Course title: Topics in Production
Course code: FILM 3001 PRFS
Programs offering course: Film Studies
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 4
Contact hours: 60
Term: Spring 2020

Course Description

Conducted by a team of eight faculty members, the Topics in Production course consists of eight interlocking units designed to give necessary theoretical background in preparation for the production of a 16mm short film. Each component consists of a combination of lecture and exercises to introduce students to the theory and techniques necessary for their filmmaking work. Instructors work as a team with awareness of each other’s approaches and adjusting to the developments in student projects. By the start of the first week, students have formed groups of two or three for their projects. They prepare to pitch their story ideas by the Wednesday of the second week. During the second half of the course, class time continues to be a mixture of lecture and exercises, and whenever possible, teachers include specifics from the student projects in process into their pedagogy. The course directly segues into its companion course FILMMAKING PRACTICUM AND MENTORSHIP.

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS:

Cinematography: This component provides a comprehensive study into the tools and craft of the cinematographer, with particular emphasis on those tools and techniques needed to prepare the students for their upcoming 16mm shoot. After discussing the relationship of the cinematographer to his crew, director and actors, the course focuses on practicalities such as the role of natural and artificial light and practicalities of how to light a scene, possible lamps, filters and gobos for special effects, exponometry and the tools for setting exposure, color temperature. Equipment for camera movement and choices of film stock are discussed and all other practical matters from preparing the technical screenplay to the steps in postproduction are discussed as needed for the successful realization of their projects. Two academic hours weekly, over seven weeks.

Acting: Meets over 7 weeks, two academic hours weekly. The course introduces the students to basic principles of acting, namely Goal/Obstacle, Other, Tactics and Expectations. Each principle is exercised separately and students engage in short scenes and improvisations to combine the principles and work additional techniques related to character portrayal and building a scene. In some exercises students gain practice directing each other, and specific problems, such as casting or work with non-actors are addressed to prepare them for their upcoming shoot.

Directing the Short Film: is a practical and theoretical class that covers basic elements of film directing, Short films will be screened and analyzed with a view to how directors have worked with story, mise-en scene, image, sound, montage and pacing. Meets over 7 weeks, two academic hours weekly.

Camera & Film Languages: This unit complements the practical dimension of the cinematography lectures by focusing on those cinematic tools that serve a dramatic purpose in storytelling with film. Several styles of cinematography are evaluated in terms of storytelling effectiveness. Technical elements such as shot sizes, axis rules, angles of view, color, composition, and camera movement, are analyzed with a view to their cultivation of film language. Meets over 7 weeks, 2 hours weekly.
Screenwriting: Meets 4 weeks, twice weekly. After introducing students to the dramatic principles of the short form, specific exercises are given to help the students find and develop their story ideas. Lectures discuss dramaturgical points of the short form, narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for bringing about character transformation and building tension. Students form into groups of two or three with roles clearly designated. The instructor guides students toward preparing stories to pitch at the end of the third week and toward incorporating feedback from the pitch into their stories during the fourth week of classes. Screenwriting class is then replaced with meetings with directing mentors and technical screenwriting. Technical Screenwriting: Meets twice weekly, during weeks 5, 6, and 7 of the TOPICS course. During these weeks, students transfer their literary screenplays into technical screenplays. At the start of these classes, students must have a finished literary script (due end of week four after consultations with directing mentors) and a definitive location for their story. The classes are taught so as to aid students in developing their storyboards and finalizing shot lists.

Editing: Editing is approached from a theoretical and practical perspective, focusing on making and organizing rhythm. Several approaches to editing are screened for the students in short segments. The phases of editing and necessary steps in preparation are also outlined for the students. Meets over 6 wks, 2 academic hrs weekly.

Sound for the Moving Image: This unit makes up a theoretical and practical crash course for creating digital sound space, effectively designing sound to create and enhance meaning. Attention is paid to sound in narrative, with mention of its use for documentary and abstract works. Students are quickly introduced to production matters: tips and tricks from conception to creation of a soundtrack built up through dialogue, narration, music, and ambient sound. Attention is given to preparing students to use equipment necessary to successfully complete their projects. Meets over 8 weeks, two hours weekly. In 8th week, class is incorporated into orientation.

How to pitch and what to expect?

Each group needs to develop a story that is realizable in a location or two per day, with two main characters, possibly three. Time restrictions prevent students from changing to multiple locations within a day, and their budget restrictions prevent them from engaging a large cast. They should also keep in mind that if they come up with a story for characters within the age range of 18 to 30, they will have a much broader range of casting possibilities than they would have for stories involving children or characters who are middle-aged or elderly. On the pitch, all mentors will arrive to hear what students have to present. The whole production group of 2-3 students will be presenting their idea together. Each group has about 5 minutes and they should not be reading from text. After their presentation, mentors will be asking questions and providing their feedback for improvement.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

The overall course objective is to enable students to gain the theoretical and practical skills, methods and approaches in the technical and creative areas of narrative filmmaking, (namely acting, directing, cinematography, screenwriting, editing and sound) used to successfully produce a short narrative 16mm film.

Sub-objectives include:

- To understand and recognize the specific tasks and elements needed to conceive and write ideas for the short screenplay
- To turn an incipient idea into a convincing script and storyboard.
• To tell the story visually using specifics of film language
• To encourage and enable the actor to make clear choices that tell the story in an engaging and dramatically interesting way
• To pace the telling rhythmically to move spectator along the lines of action
• To interplay sound with images in a way that enhances the felt meaning of the story
• To effectively link content with form using available technical means and in collaboration with other members of an artistic team in such a way that the film functions as an artistic whole, the result of creative collaboration that is the filmmaking process

Course Prerequisites
The course is part of the core curriculum of the Film Studies program, Production track.

Methods of Instruction
The course uses a variety of teaching methods: in-class exercises, powerpoint, lecture, discussion and screening of short films, depending on topic and teacher.

Assessment and Final Grade
1. Final exam on theoretical principles 30%
2. Formation of Groups 10%
3. Submission of Treatment for Pitch 10%
4. Oral Pitch of Story 10%
5. Setting up two meetings with directing mentor 10%
6. Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors 10%
7. Finalizing location for the film 10%
8. Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors 10%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements
Final exam on theoretical principles

(objective exam made from questions contributed by each of instructor)

Final Exam (comprehensive objective exam with questions from all Topics, taken Thu/Fri of week 8)

Formation of Groups

(end of week number one)

Submission of Treatment for Pitch

(Friday of week two) The Pitch is approximately 12 sentences long, and is sent to academic advisor who distributes it to all teachers attending the Pitch.

Oral Pitch of Story

(Monday of week three). Pitch is to be spoken, not read.
Setting up two meetings with directing mentor

Setting up two meetings with directing mentor for the students’ group (week five)

Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors

Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors and production staff (Friday of week five)

Finalizing location for the film

(before Tuesday of week six, done with production manager)

Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors

Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors throughout weeks 6, 7 and 8

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class

Acting: Basic Principles: Goal, Obstacle Tactics, Expectations
Directing the Short Film: Basic Directing Principles
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tools of Film language
Screenwriting: dramaturgical strategies of the short form 1
Editing: Introduction
Sound for Moving Image: Introduction

Week 2

Class

Cinematography: relationship of the cinematographer to his/her crew, directors and actors
Acting: Contacting the Other/Contentless Scenes
Directing the Short Film: Director’s Role with Other Crew Members
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Movement
Screenwriting: dramaturgical strategies of the short form 2
Editing: Basic Editing Principles
Sound for Moving Image: The Many Functions of Sound in Film
Week 3
Class

Cinematography: role of natural light
Acting: Good Acting Choices and basic principles applied to scenes
Directing the Short Film: Directing Tasks Broken Down
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Frame
Screenwriting: narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for character transformation
Editing: Series Editing vs Collision Editing
Sound for Moving Image: Sound in Different Environments

Week 4
Class

Cinematography: role of artificial light
Acting: More Physical Doing (techniques for using the space and objects)
Directing the Short Film: Director’s Analysis of Script
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Shot Size
Screenwriting: narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for building tension
Editing: Editing Analysis in Short Film Samples
Sound for Moving Image: Sound Design Analysis in Selected Film

Week 5
Class

Cinematography: lighting a screen
Acting: More Inner Doing (Techniques for dynamic subtext)
Directing the Short Film: Work with Actors and Result Direction
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Composition
Technical Screenwriting: transforming literary script into a technical screenplay
Editing: Editing Analysis in Short Films samples
Sound for Moving Image: Sound Design Analysis in Selected Films
Week 6
Class

Cinematography: *lamps, filters and gobos for special effects*

Acting: *Scenework for Review of Techniques, Improvisation for Backstory*

Directing the Short Film: *Work with Cinematographer and Composition*

Camera & Film Languages: *Expressive Tool of POV and Angles*

Technical Screenwriting: *developing storyboard*

Editing: *Editing Analysis in Short Film Samples*

Sound for Moving Image: *Sound Resources and Preparation*

Week 7
Class

Cinematography: *exponometry*

Acting: *Characterization*

Directing the Short Film: *Analysis of Short Films for Directorial Choices*

Camera & Film Languages: *Expressive Tool of Color*

Technical Screenwriting: *finalizing shot lists*

Editing: *Post-production techniques to save a film (voice-over)*

Sound for Moving Image: *Practical Considerations for Capturing Sound*

Week 8
Class

Cinematography: *wrap up and final questions*

Sound for Moving Image: *Work with equipment*

Week 9
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 10
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 11
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening
Week 12
Class Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 13
Class Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Course Materials
Readings

Available for purchase in FAMU library.