



University of North Texas

Department of Media Arts

MRTS 4150.002 / 3 Credit Hours / Wednesday 5:00-7:50P / RTPF 264

Contact Information

Professor – Jason Balas

Office – RTFP 238

Email – jason.balas@unt.edu

Office hours – by appointment.

- **Phones shall remain OFF during all designated class time. Do not text message in class. Do not check incoming calls in class. Do not leave class to attend to your phone. These are the actions that will absolutely kill your participation and engagement grade.**
- **Please have an additional notebook and pen for notes.**
- **In this course, the use of GenAI tools is not permissible. No matter the approach, any attempt to represent GenAI output as a student’s own work will be considered fabrication, cheating, and/or academic dishonesty as determined on a case-by-case basis.**

Course Objectives

Use of Film Language

- **Ability to convey clear information to an audience through the sequencing of shots.**
- **Excellent understanding of Dramatic Emphasis—Able to emphasize scene information through differentiation of shot composition/size.**
- **Effective use of camera movement to reveal new screen information.**
- **Proficient use of parallel action to visually connect seemingly disparate shots.**

Lighting and Mise-en-Scene

- **Effectively create mood and tone that best illustrates content.**
- **Ability to create a compelling, informative, content-specific “world” in front of the camera.**
- **Use of light to highlight areas of interest and importance.**

Equipment Operation

- **Full understanding of technical requirements of camera (focus, iris, menus, recording media).**

- Can effectively operate technical requirements of light kit (spotting/flooding fixtures, using gels, scrims, c-stands).
- Can safely and competently set up/tear down equipment for location shoots.
- Fluency in production terminology.
- Can effectively estimate what equipment will be needed for a specific shoot.

Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the fundamental concepts and practices of cinematography. Clearly included in this core set of ideas is composition, however great DP work is fair more than framing. Lighting, blocking, pacing, and the establishment of tone are also critical. Additionally, none of these areas can be addressed without a proper understanding of the technical requirements of production equipment. Cinematography is a unique mix of technical skill and aesthetic talent. The goal of this course is to teach students both the mechanical aspects and art of directing photography.

This class is definitely hands-on, in the classroom and out. You will shoot a lot. You must be willing to dedicate a good chunk of personal time working outside of class on exercises and projects. Throughout the semester you will work on film projects—each with a clear learning objective and set of rules.

Important – Take notes on lectures, critiques, screenings and projects. Also, readings will be assigned throughout the semester. Much of the Final Exam will be based on lecture notes and readings.

There will be (2) two film projects and (1) one exam. Each assignment will have a handout with requirements/due date.

Required Text

Title: Lighting for Cinematography
ISBN: 9781628926927 **Edition:** 14
Required: REQUIRED

Teaching Philosophy

My basic belief about teaching is that it should be personalized and individualized. In light of this, I bring a hands-on approach to teaching, focusing on individual students and their projects. I've found that students appreciate personalized analyses of their work and the opportunity to work out the particulars of their films through class participation and discussion. My overarching goal in undergraduate courses in cinematography is to help students internalize the skills of the work, so that the tools of production and the strategies of writing become second nature to them. This enables students to create their own stories in their own voices, not just tell someone else's narrative in a series of "textbook shots."

I believe this kind of teaching happens most successfully through instructor demonstration and actual experience. In my classes, I not only walk students through the use of production gear, but also show

them how to accomplish their creative goals through demonstration and engagement. For example, in cinematography class, we do a series of projects, including a low-key lighting video that resembles film noir, and an exercise in shooting dramatic blocking techniques. I have also demonstrated how to build a production reel and have required students to edit a reel of their own work. In each of these projects, students are being asked to focus on how they tell their own stories through tone, style, pace, dialogue, and the choice of location. Importantly, they start to master technical skills and the art of storytelling through this series of projects that requires them to do the work themselves multiple times in multiple assignments. The goal is not quantity, but quality. Only through practice can our students improve, and I seek to provide a range of interesting activities that helps them in that process of growth and development.

ASSESSMENT & GRADING

Projects	
Project #1 Low-Key Film	100 points
Project #2 Practical FX Film	100 points
Exam	150 points
Participation/Engagement	100 points
TOTAL	450 points

Grading Scale

450-405 = A
404-360 = B
359-315 = C
314-270 = D
269-0 = F

CALENDAR

Test Date

Cine Exam 5/6/26 5:30PM – 7:30PM

Due Dates

LOW-KEY FILM (assigned 1/21/26)

Rough Cut 2/18/26

Final Cut 3/4/26

PRACTICAL FX FILM (assigned 3/4/26)

Rough Cut 4/15/26

Final Cut 4/29/26

Week 1—Jan 14

- ✓ Syllabus
- ✓ Course Introduction

Week 2—Jan 21

- ✓ Cinematography Lecture—Master Scene Coverage, 180 rule, shot selection, overlapping action, EVA-1 refresher
- ✓ Low-Key Film Assigned

Week 3—Jan 28

- ✓ **Group A** Low Key Lighting Workshop

Week 4—Feb 4

- ✓ **Group B** Low Key Lighting Workshop

Week 5—Feb 11

- ✓ Lighting Analysis

Week 6—Feb 18

- ✓ Low-Key Film Rough Cuts DUE
- ✓ Low-Key Film Rough Cut Screening
- ✓ Each rough cut followed with critique and discussion

Week 7—Feb 25

- ✓ Work with partner

Week 8—Mar 4

- ✓ Low-Key Film Final Cuts DUE
- ✓ Low-Key Film Final Cut Screening/Discussion
- ✓ Practical FX Project Film Assigned

Week 9— Mar 11

NO CLASS - Spring Break

Week 10—Mar 18

- ✓ **Group A** Practical Effects Workshop

Week 11—Mar 25

- ✓ **Group B** Practical Effects Workshop

Week 12—Apr 1

- ✓ **Group A** Focus Pulling/Blocking Workshop

Week 13—Apr 8

- ✓ **Group B** Focus Pulling/Blocking Workshop

Week 14—Apr 15

- ✓ Practical FX Film Rough Cuts DUE
- ✓ Practical FX Film Rough Cuts Screening/Discussion

Week 15—Apr 22

- ✓ CINE EXAM Review

Week 16— Apr 29

- ✓ Practical FX Film Final Cut DUE
- ✓ Practical FX Film Final Cut Screening/Discussion

Week 17—May 6

- ✓ EXAM 5:30PM—7:30PM

COURSE POLICIES

- In the classroom, use a legal pad or notebook for in-class lecture notes.
- You **must** attend class. You get (1) one absence without penalty. Consider this absence to be an excused absence. No notes or e-mails.
- After (1) one absence, you lose a 1/3 of final letter grade each time you do not attend. This is the attendance policy for this class.
- 2 lates=1 absence
- Once class has started, you are expected to remain present until class is over.
- Attendance is taken at the start of every class period.
- You may not use any form of AI for required work in this class.
- Do not cheat, ever. The school has guidelines for dealing with this. I will follow these guidelines – it would be unfair to the other students not to.
- Participation is mandatory.
- Late work may (or may not) be accepted in certain situations, but always with **significant** penalty. The bottom line -- do not turn in work late.
- If you are tardy, find a seat as quickly and quietly as possible. Do not interrupt class to find out your status on that day's roll sheet. Address it with me after class.
- Syllabus is subject to change.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

UIT Help Desk: <http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm>

The University of North Texas provides student technical support in the use of Canvas and supported resources. The student help desk may be reached at:

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940.565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130

Hours are:

- Monday-Thursday 8am-midnight
- Friday 8am-8pm
- Saturday 9am-5p
- Sunday 8am-midnight

- Blackboard technical requirements: <https://clear.unt.edu/supported-technologies/blackboard/blackboard-technical-requirements>
- Other related hardware or software necessary for the course: such as headset/microphone for synchronous chats, word processor, etc.
- Canvas technical requirements: <https://clear.unt.edu/supported-technologies/canvas/requirements>
- Other related hardware or software necessary for the course: such as headset/microphone for synchronous chats, word processor, etc.

Student Academic Support Services

- [Code of Student Conduct](#): provides Code of Student Conduct along with other useful links
- [Office of Disability Access](#): exists to prevent discrimination based on disability and to help students reach a higher level of independence
- [Counseling and Testing Services](#): provides counseling services to the UNT community, as well as testing services; such as admissions testing, computer-based testing, career testing, and other tests
- [UNT Libraries](#)
- [UNT Learning Center](#): provides a variety of services, including tutoring, to enhance the student academic experience
- [UNT Writing Center](#): offers free writing tutoring to all UNT students, undergraduate and graduate, including online tutoring
- [Succeed at UNT](#): information regarding how to be a successful student at UNT

UNT POLICIES

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. [Insert specific sanction or academic penalty for specific academic integrity violation.]

ADA Policy

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

Student Evaluation Administration Dates

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 [insert administration dates] of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website at <http://spot.unt.edu/> or email spot@unt.edu.

Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit

discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.