

# **INTRODUCTION TO AUDIO PRODUCTION (COMM 130)**

Spring 2018

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Office hours by appointment, preferably before or after class session

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is an introduction to the world of audio production. It is meant for undergraduate students with an interest in audio and its applications in modern media and art. Students will learn to employ audio as a creative tool for documentary storytelling, fiction filmmaking, video art, news media, radio production, comedy sketches, commercials and internet production.

Creativity and careful execution are major factors in the grading of ALL projects.

## **COURSE GOALS**

- Understand basic audio concepts and terminology.
- Develop critical listening skills, learn how to effectively discuss sound.
- Gain a working knowledge of basic audio technology including microphones, recorders, mixers, and DAWs.
- Conceptualize, plan, and execute effective sound designs.
- Familiarity with audio editing, mixing, and design processes and methods.
- Practice the art of storytelling using sound.
- Develop directing and writing skills in regards to audio production.
- Understand audio workflows, practices and standards.
- Develop interviewing and field recording skills.
- Learn basic music editing and concepts.
- Learn how sound and image work in tandem to tell stories.
- Provide and incorporate constructive criticism to and from your colleagues.
- Manage effective collaborations.

## **EQUIPMENT** (Comprehensive list available on SAKAI)

- Zoom H4N Recorders
- Microphones
- Sound Device Field Recorder
- Mixers
- Adobe Audition

## **MATERIALS**

- External Hard Drive or USB Key\*

Audio Interview: Record, log, and edit a short (1.5-3 minute) audio interview with subject of your choosing, using a recording ratio of at least 10:1. Please try to "think outside of the box" regarding your subject matter, and use this as an opportunity to satiate your own curiosity about someone or something that piques your interest or inspires you, or shines light on someone or something that you feel is under-represented, or people might be surprised to find worthy of their attention. While the guidelines for the project are pretty open, please don't just interview your roommate. (10%)

Soundscape: Plan and produce a short (1.5-3 minute) audio soundscape or sonic portrait of a specific (physical and/or psychological) environment, person, or event using only sound effects and ambient audio (no interviews or music!). (10%)

Audio Documentary or Drama: Record and edit a short (2-4 minute) audio documentary, radio drama, or spoken word piece into a fully produced, radio-ready audio project. Your project must incorporate voice recordings, SFX, and music. If you wish, you may expand upon your previously completed interview projects with this assignment. Think about how sounds, when edited and placed next to other sounds, take on new narrative or conceptual significance, and about how disparate types of sound, such as the spoken word, music, and sound effects, can flow and interweave to build a fully formed narrative experience for the listener. (15%)

Film Soundtrack: Build a soundtrack from the ground up for a video clip of your choosing, from a selection of four I will provide for you (TBD). The point of this assignment is to think and act critically regarding sound's relation to image, and to develop a sort of "parallel" or "oppositional" sonic world which does more than passively reinforce what we see on the screen. A corresponding critical "treatment", which outlines your plan and analyzes your sound design decisions, will be due beforehand and discussed over with me. (15%)

## **WRITING AND OTHER ASSIGNMENTS (20%)**

Sound Walk: Go on a sound walk, record notes, and discuss in class. (5%)

Audio Analysis of Film, Sound Piece or Live Event: Written analysis of how sound is deployed in a film, sound piece or live sound event. Students are encouraged to attend a screening at an independent cinema, an experimental music concert, or performance, art show, or play in which sound is a vital component, though watching a movie at home or listening to an audio piece is acceptable. Suggestions for screenings, venues and live events provided at the end of the syllabus. (10%)

Accompanying Analysis for Film Soundtrack Project: Consider this a sort of "treatment" for your final film soundtrack project, wherein you outline your sound design strategy and critically analyze your sound design choices. Does the sound work with or against the image? What are you accomplishing narratively or tonally with your use of sound?

- Always make a safety copy of your project and bring it with you on screening days in case of any technical difficulties.
- Production Exercises and Projects include the assigned paperwork.
- Quizzes will be drawn from material covered in readings, class lectures and discussions. Some topics will be covered only in the readings, some topics will be covered only in lectures and some will be covered in both readings & lectures. Students are responsible for ALL of the material.

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS & DUE DATES**

- A penalty will be assessed for any assignment that is not turned in or uploaded to Sakai by the beginning of the class session that it is due.
- Assignments turned in one class late will lose one full letter grade.
- Assignments not turned in within the first 15 minutes of class will be considered late and lose one full letter grade.
- Assignments turned in two classes late will lose two full letter grades.
- NO WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER IT IS MORE THAN 2 WEEKS LATE. • Late projects will not be screened in class.
- You must turn in a FINAL PROJECT in order to PASS the class.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

The class will meet every Tuesday and Thursday from 2:30-3:45pm. Attendance and punctuality are mandatory and will be reflected in your grade. If it is unavoidable that you will have to miss class, you must consult the professor about the situation beforehand (via email or in person) and may be asked to provide a written excuse for the absence. If a student is more than 20 minutes late to class they will be marked absent. Three or more absences or frequent tardiness, whether or not for a reasonable cause, may result in the student failing the class if the student does not withdraw from the class prior to the deadline for withdrawal with a grade of "W." It is the student's responsibility to find out any important information missed in their absence. You are expected to come to every class on time, prepared and ready to engage in classroom discussions and participate in group projects.

### **DEVICE POLICY**

Laptops and other note taking devices may be used during lectures. All devices should be turned off and stored away during screenings and presentations. Phones must be turned off during class time. Texting and all forms of social media communication should happen outside of the classroom, during class breaks. Use of desktop computers in class is for course related work only and NOT for updating your Facebook status, checking email or other activities not directly related to this course.

### **FOOD POLICY**

To minimize distraction and the possibility of damage to equipment, food and beverages are not allowed in the classroom, editing area or studios. A water bottle is OK but please keep it capped or put away when working with the equipment or computers.

Thursday January 18

-Physical properties of sound and psychoacoustics  
-*I Am Sitting in a Room* (Alvin Lucier)

-**Read:** Ch. 10 *Sound Recording Systems* from *Filmmaker's Handbook* (Ascher & Pincus)

## **Week 2 -- Recording Techniques**

Tuesday January 23

-**Due:** Sound Walk, discuss in class  
-Digital audio recording, file types, sample rate, bit depth, compression  
-**Demo:** Zoom recorders, microphones, different approaches to digital recording & recording set-ups

-**Read:** Ch. 11 *Sound Recording Techniques* from *Filmmaker's Handbook* (Ascher & Pincus)

Thursday January 25

## **Week 3 -- DAWs, Sound Editing, Art of the Audio Interview**

Tuesday January 30

-Different approaches to interviews and platforms for their dissemination, radio, podcasts, film/tv  
-Terri Gross, Ira Glass, Story Corps, Errol Morris, *Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris), *Women's Lib Demonstration NYC* (Videofreex), *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clarke)

Thursday February 1

-**Demo:** Adobe Audition, bringing files in, volume/gain, tracks, editing, transitions

**Read:** *Rhythm and Tempo in the Landscape* (Schaeffer)

**Assign:** Soundscape (due 2/27)

Thursday March 1

- Finish critiquing Soundscapes
- Free sound archives, found sound
- Locating sound effects and music
- Read:** "Projections of Sound on Image" (Chion), "Stretching the Sound to Help the Mind See"
- Assign:** Film Soundtrack (due 4/24)

**Week 8 -- Spring Break, No Class**

**Week 9 -- Elements of a Film Soundtrack, Slippage Between Sound and Image**

Tuesday March 13

- Dialog, ambient sound, sound effects, music
- Watch and analyze film clips for soundtrack
- Introduce concepts from Walter Murch and Michel Chion

Thursday March 15

- Slippage between sound and image
- Diagetic/non-diagetic, on/off-screen
- Counterpoint, acousmatic

**Week 10 -- Further Investigations into Film Sound, Foley**

Tuesday March 20

- Screen/Discuss:** *The Conversation* (Coppola), *Hacked Circuit* (Stratman)

Thursday March 22

- Foley Workshop pt. 1

-Music editing/class recording project cont.

## **Week 15 -- Film Soundtrack Projects Due**

Tuesday April 24

**Due: Film Soundtrack Projects, listen/critique**

Thursday April 26

----- -Finish critiquing projects, celebrate end of class!

## **Local Venues and Resources**

### SOUND

Third Coast International Audio Festival - <http://www.thirdcoastfestival.org/> Based in Chicago, the Third Coast International Audio Festival (TCIAF) curates sound-rich audio stories from around the world and shares them with as many ears as possible – on the radio, on the Internet, and at public listening events all over the place.

Constellation – <http://www.constellation-chicago.com> Constellation is a venue on Chicago's northwest side founded by drummer/composer Mike Reed. Constellation's mission is to present progressive performance and forward-thinking music with a focus on jazz, improvisation and contemporary classical. \*Frequency Festival: 02/25-02/28

Lampo – <http://www.lampo.org/> The organization, which is based in Chicago, promotes and supports artists working in electronic and electroacoustic music, free improvisation, sound art and other new forms.

Experimental Sound Studio – [www.experimentalsoundstudio.org](http://www.experimentalsoundstudio.org) ESS is a non-profit, artist-run organization focused on sound in all its exploratory cultural manifestations, including music, sound art, installation, cinema, performing arts, sound poetry, broadcast, new media, and more.

Elastic Arts - [elasticarts.org/](http://elasticarts.org/) Elastic Arts is a non-profit organization fostering a community of music, art and performance through developing, hosting, producing, and promoting creative, independent, and local music concerts, exhibitions, and multi-arts performances.

Midwest Society for Acoustic Ecology - <http://mwsae.org/> The Midwest Society for Acoustic Ecology (MSAE) is a regional chapter of the American Society for Acoustic Ecology (ASAE), a membership organization dedicated to exploring the role of sound in natural habitats and human societies. while promoting public dialogue concerning the

Audio Network music catalog: <http://www.audionetwork.com> School of Communications school-wide music catalog.

Ubu – <http://www.ubu.com> Canonical sound works.

Ear Room – <https://earroom.wordpress.com/> Ear Room is an online interview platform exploring the subject of sound in artistic practice.

Freesound – <http://freesound.org> Free sound library with user submitted recordings.

Free Music: <http://dig.ccmixer.org/> <http://freemusicarchive.org/> & <https://musopen.org/music/>

Internet Archive- <http://archive.org> Source for copyright free/public domain music, video, and text.

Macaulay Library – <http://macaulaylibrary.org> The world's largest archive of animal sounds







