

Brandeis University – Summer School 2025

Cinematography

Course Code: **FILM 120a**

Instructor: **Ambrus Hernadi**

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Schedule:

Days: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

Time: 1:50 PM – 4:20 PM

Location: 105 SIMS Classroom

Summer Session 1: June 4 – July 3, 2025

Course Description

This course introduces the fundamental tools and principles of cinematography used to create compelling digital images. It explores the art of visual storytelling while providing a solid technical foundation for effectively using cameras, lighting, and other tools to convey your message. The course examines both moving and still images, emphasizing how to harness the medium to communicate your story. Students will learn to shape the viewer's experience through creative visual choices.

Students will complete four short assignments and a final project throughout the five weeks, working individually and in small groups. The visual projects created for this class will focus on dramatic development and creative storytelling through image composition, camera movement, editing, lighting, and sound.

Learning Goals

The goal of the class is to help understand basic film language, improve visual thinking and with that learn how to express certain views, ideas, feelings, and stories. This is mainly a practical course, but it is also necessary to read and prepare for every class to get the most out of the subject.

This course meets the University's **Oral Communication Curriculum Criteria**. The seminar is limited to 15 students, ensuring that everyone can actively participate in discussions. We will analyze various film and still-image examples, as well as the students' own work. Through these conversations, students will learn to articulate abstract concepts, creative ideas, and artistic

intuitions. Class discussions will involve sharing opinions, debating perspectives, and critically engaging with ideas and examples presented. Students will present their projects to the class and participate in debates about the examples discussed. It is essential to successfully participate in group critiques of creative work and improve your work through these conversations. Individual feedback on communication and presentation skills will be provided throughout the semester. In the filmmaking industry, mastering these skills is essential for persuading people to fund your ideas or assembling a creative team around your project.

During the five weeks of the course, students will be required to present twice in front of the class. Each presentation should be a coherent, well-organized pitch (or speech) in which students use visual examples to support their reasoning. These presentations will be connected to the students' own visual work and will help them better understand their decision-making process, both for the class and for their personal development.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles of cinematography.
- Operate a Sony FX6 camera and utilize different lenses.
- Create dynamic visual storytelling through framing, movement, and lighting.
- Edit footage using Adobe Premiere Pro.
- Communicate creative ideas and visual concepts effectively through oral presentations.
- Produce a narrative or documentary-style short film

Course Structure

The course is structured around lectures, screenings, discussions, hands-on camera and lighting exercises, and cinematography workshops. Students will complete four short assignments working both individually and in groups and develop a final cinematography-focused project during the course.

Course Assignments

Short Assignments (4 Total): Each assignment builds on technical and storytelling skills leading to the final project.

1. Experiment with an Object/Subject

- 1-2 minutes, 5 shots
- Focus on framing, composition, and using different lenses.
- **Due:** End of Week 1

2. Moving Dialogue

- 2–3 minutes
- Focus on camera movement and continuity editing.
- **Due:** End of Week 2

3. Documentary Short

- 5-minute observational documentary.
- Includes a 5–10 minute oral presentation about shooting and editing choices.
- **Due:** End of Week 3

4. Lighting Study

- 1–2 minutes
- Create and light different setups collaboratively.
- **Due:** End of Week 4

Final Project:

- A 3–10-minute short narrative or documentary film, based on a provided script or a developed concept.
- Collaborative work in groups of four.
- Rough cut due by July 2, 2025; Final cut due by July 9, 2025.
- 5–10 minute oral presentation explaining creative choices.

Grading Breakdown

- Short Assignments: 40% (10% each)
- Participation and In-Class Exercises: 20%
- Final Project Proposal & Development: 10%
- Final Cinematography Project: 30%

Required Equipment & Software

- **Camera:** Sony FX6 (provided by Brandeis University)
- **Lenses:** Sony and Leica lenses
- **DJI Ronin Gimbal, Slider and Dolly**

- **Editing Software:** Adobe Premiere Pro (available in lab)
 - **Storage:** External hard drive (recommended, minimum 500GB) OR EditShare
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Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Cinematography and Camera Basics

- Course overview, syllabus discussion
- Sony FX6 camera basics workshop
- Screening and discussion: The role of the cinematographer
- **Assignment 1: Experiment with Object/Subject**

Readings:

Cinematography, Theory and Practice pg. 323-337

Film Lighting – Talks with Hollywood Cinematographers - Chapter 1

Cinematography, Theory and Practice pg. 1-44

Cinematography, Theory and Practice pg. 286-300

Week 2: Camera Movement & Dialogue

- Workshop: Different types of camera movement (handheld, tripod, Ronin, slider)
- Screening: Movement in storytelling
- **Assignment 2: Moving Dialogue**

Readings:

Cinematography, Theory and Practice – pg. 301-308

The Ultimate Guide to Camera Movement – [youtube video](#)

Cinematography, Theory and Practice pg 57-91

Reflections, Twenty-one Cinematographers at Work - Breathless

Week 3: Documentary Techniques and Observational Shooting

- Approaching documentary characters and scenes
- Screening: Observational documentary examples
- Editing techniques for nonfiction
- **Assignment 3: Documentary Short**

Readings:

Directing. Film techniques and aesthetics. – **only pg. 300-312**

Shooting in the Dark

Week 4: Lighting for Film

- 3-point lighting setup workshop
- Using lighting for mood and narrative
- Screening and discussion: Lighting examples
- **Assignment 4: Lighting Study**

Readings:

Cinematography, Theory and Practice – pg. 259-284

[Types of film lights](#)

Week 5: Final Project Development and Review

- Workshops: production/post-production for the final project
- Group feedback and individual consultations
- Final proposal submissions and rough cut planning

Readings:

N/A

Policies & Expectations

Attendance:

This class meets three times per week, and the attendance at each class is **mandatory**. You may miss a class if you have **prior approval** from the instructor. If you miss a class without prior notification, you can be dropped from the course. If you are late to class **more than two times**, without prior notification, you can be **dropped** from the course. If your unexcused absence or third late arrival occurs after the drop/add period, you may receive a **failing grade** for the course. If you frequently miss class or arrive late, it can negatively affect your grade.

There will be an expectation of respecting our time together and listening to each other in class.

Grading

This class is collaborative by its very nature, therefore your work might affect others' grades. My overall attitude towards grading has to do with effort, engagement with material you are creating,

and growth over the course of the semester. The final grade is determined by the finished assignments, weekly responses, class performance, attendance and by meeting the deadlines over the semester.

All the graded assignments are relying on a **collaboration** between several students. It is essential to reach out to me on time, if you are having a hard time working with your partner or reaching out to someone from the group. I won't accept the reporting of such acts or behavior during the last week of working on the project or after you finalized the film.

Missing any assignment or handing it in late will affect your grade. You must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade, especially because all the practical assignments are building blocks that work toward a successful final project. Late assignments will be automatically marked down one grade (for example: B to B-) for every week they are late.

WEEKLY RESPONSES TO VIEWINGS AND READINGS

You will be expected to engage every week with the readings and viewings offered by this class. This means that you will be asked to interact in class and through MOODLE with the readings and viewings in the forum of a response journal. The goal is to create an open dialogue in class and outside of it as well. You must have **at least 6 responses** posted to MOODLE for this section of the grade to count (10% of the grade). No requirement in the length of these responses.

Write them to the [„Ask the Class Forum“](#) discussion board with clicking on the **„Add a new discussion topic“**. Please make sure to name your response as it follows:

Date_First Name_Title (of the reading or viewing you are responding to)

e.g.: 06.04_Ambrus_ Directing. Film techniques

Final Notes

This course is intensive but highly rewarding. You will leave with a strong foundation in cinematography and a completed short film to add to your portfolio. Since you will work in groups as well, it will be essential to be a team player and co-operate with the others. You will learn a lot just by assisting to other projects and others can help a lot in improving your own film. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out via email or schedule an appointment.

Looking forward to an exciting summer of creating interesting visuals!