

VFX 200 - Introduction to Visual Effects - Spring 2024

Brian Mellen

bmellen@depaul.edu

Office hours: M 1:30pm to 2:00pm - By Appt. Only

W 4:30pm to 5:30pm - By Appt. Only

Office Hours Location: 14 E. Jackson Rm. 506

Course Information:

Course Code: VFX 200

Course Title: Introduction to Visual Effects

Prerequisites: None

Term: Spring 2024

Section: 901

Class Hours: Wednesdays 5:45pm to 9:00pm

Location of Class: 14 E. Jackson Rm. 506

Summary of Course:

Introduction to the use, history, and production methodologies of visual effects. Fundamental techniques will be explored through compositing exercises and projects.

** Syllabus is subject to change*

Learning Outcomes:

In **VFX 200**, students will:

1. Discuss the structure and business practices of the visual effects industry.
2. Analyze historical and contemporary uses of visual effects in film.
3. Critique visual effects content.
4. Compose shots for visual effects.
5. Navigate a compositing software application.
6. Produce simple composited shots to established specifications.

Readings:

1. The VES Handbook of Visual Effects, Chapter 1 "Introduction
2. The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 2 "Learning to See."
3. The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 2 "Digital Effects: The 15 Minute Version."
4. The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 3 "Who You Gonna Call: The VFX Team."
5. The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 3 "The Digital Representation of Visual Information."

Software:

Photoshop CC

Adobe After Effects CC

Required Supplies:

Film majors should have their own external drive for their project work for this and other film classes. The University cannot guarantee that media or projects left on lab computers will be safely maintained. Non-majors should at least have some sort of other external or flash drive big enough to store their work.

Drop Dates:

Sunday, April 7: Last day to add (or swap) classes

Sunday, April 14: Last day to drop classes with no penalty

Monday, April 15: Grades of "W" assigned for classes dropped on or after this day

Sunday, May 19: Last day to withdraw from class

Grading:

Attendance & Participation	15%
Quizzes	10%
Assignments	30%
VFX Sequence Paper	10%
Midterm	15%
Final Project	20%

LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Grading Scale:

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-87, B = 86-83, B- = 82- 80, C+ = 79-77, C = 76-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-67, D = 66-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0.

A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work

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, 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.
- Being able to accept constructive feedback in stride, realizing the class and instructor are trying to help.
- Demonstrating neat, self-disciplined, and timely work habits.
- Attending class on time and stay throughout the whole class period.

Student responsibilities:

Each student is responsible for their time management and for meeting the expectations in the syllabus. The instructor is not responsible for reminding students of assignment deadlines in class. In the event of an absence, it is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor for an assignment sheet detailing any homework. If an assignment is listed on the syllabus, you are still responsible for completing the assignment on time.

Also, all hard drives fail and one point or another. Make sure you backup your projects at least twice for this class and all future projects. If your hard drive fails and you didn't backup your project, no extensions will be given. No accommodations are typically made in the real world for lack of preparation and in order to prepare you for the job market, no accommodations will be made in this course for lost data.

Deadlines:

Video production requires strict adherence to deadlines, therefore late assignments will not be accepted for grading and written feedback will be given at the instructors discretion. You will not be eligible for an A in the class unless you turn in all assignments on time.

Attendance & Participation:

This course demands class participation - attendance is mandatory. Students arriving more than 15 minutes late, or leaving before class is dismissed will be considered absent. If you have more than one unexcused absences, a one letter deduction for each absence after the first two absences will be taken from your final course grade. Excessive tardiness will also be penalized.

Quizzes:

Quizzes spread throughout the quarter will be given to students to test their knowledge of what they retained from coming to class. Some will be multiple choice and T/F while others will test your abilities in the software we use.

Visual Effects Sequence Breakdown:

Choose a visual effects shot or sequence from commercially released feature film, and discuss the role the sequence plays in the film in a two page paper. Break down how they accomplished the Visual Effects as well. You should watch the entire film and research the sequence production in detail. Research materials can include texts, publications, interviews, dvd commentary, and documentaries. Upload your paper as a .PDF to D2L. Please cite your sources.

Midterm:

The Midterm will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions based on material covered in class lectures, quizzes, and readings. Student will be allowed one sheet of notes (front side only) for the Midterm.

Use of Generative AI:

We welcome and encourage the use of AI technologies in visual effects. AI-assisted work may be accepted as part of the development of any project including story ideation, visual design, and asset development, but the content of your projects must be created by the student as assigned. If you have any questions about where AI is acceptable, please ask.

Traditional art skills and creative thinking are fundamental, irreplaceable, and at the core of film and animation education. Use of AI is not a replacement for developing fundamental art skills.

All uses of AI must be disclosed with a clear explanation of how it was implemented and what prompts were used. This can be submitted as a text document included with the assignment on d2l.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be considered a violation of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy.

Content Changes:

Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require slight alteration or rescheduling.

CLASS SCHEDULE

** Syllabus schedule is subject to change*

Week One - 04/03

Course overview, What are Visual Effects, Photographic Principles, Forced Perspective, Intro to Photoshop

ASSIGNMENT #1 (04/17 DUE): Using the principles of forced perspective, take a still photo and make something (person or object) look bigger or smaller than it actually is. You can use whatever camera you can get your hands on. This is an in-camera trick. Upload a JPEG to D2L.

Use the naming convention **Lastname_VFX200_assn1**. Points will be deducted for not following the correct naming convention or not using the correct compression.

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

04/10 - CLASS NOT MEETING - WILL MAKE UP FINALS WEEK

Week Two - 04/17

Image Generation, Photoshop Masking and Selections, Photoshop Demo (Clones), Photography Basics, Basic After Effects Overview

ASSIGNMENT #2 (04/24 DUE): Take four different pictures of the same shot (use MANUAL mode). One should be a blank plate and the other three should be pictures of yourself positioned in different parts of the frame. Splice all four together in Photoshop to make it look like there are three different versions of yourself in the same shot. Upload a JPEG to D2L.

Use the naming convention **Lastname_VFX200_assn2**. Points will be deducted for not following the correct naming convention or using the correct compression.

Readings: *The Visual Effects Producer, Chapter 2 "Digital Effects: The 15 Minute Version"*

Week Three - 04/24

Video Compression The VFX Pipeline, Intro to After Effects, After Effect Animation

ASSIGNMENT #3 (05/08 DUE): Find a **LARGE** picture on Google images that has a definite foreground, middle ground, and background and cut it apart using Photoshop. It needs to be big enough so you can export 1920 x 1080p or 1280 x 720p. Separate it into three layers so that there's a foreground, middle ground, and background. Save as a .psd file. Import the .psd file into After Effects and use the transform properties to give the illusion that a camera is dollying parallel to the still image. The animation should be five seconds in length. Render as 1280 x 720p or 1920 x 1080p in **H.264** and upload the video to D2L.

Use the naming convention **Lastname_VFX200_assn3**. Points will be deducted for not following the correct naming convention or using the correct compression.

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

Week Four - 05/01

Film formats: Media, Resolution, and Aspect Ratios, Parallax Demo, Rendering, Intro Masks, and Layer Control

Week Five - 05/08

Effects

ASSIGNMENT #4 (05/22 DUE): Effects exercise. Details will be discussed in class.

Use the naming convention **Lastname_VFX200_assn4**. Points will be deducted for not following the correct naming convention or using the correct compression.

Readings: *"Confessions of a Roto Artist"*

Week Six - 05/15

MIDTERM - Multiple Choice and T/F, Photoshop Practical

Rotoscoping, Roto-Masking

Week Seven - 05/22

Motion-Tracking

ASSIGNMENT #5 (05/29 DUE): Roto-masking exercise. Using a video camera, shoot a 5-10 second clip of a moving object that you plan on roto-masking in After Effects. Roto-mask the point of interest in your shot and apply an interesting effect to your footage. The results should be seamless. Upload the video to D2L as **H.264**.

Use the naming convention **Lastname_VFX200_assn5**. Points will be deducted for not following the correct naming convention or using the correct compression.

Visual Effects Sequence Breakdown (05/29): Choose a visual effects shot or sequence from commercially released feature film, and discuss the role the sequence plays in the film in a two page paper. Break down how they accomplished the Visual Effects as well. You should watch the entire film and research the sequence production in detail. Research materials can include texts, publications, interviews, dvd commentary, and documentaries. Upload your paper as a .PDF to D2L. Please cite your sources.

Week Eight - 05/29

Digital Color Theory, Color Matching

Work in Progress of Final Projects Due 06/05 by 5:45pm

Readings: *The Art and Science of Digital Compositing, Chapter 3 "The Digital Representation of Visual Information"*

Week Nine - 06/05

Motion Graphics, Additional Integration Techniques, Post-Production Workflows, Working in Post-Production in Chicago

FINAL PROJECT (06/12 DUE): Students will composite together elements given to students by instructor. More details will be given as the quarter progresses.

Week Ten - 06/12

FINAL PROJECT DUE JUNE 12 by 5:45PM

University Policies

Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University as aligned with our Vincentian Values:

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore “what must be done” in order to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each human person. We value diversity because it is part of our history, our traditions and our future. We see diversity as an asset and a strength that adds to the richness of classroom learning. In my course, I strive to include diverse authors, perspectives and teaching pedagogies. I also encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. I am open to having difficult conversations and I will strive to create an inclusive classroom that values all perspectives.

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. Please see <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx> for additional information.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. All students are expected to abide by the University's Academic Integrity Policy which prohibits cheating and other misconduct in student coursework. Publicly sharing or posting online any prior or current materials from this course (including exam questions or answers), is considered to be providing unauthorized assistance prohibited by the policy. Both students who share/post and students who access or use such materials are considered to be cheating under the Policy and will be subject to sanctions for violations of Academic Integrity.

More information can be found at:

<https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

Posting work on online sites, such as Hero

All students are expected to abide by the University’s Academic Integrity Policy which prohibits cheating and other misconduct in student coursework. Publicly sharing or posting online any prior or current materials from this course (including exam questions or answers), is considered to be providing

unauthorized assistance prohibited by the policy. Both students who share/post and students who access or use such materials are considered to be cheating under the Policy and will be subject to sanctions for violations of Academic Integrity.

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:

<http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

Incomplete Grades:

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at:

<http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx>

Preferred Name & 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 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:

<http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

Students with Disabilities:

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

Loop Campus (312) 362-8002

Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677

Email: csd@depaul.edu

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx> for Services and Contact Information.