film industry? What is the future of media production and distribution?

in-class activity: Screen and critique final project rough cuts.

Week 15: Final Project Critiques

***Final individual assignment due today** [both uploaded to the web and burned onto dvd]

in-class activity: Screen and critique final projects.

Finalize plans for a public screening of final projects.