

Course: DC 476

Instructor: John Psathas

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DC 476: Visual Design

Course Description

Definition, analysis, and structure of visual components that cinema employs to support and emphasize the story. Theory of visual design will be applied through student still photos, as well as an original, visually-oriented, narrative or documentary short film, animation or game design.

Course Goals:

- Understanding of the concepts of visual design employed in film
- Ability to identify and analyze visual design components used in contemporary film
- Ability to create and graph a film's visual structure that corresponds to its dramatic structure
- Ability to create and apply a visual design to a short film

Prerequisites*

DC 460: Digital Cinema Proseminar

**If you have not fulfilled the prerequisites, you may find this class very challenging. You may not understand what is being asked of you and it will diminish your educational experience. I strongly encourage you to take this class when all prerequisites have been fulfilled.*

Textbooks and Printed Resources

REQUIRED:

The Visual Story: Creating the Visual Structure of Film, TV and Digital Media, Second Edition

Author: Bruce Block

Publisher: Taylor

ISBN: 9780240807799

Supplies

REQUIRED:

1 External Hard drive (500 GB minimum), Firewire or USB 2.0

1 USB flashdrive for project backups and submissions (8 GB)

Grip Gloves

SUGGESTED:

Audio- Closed Back Headphones (no earbuds)

G&E- Multi-tool, Flashlight, Gaff Tape, Black Wrap, Gels, Diffusion

Camera- Lens Tissue, Lens Fluid, Lens Cloth, Lens Blower Bulb, Allen Wrench tool, Paper Tape, Sharpie, MEMORY CARDS

Additional Costs

Producing digital content is rarely a cheap endeavor. Such costs will potentially include items for art direction (costumes, make-up, set decoration), production (gaff tape, black wrap, camera media), post-production (primary external hard drives and a back-up) and general necessities (transportation costs and craft services). All project budgets should include a 10% contingency fee that will help account for cost overruns.

Course Management System

D2L <https://d2l.depaul.edu>

COLWeb <https://col.cdm.depaul.edu/>

Additional Website Content

Netflix www.netflix.com
Hulu www.hulu.com
Vimeo www.vimeo.com
YouTube www.youtube.com

Grading

| | |
|---|-----|
| Visual Elements Screen Captures | 5% |
| Reading and Film Viewing Quizzes | 5% |
| Visually Oriented Screenplay | 10% |
| Visual Design Statement and Storyboards | 10% |
| Design Element Exercises | 10% |
| Midterm | 15% |
| Rough Cuts | 10% |
| Final Project | 25% |
| Participation | 10% |

LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Grading Scale:

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|------------|-----------|------------|--|
| 93-100: A | 90-92: A- | | A indicates excellence |
| 87-89: B+ | 83-86: B | 80- 82: B- | B indicates good work |
| 77-79: C + | 73-76: C | 70-72: C - | C indicates satisfactory work |
| 67-69: D + | 60-66: D | | D work is unsatisfactory in some respect |
| 65-0: F | | | F is substantially unsatisfactory work |

Assignments

Visual Elements Screen Captures: Each student will be assigned visual elements to illustrate, using a screen capture from a film. The screen capture must be high enough resolution to display in class (a screen shot from a DVD on a Mac works well).

Reading and Film Viewing Quizzes: On Weeks 2-6, short quizzes will be given on the reading and the films assigned. Make sure to finish the weekly reading and film before you come to class.

Visually Oriented Screenplay: Each student will write a screenplay for a short film with a running time of approximately 7-10 minutes. Groups will decide which screenplay they want to produce for the final project amongst themselves. The film may be live-action or animated. The restriction on this screenplay is that the story must be told visually, and dialogue should be kept to a *minimum*. The less dialogue the better- you should rely less on directing actors, and more on directing the camera, lighting and art. The content of the film may be narrative fiction, documentary, or even abstract, but the film must structurally have some kind of exposition, conflict/rising action, climax, and resolution. Grading of the screenplay will be based on: how the story is told visually (and conversely, how little dialogue is needed to tell the story); whether the structure of the film includes an exposition, conflict/rising action, climax and resolution; and how detailed the screenplay is (if possible, write using standard screenplay format). Rewrites will not be accepted for new grades, but will affect the overall quality of the final cuts, so should be in order to create the most polished final product.

Visual Design Statement and Storyboards: You will write a short statement explaining the visual design for your final film- graphs of your visual structure and how it corresponds to your dramatic structure must be included. You will also create storyboards for your film. The visual design statement with graphs and the storyboards must all be turned in digitally in pdf format. The graphs and storyboards may be done using an illustration or storyboarding program, or simply drawn by hand and scanned. These storyboards will not be graded for aesthetic quality, but instead for the ability to convey the information needed to take the shot (write notes in or outside the frame if needed), and for the shots adherence to the visual design of the film. Statement, graphs and storyboards will be presented to entire class on the day they are due.

Design Element Exercises: In groups, you will design and shoot very short scenes (3-5 shots, total) that clearly illustrate a single design component. While other elements may be present, the component in question must unmistakably define the frame. You will need to edit these shots together cohesively. You can use any subject matter or location that you choose. Grading will be based on originality, aesthetic, and demonstration of the specific design component.

Midterm: The mid-term will be take-home. You will be given a list of visual components with specific concepts you will need to illustrate with digital still shots. Every shot must include a human subject. You may use your own digital still camera or check one out from the Cage. The shots must be properly labeled and turned in as pdf. Grading will be based on accuracy of illustration of the given concept and the aesthetic quality of the shots taken.

Rough Cut: The rough cut will be graded only for how complete the film is, although feedback may range across any of the crafts. Adjusting visual components to support better the dramatic elements or structure of the film will be addressed in the feedback for the film, but will not factor into the rough cut grading (although this will be a primary factor in the final cut grading). Color correction or after effects work may be helpful for the rough cut, but will not factor into the grading.

Final Film: The final cut will be screened the last day of class, and will count as your final for the course. The final cut will be graded primarily on how well selected visual components support the dramatic elements or structure of the film, as well as the overall aesthetic or professional quality of the finished piece. Sound design may affect the aesthetic or professional quality, but will not be a deciding factor in terms of grading.

Schedule

**All Assignments and Readings are to be completed by the following class.*

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|---------------|---|--|---|
| Week 1 | (1/7) Course Introduction, Contrast and Affinity, Dramatic Structure and Elements | READ: ASSIGNMENT: | Block, Chapters 1 - 3 Visually-Oriented Screenplay/Treatment Visual Elements Screen Capture 1 Design Element Exercise 1 |
| Week 2 | (1/14) Space | READ: WATCH: ASSIGNMENT: DUE: | Block, Chapter 4 Witness Visual Elements Screen Capture 2 Design Element Exercise 2 Group Formation Visual Elements Screen Capture 1 Design Element Exercise 1 |
| Week 3 | (1/21) Line and Shape | READ: WATCH: ASSIGNMENT: DUE: | Block, Chapters 5 - 6 Traffic Visual Elements Screen Capture 3 Design Element Exercise 3 Visually-Oriented Screenplay/Treatment Group Formation Visual Elements Screen Capture 2 Design Element Exercise 2 |
| Week 4 | (1/28) Tone and Color | READ: WATCH: ASSIGNMENT: DUE: | Block, Chapters 7 - 8 City of God Visual Elements Screen Capture 4 Design Element Exercise 4 Visual Elements Screen Capture 3 Design Element Exercise 3 |
| Week 5 | (2/4) Movement and Rhythm, Review for Midterm | READ: ASSIGNMENT: DUE: | Block, Chapters 9 - 10 Take Home Midterm Visual Elements Screen Capture 4 Design Element Exercise 4 |

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|----------------|---|
| Week 6 | (2/11) Story and Visual Structure, Review Midterms |
| | ASSIGNMENT: Visual Design Statement and Storyboards WATCH: Let the Right One In DUE: Take Home Midterm |
| Week 7 | (2/18) Visual Design Concepts |
| | ASSIGNMENT: Continue Shooting Final Films DUE: Present Designs and Storyboards in class for discussion |
| Week 8 | (2/25) Live Visual Analysis |
| | ASSIGNMENT: Shoot/Edit Final Films DUE: Present Designs and Storyboards in class for discussion |
| Week 9 | (3/3) |
| | DUE: Rough Cuts Group A |
| Week 10 | (3/10) |
| | DUE: Rough Cuts Group B |
| Week 11 | FINALS WEEK Exam date and time: THURSDAY, MARCH 17th 5:45 p.m - 9:00 p.m. |
| | DUE: Final Films |
| | <u>Attendance at the scheduled final is mandatory- no exceptions.</u> |

Course Policies

Student responsibilities and the Syllabus:

Each student is responsible for their time management and for meeting the all expectations in the syllabus. The instructor is not responsible for reminding students of assignment deadlines listed on the syllabus. In the event of an absence, it is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor regarding the absence and remain up-to-date regarding the topics covered in class. If an assignment is listed on the syllabus, students are still responsible for completing the assignment on time. I will not accept excuses for ignoring class or project obligations.

Attendance:

Each weeks class consists of lectures and screenings; attendance is mandatory. All absences will result in a reduction of the participation grade. Students are allowed one (1) unexcused absence. Each additional absence will result in a full letter grade deduction from your final grade. Excessive tardiness (more than 10 minutes late) will also be penalized. Excused absences are handled through the Dean of Students Office after completing an Absence Notification Form [here](#).

Group Evaluations:

Several of the assignments in this class will require you to work in a team. No group may be larger than three people. At the end of the quarter, each group member is required to turn in a written evaluation of their team members. If all evaluations are uniformly positive, all group members will share the grades in all assignments; if evaluations are negative, the grades of the group member's in question will be docked. These evaluations will be HEAVILY factored into your grade for your visual design statement/storyboards, rough cut and final film (worth 10%, 10%, and 25% of your final grade, respectively).

Deadlines:

Video production requires strict adherence to deadlines, therefore late assignments will not be accepted for grading without prior consent of the Instructor. To be clear, this prior consent is not only rare, it is only given days in advance of the due date, not hours. You will not be eligible for an A in the class unless you turn in all assignments on time.

Phones, Texting, Facebook, Email, Chatting:

NO. Do not surf the web during class. You will be asked to leave and considered absent. If you must use a cell phone or electronic device for any reason, leave the classroom.

Participation:

Participation in discussion is a component of your grade; watching the assigned films before they are discussed will help you better participate. If you've only seen the film once before, it is recommended that you watch it one more time.

Reading Assignments and Viewings:

The assigned readings and film viewings are important for both in class quizzes and class participation. Following the readings and viewings will greatly impact your final film and aid you as filmmakers.

Email Policy:

Please type **DC 376 VISUAL DESIGN** in the subject of all e-mails to the instructor about this class to ensure that they are responded to in a timely fashion.

Assignment & Project Labeling/Format Policy:

Please label all assignments as NAME_ASSIGNMENT (ex. PSATHAS_MIDTERM.pdf).

Assignment Submission Policy:

All films should be submitted with a **working Vimeo link** that enables the **video to be downloaded**. All Midterms, Visual Design Statements and Storyboards, and Scripts should be submitted in **.PDF format as ONE SINGLE FILE**. Projects not submitted in the proper format or properly labeled WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

I will grade the first project file that is submitted. Check and double-check the work you are submitting. Do not submit the wrong file, an incomplete file, a corrupted file, etc. Submit the correct project file through D2L by each deadline. Do not leave this until the last second. You should upload several hours before the deadline to be safe. No late work will be accepted.

Equipment Checkout Policies:

Students are expected to follow all equipment policies when checking out gear from the Cage, Stage or Cinespace. All of these policies as well as the REQUIRED FilmSkills Safety Training can be found under "[Equipment](#)" on the Production Resources Website.

REQUIRED Cinespace Orientation and Set Safety Training:

If you intend to shoot at Cinespace please remember: students who have not shot at Cinespace before MUST complete a Cinespace Orientation and Set Safety Workshop prior to being allowed to do so. An email to students with more information is forthcoming. If you have any questions, or need to schedule a workshop, please contact cinespace@cdm.depaul.edu.

Use of Prop Firearms:

Rules and regulations MUST be followed when using prop firearms. The instructor must approve the appearance of a prop gun in any student film. An approved/signed Prop Firearm Request Form must be submitted to the Production Office prior to filming. It can be found under "[Equipment](#)" on the Production Resources Website.

ABC - Always Be Careful:

Film and video production shoots can be hazardous. Above all, work safely in all situations and always think before you act. Please don't hesitate to ask me if you're unsure about anything regarding your shoot, in or out of class.

Original Work:

All work submitted for this class should be original and made specifically for this class. If you are found to be submitting work you have made for another class you will receive zero credit for that particular assignment.

Academic Integrity Violations:

Plagiarism or cheating on assignments or tests are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for the class. There are no exceptions to this rule. If you are in doubt about the definitions of plagiarism or cheating, consult your student handbook and the University's Academic Integrity Policy. All students will be held to the Code of Student Responsibility.

Content Changes:

Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require alteration or rescheduling. You will be notified of all changes. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L, and/or sent via email. As the quarter progresses, some items may change at the instructors discretion, but the overall workload will not. Make sure you pace yourself accordingly.

Classroom Decorum and the Student Handbook:

All policies as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this class. Please be respectful of your fellow students and their work.

University Policies***Online Course Evaluations:***

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in [CampusConnect](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

Academic Policies:

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the [University Academic Calendar](#). Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment.

Students with Disabilities:

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

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