

CLASSROOM VISITATION REPORT

Faculty Visited: Courtney Hermann

Visitor: A. Eliza Greenstadt

Course # and Title: Film 131: Introduction to Digital Filmmaking

Pre-Visit: 1/20/20

Class Visit: 1/29/20

Post-Visit: 2/6/20

1. Describe and evaluate the instructor's plan for the course.

The primary purpose of FILM 132 Introduction to Digital Filmmaking is to familiarize students with digital filmmaking technologies, the film production process, and storytelling for live action motion pictures. Secondly, students are introduced to professional practices, legal considerations, and ethical issues related to the discipline. Projects require students to engage in the creative and technical aspects of developing story ideas, treatment writing, scriptwriting, pre-production planning, operating camera, recording sound, lighting, editing, and content delivery.

The studio portion of the coursework includes fiction and non-fiction filmmaking components, which are intended to foster interest in and prepare students for the program's two existing production tracks in fiction and documentary-making. Majors who do not continue with the production curriculum after this experience exit with a basic understanding of media production that informs their scholarship in film studies and screenwriting practice.

Professor Hermann's syllabus systematically covers the major aspects of filmmaking through readings, lecture, discussion, exercises, and longer projects, and is expertly designed to train students in the skills they need to succeed as beginning filmmakers.

2. Describe and evaluate the plan for the class session to be visited.

The class I visited began with a review of the previous week's camera exercise, which asked groups of students to compose a series of shots demonstrating techniques such as wide, low, and high angle. This portion of the class consisted of student critiques of two groups' work. The remainder of the class was taken up with a lecture on the basics of sound recording that prepared students for their next exercise in sound techniques as well as assigned readings on the subject.

The lesson plan included a good mix of discussion and lecture. The session was sandwiched between two studio-focused classes, so it provided an opportunity to evaluate previous group work and prepare for the next activity. In the post-class meeting, Prof. Hermann and I discussed the possibility of building a brief break into the class, perhaps by shortening the critique section slightly. However, this may not be necessary since the class was well-timed and the students appeared highly engaged throughout.

3. Describe and evaluate the activities observed in the class visited.

The class began with attendance roll. This demonstrated Prof. Hermann's commitment to student accountability, cohesion, and success in a course that depends on class participation.

Camera Exercise Critique

Prof. Hermann led a critique of shots from the group exercise completed in the previous class period. The discussion atmosphere was relaxed: candid without being judgmental. She asked questions such as, “Which shots are particularly successful?” and “Describe this shot composition: what do you see and how do you see it?” When one student began describing a shot, Prof. Herman kept encouraging him: “keep going, Dusty—you’re doing great.” At the same time, she was clear when student errors had lessened the impact of a shot, even as she explained that learning the rules can give filmmakers the latitude to break them. “Audiences can be trusted to decode the messages you give them,” she told the students, “They are your partner.” By the end of the discussion, it was clear what had been expected from the assignment and how students could improve on these techniques in the future.

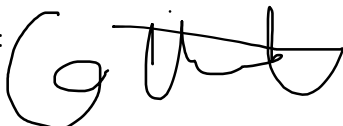
Lecture: Sound Production

The rest of the class period was devoted to a lecture on sound production. Prof. Hermann asked the class to take handwritten notes for this section to avoid distractions. She began by describing the physiology of the ear, using a sculpted model and slides to explain decibels and amplitude. She took the opportunity early on to warn the class about how amplified sound can damage ears—underscoring the impact this will have on a film career and detailing preventive safety measures. Next, Prof. Hermann explained the difference between analog and digital sound and reviewed recommended recording levels; during this part of the lecture she opened up the discussion to draw on the expertise of those students who already had experience working in sound production. She enlivened her demonstration of how to use sound equipment by pretending to record the students’ comments with a shotgun mic she had brought to class, showing how the device must be angled and moved properly to catch the dialogue. Prof. Hermann screened a brief film on syncing sound using a slate and finally demonstrated (with the help of the overhead camera) how to use several types of mics and recorders. By varying the delivery method and involving students, Prof. Hermann was able to keep the lecture lively and engaging, as evidenced by the students’ alert gazes and attentive posture throughout the almost two-hour class.

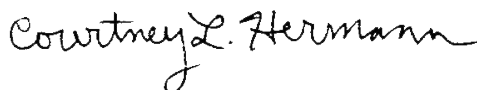
Prof. Hermann ended the class by asking students basic questions about what they had just learned. This was a good technique for immediately cementing new knowledge in their minds.

4. *Other comments.*

The class I observed was a model of its kind. Prof. Hermann was jovial, honest, and informative. Students in her course are lucky to have such a committed and knowledgeable instructor.

Visitor’s Signature: 

Date: 2/22/20

Visitee’s Signature: 

Date: 2/24/20