
FILM STUDIES CAPSTONE

FALL 2024

Instructor
Parker Neff

Email
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Office Location & Hours
By appointment

Course Number
FILM 486 (3 credit hours)

Location
Online via Zoom

Time
F 9:00 – 11:00am CT

DESCRIPTION

A senior capstone experience synthesizing and assessing the complete field of study for film majors. Emphasis on preparation for and emulation of post-undergraduate employment and education opportunities through discussion, research, and independent development.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate awareness of topical issues in the film industry and their chosen field of interest.
- Work comfortably and communicate fluently in professional film environments.
- Effectively execute entry-level tasks such as making sides and completing coverage.
- Market themselves as professionals or potential graduate students with a comprehensive portfolio.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Participation (360 points):

The nature of this class requires practical mastery of eager, active, and professional communication habits which will help sustain each student at the professional or graduate level. To reflect that, Participation constitutes 36% of each student's final grade. Participation will be measured primarily in two ways:

- Watercooler Chat: On weeks flagged for Watercooler Chat, each student must be prepared to present one story of interest they've pulled from the trades (Deadline, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, etc.). These stories must be submitted to Professor Neff via email by 11:59p CT on the Wednesday before class. Each Watercooler Chat is worth 15 points. Failure to submit a story by the Wednesday deadline *or* failure to present means that the student may only receive 10 points maximum for that week's Watercooler Chat. Failure to do both means that the student will receive 0 points for that week's Watercooler Chat.
- Guest Interview: On weeks flagged for a Guest Interview, we will be joined by a professional with expertise in a specific area of Film. Each guest will be announced the week before their interview. Each student must be prepared to ask the guest one question related to their area of expertise. This will be worth 15 points. Failure

to prepare a question will result in 0 points. (If we run out of time for everyone to ask questions, immediately following class a student may email Professor Neff with the question they had prepared to receive full credit.)

Students will occasionally be asked to present their projects, and these presentations will also be worth 15 points. If a student is unable to present, they will receive 0 points for that presentation.

Coverage (200 points):

One of the most fundamental tasks of entry-level film professionals is the ability to read and synthesize scripts as coverage. For this class, students will be expected to complete three:

- Half-Hour Coverage: 25 Points
- Hour-Long Coverage: 50 Points
- Feature Coverage: 125 Points

The parameters of these assignments will be explained in class. If a student misses a class when parameters are explained, they can email Professor Neff for the guidelines.

Professional Portfolio (440 points):

Each student will be asked to complete four assignments to reflect their ability to market themselves and to execute the next steps in their Film career:

- Resume/Cover Letter: 80 Points
- Networking Plan: 80 Points
- Six-Month Budget: 80 Points
- Professional Sample (Reel, Visual Portfolio, or Script): 200 Points

The parameters of these assignments will be explained in class. If a student misses a class when parameters are explained, they can email Professor Neff for the guidelines.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Item	Point Value
Participation	360 points
Coverage	200 points
Professional Portfolio	440 points
Total	1000 points

Grade Scale: A = 90% – 100%; B = 80% – 89%; C = 70% – 79%; D = 60% – 69%; F = 59% or below.

Blackboard Grade Book: Grades will be as up-to-date as possible on Blackboard. Please consider the online grade book a courtesy to you, subject to errors given various upgrades and shifts in the software. Professor Neff reserves the right to make grade book corrections to keep it consistent with the syllabus so that your grade reflects true performance, not software or user error. If students spot something that seems off, please contact Professor Neff to discuss rectification.

LATE WORK POLICY

Coverage and Professional Portfolio assignments will be accepted up to 48 hours after the due date / time, with a grade deduction as outlined below. A Coverage or Professional Portfolio assignment submitted after 48 hours will not be accepted.

- 0-24 hours late: 10% deduction
- 24-48 hours late: 20% deduction
- 48+ hours late: will receive a "0"

EXTRA CREDIT

There will be one opportunity to earn extra credit in this course: To successfully complete a Sides Assignment as introduced by Professor Neff in Week 2. This will be worth up to 30 points. In order to receive points, this assignment must be completed without any mistake—and cannot be submitted any later than Thanksgiving Break.

A student may submit this assignment at any time. Providing the assignment is submitted well before Thanksgiving Break, Professor Neff will return feedback on the assignment by the next week's class. If there are mistakes found, the student will have the opportunity to correct their mistakes and re-submit the assignment for 20 points. After that, if there are still mistakes, the student may try to submit the assignment one final time for 10 points. If upon the third submission there are still mistakes, the student forfeits the opportunity for extra credit.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Description	Due
1	8/23	Establishing: Introduction to class and syllabus, initial discussion on current state of film and student goals.	
2	8/30	The Marketplace: The history of Hollywood, life on a studio lot, intro to sides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
3	9/6	The Break-In Artists: Starting from scratch, intro to coverage, conceiving of a project, film festivals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
4	9/13	Inside the Hive: Working in an agency, connecting talent, the world of spin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Half-Hour Coverage• Guest Speaker Question
5	9/20	Mount Olympus: Writers' offices and rooms, working as a creative assistant, pitching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
6	9/27	Setiquette: Life on set, varieties of sets, roles and unions, working in live TV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hour-Long Coverage• Guest Speaker Question
7	10/4	The Architects: The world of producing, designing a project, recruiting a team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
8	10/11	Standing in Quicksand: Establishing a career amidst changing formats, streaming, building stable skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feature Coverage• Guest Speaker Question
9	10/18	The World of Cinema: Navigating and plugging into the filmmaking cities around the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
10	10/25	Know Thyself: Intro to resumes/cover letters and professional sample, building expertise, graduate school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watercooler Chat• Guest Speaker Question
11	11/1	Making the Move: Budgeting, planning, networking, intro to budget assignment and networking plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resume/Cover Letter• Guest Speaker Question

12	11/8	Survival Habits: Staving off burnout, staying productive, independent filmmaking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking Plan • Guest Speaker Question
13	11/15	Sticking Around: The art of pitching and adapting, importance of flexibility, take-two of first class discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six Month Budget
14	11/22	Wrap Party: Students pitch themselves, sharing Samples, demonstrating skills built in this course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Pitch • Professional Sample
15	11/29	**Thanksgiving Break – No Class**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra Credit

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Regular and Substantive Interaction: The U.S. Department of Education requires that distance education courses must include regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty. For more information about Regular and Substantive Interaction at WKU, please visit the Regular and Substantive Interaction in Online and Distance Learning webpage.

In this course, regular and substantive interaction will take place in the following ways:

- Weekly synchronous sessions between faculty and students with emphasis on participatory interaction.
- Timely and detailed feedback on assignments provided within one week of submission.

ADA Accommodation: In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, Room 1074. The SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

Pregnant and Parenting Students: Western Kentucky University does not discriminate against any student or exclude any student from its educational programs or activities, including classes or extracurricular activities, on the basis of pregnancy and/or pregnancy-related conditions such as, but not limited to, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom. Students who seek pregnancy or pregnancy-related accommodations should make their requests as soon as possible via WKU's Title IX Website at www.wku.edu/titleix/ under the heading, "Pregnancy or Pregnancy-Related Conditions." Students can also contact the Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir, via email at ena.demir@wku.edu or by phone at (270) 745-6867 to request accommodations or seek assistance. We encourage students and faculty to work together to establish a plan that allows the student to complete the class and coursework without jeopardizing academic integrity and course standards. The Title IX Coordinator can help facilitate conversations between students and faculty regarding appropriate and reasonable accommodations. If you are a WKU student and believe that you have experienced an incident(s) of discrimination or harassment based on pregnancy (or pregnancy related conditions or issues), please report it to the Title IX Coordinator via email at ena.demir@wku.edu or by phone at (270) 745-6867. Additional resources for pregnant and parenting students can be found on WKU's Title IX Website at www.wku.edu/titleix/.

Title IX Discrimination & Harassment: Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (#0.070) and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040). Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Executive Director, Office of Institutional Equity/Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir, 270-745-6867 or Title IX Investigators or Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429. Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual

misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and MUST report what you share to WKU’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU’s Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

Inclusion Statement: Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to ensuring all members of our campus community have access to equitable and inclusive learning, working, and living environments. At the heart of our mission, we seek to provide holistic education and employment experiences that prepare students, faculty, and staff to become effective scholars, contributors, and leaders in our diverse and evolving communities. Consistent with our campus purpose statement and creed, this classroom will be a respectful space, welcoming all sexes, races, ages, national origins, ethnicities, gender identities/labels/expressions, intellectual and physical abilities, sexual orientations, faith/non-faith perspectives, income levels and socio-economic classes, political ideologies, educational backgrounds, primary languages, family statuses, military experiences, cognitive styles, and communication styles. If at any time during this course you are excluded or feel a sense of alienation from the course content, please feel free to contact me privately without fear of reprisal.