

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Film Production at FAMU

Course Code / Title: (PR/FILM 410) Narrative Film: Pre-Production and Production

Total Hours: 130

Recommended Credits: 6

Primary Discipline / Cross-Listings: Film Production / Film Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: For 16mm: previous experience in filmmaking, film theory, visual arts, or photography is highly recommended but not required. For 35mm: previous experience in 16mm is required.

Description

Offered exclusively to CET students - and serving as one of two integrated core courses for the *Film Production at FAMU* program - this course is run through FAMU, the Film and Television School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, and is administered and taught by FAMU staff and faculty. FAMU oversees the curriculum, professors, and grading. CET serves in a supportive role through onsite orientation, ongoing advising, and troubleshooting matters that might arise in the course of production. CET also supports the administration of the course and the *Film Production* program by liaising with faculty, administrators, and project managers at FAMU, and by funding the film budget.

This comprehensive, multi-faceted course is based on an academy approach that involves intensive mentoring by with a team of expert faculty. During production, students also collaborate with a professional production manager, camera assistant, sound designer, and color grader, and practice the art of talent selection by working with a professional casting agency. Students work with the film lab to select film stocks for greater cinematic control, and practice lighting for both interior and exterior productions. The post-production process and final product are graded separately, with a focus on editing, color grading, and sound design, and a formal screening and jury review of the final product.

The class is composed of five modules, each of which is described in greater detail below:

1. Directing and Script
2. Screenwriting
3. Cinematography and Lighting Exercise
4. Camera & Film Language Seminar
5. Working with Actors

The course also includes guest lecturers throughout the semester in which students view the works of and meet with established local filmmakers. In total, this course includes approximately 130 contact hours per semester, though the total number of contact hours may fluctuate slightly each semester. CET recommends granting 6 semester hours of credit for this course.

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Methods of Evaluation

Grades for each module are determined by the faculty teaching them, based on exams, scripts or projects. The final grade is calculated according to the following percentage:

- Directing & Script: 50%
- Cinematography: 20%
- Working with Actors: 10%
- Professionalism and Participation: 20%

This includes active and thoughtful participation, punctuality, and respectful and collegial attitude to fellow students, crew members, and faculty.

Students should be aware that their work is evaluated according to quality of both process and product, talent and discipline. As noted above, FAMU instruction follows an academy approach, where students work closely with faculty mentors, but structured, written feedback may be minimal. Last but not least, though artistic success is celebrated, the FAMU pedagogical approach also values learning from failures—learning what doesn't work. Students are expected to approach the course and the process with a willingness to learn both from success and from failure.

Because the course's academic content and evaluation is managed by FAMU faculty, any grade appeals are handled through FAMU.

Attendance Policy

Active participation and attendance in all components of this course are required as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy.

Outline of Course Content

1. Directing and Script (45 contact hours, plus 8-10 hours of organizational meetings with film group)

Description: This module focuses on mastering the fundamentals of filmmaking and its grammar. Students establish a theoretical knowledge of the craft by developing their projects and discussing the process and results with the group instructors, supervising mentor, and fellow students. Through their final projects, students practice and explore filmmaking in three organically overlapping parts:

- Cinematic Storytelling - Parts of a story, Becoming Good Cinematic Storytellers, Understand the Language of Cinema & Guiding the viewer's eye.
- Key elements of film production - Understanding the various facets of filmmaking and crew roles, how they work together and what they contribute to the finished product.
- Essential Elements of Visual Language - line, color, shape, Space (deep/flat) and perspective, Rhythm, intensity, Light, Shadow, specularly, fat off, Cutting shots for emotion, etc.

The instructors and students work together on the final project from the beginning of the process to the shooting of the film (idea, script, storyboard, shots, directing) under the guidance of the supervising

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mentor, who also holds weekly classes and individual consultations with the students to track the development of the projects step by step.

Objectives: During this module, students learn to recognize that directing is a complex and multifaceted craft that involves working with several factors which create meaning, drama, and powerful imagery. The students understand that while specific responsibilities carry over throughout the entire production, each stage of pre-production and production has its specific tasks that must be completed before the film is ready for audiences by participating in various capacities on different sets.

The students also learn to appreciate the highly collaborative nature of filmmaking practice.

Topics Covered:

- Fundamental concepts of writing and directing for motion pictures.
- Understanding Key Crew members and effectively communicating with them,
- Objective and Subjective storytelling
- Preserving Artistic Integrity
- Identifying and Analysing signifiers
- Image associations & visualizations,
- Pre-production & Production Workflow
- Script Breakdown
- Scheduling & Project Management.

2. Screenwriting (16.5 contact hours)

Description: One purpose of this course is to study films from a dramaturgical perspective—to understand diverse narrative techniques, dramatic structures and genre forms—and to closely examine the craft of screenwriting. Each student group writes a script for their individual films and has it analyzed by the class and instructor. The instructor also works with the students on their individual scripts for their final projects.

Objectives and Topics Covered: Through the intensive analysis of films, students learn to examine and explain the following elements of screenwriting: three-act story structure, plot points, turning points, the function of exposition, the catalyst, rising action, crisis, climax, culmination, resolution, main tension, theme, scenes and sequences, sub-plots, double-plots, multi-plots and internal scene structure. Analysis also covers the role of the protagonist, the creation of empathy, the journey of protagonist (spine), active and passive characters, supporting characters, "string characters," character arcs and motivation, the role of the antagonist, the use of conflict and obstacles, and comparison of objective vs. subjective conflict, action vs. activity.

The course also explores interpretations of film as a temporal-spatial art by examining pacing, rhythm, accelerating action, and the handling of time and space, montage, transitions, sound, and music. Dialogue, the dramatic use of props and costumes, staging and the creation of atmosphere as

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employed in the screenplay are also covered. Students are expected to recognize and begin to master these dramatic and narrative elements.

3. Cinematography and Lighting Exercise (48.5 contact hours)

Description: This workshop provides a comprehensive study into the tools and the craft of cinematography. Each week, students meet with their professor to analyze various aspects of cinematography in relation to a specific field project. The field project explores the tools of the cinematographer (i.e. camera equipment, lighting, exponometry) while at the same time providing students the necessary theory and experience to develop an individual style and poetic. By the end of the semester, students have the groundwork to conceive and photograph their final project. The professor also works with the students during the process of making of the final film.

Objectives: In this module, students learn to understand and apply:

- Lighting: terminology, basic rules, intensity, color temperature, filters
- Exponometry: setting exposure, and the variables affecting exposure
- Incident light-measuring technology
- Spotmeter measuring technology
- Cameras and equipment, such as:
 - Aaton 16mm – XTR, LTR, Production
 - ARRI SR 3 16 mm
- Studio lighting theory
- Photographic methods
- Telecine transfer technology
- Video production: TV technology
 - TV cameraman's role in the process of video production
 - Pre-shooting camera and sound preparation (i.e. white balancing)

Topics Covered: Introduction to the Workshop, Analysis and Discussion of Project, Introduction to Lighting, Analysis and Discussion of Lighting Project.

4. Camera & Film Language Seminar (24 contact hours)

Description and Objectives: The Camera and Film Language seminar focuses on the role of the camera in cinematography. Elements such as shot size, axis rules, and angles of view—technical tools that serve a dramatic purpose in film—are examined in-depth. Several styles of cinematography are considered in order to understand how to develop a story and cultivate a style using film language. Movement as a fundamental tool of cinematography is emphasized. The professor works with the students on the final film and advises on camera techniques during the shooting process.

Required readings for this module are as follows:

- Daniel Arijon, *Grammar of The Film Language*. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1976.
- Steven D. Katz, *Shot by Shot*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wise Productions, 1991.
- Kris Malkiewicz and M. David Mullen, *Cinematography*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

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Topics Covered:

- Introduction + shot sizes, angles, and axis rules. Cinematographer as collaborator of storyboards, collaborator of storytelling.
- Movement as basic means of expression of film. Historical experience projection. Movement of objects in front of camera. Movement of lights. Movement of camera. 3D feeling. Using plans.
- Movement exercise. 30m reversal B&W film: study of movement. Projection.
- Basic rules of picture composition and framing. Composition styles in painting. *Le nombre d'or* + Golden Section rules.
- Theory of backgrounds. Parameters of shooting locations.
- Theory and practice of depth of field.
- Color theory. RGB + CMY + K. Color wheel. Color grading in film and video.
- Lighting theory. Cinematography styles. Historical overview.
- Storyboard consultations for main film exercise.
- Additional time for individual consultations with the professor for preparation, shooting and editing of final film exercise.

5. Working with Actors (13 contact hours)

Description: This course prepares the directing student for creative collaboration with the actors who inhabit the characters of their stories. Understanding their process in approaching a role and developing a character will help the director contribute to their success. The work is approached through in-class exercises on short scenes.

Objectives

- To learn tools for breaking down a script into acting units
- To learn tools for getting actors to connect to their roles and to each other;
- To practice communicating productively through verbs, images, questions and events;
- To practice using improvisation techniques for developing rich characters, and for integrating the characters into the space and situation of the story.

Recommended readings:

Travis, M. (2002). *Directing Feature Films*. LA: Michael Weise Productions
Weston, J. (2014). *Directing Actors*. LA: Michael Weise Productions