

## **Technical Directing**

**Wednesdays – 6:00 – 9:15 PM**

**Winter 2016 – January 13 – April 20**

**There will be no class March 9 due to Spring Break**

Mike Watt

[mike@happycloudpictures.net](mailto:mike@happycloudpictures.net)

412-389-0402

### **Course Objectives**

Directing is a skill that grows out of education and instinct. However, you never really learn how to direct. You only learn how to direct the movie that you're currently making. And even then, likely not until midway through.

The most-respected directors working today deal with many of the same problems as those just starting. Scheduling conflicts, lack of time to prepare, lack of time to shoot, faulty equipment, uncooperative weather, and endless, endless questions. Directing a film is a huge task, but it's accomplished step-by-step. As a leader, you'll have to keep your cool and never lose sight of your goal: the completed film.

The goal for this class is not to make you into a great director—that will come with time (and talent)—but a leader who can handle the stress of a production, finding quick and creative ways to solve any and all problems that crop up during the average production, while still placing your personal stamp on the final product. To accomplish this, we'll analyze the director's major goals and major stresses through discussion, screenings of films (both big-budget and no-budget), and hands-on experience while shooting in and outside of class.

Grading is based on attendance and assignments, with the major emphasis on participation. All opinions will be valued but expect to justify your choices and actions. Get used to the word "Why?" as if you're constantly in a pitch meeting with your executive producer. If you can't express—and fight for—your shot selections, your influences, and your needs to accomplish your goals, you probably won't be able to communicate with your crew. So, directors: know thyself. Learn to express your ideas visually and defend them critically.

This syllabus is meant as a guide, not an absolute. Subjects may be moved around or changed without notice. But our intention and vision will remain the same.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

The majority of work will be done in class, with the primary focus on four Shooting Days. These days will be broken up into six 25-30 minute sections wherein each student will get the opportunity to direct a short scene, with the other students working as a crew. This is not a lot of time and will not allow for procrastination, so be sure to be prepared with shot lists, props, etc., before each class.

Outside class work will include keeping a "Director's Notebook", including ideas, images, films, and filmmakers who inspire you. The strength of this assignment will be in the detail and time put into it, including justifying and/or explaining why each image/person/place/thing/idea inspires you and adds to your drive to direct.

**It is important that every student procure their own Camera Card and/or a Flash Drive for storage of footage shot in class. Editing outside of class is a necessity.**

### **GRADING:**

80% of your grade is based on class participation. Because of the short semester, absences are ill-advised without a note from a local politician.

10% of your grade will be based on your Director's Notebook and the time spent developing it, including using it to prep for the Shooting Days.

10% of the grades will come from the Final, which will judge how much you've learned during the semester.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

As stated, attendance is *extremely* important; chronic lateness or absenteeism will not only severely impair a student's ability to pass the course, but will also affect the performance of the class as a whole, especially during the Shooting Days. Treat this class as you would a production job. Lateness and absenteeism is not tolerated on sets, nor will they be in this class. Make-up exams will be given only in unavoidable circumstances, and never more than one week later than the scheduled exam date. If assignments are not completed by the due date deadline points will be forfeited for that assignment – no exceptions will be granted.

### **PLAGIARISM POLICY:**

This should go without saying but:

***Pittsburgh Filmmakers will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form***, including: direct copying of (uncredited) writing from other sources such as books, magazines, the Internet; use of other people's media work without identifying it as such; use of assignments produced for other classes without the permission of the current instructor. Consequences of cheating or plagiarism will be: first offense -- failure/grade of zero on the exam or assignment; second offense -- failure of the course. Any outside sources included in the Director's Notebook ***must*** be cited.

JANUARY 13: CLASS ONE – Critical Thinking

Screening: Selections from Robert Rodriguez's *Ten Minute Film School* segments.

Homework: Begin your Director's Notebook: choose one scene from a favorite movie/director that inspires you and justify the choice.

JANUARY 20: CLASS TWO – Wishful Thinking

Screening: Clips from *Performance* and discuss vision vs. execution

Discussion of shot selections: Establishing, singles, two-shots, coverage, camera movement.

Homework: Choose a short scene (a sketch, a joke, etc., 5 min. max) and prep pre-production: shot list, story board, script breakdown (props, costumes needed, etc.)

JANUARY 27: CLASS THREE – Practical Thinking

Present Director's Notebook and explanation of choice.

Screening: *Tales of Poe: The Tell-Tale Heart* – discussion of visual style and shot choices.

Production Meetings and final prep for First Group shoots. Teams will be chosen for each week's shoots. Inventory will be taken of who has personal editing software.

Fill Director's Notebook with style ideas. What do scenes have to accomplish? Moving the plot forward? Evoking an emotional response? Overall, how does it serve the story? Following a screening, discuss what elements were needed to complete the scene (location or set? Set dressing. Costuming, make-up, minimum amount of crew needed).

FEBRUARY 3: CLASS FOUR – Do or Die – Part 1

Team 1 - Shoot scenes based on shooting scripts, shot lists, story boards, and overhead schematics. Each team gets a max of 120 minutes for production.

All students will rotate roles. Be prepared for the unexpected. The executive producer WILL throw in monkey wrenches.

FEBRUARY 10: CLASS FIVE – Do or Die – Part 2

Team 2 - Second round of shooting for remaining groups. See caveats above.

FEBRUARY 17: CLASS SIX – Presentation Part 1

Screening of first group films. Discussion and critique will ensue. What went wrong? What went right? What was a happy accident?

FEBRUARY 24: CLASS SEVEN – Do or Die 3

Team 3: Shooting in-class scenes, learning from the previous shoots, dealing with new problems and old ones.

MARCH 2: CLASS EIGHT – Do or Die 4

Team 4: shooting in-class scenes. Dealing with new problems and old ones.

MARCH 16: CLASS NINE – Resources and How to Recognize Them

Screening: Teams 3 & 4 class projects. Discussion of what went right/wrong and what can be learned.

MARCH 23: CLASS TEN – Trying Again: Shoot Part 5

Team 5: shooting in-class scenes. Dealing with new problems and old ones.

MARCH 30: CLASS ELEVEN – Trying Again: Shoot Part 6

Teams 6: shooting in-class scenes. Dealing with new problems and old ones.

APRIL 6: CLASS TWELVE – Trying Again: Shoot Part 7

Screening of Teams 5-6 in class projects plus another fun-filled round of discussion.

APRIL 13: CLASS THIRTEEN – Screenings of All

Screenings of all projects. Critical discussion.

Business Realities and Career Goals

Several film screening choices will be presented and voted upon. Q&A and recovery.

APRIL 20: CLASS FOURTEEN – Bon Voyage

Short final quiz. Final presentation of Director's Notebooks.