

STUDENT LEARNING DATA

OVERVIEW

The Film Department focuses on the development of the writer-director's original vision and ensures that students learn the tools for expressing it. In 2019-20 the first-year experience was part of the foundation year; in 2020-21 students will enter the program directly. The strength of the Film program lies in its balance of experimental practices and traditional narrative skill-building. Students are asked to learn conventions of filmmaking and then invited to test them, pushing against received ideas. In their first two years students learn essential skills and concepts. In their third and fourth years they learn to deepen their practice in more advanced narrative production courses, filmic self-portraiture, and a thesis film that invites them to synthesize their learning to that point. They deepen their knowledge of film history with electives in major forms, major directors, and national cinemas. The third program learning outcome reads, "Synthesize concepts about light, photography, sound design, directing actors, story, research, and editing." Students are introduced to these sometimes in a single class (the 200-level Introduction to Narrative Filmmaking course is a good example), but it usually takes until their fourth year to be realized. The second learning outcome, "Make short, emotionally resonant films, working with the tools and concepts of film language as part of a symbolic system" often turns on introducing students to the symbolic system of film, and in particular discovering the possibilities in separating (and recombining) image and sound.

CLOSING EQUITY GAPS

The Film department is committed to closing equity gaps through a variety of means, including the range of work students are required to study (films, filmmakers, film styles, fiction, scripts) and in faculty recruiting and hiring. Film history courses incorporate innovative and classic films made around the world, and studio courses also frequently introduce students to new ideas, new techniques, and to films made by diverse voices, including women and people of color. Diversity of voice among faculty was an especial focus of 2019-20. We acknowledge that students have different learning styles and needs, and because we want there to be as little hindrance as possible, we accommodate different needs in delivery of assignments, in deadlines, and in the use of the College's ADA-approved syllabus template.

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The Film department reviews its program annually, seeking to understand and improve student growth as it has occurred through the program, through changes to the curriculum, the balance of required and elective courses, and opportunities students have to learn from other disciplines. Student learning is studied alongside feedback from faculty, student evaluations, and conversations about developments in the field. The development of a four-year pathway in Film is a good example of program improvement. We studied student success for several years before seeing that a first-year experience in Film, combined with open electives, would enrich student learning and provide them with the opportunity to minor in another subject if they wished. The new four-year program, built partly in 2018-19, when several new courses were introduced, and completed in 2019-20 with a new first year, begins in the fall of 2020.

HIGH IMPACT TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A student in his final year, in the 400-level Self-Portrait class, made a film about a fictional version of himself that weaves the elements named in program learning outcome 3: "Synthesize concepts about light, photography, sound design, directing actors, story, research, and editing." The film makes good use of most of these elements, with the sound design, narrative style, and editing rhythm revealing a singular, complex voice. This is a particularly good outcome given that as a sophomore the student frequently turned in preparatory work -- his development of ideas -- that was strong, but typically on which neither his audio nor his images delivered. For evidence: Emperor Black. In the fall of 2019, a sophomore in Experimental Film responded to an assignment that began with a discussion of Robert Bresson's admonition to filmmakers: "What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear." Students each wrote a page of unconnected observations and were asked to use these as the basis for a film whose audio was principally voiceover. Several interesting pieces came from the assignment, and one made inspired leaps among images, sounds, and the thoughts themselves. This film, Without Their Marauding, is a good example of work that fulfills the program's first learning outcome: "Make short, emotionally resonant films, working with the tools and concepts of film language as part of a symbolic system." Films like this often turn on the discovery of film's symbolic system, and particularly on a new understanding of the separate worlds that image and sound can inhabit and invoke.