

# SYLLABUS

## FILM285 DIRECTING I

Fall Quarter 2021 • Section 1

**Professor: Steve Kniss**

Email: [skniss@depaul.edu](mailto:skniss@depaul.edu)

Office Hours: Online – T 9:00-10:30am

### CLASS SESSIONS

M 1:30-4:45pm – In-person

### LOCATION

14 EAS LL107

**CREDIT HOURS:** 4 credit hours

**LENGTH:** 11 weeks

**PREREQUISITES:** FILM210

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

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course in directing motion pictures. Topics include casting, rehearsals, the basic relationship between the director, actor, and script, script breakdown, camera placement, and shooting for continuity editing. Each student will produce and direct a scene study and a short narrative film.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This directing course challenges students to experiment with a variety of tools to become more effective communicators. Students will learn about director's preparation in relation to casting, rehearsing and how technical choices contribute to performance. Effective directing shapes how techniques such as cinematography, production design, lighting, sound and editing are used within a film to create a cohesive director's vision.

## COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify subtext, themes, and intentions of a script.
2. Analyze a story for its individual moments and the beats that build its arc.
3. Understand and execute the casting process.
4. Communicate effectively with actors.
5. Prepare and carry out rehearsals.
6. Execute pre-visualization of scenes through shot lists, storyboards, and floor plans.
7. Learn the relationship between camera and performance.

## TEXTBOOKS + READINGS

Weston, Judith. Directing Actors: 25<sup>th</sup> Edition. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2021.  
ISBN-10: 1615933212

Various screenplays to choose from on d2l

Dedicated director's notebook

## Suggested Reading:

Anything and everything. Reading will help you think outside yourself, develop empathy, and increase your imagination. Read anything you enjoy and challenge yourself. Read comic books. Read newspapers. Read and build strong stories.

In the same way- watch anything and everything. Stretch yourself! Art is imitation- to be the best, you must first learn from the best.

## **INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES**

"A director is someone who presides over the accidents." Orson Welles

## **CASTING RESOURCES**

Backstage/Breakdown Express – These are interactive on-line casting tools that enable you to send out a casting notice to regional Chicagoland actors and set up/manage audition appointments on-line. We will cover these tools in class.

Production Office – 14 East Jackson Ave – Daley Building, Lower Level 103  
Monday – Friday: 10am - 6pm  
[production@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:production@cdm.depaul.edu)

<https://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Student-Resources/Pages/Production-Office.aspx>

## **SCA PRODUCTION HANDBOOK**

The School of Cinematic Arts Production Handbook is an invaluable resource to all DePaul student filmmakers. The answers to most questions regarding contacts, resources, contracts, rules, and guidelines can be found inside. It is updated annually on SCA Central and linked to the CDM Production Resources page [here](#).

## **TALENT WAIVERS**

Talent waivers must be signed by any outside talent (non-DePaul students) **prior** to camera rolling for any projects. These waivers must be signed and submitted to the Production Office before shooting. Waivers and other commonly used forms can be found on SCA Central under "Filmmaking Paperwork".

## **DEPAUL PRODUCTION INSURANCE**

DePaul production insurance does not cover the use of fire (including pyrotechnics and fireplaces), vehicles, or animals of any kind. Insurance is required for location agreements, film permits, and any equipment rental agreements. Any questions about DePaul's production insurance should be directed to the Production Office well before shooting begins ([production@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:production@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 on SCA Central under "Filmmaking Paperwork".

## **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.

## GRADING

You will be graded on all assignments. Late work will not be accepted. An assignment worth 10 points (10%) is equal to one full letter grade. AKA - don't neglect assignments! There is a lot to cover in this class so wasted time equals wasted opportunity.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Weekly Assignments                         | 20% |
| Open Scene Assignment                      | 10% |
| In-class Scene Performance                 | 10% |
| Photography Assignment                     | 20% |
| Final Scene Performance on Camera          | 30% |
| Participation, Preparation, and Attendance | 10% |

It is impossible to pass the course unless the Final Scene Performance on Camera is turned in on time, regardless of previous points earned.

| GRADE CRITERIA  | Letter Grade | % Grade  |
|---|--------------|----------|
| Performs at the highest level and demonstrates full, uncompromised commitment and effort                      | A            | 93-100   |
|   | A-           | 90-92.99 |
| Performs at a high level and demonstrates consistent and effective achievement in meeting course requirements | B+           | 88-89.99 |
|   | B            | 83-87.99 |
|   | B-           | 80-82.99 |
| Meets the basic requirements of the course  | C+           | 78-79.99 |
|   | C            | 73-77.99 |
|   | C-           | 70-72.99 |
| Meets minimum standards and performs at a level sub-par to basic requirements                                 | D+           | 68-69.99 |
|   | D            | 63-67.99 |
|   | D-           | 60-62.99 |
| Fails to meet minimum course requirements   | F            | < 60     |

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 09/14 | Last date to add classes                  |
| 09/21 | Last date to drop classes without penalty |
| 10/26 | Last day to withdraw from classes         |

More info here: <https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx>

# COURSE CALENDAR

*Subject to change with notification*

## **Week 1 INTRODUCTION**

What is a director and why do we need them? Building a story and understanding beats. Screen selected shorts and clips, including silent era, current, and music video. Discuss interpretation and beats. Discuss how everyone approaches the same raw material differently.

Discuss approaching the script as the film's blueprint; breaking down beats; getting a scene on its feet and starting to examine the space.

Choose a screenplay to analyze and direct from the d2l examples. This will be used throughout the quarter.

**Assignment:** Buy a dedicated director's notebook

**Read:** Choose screenplay to explore further + Weston Introduction (xxv-xxxvi)

## **Week 2 INTERPRETATION AND CHARACTER**

Discussion: how to create a world; how to decide what shots to use when. How character affects shot choices, be it person character or location character. Back story. Motivation. Internal and external environments.

**Assignment:** Open Scene Assignment; Choose a scene to direct

**Read:** Weston Chapter 7 (pg. 185-229)

**Due:** Screenplay choice

## **Week 3 PREVISUALIZATION PROCESS**

Open Scene – Watch and Critique  
Discuss and practice making a shot list.  
Discuss and practice storyboards.  
Begin work on your chosen scene

**Assignment:** Create a shot list and storyboard for your chosen scene

**Read:** Weston Chapter 8 (pg. 229-247)

**Due at 11:59pm:** Open Scene Assignment; Choose a scene to direct

## **Class 4 CASTING + AUDITIONS**

We will go over everything about setting up auditions and then practice conducting them. Each student will be director, producer, reader, actor, and support staff for an audition process. Discuss how to ask for certain things and how to tell if you will be able to communicate well enough with an actor to get the performance you need.

**Assignment:** Set up a casting call via Backstage or Breakdown Express

**Read:** Weston Chapter 4 (pg. 72-134)

**Due at 11:59pm:** Shot lists and storyboards

**Class 5      ON SET PROTOCOLS – We will be on Zoom for this class**

Discuss script and prep scene study.

What are the roles on set? Who makes what calls? What is the workflow? Department heads and key roles, big plans, communication, etc...

**Assignment:** Hold auditions and confirm actors

**Read:** Weston Chapter 9 (pg. 247-318)

**Due at 11:59pm:** Casting call should be set up and you should be organizing auditions for this week

**Class 6      REHEARSALS**

What methods do actors use? What are the best ways to communicate with actors? How do you ask good questions? How do you develop trust with actors? How do you get to a place of understanding and collaboration with an actor?

**Assignment:** In-class Scene Performance; Schedule rehearsals and shoot dates

**Read:** Weston Chapter 10 (318-332)

**Due at 11:59pm:** Confirm actors

**Class 7      FINAL PREP**

In-class scene performances – we will watch and discuss  
Bringing together all of your preparation and scheduling your scene study shoots.

**Assignment:** Director's notebook check (will be done in class)

**Read:** TBD

**Due at 11:59pm:** In-class Scene Performance; Rehearsal and shoot dates confirmed

**Class 8      BLOCKING EXERCISES**

In-class blocking exercises  
Production Meetings  
Photo assignment – discussion about what it is

**Assignment:** Shoot Final Scene; Photo Assignment

**Read:** TBD

**Due by class:** All production details should be confirmed by this date – will discuss in class

**Class 9      PHOTO ASSIGNMENT REVIEW**

View photo assignments in class and talk about them  
Finalize prep or discuss post-production plan if shoot is complete

**Assignment:** Shoot Final Scene; Prepare dailies for class

**Read:** TBD

**Due by class:** Photo Assignment

**Class 10      EDITING AND POST-PRODUCTION**

The director in the edit room. What is that collaboration like? How much of a leadership role should you take?

We will review your dailies in class and discuss how to bring them together to form a scene.

**Assignment:** Edit Final Scene; Upload to d2l

**Read:** TBD

**Due this week:** Final scene should be shot by now

**Week 11      FINALS WEEK**

**Due by class:** All films uploaded to d2l for screening/critique in-class

**Assignment:** Celebrate!

---

# ACADEMIC POLICIES

---

## CHANGES TO SYLLABUS

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

## COVID-19 HEALTH AND 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).

## 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. If at any time, the classroom experience does not live up to this expectation, please feel free to contact me via email or during office hours.

## 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](mailto: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.

### **ONLINE OFFICE HOURS**

For the current quarter, I will be conducting online office hours. If for some reason, my hours do not work with your own, please reach out to schedule a different time that can work for both of us.