

COMM 308 - Screen Directing

T 4:15-6:45 p.m. in SOC 100 (studio)

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Office Hours: SOC 203, T/Th 1:00-4:00 p.m. or 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 and multi-camera narrative scenes;
4. direct and construct narrative films/videos from a screenplay.

Texts and Readings

- Required:**
- *Film Directing Fundamentals: From Script to Screen* by Proferes.
 - *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & TV* by Weston.
 - Articles/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.

Grading & Evaluation:

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.

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 peers' work, your ability to function as part of the group will also be evaluated and impact your overall participation grade.

The breakdown of your grade is as follows:

Directing Exercise I - Live Performance: 10%

Directing Exercise II - Long Take: 10%

Directing Exercise III - Analytic Montage: 10%

Script Breakdowns: 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: Live Performance- basic acting, staging and use of mise-en-scene.
- Directing Exercise II: Long Take- blocking for the camera, lens choice, using off-camera space.
- Directing Exercise III: Analytic Montage- breaking into shots, perspective, voice and POV.
- Script Breakdowns- script analysis, breakdowns, 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 ScreeningRoom.org.

Assignment Descriptions

Directing Exercise I – the live performance

In groups of 3, use the script provided by the instructor to stage a scene in class. 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 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. Mark-up or rewrite the script to include the subtext, beats, action verbs, and given circumstances for your characters. Have members of the group prepared to perform the scene in class, using whatever props and costumes are necessary and possible to bring in. Your written character backgrounds and marked-up script 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 II – the long take

Working in the same groups and with the same scenes used in project 1, produce the scene on video as a long take or master shot. 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 by the beginning of class.

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

- Mise-en-scene – use of props, costumes, blocking, acting, etc.
- Camera – camera mov't, framing, use of axes and cinematography.
- Dramatic Logic & Creativity – articulation of beats thru camera, blocking, sound.
- Floor-plan and Pre-production – script mark-up and floor-plan.

Directing Exercise III – the analytic montage

Working in the same groups with the same script from projects 1 & 2, produce the scene on video as an edited sequence comprised of at least 10 shots and 3 set-ups. In this version of the scene, you must also include both a shot from the preceding scene and a shot from the scene that follows. In other words, you should extend the scene a bit, including the moment before and moment after, but without adding more lines of dialogue. Switch around the talent, having new actors from the group play the roles. A copy of the script, storyboards and an edited cut of the scene must be submitted at the beginning of class.

Your Montages 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.
- Editing – pacing, sound, continuity and articulation of beats.
- 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 the script created in your previous project or new one provided by the instructor, create a short-subject film as a team. You may make minor changes to the script, as fits your talent and interpretation, but should retain the basic storyline and dramatic elements of the original. 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**
8/29 Introductions and syllabus. Group assignments. The Director and The Beat. Introducing *Scars*. Casting Calls for *Scars*.
Reading for Week 2: in Weston, "Introduction" (pp. 1-12) "Result Direction," (pp. 13-47) and "Casting" (pp. 235-244), & in Proferes chapter 10 (pp. 123-131).
- Week 2**
9/5 **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**
9/12 **Assignment Due: Directing Prep 1 – Characters and subtext.**
Scars Auditions and Casting.
Reading for Week 4: *Film Directing Fundamentals*, chapters 1-4 (pp. 3-35).
- Week 4**
9/19 Art direction & stage biz: working outside in. *Scars* Rehearsal.
Reading for Week 5: *Film Directing Fundamentals* chapters 4-7 (pp. 36-86).
- Week 5**
9/26 **Assignment Due: Directing Exercise I – Live Performances.**
Review long-take aesthetics. Master shot. 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**
10/3 **Quiz 2.** Blocking & scene design continued: designing master for *Scars*. Pre-viz: floor-plans. Hierarchy of knowledge, directorial POV and voice.
- Week 7**
10/17 **Assignment Due: Directing Exercise and Prep II - Long-Take/Master Shot.**
Pre-viz cont'd: coverage, shot lists & storyboards. Prep for *Scars* shoot.
Reading for Week 8: *Film Directing Fundamentals* chapters 8-9 (pp. 87-122), and Katz "Editing: Temporal Connections" (Sakai).
- Week 8**
10/24 **Assignment Due: Directing Prep III - Pre-viz materials.**
Quiz 3. Directing on set and set procedures. *Scars* Shoot.
- Week 9**
10/31 **Assignment Due: Directing Exercise III - Analytic Montages.**
Script Selection and Analysis. Final project casting calls.
- Week 10**
11/7 **Assignment Due: Casting Calls, Sides and part I of script analyses.**
Auditions Group 1.
- Week 11**
11/14 **Assignment Due: part II of script analyses.**
Auditions Group 2.
Reading for Week 12: Weston's "Rehearsal" & "Shooting" pp. 245-290, and *Film Directing Fundamentals* Chapter 11-14 (pp. 132-217) and Rabiger/TBD (Sakai).
- Week 12**
11/21 **Assignment due: Final project pre-viz materials, cast and art list.**
Scene workshop or rehearsal. Pre-viz review. Production meetings.

Week 13 **Quiz 4.** Scene workshop. Post-production procedures. Filming
11/28 Directing jobs. Course evaluations. Set individual meeting times.

Week 14 **Assignment: Footage due at individual meetings.**
12/5-7

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

** 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.*