

ENG 4146: Long-Form Filmmaking

Instructor: Trevor Mowchun

Fall 2024, Film and Media Studies, Department of English, UF

The ten best films have yet to be made.

— Sidney Peterson, “The Dark of the Screen”

Instructor contact and office hours:

Dr. Mowchun

Email: tmowchun@ufl.edu

Phone: 352-294-2839

Office Hours: Wednesday periods 9-11

Class: Thursday E1-E3 (7:20-10:10pm) (TUR 2334)

Screening: Wednesday E1-E3 (7:20-10:10pm) (ROLFS 115) – Projectionist: Alex Franco

Film lab technician: Owen Ward (TUR 4303)

Email: owen.ward@ufl.edu

Phone: 352-672-8459

Lab hours (with Owen):

- Monday: periods 8-9 (3:00-4:55pm)
- Tuesday: periods 8-9 (3:00-4:55pm)
- Wednesday: periods 9-11 (4:05-7:05pm)
- Thursday: periods 9-11 (4:05-7:05pm)
- Friday: no office hours/by appointment

*Keycode to the lab will be provided.

*Students should see Owen during his hours to sign out keys to the editing suites. Students will have access to the editing suites outside of Owen’s lab hours.

Course Description

The only way to describe this course is to utter the ultimate “I do” to collectively creating a long-form film as a class. As in all big life commitments, marriage being the most exemplary, it’s about saying “yes” every day of which one is a participant in a higher and selfless venture. In this class you can to a certain extent focus on your filmmaking strengths, but, at the end of the day, everyone will have to do a bit of everything to make this cinematic dream come to life. This will mean discovering what your weaknesses are and improving them. The bold venture, in addition to being a valuable learning experience, gives us the rare opportunity to make a memorable and impactful film for the ages. (To my knowledge we are the first class in the film program to attempt a long-form feature film in a single semester.) I will get us started with source material and will oversee the entire process, vetting all major artistic decisions. My job is to steer the cinematic ship away from familiar or conventional routes of passage, avoiding errors and foreseeable disaster, and into the creatively liberating waters of film. To receive credit for

the course you must earn your credits on the finished film. Finally, I must confess that I wish we had a full year to do this. I nevertheless remain optimistic that we can finish or ALMOST finish the film by the end of the year. If that doesn't happen then the remaining work will continue into the Spring 2025 semester with whomever is able and willing to see the film through to the end. I've said it once and I'll say it again: success and style come with seeing something through all the way to the end, the bitter end, after which sweetness reigns in good results worthy of pride.

Books:

Since the class film is our top priority, we will not have as much time to formally discuss the readings in class. The readings are kept to a minimum for this reason. However, that does not mean that reading is not vital to the filmmaking process. Ample inspiration and instruction can be gathered from these texts and I will be making reference to them throughout our collaborative process.

- Sidney Peterson, *The Dark of the Screen* (Anthology Film Archives, 1980).
*Read this book during the first month of the semester. Purchase from [Anthology Film Archives](#).
- Blain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and Practice: Imagemaking for Cinematographers and Directors*, 4th edition (Routledge, 2022).
*I originally listed this book as "recommended" but I am reconsidering that. It is a solid and detailed (if at times overly complex) technical resource with emphasis on digital cinematography. I believe you will benefit from reading it gradually throughout the semester.
*Purchase latest (4th) edition on [Amazon](#). A hardcopy of the 4th edition is on reserve at Library West. The 2nd edition is available as an e-book through the library.
- Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece* (NYRB Classics, 2001).
*This short story is to be read prior to the screening of Sidney Peterson's short film, *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* (1949). I will provide at least one week's notice.
*Available digitally through Library West.
- Leo Tolstoy, "The Forged Coupon," in *The Forged Coupon, and Other Stories*.
*This novella is to be read prior to the screening of Robert Bresson's feature film, *L'argent*. I will provide at least one week's notice.
*Available digitally through Library West.

Relevant books from ENG 4136: Introduction to Filmmaking:

- Alexander Mackendrick, *On Film-making: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director*, ed. Paul Cronin (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004). *Still the best book on film language from a storytelling perspective.
- Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York Review of Books, 2016). *Still the best book on film language from a non-storytelling/formalist perspective.
- Steven Ascher (with Edward Pincus), *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, 5th edition (Plume 2019).
*A clear and thorough technical reference book.

Film screenings:

Films will be screened on Wednesday evenings. They will be selected on a weekly basis throughout the semester in relation to the thematic and aesthetic directions of the class film project. For this reason the films cannot be laid out here in advance. Please note some screening sessions may be used to work on the class film, especially later in the semester.

Coursework – Collaborative Long-Form Film Project:

- “Go big, or go home.” – There is only one project at stake in this course: the making of a long-form/feature length film. I am opting for the term “long-form” because the framework of the feature film is freighted with much formulaic baggage. Our film need not conform to these standards. We can experiment without abandoning narrative.
- “Everyone fights, no one quits.” – Everyone will be expected to pull their weight. Everyone will have to perform various jobs, wearing multiple hats, and must work well in teams. I will be supervising on the set and during editing as much as possible. It is my hope that the film will be complete or close to completion by the end of the course.
- “Full commitment, making sacrifices.” – The film will be made outside of class—morning, noon, and night—whatever it takes. Ideally students should have a light course load for maximum flexibility when scheduling. Being busy with other courses or extracurricular activities is not a valid excuse if others are consistently available to work.
- “What we’ll be doing in class – a great deal!” – Our weekly classes will be devoted to working out the various artistic, technical and logistical aspects of the film, including discussing the film’s ideas, story, and vision; preproduction work; assigning roles; auditioning; rehearsing; screening rushes and rough cuts; and scheduling, scheduling, scheduling! Regular attendance and active participation are crucial for credit.
- “The power of a small yet resourceful crew.” – We are a relatively small class. Fear not—this is not the limitation that it might appear to be. Strength in numbers and dollars are not guarantors of anything artistically worthwhile in film. In my experience, small crews are often advantageous. (The difficulty is finding enough actors for scenes with multiple players.) That being said, everyone should try to recruit as much volunteer help as possible from friends, family, coworkers, even strangers. In exchange you can offer due credit on the film. (Be sure to keep track of all names and roles for inclusion in the credits.)

On acting in the film:

- I just alluded to the importance of acting above. Everyone will be expected to act if needed. Some of you may end up being the principal actors in the film. But keep in mind our class may not be big and/or suitable enough to staff both sides of the camera, cast AND crew. Depending on the project, we will likely have to recruit actors from outside the class. Casting calls can be placed within the English department to undergraduate, graduate and even faculty listservs. We should also approach other departments where the pool of acting talent is potentially deeper, such as the Acting program in the School of Theater & Dance and the Media Production department in the College of Journalism and Communications. Keep your eyes open in your day-to-day for potential actors. As Alexander Mackendrick and so many directors have said, if a role is well-cast then we have done 90% of the job.

- Speaking of Mackendrick, the best text on the complex and mysterious process of acting and directing actors that I know of is one you will be familiar with from the first filmmaking course: Mackendrick's chapter on film acting, "The Director and the Actor," from his endlessly instructive and inspirational book *On Film-making*. And if memory serves, I can also recommend Judith Weston's book, *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television* (Michael Wiese Productions, 1999).

Budget:

There is a small budget for the film that can be used for equipment, costumes, props, etc.

Schedule and Deadlines:

- Aug. 22 – Orientation and game plan.

Script work:

- Aug. 26-28 – Class reads the source material/script.
- Aug. 29 – In-class script workshop.
- Writing team of two to rewrite the script. Submit 2nd draft to instructor on Sept. 3 by midnight. Mandatory meeting with instructor during office hours on Sept. 4 to finalize the script. Instructor finalizes script.
- One production manager to break down the script into locations and times of day. Send to entire class by Sept. 6.

Preproduction:

- Sept. 7-29 – Locations team of two. Bring photographs/videos/drawings of the locations to the class meetings. Weekly meetings with instructor during office hours upon request. Instructor vets locations.
- Sept. 7-29 – Casting team of two. Actors can come from within and outside the class. Auditions/screen tests for principal roles. Bring screen tests to the class meetings. Weekly meetings with instructor during office hours upon request. Instructor vets casting.
- Sept. 7-29 – Set/props/costume team of four. Bring photographs/videos/drawings of the sets/props/costumes to the class meetings. Weekly meetings with instructor during office hours upon request. Instructor vets.
- Sept. 7-29 – Direction/camera/lighting/sound team of four. Bring illustrative storyboards/photographs/videos to the class meetings. Weekly meetings with instructor during office hours upon request. Final shot list will be prepared by the instructor.
- Sept. 7 – Oct. 6 – Two production managers/assistant directors (the student who did the script breakdown will continue on here). Responsible for scheduling all rehearsal and shooting days; prepare sides; budgetary matters in consultation with the instructor.
- Sept. 30 - Oct. 6 – Rehearsals and prep for production. In-class rehearsals/prep on Oct. 2-3.

Production: Oct. 7 - Nov. 10

- The class will be split into two production crews which can work simultaneously on smaller scenes or pickups. Larger or more complex scenes will require the entire class crew.
- Preproduction roles will continue into production. *Production management team MUST continue in this role.
- The instructor will be present on set as much as possible.
- Rushes will be screened every Thursday class, and possibly also on the Wednesday screening.
- *It will be the responsibility of one member from each production crew to work with our technician, Owen, to ensure the rushes are backed-up and prepared for class.

Postproduction: Nov. 11 - Dec. 15

*We must account for the Thanksgiving Break – Nov. 25-30.

- The class can be divided into 3-4 postproduction teams, depending on the needs of the project: picture editing, sound editing, color & VFX, music.
- The instructor will supervise the editing process. Postproduction teams will be required to meet separately with the instructor during office hours to review the work.
- Postproduction teams' edited scenes/sequences will be screened every Thursday class, and possibly also on the Wednesday screening. Remember to bring your work to these classes!

Equipment, Technical Assistance, and Proficiency

- Basic proficiency must be met before checking out equipment for the first time, particularly the department's cameras/lenses.
- Our film lab technician, Owen Ward, will be available in the equipment room (TUR 4303) during scheduled lab hours (see above) to conduct basic proficiency tests and provide demonstrations of production and postproduction equipment, in addition to assisting with any technical questions you may have. Owen will also be available to answer questions via phone, email, and text message. Please be aware that technical support is restricted to the department's onsite resources.
- The department will provide optimal SD cards for the production. As a backup, you should have your own video/audio SD storage for assigned preproduction work.

Equipment and Lab Policies

- The department media lab is located in TUR 4303. The key code will be provided. Throughout the semester you will have access to the lab and will be given a key to one of the editing suites. A \$50 replacement fee will be charged for lost keys. To sign out keys please consult with the technician during scheduled office hours in TUR 4303. Be sure to return your keys at the end of the semester.
- When checking out equipment, the technician will manage all equipment sign-ins and sign-outs, support all computer platforms and deal with any equipment problems, exchanges, repairs

etc. He will provide a schedule and forms for requesting equipment for all projects and determine return dates in accordance with the syllabus and the course deadlines.

*NB. You are fully responsible for all equipment that you have signed out, including any mishandling, damage or loss of gear. Treat our equipment as if it were your own and think of future filmmaking classes that will depend on the equipment being in good condition.

UF Policies and Services:

- Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>).
- Information on current UF grading policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.
- For counseling or urgent help you may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/services/individual/>
- UF's policy on Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/>