

COMM 240 CINEMA TECHNIQUES
2007-2008 Spring Semester
Monday and Wednesday, 3:00 - 5:00 in AC N211

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Course Description

“The study of conventions and creative strategies through which a director visualizes thought and emotion, as well as an introduction to motion picture production. The course combines an analysis of films, art, and photography with practical field experience. Students select use of either motion picture or video equipment.”

Course Objectives

1. To understand the conventions of cinematography/videography and how they can be creatively used (or violated) within the film/video medium.
2. To thoroughly understand the procedures and technology of 16mm silent film production.
3. To develop competence and confidence in the execution of each phase of the production process.
4. To understand different aesthetics (or visual styles) used within film and video production.

The Value of a Liberal Arts Education

This course, Radio-TV-Film, and the Department of Communication are all housed within the College of Letters & Science. We strongly endorse a liberal arts education, and this belief has informed the structure and goals of this course. As a consequence, we will not simply teach you how to operate equipment; we are also interested in filmmaking as a means of expression. To this end, we will analyze excerpts from a wide variety of films you are likely unfamiliar with, and we will deconstruct the visuals of dozens of paintings — from Raphael to Dorothea Tanning. For the creed of this course, we have chosen the following quote from cinematographer John Bailey, found in the book *Masters of Light*: “I think a lifetime commitment to learning and studying still photography, painting and all the graphic areas is real important. It’s a constant process. In a sense, you’re a student for your whole career. It’s important to keep that disposition. I think that the same kind of questioning that you do when you’re first starting, where every shot is a new experience is important to do all the way through. It’s not a skill that you’re learning where, at a certain point, you’ve learned it all.”

Methods of Instruction

Lectures and labs with hands-on experience.

Instructional Materials

Edward Pincus and Steven Ascher's *The Filmmaker's Handbook* (required)

Doug Heil's *Film Production at UW Oshkosh* (required)

16mm film equipment

Screenings of slides/films/videos.

<u>Grading</u>	<u>Grade Scale Used for Each Student's Cumulative Avg.</u>		
25% Midterm	90 to 100 = A		70 to 77.9 = C
25% Final Exam	88 to 89.9 = AB		68 to 69.9 = CD
35% Final Project	80 to 87.9 = B		60 to 67.9 = D
10% Quizzes and Labs	78 to 79.9 = BC		Below 60 = F
05% Attendance			

Midterm and Final Exam

Both will consist of short answer, multiple choice, identification, and true/false questions with perhaps an essay or two. Questions will cover lecture material and the textbook. Please make every attempt to be present for these exams as make-ups will necessarily be different and more difficult. The second exam is not comprehensive.

Quizzes and Labs

This course will utilize take-home quizzes. Each one will be passed out in a class prior to the reading assignment and will be due at the beginning of the class period designated by the instructor. Each correct answer is worth two points. Quizzes cannot be made up.

Up to 16 points will be awarded for the edited Lab #3. Sixteen points are given to projects that are flawlessly shot and edited with technical and creative proficiency (and that have a title). Fifteen points are given to films with only a single flaw (perhaps a match cut that does not match, or no title, or a poorly framed or exposed shot). Fourteen points are given to projects that may be flawed but show strong potential and strong effort. Twelve points are given for flawed projects that have the minimum two match cuts. Ten points are given for projects that have at least been turned in with at least two attempted edits.

Earned lab points will be added to earned quiz points and then divided by the total number of possible lab and quiz points to determine 10% of the overall grade. For example, if 42 quiz questions are given (worth two points a question, and the student answers 38 of them correctly, the student earns 76 quiz points out of a possible 84. The student also is awarded 12 points out of a possible 16 for lab work. Consequently, the student has accumulated 88 points out of a possible 100, which translates into 88%, which is an AB.

Attendance

Ideally, each student should attend 28 classes in this course. To determine the 5%

grading clause for attendance, the following scale will be used:

100 = perfect attendance	58 = seven missed classes
94 = one missed class	52 = eight missed classes
88 = two missed classes	46 = nine missed classes
82 = three missed classes	40 = 10 missed classes
76 = four missed classes	32 = 11 missed classes
70 = five missed classes	26 = 12 missed classes
64 = six missed classes	20 = 13 missed classes

Anyone missing 50% or more of the class sessions (14 or more classes) flunks the entire course. If a student arrives late, it is the student's responsibility after class to ensure that the instructor has recorded his/her attendance. Medical problems (in which I am notified through proper university channels) will not be counted against the student; these are excused absences. Field trips or organizational activities cleared through proper University channels are also excused.

Final Project

The class will be divided into four-person groups: students within a group will work as a unit during the three labs and are also encouraged to help each other with the final project. However, each member must turn in his or her own final project; no collaborations will be accepted. (Groups will be organized according to whether the student wishes to shoot on 16mm or Beta in this course.)

Class time may not be used for a final project shoot.

Grading will be based on the following factors:

1. Camera. Do shots stay in focus? Are exposures, white balancing, and/or color balancing handled correctly? Are pans, zooms, and/or tracks smooth? Are framing conventions observed? (Note: students who shoot on automatic exposure will be penalized 20 points on this segment of their final project grade.)
2. Direction. Has the script material been made as compelling as possible through direction and cinematography? Has continuity been maintained? Are performances stylistically consistent?
3. Editing. Have flash frames and dead spaces been trimmed from the fine cut? Does the film have an appropriate pace? Are there at least three match cuts and do the match cuts work? Are there titles and a countdown leader? Are the titles an appropriate length?

To avoid any point penalties, the final project must be completed in time for a critique session held outside of class during the final week of the semester. Each student is responsible for scheduling this session (during which the project is critiqued and a grade is given).

Final deadline is 4:00 p.m. Monday after the last week of classes. Students who do not turn anything in by this time receive a “0” on their final project.

Reshoot Option

Students who are dissatisfied with the quality of their final project may, upon showing it to the instructor, request an incomplete. For a reshoot, a student may elect to switch from 16mm to Beta to save money. Reshoots are due the final Friday of the following Interim at 4:00 p.m. If a student who has requested and received an incomplete fails to turn in the reshoot by this deadline, the original final project grade is reinstated, and the incomplete removed. All reshoots receive a five-point penalty.

Optional Class Fee

Film production classes across the country are much like art classes: students are required to purchase their own supplies. Besides film stock and processing, expenses include a light meter (varies from \$60 to \$400), gaffer’s tape (\$9.50), a tape measure (c. \$10), lens cleaning tissue and fluid (\$3), compressed air (\$29.20), various tools (c. \$50), a neutral density filter (c.\$15.53), a stopwatch (c.\$10), a color separation guide (\$10), 18% gray cards (45.99), and white leader. (Shipping has not been included in these prices.) Until 1987, UW-Oshkosh also followed this tradition, but due to the rising costs of many of these items, there is now an alternative: students may pay an optional \$10 class fee. The collected funds are then used to purchase the above-mentioned supplies. These supplies are shared only amongst paying students. Before deciding whether or not to pay the optional fee, please consider the following:

1. The \$10 fee is used for light meter purchase, camera kit supplies, and editing supplies to facilitate transfer to video. By paying the fee, a student has access to the camera kits (which includes a light meter).
2. The four members of a group must unanimously decide whether or not they wish to pay each of the optional fees. If a group elects not to pay a fee, members of the group will not be allowed to check out materials funded by that fee.
3. The camera kits and editing supplies exist solely as a result of student fees.
4. Any materials purchased through optional fees which are not used up by the end of the semester (such as light meters) will be retained by the University for future student use.
5. If the student does not pay the fee, but uses the fee materials in lab or on the final project shoot, the student’s grade will be withheld until the fee is paid.
6. After paying the fee, retain your receipt and then show it to the instructor as proof of payment. Note what date you have paid the fee. If you lose your receipt before showing it to the instructor, the Cashier’s Office can still provide verification. If you do not show your receipt and if the Cashier’s Office cannot

find you in their records, the instructor will reluctantly be unable to accept your word that you have paid.

(Note: Materials purchased by the optional course fee do result in a tangible product that is retained by the student.)

Additional Course Expenses

If a student elects to shoot on film, he/she should budget for either three 100' rolls of film and two rolls processed or else two 100' rolls of film and three rolls processed (depending on the arrangement made with one's lab partner) (three is recommended). To hold down costs, students are encouraged to purchase black and white reversal film (the least expensive stock), and purchase of a workprint is neither required nor even recommended.

If you shoot on film, estimated expenses for the course will be as follows:

Pincus and Ascher textbook	\$20.00 / \$15.00 used
Heil's Cinema Tech book	6.00
Class fee	10.00
Two 100' b/w film rolls w/shipping	35.00
Processing of three rolls w/shipping	57.00
One 30' Beta SP videotape	<u>11.00</u>
Total:	\$139.00

These expenses will be reduced if you are able to shoot your final project on a single roll of film as opposed to two rolls.

Equipment Problems

Equipment breakdown is inevitable. If you have a problem, immediately inform both the equipment check-in person and the engineers.

Film Versus Video

In the past, students did not have a choice in this course: lab and final projects had to be shot on film. Since the focus of 240 is on learning visual expression, however, it ultimately does not matter what kind of camera is used on the shoots. As a result, in order to make this class as relevant as possible to the greatest number of RTF majors, we are now offering a choice: students may shoot on either 16mm film or Beta. Because this is the only lower level course that addresses film production at all, the focus of the "technical" lectures in this course will continue to center on the film medium. But we will also try to increase your knowledge of video, as well.

Should one shoot on film or on video? The advantages of video are that it is cheaper, there are probably less ways in which an oversight can impair your project, and you can immediately review what you have shot, enabling you to make corrections on the spot. For this reason, video is the less stressful medium.

The primary advantage of shooting on film is that you'll never again have as "safe" an environment in which to experiment with this medium. By this I mean that a) the final project has been designed so that it can be shot on a single 100' roll of film (although you may want to order a second roll as protection) in one afternoon and without using any lights, b) you will transfer your film to Beta for free in Master Control and then edit it on the nonlinear editor, c) you are allowed to reshoot the project if it does not work out (on Beta if you wish), and d) since the final project is only 35% of the final grade, you have "protection" from all the other grades in this course. In short, you will never have a less intimidating and painless environment in which you can shoot film.

In the end, you should use your career goals as a determinant of which medium to use. Students who are committed to working in news or reality programming (sports, game shows, talk shows, and prime-time fare such as *Fear Factor*) may well want to deepen their knowledge of the video medium, which is what they will exclusively be working with after they graduate. Students who are interested in cinematography, directing, or writing/producing dramatic television should take the plunge now with the film medium. For anyone else (scriptwriters, critics, actors, etc.), the choice is strictly yours! (P.S. - if you think you will be taking Comm 305 Cinema Production — the intermediate sequel course to 240 — definitely shoot on film!)

One last caveat: because this class has one-on-one final project conferences outside of class in which a shot-by-shot analysis is conducted on the final project, students who shoot on video must use the same restraint and discipline as students shooting on film. Any project exceeding three minutes in length will receive a 10-point penalty.

Class Attitude

A student who has an outstanding in-class attitude will benefit in a borderline grade decision. For this class, such a student is one who is attentive, inquisitive, positive, and sensitive to the needs of his/her classmates. Try to avoid sealing yourself off within a clique; move around and work with different students. Remain open to the ideas and input of others. (You may know the camera inside and out, but perhaps the person next to you is skilled at structuring a script.) Remember that film/video is a collective art and that projects are best served by a good team spirit. Conversely, talking during a lecture or screening or jeopardizing a classmate's project during a lab or shoot constitutes negative, disruptive behavior. After the second disruption, I will privately talk to the student. If the student continues to disrupt, four points may be deducted from the final grade.

Course Schedule

- 2/04 Introduction to the Course
- 2/06 Filmmaking Basics/ Film Formats
(P&A: Chapter 1)
- 2/11 Film Stock/ Exposure Index/Ordering Procedures
(P&A: 111-132 from Chapter 4; Heil: 31-36)
- 2/13 The Lens: F-Stop Ring and Focal Ring
(P&A: Chapter 3; Heil: 41-42)
- 2/18 Bolex Camera/Division into Groups
(P&A: Chapter 2; Heil: 124-132)
- 2/20 Lab #1: Loading the Camera/Working the Light Meter
(Heil: 17, 145-149; P&A: Chapter 5)
- 2/25 Lab #1: Loading the Camera/Working the Light Meter
(P&A: 132-150 from Chapter 4)
- 2/27 The Lens Ring
(P&A: Chapter 6)
- 3/03 Framing as a Cinematic Variable
(Heil, 45, 162-163; P&A: Chapter 7)
- 3/05 Depth of Field/The Tripod
(Heil: : 150; P&A: Chapter 8)
- 3/10 Lab #2: Practice Shoot
(Heil: 18-19, 132, 160-161)
- 3/12 Lab #2: Practice Shoot
- 3/17 Camera Movement
(P&A: 472-79)
- 3/19 Camera Movement and Camera Angles
- 3/24-28 SPRING BREAK
- 3/31 Basic Lighting
(P&A: 11; Heil: 103-108)
- 4/02 MIDTERM
- 4/07 Reviewing the Midterm/The Editing Process
- 4/09 Editing Strategies
(P&A: Chapter 12)

- 4/14 Editing Theory/Editing Mechanics
(Final Cut Pro handout; P&A: Chapter 14)
- 4/16 Lab #3: Practice Edits
(Heil: 20)
- 4/21 Lab #3: Practice Edits
- 4/23 Continuity/Blocking Actors and Environment
(Heil: 164-167; P&A: Chapter 16)
- 4/28 Nonverbal Expression
(P&A: Chapter 17)
- 4/30 Creative Direction
(Heil: 168-179)
- 5/05 Visual Aesthetics: Classicism
(Heil: 180-182)
- 5/07 Visual Aesthetics: Romanticism and Realism
(Heil: 183-187)
- 5/12 Visual Aesthetics: Expressionism and Surrealism
(Heil: 188-190, 194-202)
- 5/14 FINAL EXAM