

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Course Syllabus
MCOM 221A Digital Filmmaking I (3 sem. hr.)
Fall 2020

Instructor: Ned Vankevich, Ph.D.
Office Hours: Online and by Appointment
Office Location: Online
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Prerequisite(s): None.

Course Time: M/W 12 to 1:15 PM Pacific Time
Course Place: Online
Course Fee: \$30 for course text.

Fulfills university core requirement for aesthetic and performance inquiry. Fulfills departmental visual creativity competency requirement; required of all film concentrations and minors.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This introductory course in the art and craft of digital video production familiarizes students with the “classical” approach to cinematic aesthetics and techniques. Students work individually and collaboratively as they produce, shoot, and edit short films. Emphasis is placed on analyzing films from a filmmaker’s perspective.

COURSE SPECIFICS

Motion picture and single camera film production have undergone major changes during the “digital revolution.” Today more people have access to inexpensive high-end film gear than ever before. However, this does not mean the quality of productions has increased along with the quantity of great looking productions. To help remedy this situation, this course will introduce students to the seminal visual language, aesthetics, poetics, and techniques that enhance filmmaking. As such, it will involve both a theoretical and an applied, or “hands-on,” approach to digital filmmaking. In addition, students will be introduced to the process of critiquing film from a film artist’s perspective with an aim toward helping students gain confidence in the conceptual, narrative, and practical applications of digital-based film production. Students will also be given the opportunity to work in creative, collaborative teams to produce several short video pieces as they face the multiple challenges of making excellent short films.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Vankevich, Ned. Digital Filmmaking: A Beginner’s Guide to Mastering the Craft. Epub. 2019.

Internet links provided in Moodle and Course Text.

You will also be required to purchase some inexpensive equipment for this course. To be discussed first class.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Block, Bruce. The Visual Story: Seeing the Structure of Film, TV and the New Media. 2nd ed. London: Focal, 2008.

Figgs, Mike. Digital Filmmaking. New York: Faber and Faber, 2007.

Schroepel, Tom and Chuck DeLaney. The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video. 3rd ed. New York: Allworth, 2015

Stockman, Steve. How to Shoot Video That Doesn't Suck: Advice to Make Any Amateur Look Like a Pro. New York: Workman, 2011.

Vineyard, Jeremy. Setting Up Your Shots. Studio City, CA, Michael Wiese Productions; 2nd edition, 2008.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

Students will engage in the following activities during this course.

- A. Composition Exercise
- B. Motion exercise
- C. In-Camera Continuity Exercise
- D. Montage Short
- E. Short Film
- F. Course Journals
- G. Ungraded but important viewing assignments
- H. Film viewings
- I. Screening of work with instructor and peers
- J. Text readings and discussions
- K. Pitching projects (oral presentations)
- L. Peer feedback and discussion

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to a series of short filmic exercises involving cinematic movement, composition, and staging the following projects will be used to determine your grade:

Composition Exercise. For this assignment, you will explore and create photographic compositions. The goal is to incorporate the principle, practices, and technique of visual composition into still images. Although this exercise will not be graded to give you the freedom to explore without fearing a penalty, it is vital that you take it seriously because this will form the foundation for your graded assignments given that film is made up of a series of individual frames. Composing still shots well will help you to compose motion shots well. Guidelines for the exercise will be given during the course.

Motion Exercise. For this assignment, you will explore and create moving cinematic images. The goal is to incorporate the course lectures, demonstrations, and discussions and shoot a variety of shots and scenes that reveal your understanding of the material. For this exercise, you are free to try an assortment of motion-centered shots with the goal being to explore “motivated and “invisible” techniques that will be explained in class. If you choose a partner you must do all your own camerawork. Like the Composition Exercise this assignment will not be graded but it is vital that you work hard on it as it too will form the foundation for your later assignments.

Note: The Composition and the Motion exercises will be not be graded. You will get detailed feedback on what does and does not work in your shots but you will not be assigned a grade. The reason for this is that you should be free to explore this experience without fear of “punishment” if you do not succeed well. At the same time, it must be pointed out that these two assignments form the foundation for later exercises and thus must be done intentionally and not just as a “rote” exercise.

Individual In-Camera Continuity Exercise. For this assignment, you will conceive, direct, and shoot a short 1 to 2-minute visual narrative exercise that reveals your understanding of cinematic composition, motion, and directional continuity. The goal is to be as creative as possible as you employ many of the camera and shooting techniques discussed in class to tell a “linear” story. Remember, this is to be a visual-centered, non-verbal story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. That is, there will be no dialogue as you tell a story that involves linear visual-centered action. This assignment will be screened as shot. Therefore, all of the editing and transitions must be done “in camera.” Your grade will be determined by the quality and creativity of your visual storytelling techniques, how well you meet the assignment requirements, and whether or not you meet the deadline for this assignment. You will be given a handout that will outline the objectives for the assignment. N.B. You must also submit a brief (one page) statement of your intent for the project, e.g., to make us think, to scare us, to make us laugh, to show off your action skills, etc. and how you went about doing this from a filmmaker’s perspective and what you learned from the exercise.

Montage Short. This assignment will allow you to explore the non-linear nature of the cinematic medium. For this exercise, you will fashion a montage and or “film-poem.” By this is meant that you will shoot and edit images and sounds (music, voice over, sound FX, etc.) designed to tell a story, visualize a poem or script reading, reveal the interior life of a character, e.g., what it means to be homeless or lost in life, etc. You can also make a music video.

The goal is for you to plan and discover audio/visual correlations for the text, concept, issue, or idea you will explore. You are encouraged to experiment with light, camera angles, composition, the manipulation of time and space, visual thematics, etc. Your finished piece will be edited using matching and counter-punctual sound and image techniques. This project should be approximately 2.5 to 4 min. in length. You must submit the “text” that you have “cinematized” as well as a brief write-up of what you intended to do, how and why you went about doing it, and what you learned from the exercise. You will be given a handout detailing criteria for this assignment.

Short Film. For this assignment, you will produce, produce, shoot, and edit digital film short that tells a narrative story. In doing so, you can write an original story, adapt a myth, folktale, or Bible story, parable, fable, etc. as the basis for your project. The goal is to show what you have been learning and to create a film that moves and engages your audience as you write/adapt a short script, storyboard it, devise a shot list, and produce, shoot, and edit your project.

Each team member must play a key role in the film, e.g., writer, director, cinematographer, editor, etc. **You will also submit a production log or journal explaining what you did on the film and detail what you learned from this experience.** Your grade for this production will be based upon how well you have implemented and integrated the key concepts and insights covered in class and gained competency in the technical and aesthetical aspects of filmmaking. This project should be approximately 3 to 5 min. in length. You will be given a handout that details the requirements for this project.

Course Journals and Peer Critiques. Being engaged with the course material and your peers is a critical part of this course. To help you do this you will keep two journals and submit them at the end of the course. Journal One will be a personal journal where you log your responses to the course readings, viewings, modules, etc. You must include at least two key take-aways from each chapter reading, module viewing, etc. This journal will also include a summary assessment of the work you have done during the course and of what

you learned. Journal Two will be your responses to the work of your peer. That is, what worked well and how they could have improved it. How to do this will be explained during the course. Both of these journals will be submitted at the end of the course as evidence of your engagement.

Ungraded But Important Assignments. This course will involve activities that are not graded but which will enhance your learning experience such as viewing course related films and assignments, . Along with the course and Module readings you must pitch your film projects to your peers. Pitching is a vital part of the film industry and it will help you clarify what you intend to do. Guidelines will be handed out for how to do this.

SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following outlines what the diligent and hardworking student can experience and achieve through this course.

TWU Student Learning Outcomes	Course Learning Outcomes	Assessment Strategies in MCOM 221 (as detailed below)
1. Knowledge and its Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a broad foundational knowledge of human culture and the physical and natural world a depth of understanding in any chosen field(s) of study applied knowledge acquired through discipline-appropriate experiential learning 	1. Students will gain understanding of what constitutes “classically” executed filmmaking. 2. Students will become acquainted with many of the key filmic techniques that make for effective filmmaking.	Participation in and execution of the following exercises: A. Composition Exercise B. In-Camera Continuity Exercise C. Motion Exercise D. Montage Short E. Short Film F. Ungraded assignments G. Screening of your projects H. Text readings and discussions I. Pitching projects J. Peer feedback and discussion H. Journals
2. Cognitive Complexity Skills including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> critical and creative thinking, quantitative reasoning, communication, research, and information literacy an ability to articulate various interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary perspectives, integrating informed Christian perspectives an ability to respond with wisdom, humility & charity to questions, issues, & problems of the human condition 	1. Students will gain the ability to appreciate and to adjudicate good filmmaking. 2. Students will become proficient in developing critical skills and templates that enable them to unpack the multiple layers of meaning in cinematic techniques and stories.	Course readings and self-critiques in the following assignments: A. Composition Exercise B. In-Camera Continuity Exercise C. Motion Exercise D. Montage Short E. Short Film F. Ungraded Assignments G. Screening of your projects H. Text readings and discussions I. Pitching projects J. Peer feedback and discussions K. Journals
3. Aesthetic Expression and Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative, performative, material and narrative forms of critical inquiry Intuitive, imaginative and interpretive methodologies Ways of knowing through which maker and receiver come to insight and understanding Collaborative and community-based interdisciplinary practices 	1. Students will be given the opportunity to imagine, create, and share their technique exercises and film projects they create. In doing so, they will exhibit their growing cognitive and creative understanding and interpretation of cinematic texts while exploring ideas, concepts, and understandings related to film story elements and the techniques that reveal them.	Participation in the following projects: A. Composition Exercise B. In-Camera Continuity Exercise C. Motion Exercise D. Montage Short E. Short Film F. Ungraded Assignments G. Screening of your projects H. Text readings and discussions I. Pitching projects J. Peer feedback and discussions K. Journals

4. Inter- and Intra-Personal Wellness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a holistic awareness of their personhood, purpose, and calling within the context of the communities in which they live and study personal and social health an appreciation of the role of community in wellness 	1. Students will gain appreciation of better and worse ways to conduct their personal and communal lives as we explore the deeper moral and spiritual implications of cinematic stories, characters, and themes. 2. Students will learn how to give and receive criticism, work in groups, and grow as a person as a result of their experiences.	Participation in the following projects: D. Montage Short E. Short film I. Pitching Projects J. Peer feedback and discussion
5. Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> skills to become creative, collaborative, informed, competent, and compassionate people who influence the various contexts into which they are called abilities and attitudes characterized by service, humility and integrity. 	1. Students might be given the opportunity to work in groups and to take leadership roles as they discover their strengths weaknesses in terms of their relational skills and ability to collaborate. This will depend on evolving COVID-19 responses.	Participation in the following projects: D. Montage E. Short Film I. Pitching Projects J. Peer feedback and discussion

DETERMINATION OF FINAL SEMESTER GRADE

The following will be employed to determine the percentage and quality of your grades:

Assignment	Grade Percentage
In-Camera Continuity Exercise	10%
Montage Project	30%
Short Film	30%
Course Journal	30%
TOTAL	100%

QUANTITATIVE GRADE INDEX

The following standard University grading scale will be used in tabulating marks for this course.

NUMERICAL PERCENTAGE LETTER GRADE

90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76.9	B
70-72.9	B-
67-69.9	C+
63-66.9	C
60-62.9	C-
57-59.9	D+
53-56.9	D
50-52.9	D-
BELOW 50	F

QUALITATIVE GRADE PRINCIPLES

Letter grades for exams, papers and/or projects will be based on the following criteria:

A- to A+	Superior written, oral, or audio/visual content entailing vivid and engrossing ideas Outstanding organization including strong introduction, idea/image development, and closure Distinctive oral or written style and delivery of the material high level of creativity and insight expressed in the work
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The student is exceptionally sensitive to the given rhetorical situation and constraints imposed by the presentation, paper, or project
 The student's work is superior in generating audience identification, empathy, response, etc.
 The student's work stimulates the audience to think and want to hear more about the topic

- B- to B+ significant written, oral, or audio-visual project content
 good organization
 good delivery, creativity and technical and aesthetical execution of the presentation, project, or paper
 a good job, but not achieving the excellence to merit an A
- C- to C+ average content
 reasonably clear purpose and organization
 distracting problems in the conceptual, technical and aesthetical execution of the paper, oral presentation, or audio/video project
- D
 unclear purpose and superficial below average content
 serious deficiencies in most areas of content, organization, and style
- F
 unacceptable at all levels of expectation
 reveals lack of preparation
 extremely poor execution of content, style and delivery

In short, an A signifies an excellent and highly effective communication and content performance; B: an above average content and communication performance; C: an average and competent content and communication performance; D: poor content and communication performance; F: failure to communicate and meet the necessary and sufficient requirements for an assignment.

COURSE SCHEDULE

N.B. Bold indicates a project that is due by everyone—their critiques will often extend over more than one class. Note, too, that this schedule might be altered or changed in light of events related to COVID-19.

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignments Due</u>
Sept 09	Course Introduction	Study Syllabus
14	Project Excellence and Professionalism	Moodle Unit One ;Vankevich Intro and Ch. 1
16	The Film Production Process	Moodle Unit Two; Vankevich Ch. 2
21	Visual Composition	Moodle Unit 3; Vankevich Ch. 3
23	Visual Composition CONT.	Moodle Unit 3; Excellent Composition and Why
28	Visual Composition CONT.	Composition Exercise
30	Visual Composition CONT.	Composition Exercise
Oct 05	Cinematic Motion	Moodle Unit 4; Vankevich Ch. 4
07	Cinematic Motion Critique	Moodle Unit 4; Vankevich Ch. 4; Motion Exercise
12	Thanksgiving	No Class
14	Cinematic Motion Critique	Motion Exercise
19	The Grammar of Film	Moodle Unit 5; Vankevich Ch. 5
21	Visual Story Telling	Moodle Unit 6; Vankevich Ch. 6
26	Visual Story Telling CONT.	Moodle Unit 6; Vankevich Ch. 6
28	First Graded Project	In-Camera Exercise
Nov 02	First Graded Project CONT.	In-Camera Exercise
04	Pitching Projects	Montage Project Pitch Due
09	Editing and Montage	Moodle Unit 7; Vankevich 7
11	Editing and Montage CONT.	Moodle Unit 7; Vankevich Ch. 7
16	Montage Critiques	Montage Project
18	Montage Critiques	Montage Project
23	Creating Short Films	Moodle Unit 8; Vankevich Ch. 8; Final Project Pitches Due
25	Creating Short Films CONT.	Moodle Unit 9; Vankevich Ch. 9
30	Making Short Films CONT.	Independent Research
Dec 02	Making Short Films CONT.	Short Film Due
07	Making Short Films CONT.	Short Film Due

N.B. Changes could be made to this schedule depending on course size and COVID-19 responses.

POLICIES

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU

One of the core values of Trinity Western University is the integration of academic excellence with high standards of personal, moral, and spiritual integrity. The University considers it a serious offence when an individual attempts to gain unearned academic credit. It is the student's responsibility to be informed about what constitutes academic dishonesty. For details on this, and on identifying and avoiding plagiarism go to page 46 of the Academic Calendar (found at <https://www.twu.ca/academics/academic-calendar>).

<https://prezi.com/od62fxnkbmxh/plagiarism-how-to-get-it-out-of-your-life/> (Prezi presentation)

<http://bit.ly/1p00KX3> (Google Slide presentation offering more comprehensive information)

N.B. On all personal assignments you must do your own creative work or you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. In group projects your write-ups will explain who did what on the activities. Guidelines will be handed out for how to do this.

Campus Closure and Class Cancellation Policy

In the event of extreme weather conditions or other emergency situations go to <https://www.twu.ca/campus-notification>.

University Standard Grading System

The Standard Grading System can be found on page 41 of the Academic Calendar (found at <https://www.twu.ca/academics/academic-calendar>).

Accessibility Statement

Students with a disability who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Centre for Accessible Learning upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All social and educational considerations must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and include the educational impact along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Centre for Accessible Learning outlined in on the Centre for Accessible Learning website. <https://www.twu.ca/academics/learning-commons/centre-accessible-learning>

The Writing Centre is available to assist all students with their academic writing assignments in any subject at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to editing. This is a free service. In person one-on-one coaching sessions are available Monday to Thursday. To make an appointment, visit www1.twu.ca/writingcentre. Fridays are Studio Days: students can drop in to work on papers and ask questions between 9am-4pm. Online writing support is offered through WriteAway. Students can submit up to three drafts of a paper, and the online tutors will provide feedback and resources to help improve the writing. Find out more at <https://writeaway.ca/>. For more information, visit create.twu.ca/learningcommons or contact writingcentre@twu.ca.

Online Learning

TWU offers a helpful resource page to help you with your online learning experiences. Please study this page and access it when you have questions or need guidance. See: <https://www.twu.ca/students/courses/online-learning>

LATE ASSIGNMENTS POLICY

Unexcused late assignments will be docked half a grade for each day they are late.

TRIGGER WARNINGS

This course will involve viewing and critiquing both your work and some controversial films and themes that might be disturbing. Should issues arise, please feel free to discuss them with your teacher.

LEGAL ISSUES

Part of being a professional filmmaker involves abiding by industry standards and legal requirements. Therefore: be sure to get permission from parents if filming minors; get permission from school authorities if filming on or around schools and school grounds; abide by trespassing rules; respect copyrighted material, etc. Common film etiquette also involves respectful and responsible use of locations and borrowed property. Any use of firearms, explosives, or other potentially

dangerous props and items must be approved by Campus Security and local police ahead of time. (All weapons must be fake or replicas, that is, no real weapons are allowed.)

The instructor reserves the right to alter the course in order to accommodate unexpected circumstances and/or the skill and experience level of the students.