

VFX200 - Introduction to Visual Effects

Instructor: Kaia Olsen

Instructor Contact Information

- **Instructor:** Kaia Olsen
- **Email:** colsen11@depaul.edu
- **Office Hours:** Wednesday Noon-1:30PM BY APPOINTMENT. Please email me to request a time.
- **Phone:** +1 (312) 415-9095
- **Preferred Contact:** via email
- **Tech Support:** scaavsupport@depaul.edu

I respond to emails within 24-48 hours Monday through Friday. I generally don't respond to emails on the weekends or holidays. Please don't wait until the weekend to ask questions.

Course Information

- **Description:** Introduction to the fundamental techniques, use, history, and methodologies of visual effects production, explored through a variety of compositing and effects-based projects.
- **Topics will include:** Photographic principles, Chromakey, Compositing, Rotoscope, Basic Animation and more.
- **Meeting Day/Time:** Wednesdays 1:30PM - 4:45PM
- **Class Physical Location:** CDM 632
- **Instruction Type:** In Person Lecture-Discussion

Course Prerequisites

There are NO course prerequisites. However, this is a digital course, and you will need at a minimum:

- Frequent access to a Mac or Windows computer that connects to the Internet, with the following suggested technical specifications: Intel® 7thGen CPU or equivalent, 16 GB of RAM, Graphics card with 4GB+ VRAM, 1920 x 1080 or greater monitor resolution, 30GB disk space for installation. *(Specifications lower than this should be tested in advance of class to ensure a good experience.* Instructions to find out the specifications of your system are available here: [Finding Out Your Technical Specifications](#))
- A working e-mail account that you check regularly (and is updated in Campus Connect)
- [Adobe Creative Cloud software](#) (and more specifically: After Effects, Premiere, Photoshop and Media Encoder.)
- Access to a software suite such as Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point). DePaul students are eligible to receive Office 365 ProPlus for installation on their home computer and personal mobile devices. See [Office 365 Education Plus](#) for instructions.
- Administrator access to a computer to install software.
- The ability to view video files.

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Reading Materials/Media (digital links available within D2L)

- The VES Handbook of Visual Effects, Chapter 1 "Introduction"
- The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 2 "Learning to See"
- The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 2 "Digital Effects: The 15 Minute Version"
- The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 3 "Who You Gonna Call: The VFX Team"
- Banksy's - Exit Through The Gift Shop (Film)
- The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 3 "The Digital Representation of Visual Information"
- Isaac Asimov's "Light Verse"

Learning Outcomes

- Analyze historical and contemporary uses of visual effects in film.
- Critique visual effects content.
- Compose shots for visual effects.
- Navigate a compositing software application.
- Produce simple composited shots to established specifications.
- Understand the structure and business practices of the visual effects industry.

Assessment

- VFX Exercises: 30%
 - VFX Exercise 1 – RETOUCH: Concept & Element Design, Retouch & Compositing with Photoshop
 - VFX Exercise 2 – ANIMATIC: Playing with Action and Timing
 - VFX Exercise 3 – MASKING/ROTO: Removing, Replacing, and Isolating Elements using Rotoscopy
 - VFX Exercise 4 – IMAGE EFFECTS/CHROMAKEY: Visually altering images through compositing, and Intro to ChromaKey
 - VFX Exercise 5 – MOTION TRACKING: Creating a piece of Virtual Street Art
- Final VFX Project: 50%
 - Previs: 10%
 - Work-In-Progress VFX Project Review: 15%
 - Final VFX Project Completion: 25%
- Final VFX Research Presentation: 20%
- **(Extra Credit is available for completing and participating within assigned Class Readings/Discussions)**

PLEASE NOTE: ALL COURSE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE TURNED IN/SUBMITTED WITHIN D2L.

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Course Outline

Week 1

Topics: Course overview; What are a Visual Effects; Photographic Principle; Image Retouch & Basic PreVisualization; Intro to Photoshop

Readings: The VES Handbook of Visual Effects, Chapter 1 "Introduction"; The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 2 "Learning to See"; "Light Verse"

Assignments: VFX Exercise 1 – Retouch

Week 2

Due: VFX Exercise 1 - Retouch

Topics: VFX 1 Dailies, Introduction to AfterEffects; Photoshop to AfterEffects Workflows; Keyframing in AE.

Assignments: VFX Exercise 2 - Animatic

Week 3

Due: VFX Exercise 2 - Animatic

Topics: VFX 2 Dailies; The Visual Effects Pipeline, Premiere to AfterEffects Workflows, Masking & Rotoscopy

Readings: VES Handbook Chapter 1; "Confessions of a Roto Artist"; Star Wars In a minute (Video Excerpts)

Assignments: VFX Exercise 3 - Roto

Week 4

Due: VFX Exercise 3 - Roto

Topics: VFX 3 Dailies; Mattes, Image Effects, and Basic Chromakeying

Reading: The Visual Effects Producer, Ch. 2 "Digital Effects: The 15 Minute Version"

Assignments: Watch any of the films mentioned in lecture; VFX Exercise 4 - Image Effects/ChromaKey

Week 5

Due: VFX Exercise 4 - Image Effects/ChromaKey

Topics: VFX 4 Dailies, 2D Motion Tracking; Camera Tracking

Assignments: VFX Exercise 5 – Motion Tracking & Street Art Design

Week 6

Due: VFX Exercise 5 – Motion Tracking & Street Art Design

Topics: VFX 5 Dailies; PreVis Animatics; Digital Color Theory, Color Matching; Puppet Tool

Readings: The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 3 "Who You Gonna Call: The VFX Team"

Assignments: **Final Project V6A: Previs Animatic**

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Week 7

Due: Final VFX Project V6A Previsualization

Topics: Final Project V6A: Review Previs; Lecture-Structure of the VFX Industry;

Readings: The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 3 “The Digital Representation of Visual Information”

Assignments: **Final VFX Project V6B: Work In Progress**

Week 8

Due: Final VFX Project V6B: Work In Progress

Topics: Final Project 6B: Review Work In Progress; Atmospheric; Lightwrap & Shadow, Noise & Grain; Lecture-History of VFX, Part 1; Studio Time

Assignments: **Final VFX Project V6C: Completion**

Week 9

Due: **Final VFX Project V6C: Completion/Delivery**

Topics: Final Project Review & Critique; History of VFX, Part 2: Digital – Today;

Assignments: **Student VFX Presentations**

Week 10

Due: **Student VFX Presentations**

Topics: Student VFX Presentations – Group 1

Week 11

DUE: All VFX Exercise Resubmissions due before class

Topics: Student VFX Presentations – Group 2;

Course Policies

- **Focus:** Class time requires your complete attention. All students are expected to participate in all class activities. This means no distractions, such as cell phone use, web browsing, texting/chatting, food, or working on other projects in class.
- **Professionalism:** Students are expected to act according to the professional environment of the classroom. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Maintaining a positive and open-minded attitude while participating in class discussions.
 - Progressively achieving the highest standards of quality of artwork to be submitted for grading.
 - Defending their artwork in an articulate manner that demonstrates critical and analytical thinking.
 - Demonstrating neat, self-disciplined, and timely work habits.
 - Attending class on time and staying throughout the whole class period.
- **Originality & Ethical Image Use:**

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- **You should be creating your own original VISUAL EFFECTS from scratch in this class.** It may be tempting to use generative AI, or images/elements you find on the internet of creatures, robots, spaceships, fireballs, explosions, laser beams etc., but the goal of this class is to develop your own ideas using your own skills. I will always prefer to see "Do It Yourself" versions of your visual effects using your knowledge, artistry, and the techniques you learn in class in class, than to see someone else's effort within your projects. That being said, there are legitimate situations where an external (not self created) element could be helpful in the creation of an otherwise original effect. IF this is something you wish to pursue, please contact me for approval, and then accompany your submission with an attributions PDF stating the asset(s) used, the creator/source name(s), and a link to the original asset.
- **Informed Consent:** When using images of people, ALWAYS procure Informed Consent.
- **Dailies:** Each week we will spend the first portion of class reviewing your assignments together as a group. IN ORDER TO BE INCLUDED IN DAILIES, YOUR ASSIGNMENT MUST BE TURNED IN 1-2 hours **BEFORE** THE CLASS THEY ARE DUE. Please do not wait until the last moment to work on your VFX assignment.
- **Resubmissions:** Visual effects are a highly iterative process. In the spirit of this, any of the initial five VFX exercise assignments that are turned in BY THEIR ORIGINALLY ASSIGNED DEADLINE are able to be revised and resubmitted. Revised files should be uploaded to the original submission folder on D2L. Resubmissions for these exercises will be accepted until the beginning of the final class of the course. **Neither the Student Presentation nor Final Project assignments are eligible for resubmissions.**
- **Late work:** Assignments submitted late will have their grades immediately reduced by 10%, plus an additional 10% per week the assignment is late. **Late assignments are not eligible for resubmissions.**
- **Missing work:** Missing work will receive a zero until a submission occurs.
- **Grading:** I generally grade assignments within one week of submission, and assign grades according to the following: **A=93-100, A-=90-92, B+=87-89, B=83-86, B-=80-82, C+=77-79, C=73-76, C-=70-72, D+=67-69, D=63-66, D-=60-62, F=0-59.**
- **Attendance:** Attendance is key to success in this course. **Students who miss three days of class without prior instructor approval (in writing) will have their final grade lowered by 20%. Students who miss four days of class automatically fail the course. Missing more than 15 minutes of class (again without prior instructor approval) counts as an absence.**
- **Contact:** Please make time during my office hours to ask questions in person, as this is often the fastest way to answer a complex question. I also can be available outside of office hours by appointment. I make every effort to respond to email within 24 hours, except on weekends and holidays. If you have an issue or emergency, please contact me as soon as possible before the next class date.
- **Have fun:** Making film and VFX can be challenging and stressful; don't forget to have fun and enjoy the process. We are all artists, and our art thrives when we put our individual ideas, passion and enthusiasm into our work.
- **Syllabus Changes:** This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be addressed during class, and posted here in D2L.
- **Drop Dates:** Can be found at <https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx>

University policies

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Covid-19 Health & Safety Precautions

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty and staff are expected to (1) wear a mask as required at all times while indoors on campus; (2) refrain from eating and drinking in classrooms; (3) keep current with their COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions; (4) stay home if sick; (5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing; (6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who do not abide by the mask requirement may be subject to the student conduct process and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office. Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

Accommodations and Students with Disabilities

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling you to access accommodations and support services to assist your success. There are two office locations:

- Loop Campus - Lewis Center #1420 - (312) 362-8002
- Lincoln Park Campus - Student Center #370 - (773) 325-1677

Students can also email the office at csd@depaul.edu

Students who are registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact me privately to discuss how I may assist in facilitating the accommodations you will use in this course. This is best done early in the term. Our conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Additional Accommodations

This course may include instructional content delivered via audio and video. If you have any concerns about your ability to access and/or understand this material in its default format, please notify me within the first week of the course so accommodations can be made.

Preferred Name and Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose

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to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at policies.depaul.edu.

University Counseling Services

DePaul University Counseling Services (UCS) is committed to providing a range of culturally aware and sensitive clinical services to help currently enrolled DePaul students remove barriers to academic and personal success by addressing emotional, psychological, and interpersonal concerns through multiple treatment modalities. Services offered include: group counseling, individual counseling, couples counseling, crisis management, consultation, referrals, and telereach/outreach workshops. All services are currently being offered on a virtual, remote basis with no fees due to COVID-19. To connect with the counseling center, contact our main number at (773) 325-7779 during regular business hours (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm) to schedule an initial consultation, which is typically scheduled within 1-2 business days of your call.

If you need more immediate assistance or are in acute distress, you can call the main number during regular business hours and ask to speak with a counselor. If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. The Counseling Services staff has extensive experience with providing support services to individuals of varying social identities and backgrounds. Further, our counselors know that commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and anti-racism is an ongoing and open-ended journey and, as such, our counselors frequently and regularly engage in self-reflection and training opportunities to increase cultural awareness and to challenge one's own privileges and biases.

Assistance with Writing – The Writing Center

I strongly recommend you make use of the Writing Center throughout your time at DePaul. The Writing Center provides free peer writing tutoring for DePaul students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Writing Center tutors work with writers at all stages of the writing process, from invention to revision, and they are trained to identify recurring issues in your writing as well as address any specific questions or areas that you want to talk about. Visit www.depaul.edu/writing for more information.

Student Evaluations

At the end of this course, you will be provided with the opportunity to evaluate this course. Course evaluations provide valuable feedback that can improve teaching and learning. The greater the level of participation, the more useful the results. As students, you are in the unique position to view the instructor over time. Your comments about what works and what doesn't

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can help faculty build on the elements of the course that are strong and improve those that are weak. Isolated comments from students and instructors' peers may also be helpful, but evaluation results based on high response rates may be statistically reliable (believable). As you experience this course and material, think about how your learning is impacted. Your honest opinions about your experience in and commitment to the course and your learning may help improve some components of the course for the next group of students. Positive comments also show the department chairs and college deans the commitment of instructors to the university and teaching evaluation results are one component used in annual performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard on an important issue – the quality of teaching at DePaul. Don't miss this opportunity to provide feedback!

Academic Integrity

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>) for further details.