Conducted by a team of eight faculty members, the Topics in Production course consists of eight interlocking units designed to give necessary theoretical background in preparation for the production of a 16mm short film. Each component consists of a combination of lecture and exercises to introduce students to the theory and techniques necessary for their filmmaking work. Instructors work as a team with awareness of each other's approaches and adjusting to the developments in student projects. By the start of the first week, students have formed groups of two or three for their projects. They prepare to pitch their story ideas by the Wednesday of the second week. During the second half of the course, class time continues to be a mixture of lecture and exercises, and whenever possible, teachers include specifics from the student projects in process into their pedagogy. The course directly segues into its companion course FILMMAKING PRACTICUM AND MENTORSHIP.

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS:

Cinematography: This component provides a comprehensive study into the tools and craft of the cinematographer, with particular emphasis on those tools and techniques needed to prepare the students for their upcoming 16mm shoot. After discussing the relationship of the cinematographer to his crew, director and actors, the course focuses on practicalities such as the role of natural and artificial light and practicalities of how to light a scene, possible lamps, filters and gobos for special effects, exponometry and the tools for setting exposure, color temperature. Equipment for camera movement and choices of film stock are discussed and all other practical matters from preparing the technical screenplay to the steps in postproduction are
discussed as needed for the successful realization of their projects. Two academic hours weekly, over seven weeks.

**Acting:** Meets over 7 weeks, two academic hours weekly. The course introduces the students to basic principles of acting, namely Goal/Obstacle, Other, Tactics and Expectations. Each principle is exercised separately and students engage in short scenes and improvisations to combine the principles and work additional techniques related to character portrayal and building a scene. In some exercises students gain practice directing each other, and specific problems, such as casting or work with non-actors are addressed to prepare them for their upcoming shoot.

**Directing the Short Film:** is a practical and theoretical class that covers basic elements of film directing. Short films will be screened and analyzed with a view to how directors have worked with story, mise-en scene, image, sound, montage and pacing. Meets over 7 weeks, two academic hours weekly.

**Camera & Film Languages:** This unit complements the practical dimension of the cinematography lectures by focusing on those cinematic tools that serve a dramatic purpose in storytelling with film. Several styles of cinematography are evaluated in terms of storytelling effectiveness. Technical elements such as shot sizes, axis rules, angles of view, color, composition, and camera movement, are analyzed with a view to their cultivation of film language. Meets over 7 weeks, 2 hours weekly.

**Screenwriting:** Meets 4 weeks, twice weekly. After introducing students to the dramatic principles of the short form, specific exercises are given to help the students find and develop their story ideas. Lectures discuss dramaturgical points of the short form, narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for bringing about character transformation and building tension. Students form into groups of two or three with roles clearly designated. The instructor guides students toward preparing stories to pitch at the end of the third week and toward incorporating feedback from the pitch into their stories during the fourth week of classes. Screenwriting class is then replaced with meetings with directing mentors and technical screenwriting. **Technical Screenwriting:** Meets twice weekly, during weeks 5, 6, and 7 of the TOPICS course. During these weeks, students transfer their literary screenplays into technical screenplays. At the start of these classes, students must have a finished literary script
(due end of week four after consultations with directing mentors) and a definitive location for their story. The classes are taught so as to aid students in developing their storyboards and finalizing shot lists.

**Editing:** Editing is approached from a theoretical and practical perspective, focusing on making and organizing rhythm. Several approaches to editing are screened for the students in short segments. The phases of editing and necessary steps in preparation are also outlined for the students. Meets over 6 wks, 2 academic hrs weekly.

**Sound for the Moving Image:** This unit makes up a theoretical and practical crash course for creating digital sound space, effectively designing sound to create and enhance meaning. Attention is paid to sound in narrative, with mention of its use for documentary and abstract works. Students are quickly introduced to production matters: tips and tricks from conception to creation of a soundtrack built up through dialogue, narration, music, and ambient sound. Attention is given to preparing students to use equipment necessary to successfully complete their projects. Meets over 8 weeks, two hours weekly. In 8th week, class is incorporated into orientation.

**How to pitch and what to expect?**

Each group needs to develop a story that is realizable in a location or two per day, with two main characters, possibly three. Time restrictions prevent students from changing to multiple locations within a day, and their budget restrictions prevent them from engaging a large cast. They should also keep in mind that if they come up with a story for characters within the age range of 18 to 30, they will have a much broader range of casting possibilities than they would have for stories involving children or characters who are middle-aged or elderly. On the pitch, all mentors will arrive to hear what students have to present. The whole production group of 2-3 students will be presenting their idea together. Each group has about 5 minutes and they should not be reading from text. After their presentation, mentors will be asking questions and providing their feedback for improvement.

**Learning Objectives**

By completing this course, students will:

The overall course objective is to enable students to gain the theoretical and practical skills, methods and approaches in the technical and creative areas of narrative
filmmaking, (namely acting, directing, cinematography, screenwriting, editing and sound) used to successfully produce a short narrative 16mm film.

Sub-objectives include:

- To understand and recognize the specific tasks and elements needed to conceive and write ideas for the short screenplay
- To turn an incipient idea into a convincing script and storyboard.
- To tell the story visually using specifics of film language
- To encourage and enable the actor to make clear choices that tell the story in an engaging and dramatically interesting way
- To pace the telling rhythmically to move spectator along the lines of action
- To interplay sound with images in a way that enhances the felt meaning of the story
- To effectively link content with form using available technical means and in collaboration with other members of an artistic team in such a way that the film functions as an artistic whole, the result of creative collaboration that is the filmmaking process

Course Prerequisites

The course is part of the core curriculum of the Film Studies program, Production track.

Methods of Instruction

The course uses a variety of teaching methods: in-class exercises, powerpoint, lecture, discussion and screening of short films, depending on topic and teacher.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Final exam on theoretical principles 30%
2. Formation of Groups 10%
3. Submission of Treatment for Pitch 10%
4. Oral Pitch of Story 10%
5. Setting up two meetings with directing mentor 10%
6. Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors 10%
7. Finalizing location for the film 10%
8. Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors 10%
   TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Final exam on theoretical principles

(objective exam made from questions contributed by each of instructor)

Final Exam (comprehensive objective exam with questions from all Topics, taken Thu/Fri of week 8)

Formation of Groups

(end of week number one)

Submission of Treatment for Pitch

(Friday of week two) The Pitch is approximately 12 sentences long, and is sent to academic advisor who distributes it to all teachers attending the Pitch.

Oral Pitch of Story

(Monday of week three). Pitch is to be spoken, not read.

Setting up two meetings with directing mentor

Setting up two meetings with directing mentor for the students' group (week five)

Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors

Submitting the written literary screenplay to mentors and production staff (Friday of week five)

Finalizing location for the film

(before Tuesday of week six, done with production manager)

Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors
Initiating meetings with directing and technical mentors throughout weeks 6, 7 and 8

Attendance

CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor’s or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

CIEE Prague Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences are treated equally regardless of reason for any affected CIEE course. Attendance
policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursions or events, as well as Internship.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

Missing classes will lead to the following penalties:

90-minute semester classes:

180-minute semester classes:

Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% of the total course hours missed, or violating the attendance policy in more than one class) will result in a written warning, a notification to the student’s home school, and possibly a dismissal from the program.

Missing more than 20% of the total class hours will lead to a course failure, and potential program dismissal. This is a CIEE rule that applies to all CIEE courses and is in line with the Participant Contract that each CIEE student signs before arriving on-site.

Late arrival to class will be considered a partial (up to 15 minutes late) or full (15 or more minutes late) absence. Three partial absences due to late arrivals will be regarded as one full class absence.
Students must notify their professor and Program Coordinators (PC) beforehand if they are going to miss class for any reason and are responsible for any material covered in class in their absence.

If missing a class during which a test, exam, the student’s presentation or other graded class assignments are administered, make-up assignment will only be allowed in approved circumstances, such as serious medical issues. In this case, the student must submit a local doctor’s note within 24 hours of his/her absence to the PC, who will decide whether the student qualifies for a make-up assignment. Doctor’s notes may be submitted via e-mail or phone (a scan or a photograph are acceptable), however the student must ensure that the note is delivered to the PC.

Should a truly extraordinary situation arise, the student must contact the PC immediately concerning permission for a make-up assignment. Make-up assignments are not granted automatically! The PC decides the course of action for all absence cases that are not straightforward. Always contact the PC with any inquiry about potential absence(s) and the nature thereof.

Personal travel (including flight delays and cancelled flights), handling passport and other document replacements, interviews, volunteering and other similar situations are not considered justifiable reasons for missing class or getting permission for make-up assignments.

For class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips, make-up classes and other instances), always contact the Academic Assistant to decide the appropriate course of action.

Course attendance is recorded on individual Canvas Course Sites. Students are responsible for checking their attendance regularly to ensure the correctness of the records. In case of discrepancies, students are required to contact the Academic Assistant within one week of the discrepancy date to have it corrected. Later claims will not be considered.

CIEE staff does not directly manage absences at FAMU and ECES, but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

CIEE Academic Honesty Policy
CIEE subscribes to standard U.S. norms requiring that students exhibit the highest standards regarding academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in any course assignment or exam will not be tolerated and may result in a student failing the course or being expelled from the program. Standards of honesty and norms governing originality of work differ significantly from country to country. We expect students to adhere to both the American norms and the local norms, and in the case of conflict between the two, the more stringent of the two will preside. Three important principles are considered when defining and demanding academic honesty. These are related to the fundamental tenet that one should not present the work of another person as one’s own.

The first principle is that final examinations, quizzes and other tests must be done without assistance from another person, without looking at or otherwise consulting the work of another person, and without access to notes, books, or other pertinent information (unless the professor has explicitly announced that a particular test is to be taken on an "open book" basis).

The second principle applies specifically to course work: the same written paper may not be submitted in two classes. Nor may a paper for which you have already received credit at your home institution be submitted to satisfy a paper requirement while studying overseas.

The third principle is that any use of the work of another person must be documented in any written papers, oral presentations, or other assignments carried out in connection with a course. This usually is done when quoting directly from another’s work or including information told to you by another person. The general rule is that if you have to look something up, or if you learned it recently either by reading or hearing something, you have to document it.

The penalty ranges from an F grade on the assignment, failure in the course to dismissal from the program. The Academic Director is consulted and involved in decision making in every case of a possible violation of academic honesty.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class .
Acting: Basic Principles: Goal, Obstacle Tactics, Expectations

Directing the Short Film: Basic Directing Principles

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tools of Film language

Screenwriting: dramaturgical strategies of the short form 1

Editing: Introduction

Sound for Moving Image: Introduction

Week 2
Class .

Cinematography: relationship of the cinematographer to his/her crew, directors and actors

Acting: Contacting the Other/Contentless Scenes

Directing the Short Film: Director's Role with Other Crew Members

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Movement

Screenwriting: dramaturgical strategies of the short form 2

Editing: Basic Editing Principles

Sound for Moving Image: The Many Functions of Sound in Film

Week 3
Class .

Cinematography: role of natural light

Acting: Good Acting Choices and basic principles applied to scenes

Directing the Short Film: Directing Tasks Broken Down
Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Frame

Screenwriting: narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for character transformation

Editing: Series Editing vs Collision Editing

Sound for Moving Image: Sound in Different Environments

Week 4
Class

Cinematography: role of artificial light

Acting: More Physical Doing (techniques for using the space and objects)

Directing the Short Film: Director's Analysis of Script

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Shot Size

Screenwriting: narrative techniques and dramatic strategies for building tension

Editing: Editing Analysis in Short Film Samples

Sound for Moving Image: Sound Design Analysis in Selected Film

Week 5
Class

Cinematography: lighting a screen

Acting: More Inner Doing (Techniques for dynamic subtext)

Directing the Short Film: Work with Actors and Result Direction

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Composition
Technical Screenwriting: transforming literary script into a technical screenplay

Editing: Editing Analysis in Short Films samples

Sound for Moving Image: Sound Design Analysis in Selected Films

Week 6

Class

Cinematography: lamps, filters and gobos for special effects

Acting: Scenework for Review of Techniques, Improvisation for Backstory

Directing the Short Film: Work with Cinematographer and Composition

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of POV and Angles

Technical Screenwriting: developing storyboard

Editing: Editing Analysis in Short Film Samples

Sound for Moving Image: Sound Resources and Preparation

Week 7

Class

Cinematography: exponometry

Acting: Characterization

Directing the Short Film: Analysis of Short Films for Directorial Choices

Camera & Film Languages: Expressive Tool of Color

Technical Screenwriting: finalizing shot lists

Editing: Post-production techniques to save a film (voice-over)
Sound for Moving Image: Practical Considerations for Capturing Sound

Week 8
Class

Cinematography: wrap up and final questions

Sound for Moving Image: Work with equipment

Week 9
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 10
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 11
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 12
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Week 13
Class

Shoot, post-production, final editing and screening

Course Materials
Readings


Available for purchase in FAMU library.