

Cinematography Theory and Practice

Last Updated: Thu, 07/31/2025

Course prefix: LMC

Course number: 3318

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
91431

Instructor First Name: John

Instructor Last Name: Thornton

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2024

Course description:

This course investigates cinematography as a collaborative and creative discipline at the heart of visual storytelling. Focusing on the work of contemporary cinematographers and production designers, students will analyze how lighting, lensing, composition, and design choices shape tone, mood, and meaning across diverse genres and formats. Through weekly screenings, scene studies, and technical labs, students will develop the visual literacy and production skills necessary to craft purposeful images. Building on core principles introduced in LMC 3406 and LMC 3407, this course emphasizes hands-on experimentation with camera and lighting setups while fostering a deeper understanding of the visual strategies used by today's leading image-makers. By the end of the semester, students will assemble a portfolio of creative work that demonstrates their ability to design and execute visually cohesive scenes for both narrative and commercial contexts.

Course learning outcomes:

- Operate digital cinema tools to execute lighting setups, exposure control, and composition techniques that support specific narrative goals.
- Critically evaluate the visual styles and storytelling approaches of Roger Deakins, Rachel Morrison, and Hoyte van Hoytema to articulate the creative responsibilities of cinematographers and production designers.
- Use industry-standard pre-visualization tools to design lighting plans, camera movements, and set layouts for short-form productions.
- Collaborate in rotating crew roles during in-class and full company shoots, demonstrating effective communication, technical execution, and creative problem-solving on set.

- Develop a polished portfolio and demo reel that reflects personal visual style and technical competence as a cinematographer or production designer.

Required course materials:

Required Textbook

Cinematography Theory and Practice, 4th Ed.

Required Tools

- 1 Mini-LED flashlight
- 1 Mini multi-tool (with a flat head screwdriver)
- 1 Pair of leather work gloves
- 10 Lens wipes
- 1 Cloud-based storage server with 10 – 15 GB of available space.

Required Software and Apps

[Set.a.Light 3D Lighting Simulator](#): You will need this software beginning in week 6. Download the 15-day free trial to your PC

[Shot Designer App](#): Install this on your PC and your mobile phone

[Blackmagic Camera App](#): Install this on your mobile phone

Grading policy:

Projects (20%) | You will complete four projects this semester *outside of the classroom setting*. The projects include **Unity and Balance, Space and Place, 3 Looks One Location, and The Visual Scene**. I have posted the requirements for each project on Canvas. Check the course schedule for the due dates for each assignment.

In-Class Film Shoots (10%) | You will work in groups of three to complete two ICFS, including **Lighting for mood and Monochromatic**. You will film the ICFS during our regular class period; as such, students who have an unapproved absence for the ICFS will not be able to make up the assignment. I have posted the requirements for each project on Canvas. Check the course schedule for the due dates for each assignment.

Full Company Shoots (25%) | You will work in small groups to lead the entire class through a **Full Company Shoot**. When your group is not leading an FCS, you will work as a crew member. You will film the FCS during our regular class period; as such, students who have an unapproved absence from an FCS will not be able to make up the assignment. I have posted the requirements for each project on Canvas. Check the course schedule for the due dates for each assignment.

Quizzes (15%) | You will complete several **quizzes**. You will take the quizzes on Canvas, and once a quiz has opened, you may complete it at any time before the due date. The material included on each quiz is on Canvas. Check the course schedule for the due dates for each assignment.

Portfolio (30%) | Your **portfolio** is a polished collection of your best visual work from the course, showcasing your work as either a cinematographer or production designer.

Attendance policy:

Attendance is mandatory. I will take attendance at the start of every session. Anyone who misses four classes or has four unexcused absences will automatically drop a letter grade. Anyone who accumulates six unexcused absences will automatically fail. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes after the scheduled start time are considered absent. The Institute's [rules and regulations](#) for approved absences will be strictly adhered to. If you must miss class, please contact me through MS Teams **at least 30 minutes before** class time to discuss excusing your absence.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course in the Humanities area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master the course content and support their broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad, broad-orienting question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary or philosophical texts or works in the visual or performing arts.

Course content, activities, and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence