

## **COMM 308 - Screen Directing**

**Wednesdays 4:15 - 6:45pm (Mundelein Rm 1410)**

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**Office Hours: by appointment**

### **Course Objective**

COMM 308 is an advanced course in screen directing designed to further the students' narrative storytelling skills. Geared toward creating fiction work, the course focuses primarily on blocking for the camera, directing actors for the screen, and analyzing dramatic scenes. It is required that students entering the course have a working knowledge of basic videography, editing, shot composition and film grammar. At the conclusion of the course students will be able to:

1. communicate effectively with talent and crew;
2. analyze a narrative scene for its dramatic and stylistic elements;
3. direct single-camera narrative scenes;
4. produce and construct narrative films/videos from a screenplay.

### **Texts and Readings**

- Required:**
- *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & TV* by Weston.
  - Videos on Sakai.
  - Articles and Essays on Sakai.

### **Grading and Evaluation**

#### **Attendance Policy and Late Assignments:**

- Students are expected to complete all of the assigned projects and readings on time. Late projects will automatically be penalized one point per day (i.e. project that earns a 15/15 will get a 13/15 if submitted two days late). No projects will be accepted more than five business days (i.e. one week) after the due date.
- Students are expected to arrive on time and attend every class. More than two absences (even excused absences) will automatically result in a lower participation grade.
- We will be filming a scene as a class on a weekend in late October (tentatively). You should make arrangements in advance to be available for that day. Participation in the shoot is an integral and *mandatory* part of the course.

**Note on working in groups:** media production is by nature a collaborative medium, consequently students will be required to work together on many of the assigned projects for this class. In fact, on the first three assignments, you will receive the same grade as your group members. Consequently, to ensure your full participation and provide a means of evaluating your contribution to your group and your peers' work, your ability to function as part of the group will also be evaluated and impact your overall participation grade.

**Grade Breakdown and Feedback:** Your final grade will be based on your participation in classroom discussions, critiques and exercises, your performance on quizzes and the quality of your assignments.

The breakdown of your grade is as follows:

Directing Exercise I - Understanding the Actor: 10%

Directing Exercise II - The Live Performance: 10%

Directing Exercise III - Auditioning the Actor: 10%

Script Breakdown: 15%

4 Quizzes: 20% total (5% each)

Final Project Narrative Video: 25%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

## **Equipment and Material Supplies**

Students enrolled in SOC production courses are eligible to check out cameras, sound and lighting equipment for use in completion of course assignments. The range of equipment access is determined by course and subject to both the permission of the instructor and item availability. Students are responsible for the timely and safe return of all equipment (see checkout policies)

Students are welcome to utilize their own equipment to complete course assignments, but should consult with the instructor about technical specifications and compatibility issues before proceeding.

## **Computer Use and External Drive Policy**

Occasional software bugs, virus presence, human error and/or hardware failure can result in damaged, corrupted or deleted files (including audio, video and graphic files). In addition, to conserve drive space and ensure the smooth operation of the computers, the drives in the SOC labs are wiped clean upon log-out. Consequently, it is your responsibility to back-up your media and project files during and after each use. As you are not guaranteed access to the same computer AND it is probable that all of the files saved to a computer's drive will be erased before your return, students should secure an external drive for maintaining their own files and media. Consult the instructor about recommended specs before purchasing an external drive.

## **Assignments**

The meat of this course consists of completing the following projects:

- Directing Exercise I: Understanding the Actor- basic acting, becoming the actor.
- Directing Exercise II: The Live Performance -basic acting, staging and use of mise-en-Scene.
- Directing Exercise III: Auditioning the Actor- casting, audition prep, communication.
- Script Breakdowns- script analysis, pre-visualization and production planning.
- Final Project- casting and directing a short subject video; from pre-viz thru production.

The assignments are designed to introduce you to the various components of directing and narrative filmmaking. Each project relates to and builds on the previous one, culminating in a

final project utilizing the directing and cinematic storytelling skills learned over the course of the semester.

All written assignments must be submitted electronically BEFORE the start of class. Video projects must be submitted via a [YouTube or Vimeo link](#).

### **Assignment Descriptions**

#### ***Directing Exercise II – the live performance***

In the same groups of 3, with the same scenes used in project 1, flesh out the action, set, character information, etc. so that the scene has dramatic logic and can be performed without using outside actors. You can modify the set and action as needed (i.e. change who does what, where, when and why), but you cannot revise, add to or subtract from the dialog in any significant way. Rewrite the script to include blocking, stage business, the subtext, beats, actions (verbs) for your characters. Have members of the group prepared to perform the scene in class, using whatever props and costumes are possible to bring in. Your directing preps and scripts are due before the performance.

Your Exercises will be judged using the following criteria (5 points each, 20 total)

- Directing prep: Character and Script – characters, beats, action verbs, subtext, etc.
- Staging/Mise-en-scene – use of props, costumes, blocking, staging, stage-business, etc.
- Performance – actors' investment in the scene, circumstances, line memorization, etc.
- Dramatic Logic & Creativity – clear beats, motivated actions, inventive interpretation.

#### ***Directing Exercise I – understanding the actor***

In groups of 3 use a script provided by the instructor to stage a scene in class. Each group member has to act/direct a different scene within the same script. Make the scene cinematic, using off-screen space and sound, compositions in depth, and mise-en-scene (props, sets, costumes) to add to the dramatic or thematic impact of the scene. Switch around the talent, having new actors from the group play the roles. You can make changes to the action, location or characters, but once again, cannot change the dialog in any significant way. A copy of the floor plan, revised director prep/script, as well as the video for the scene must be submitted for the assignment.

Your Acting Scenes will be judged using the following criteria (5 points each, 20 total)

- Mise-en-scene – use of props, costumes, blocking, acting, etc.
- Performance – actors' investment in the scene, circumstances, lines learned...
- Dramatic Logic & Creativity – articulation of beats thru camera, blocking, sound.

#### ***Directing Exercise III – auditioning the actor***

Working in the same groups with the same script from projects 1 & 2, run the audition process with professional actors/actresses. One person reads with the actor, one directs the whole audition, while the other records the session. In this version of the scene, you must record the whole audition process even before the actor reads for the part and after the actor reads. Switch around the scene! A copy of the script, floorplans and shot lists or storyboards, as well as sides for the actors to be submitted at the beginning of class.

Your "Audition Videos" will be judged using the following criteria (5 points each, 20 total)

- Mise-en-scene – use of props, costumes, blocking, acting, etc.
- Camera – framing, cinematography, articulation of beats and style.
- Organization – Making the actor comfortable and having a clear vision.
- Preproduction and Storyboards – shooting script, storyboards and floor-plans.

### ***Script Analysis & Breakdown***

Select one of the scripts provided by the instructor. Write a full, directorial vision for the scene, using the “Script Analysis” questions as a guide. Describe how you would interpret the scene addressing the character’s given circumstances, the subtext, the POV, hierarchy of knowledge, locations, blocking, production design, etc. Also, make note of any special production challenges and/or needs for your script, and discuss how you might address those challenges.

Next, create a copy of the script itself in proper screenplay format. Make sure your script reflects your interpretation, indicating specific information about the characters, the actions, the stage business, the locations, etc. in the description and action.

Create storyboards, floor-plan(s), a lined script and/or shot list for your interpretation. A double-spaced, typed copy of your scene analysis and interpretation, as well as an electronic copy of all your pre-visualization materials and script must be submitted on the project due date.

Your Script Analyses will be judged on the following criteria (5 points each, 15 total)

- Writing and organization – clarity, depth and completeness of your written analysis.
- Interpretation – thoroughness and inventiveness of your interpretation.
- Pre-viz materials – floor-plans, storyboards, etc. reflecting your interpretation.

### ***Final Project Video***

Using a "3 beat" scene you've created amongst a new group, create a short-subject scene as a team. It should retain a basic storyline and strong character development. Each member within the group will direct a beat within the scene. Professional actors are strongly encouraged! You will be required to submit materials at various stages of the production, including: sides, a shooting script, storyboards, art list, dailies, a rough-cut and fine-cut of the film.

Your Final Projects will be judged on the following criteria (5 points each, 25 total)

- Casting & Pre-pro materials – audition preparation, sides, casting, rehearsal, etc.
- Production Values – videography, sound, editing, etc.
- Use of Mise-en-scene – set, costume, props, blocking, acting
- Dramatic Logic – camera blocking, beats, motivated actions, directorial voice.
- Impact – overall creativity, originality, coherence and impact of interpretation.

## Course Schedule

- Week 1**  
**8/30** Introductions and syllabus. Group assignments. The Director and The Beat. Introducing *"The 5 Scripts"*. Casting Calls for 5 films.  
Reading for Week 2: in Weston, "Introduction" (pp. 1-12) "Result Direction," (pp. 13-47) and "Casting" (pp. 235-244). & watch Video Clips on Sakai.
- Week 2**  
**9/6** **Quiz 1.** Intro to acting theory and practice. Exploring text vs. subtext. Casting.  
Reading for Week 3: Weston, "Moment," "Listening" & "Choices," pp. 49-132.
- Week 3**  
**9/13** **Assignment Due: Acting Prep 1 – Characters and subtext.**  
*Films:* Auditions and Casting.  
Screening for Week 4: *Directors on Directing, Part 1* (Kanopy).
- Week 4**  
**9/20** Art direction & stage biz: working outside in. Casting for your films.  
Screening for Week 5: *Directors on Directing, Part 2* (Kanopy).
- Week 5**  
**9/27** **Assignment Due: Acting Exercise I – Understanding the Actor "video".**  
Review character Development/Director's process. Whose scene is it? The reveal. Actor and camera blocking. Active vs. passive camera.  
Reading for Week 6: Dancyger & Rush "Dramatic Voice/Narrative Voice," and Bordwell & Thompson "Narration," (Sakai).
- Week 6**  
**10/4** **Quiz 2.** Hierarchy of knowledge, directorial POV and voice. Blocking & shot design continued: designing masters for *the 5 films*. Storyboards and shot lists. Pre-viz: floor-plans.
- Week 7**  
**10/11** **Assignment Due: Directing Exercise and Prep II - The Live Performance.**  
Review long-take aesthetics. Master shot.. Blocking and using improvisation.  
Reading for Week 8: *Screen Video Clips* (Sakai), and Katz "Editing: Temporal Connections" (Sakai).
- Week 8**  
**10/18** **Assignment Due 3/16: Directing Prep III - Pre-viz (Audition) Casting and**  
Audition procedures. Workshop w/Actors.
- Week 9**  
**10/25** **Assignment Due: Directing Exercise III - "Auditioning the Actor" Videos.**  
**Quiz 3.** Script Selection and Analysis. Final project casting calls/assign groups.
- Week 10**  
**11/1** **Assignment Due: Director's Prep and Script Analysis.**  
Review preps. Write/post casting calls. Directing on set and set procedures.
- Week 11**  
**11/8** **Assignment Due: 3 Beat scenes (Scripts).**  
Individual Meetings.  
Reading for Week 12: Weston's "Rehearsal" & "Shooting" pp. 245-290 and Rabiger/TBD (Sakai).

**Week 12**      **Assignment due: Final project pre-viz materials, shot and art**  
**11/15**      **list. Auditions/workshop w/actors. Individual meetings.**

**\*\*\*\*\* Thanksgiving Break \*\*\*\*\* (No class Wednesday)**

**Week 14**      **Quiz 4. Assignment: Footage/rough cut due by the start of**  
**11/29**      **class.**

**Week 15**      **Post-production procedures. Filming Directing jobs. Course**  
**12/6**      **evaluations.**

**Final Exam**      **Final Cuts**  
**12/6**      **Due. 4:15pm**

*\* Note: The instructor reserves the right to adjust the schedule and assignments as dictated by the needs of the course. Any significant changes to the class or its schedule will be both announced in class and represented in an updated version of the syllabus on Sakai.*