

Remington Smith

Teaching Statement

My teaching practice focuses on developing students as critical thinkers, students of the moving image, and filmmakers in various arenas of film production. These three areas -- analytical, technical, professional -- ground my work as a teacher and mentor. I stress “real world” lessons, whether for academia or the film industry, in order to prepare students for post-college careers.

My philosophy is put into practice through regular class discussions of course screenings and readings, including topics on the history of film and representations of race, class and gender in cinema & television. One of my most successful exercises begins by asking students to list their favorite films on the whiteboard. I then ask what all of the films, put together at random, have in common. Eventually students realize all of the films have white male directors and a majority star white male protagonists. This exercise provides a launchpad to discuss the lack of diversity in cinema (in front of the camera and behind it) and interrogate our responsibility as filmmakers to change that dichotomy between real life demographics and reel life demographics.

In order to develop technical & aesthetic proficiency in a range of areas of film production, my courses stress hands on exercises in the classroom and film production assignments in the field. The fundamental technical demonstrations are taught by myself (camera operation, sound recording, video editing), with supplemental demonstrations actually performed by students as part of their participation grade. Allowing students to teach a lesson provides leadership experience and an opportunity to explore an area of their interest, while the class is exposed to areas of film production they have not encountered. Enlisting students as collaborators in the course adds to the classroom community dynamic that I strive for.

In order to gauge teaching success, student work is graded according to technical and aesthetic parameters, with constructive feedback from both fellow students and myself throughout the rough cut stages. Such assessments led to the creation of a photography assignment for the fiction film production course. The photography assignment tasked students to create a narrative through 10 images, stressing composition, lighting and storytelling through visuals alone. With this assignment in place, the films from that semester were some of the strongest produced in my classes.

The most valuable tool that has guided my teaching has been evaluations. Students department wide seemed thirsty for more hands on exercises, which led to the inclusion of the hands-on tech demos. I also believe the greatest feedback about my teaching can be found in how frequently students seek me out after the class is completed. I've been fortunate enough to stay in touch with well over a dozen of my advanced students, writing letters of recommendation and connecting them with professional production work.

As a filmmaker whose professional pursuits have run the film gamut (projectionist, writer, academic, freelance film production), I aim to funnel these experiences into a creatively stimulating communal environment, where students can take risks, learn from mistakes and leave the class creatively satisfied and confident in their abilities as they pursue next steps in their academic and professional careers.