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MART 336.01: Directing the Fiction Film

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DIRECTING THE FICTION FILM

MART 336, Section 01, 3 credits. Prereq: none. Fall 2021

Instructor: Tobin Addington
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Office: McGill 234
Office Hours: Tues. 2-3pm; Wed. 1pm-2pm

Day & Time: Th 1:00-3:20
Room: McGill 228

Course Description:

Students will identify, analyze, and practice the specific techniques needed to write, direct, and produce a short narrative film suitable for screening in film festivals and on the web. This will include directing several brief exercises, finalizing a 3-to 5-page script (perhaps initially drafted in Screenwriting, or written by / with a peer), creating an effective shooting strategy and shot design, mastering production issues (from location scouting and casting, to script breakdowns and scheduling) and completing the post-production process.

Course Objectives:

The main objective in this course is to get you to think like a narrative filmmaker – that includes developing not only a fertile visual imagination and practical command of cinematic language, but also the logistical skills to successfully navigate this intense, grueling, but ultimately rewarding endeavor: making a fiction film.

Given the challenging nature of this task, you must practice and prepare the necessary production skills (technical mastery, organization, and leadership) so that you will have the freedom to create an inspired shot, capture a solid performance, and ultimately tell a meaningful story with images. A beautiful scene that's shot out of focus is useless; getting kicked out of a location because you don't have the proper permit can be disastrous. By the same token a beautiful film that is perfectly executed but has nothing to say is a waste of time.

With that in mind, we will work to develop both sides of your brain, the creative and the practical. You will learn how to evaluate a script for cinematic possibilities and practical challenges (its "plumbing"), design a shooting strategy that best illuminates the story's themes as well as its plot, and work in postproduction to make the most of the footage you *have*, not the footage you *wish you had*.

Through in-class discussions, screenings, and in-the-field exercises, you will master all facets of making an effective short film.

Course Goals:

Strengthen visual analytical skills	Think critically
Articulate narrative through shot and cinematic grammar	Introduce strategies for working with actors

Enhance pre-production and pre-visualization skills	Practice verbal communication skills through pitching projects
Practice narrative post-production work	Enhance knowledge of media history and ethics
Produce final project from conception through completed film	Practice effective collaborations

Time & Effort

When you successfully complete the course, you will earn 3 university credits. The time & effort it takes each of you to complete your assignments will vary. You may find that some weeks require more effort, but if you put in that effort, it will be noticed and rewarded.

Course Workload

In addition to regularly scheduled meeting times, expect five hours of work outside of scheduled class per week for completion of projects and assignments.

Measurable Student Learning Outcomes:**Evaluation**

Final grades are based on the following criteria:

Grade Determination:

20 points (10%) Attendance & Participation
 20 points (10%) Daily Visual Quiz
 60 points (30%) Film Exercises 1-3
 15 points (7.5%) Shooting Plan Presentation
 15 points (7.5%) Crewing for Colleague
 20 points (10%) Production Notebook
 50 points (25%) Final Short Film (rough and fine cut)

Attendance & Participation (10%)

Students will arrive to class on time, having read and/or viewed all relevant material and completed all the film exercises, and will participate in class discussions and critiques. Students will be advised halfway through the semester as to their Participation grade.

Daily Visual Quiz (10%)

I will screen a brief film clip (twice and only twice) at the beginning of each class period. Students will complete a shot-by-shot description of the cinematic techniques (specifically camerawork, staging, editing, and sound) used to create meaning. The goal is to sharpen students' attention to and appreciation of the fundamentals of film grammar. Each student's two lowest scores will be thrown out before the final grade is calculated.

Film Exercises (10% each = 30%)

Students will shoot and present assigned film exercises in a timely and professional manner to hone their technical and aesthetic skills in anticipation of their final film production.

Shooting Plan Presentation (7.5%)

Students will present storyboards and shooting schedule to the professor on a designated day prior to production of their final film.

Crewing for Colleague (7.5%)

Students will crew on at least two Final Film shoots for other students in the class.

Production Notebook (10%)

Students will complete a notebook containing all your production materials, including permits (if required), schedules, floor plans, shot lists, storyboards, and so on.

Final Film (25%)

Students will write, direct, and edit a 3-to 5-minute film, as well as crew on two of their colleagues' productions. Final films will be graded on dramatically effective selection and execution of shots, consistency of style and tone, effective editing, and a sincere attempt to develop thematic content. In short, a simple story effectively told. (No genre or subject matter will be given preferential treatment.)

Grading System:

188-200 points (94 to 100%)	A
180-186 points (90 to 93%)	A-
174-178 points (87 to 89%)	B+
168-172 points (84 to 86%)	B
160-166 points (80 to 83%)	B-
154-158 points (77 to 79%)	C+
148-152 points (74 to 76%)	C
140-146 points (70 to 73%)	C-
130-138 points (65 to 69%)	D+
120-128 points (60 to 64%)	D
Under 120 points (Under 60%)	F

Attendance and Other Class Rules:

2 class absences	no penalty
3 class absences	grade reduction of one whole grade for semester
4 class absences	fail class
<20 min. late to class	once = no penalty; twice = one absence
>20+ min. late to class	counted as absence
Phone out in class	counted as absence

Deadline Policy: All deadlines are final. Late assignments will receive 50% of their original grade and will only be accepted up to one week past their original deadline.

Punctuality: Be on time. Walking in late is disruptive, disrespectful, and unfair to your colleagues. In addition if you miss any part of the daily visual quiz, it will not be repeated.

Professionalism: This is a workshop class, requiring you to engage with and comment on your work and the work of others. You are expected to be respectful, open-minded, and constructive in your criticism. Similarly, you are expected to take criticism gracefully and without getting defensive.

Responsibility: During this class you will be wearing many hats. As a producer, you are responsible for looking at the syllabus and calendar, and scheduling yourself accordingly.

This means booking time in the editing room, reserving a camera, finding actors, locations, and all other production coordination.

As a crew member, you are responsible for fulfilling your commitment to your classmates, showing up on time, working as hard for them as you hope they will work for you – fiction filmmaking is a collaborative medium. No one can or should do it alone. As a writer, you are responsible for FINISHING your script early enough that you, the director, will have time to develop it visually. Being a director means visiting locations (preferably with a camera for visual research), casting, rehearsing, and developing a comprehensive and practical shooting strategy. I cannot possibly police all the work you do outside of class, but suffice it to say it will all be visible on the screen. Take pride in what you present to the world and do your very best work.

Other Course Policies

School Statements

- COVID-19 policy: The University of Montana requires masks for every course being held in a classroom, lab, or studio until otherwise informed.
- Land Acknowledgement:
The University of Montana acknowledges that we are in the aboriginal territories of the Salish and Kalispell people. Today, we honor the path they have always shown us in caring for this place for the generations to come.
- Inclusion Policies:
The University of Montana values leadership, engagement, diversity, and sustainability, because our institution is committed to respect, welcome, encourage, and celebrate the differences among us. As members of the University of Montana community, we aspire to:
 - Respect the dignity and rights of all persons.
 - Practice honesty, trustworthiness, and academic integrity.
 - Promote justice, learning, individual success, and service.
 - Act as good stewards of institutional resources.
 - Respect the natural environment.

The College of the Arts and Media at the University of Montana, has chosen to actively pursue equity and access for all persons. In this charge we will be researching, planning, and implementing ways in which our culture can be more accessible, inclusive, equitable, sustainable. It is not enough to be anti-bias in principle without being equitable in action. We will implement these actions organized by a group of students, faculty, and staff across the entire College in an ongoing way.

Student Support Resources

- Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:
This Code of Conduct embodies and promotes honesty, integrity, accountability, and duties associated with citizenship as a student in our community at the University of Montana. This Code exists to protect the interests of the community and dignity of its members, and to challenge those behaviors which are not in accordance with our policies. The Code is available for review online at <https://staging.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/student-code-of-conduct-2021-pdf>
- Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting the DSS office. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability

Services for Students (DSS). For more information, please consult <http://www.umt.edu/disability>.

- The Writing and Public Speaking Center provides one-on-one tutoring to students at all levels and at any time in the writing process. Visit now. Visit often. We're ready when you are. www.umt.edu/writingcenter.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy:
The University of Montana is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, visit <https://www.umt.edu/diversity/resources/mental-health.php>

Stay connected:

Please join SVMA social media to stay informed about events and happenings in our school.

- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/umt_svma/

Class Schedule

WEEK #1: September 1**INTRODUCTION & THE SHOT**

Introductions – Description of class and assignments (syllabus) – General questions – Basic terms

- *Practice Daily Visual Quiz*
- *Assign first exercise*
- *Assign script for final film*

WEEK #2: September 8**FILM GRAMMAR & THE SHORT**

Film Grammar/Shot Selection – “Effectiveness” – Scenes – Protagonist/Antagonist – Wants/Needs – Obstacles – Conflict/Escalation – Fulcrum – Script Breakdown

- *Watch Exercise 1*
- *Assign Exercise 2 (Short Silent Scene)*

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Exercise 1 – process film

READINGS:

“Keep It Fresh” [parts 1 & 2] (Munroe)

WEEK #3: September 15**PITCH WEEK**

Pitch Final Films – Student filmmaker clichés – What makes a short film short

READINGS:

“Filmmaker Cliches” (Munroe)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Pitch Final Film ideas

WEEK #4: September 22**PRE-PRODUCTION, BASIC COVERAGE, & PLANNING YOUR SHOOT**

Introduction of Production Notebook – Pre-visualization – Storyboards – Shot-list – Floorplan – Camera Design – Camera as Narrator – P.O.V. – Subjective/Objective Camera – What is Basic Coverage?

- * *Assign Production Notebook*

WEEK #5: September 29**CRITIQUES:**

- *Watch & critique Exercise 2 (Short Silent Scene)*
- *Assign Exercise 3 (Dialogue)*

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Exercise 2 (Short Silent Scene)

Scripts for Final Films

WEEK #6: October 6**TABLE READ SCRIPTS FOR FINAL FILMS**

Students bring 12 hard copies of their final scripts to workshop in class.

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Exercise 2 (Short Silent Scene)

Scripts for Final Films

WEEK #7: October 13**DIRECTING THE ACTOR**

Casting & auditions – Working with actors – Breaking down the script – Throughline – Needs – Verbs – Actions vs. activities

** In-class exercises*

***** You should now be going into pre-production – scheduling, casting, crewing, creating production notebooks, etc. *****

WEEK #8: October 20**CRITIQUES:**

- Watch Exercise 3 (Dialogue)
- Final film scripts returned

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Exercise 3 (Dialogue)

Director's Statement

***** NOTE: YOU MUST BE GREENLIT BY TODAY!!! *****

WEEK #9: October 27**PRE-PRODUCTION DAY**

Discuss and Practice Strategies for Planning Film Shoots

WEEK #10: November 3**SHOOTING PLAN PRESENTATIONS**

Present your Final Film Shooting Plans

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

Storyboards and Shooting Schedule for Final Film

***** Shooting Final Projects*****

WEEK #11: November 6**EDITING FOR STORY & "ORCHESTRATION"**

What is the power of editing? – POV – "Surprise" & "in good hands" – Separation vs. inclusion – 180° rule – Transitions – Continuity vs. discontinuity

***** Shooting Final Projects*****

WEEK #12: November 10**PRODUCTION DAY:**

Students produce their films

WEEK #13: November 17

ROUGH CUT DAY:

Students receive extra credit for a rough cut to screen today.

November 24 – NO CLASS – Thanksgiving (Travel Day)

WEEK #14: December 1

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

ROUGH CUTS DUE TODAY – NO EXCEPTIONS!!!

WEEK #15: December 8

ROUGH CUTS CONT.:

Finish rough cut critiques

FINAL: December 14 – 1:10-3:10

FINE CUT SCREENING

- Screen FINE CUT of project
- Send me link (Vimeo, YouTube, etc.)
- Hand in complete DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK