Introduction to Digital Film- and Video-Making

Goal: To introduce students to the process of making digital motion pictures, such that they would feel comfortable undertaking independent projects thereafter.

Overview: This studio course will break down the process of making motion pictures utilizing digital technology, giving students a general background in each of the necessary sub-disciplines. In class, we will discuss the various techniques and crafts involved with making movies, and analyze a variety of film and video clips to elucidate relevant points. Each week, students will have a short project that builds upon prior projects. By the end of the course, each student will have made a complete one-minute movie.

Topics Covered:

- Writing – Introduction to the process of writing a script. Characterization, dramatic arc, narrative structure, and writing dialog will be discussed. Each student will write a one minute script in proper screenplay format. This script will form the basis for the film that the student will make.
- Storyboarding – Students will create a storyboard of their script. Discussions of composition, framing, pacing, montage and other elements of cinema will give students a basis for creating their storyboard.
- Producing – Students will analyze their storyboards to determine the necessary elements for their impending film production. Each student will plan a schedule and budget to insure that the film is completed on time and on budget.
- Acting – A quick overview of the fundamentals of acting for film and video will be given, so that students can serve as actors in each other’s films. Movie acting will be compared and contrasted to theater acting.
- Cinematography – We will discuss composition, camera placement and movement, lighting, filters, and other tools of the trade. Students will be trained in the basic functioning of whatever cameras we have at our disposal.
- Sound Design – Sound is the unsung hero of great films. Sound recording, microphone placement, mixing and effects will be discussed, in both the production and post-production stages.
- Directing – We will discuss the role of the director on a film shoot, coordinating the different elements of the film so that they adhere to a single aesthetic vision. Each student will shoot their short film with other students as film crew.
- Editing – Using their storyboard and the raw footage from their shoot, students will edit their short film. They will be introduced to the operation of a digital editing suite. Montage, pacing and sound design will be revisited.
- Distribution – We will discuss the alternatives for distribution of a film, including film festivals, commercial distribution and web-based opportunities. Having now created a short film, students will go through the process of preparing their film for submission to festivals.