

# **ACTING FOR THE CAMERA**

## **THEA 4310.002**

### **Spring 2024**

**THEA 4310.002 and 4310.302 (Lab)**

**Monday 2:00p - 5:50p**

**RTFP 130 and Remote Private Coaching**

**3 Units**

**Professor Bob Hess**

**RTFP 222**

**Office Hours: Mondays 1:00p - 2:00p, Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:00a – 12:00p, and by appointment**

**For Class Correspondence: [untcamera@aol.com](mailto:untcamera@aol.com)**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The exploration of camera acting and audition technique in order to prepare the student for the diverse opportunities in the medium, with an emphasis on building confidence with the camera, expanding acting range, and preparing for the profession.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- Demonstrate basic on-camera acting performance techniques for a diverse range of projects
- Analyze the demands of screenplay and media script and apply those observations to their performances
- Interact with and take direction from a film medium director
- Practice audition technique (including prepared auditions, cold reads, and taped submissions)
- Demonstrate a comprehension of basic camera and industry terminology and protocol
- Observe and discuss the lessons of existing on-camera performances from film and television and allow that to inform their own work
- Critique and offer feedback for both their own on-camera performances and those of their class colleagues
- Document information about the process of seeking agency representation, as well as other forms of marketing, promotion, and professional conduct

Specific units/projects will include:

- The on-camera slate

- Commercials
- Spokesperson
- Motor only shots (MOS)
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- Public Service Announcements (PSA's)
- Testimonials
- Film, television, and corporate scenes
- Introduction to the teleprompter
- Self-taped audition submission

By the end of this course, a student will have a solid foundation in what performance opportunities *outside of the theatre* await them, and what is expected of an actor in the real world of media production. The time spent on camera acting and audition technique throughout the semester will provide the student with a more acute sense of their acting range, an expansion of creativity, and greater self-confidence with both the medium and acting, in general.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS AND RESOURCES**

- Caine, Michael. *Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making*. New York: Applause Theater Book Publishers. ISBN #0-936839-86-4.
- Film/TV viewing outside of class
- Spiral notebook

## **EXPECTATIONS**

A major goal of this course is to prepare the advanced actor for the demands of working in a broad range of media performances. It is assumed that you have a solid understanding of theatrical acting technique and script analysis. This class will teach the student how to adapt this acting technique to the size and microscopic precision dictated by the camera. A student enrolled in this course should be extremely comfortable playing psychological realism, as this is the predominant style used in most forms of media work we will encounter.

The course is absolutely lab-driven. The work in this class is performance-driven and will happen during class meetings and private coaching. Your grade in the class will be determined by your attendance, preparation, participation, observation, and execution of assignments.

The teaching methodology will include individual interaction/coaching, skills training, class discussion, peer review, written work (reading quizzes and observational self-critique), and audition/performance simulation.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Attendance and Punctuality (*refer to attendance policy outlined in this syllabus*)
- Preparation and completion of assignments and exercises
- Participation in discussion of all work performed in class
- Reading, analysis, and discussion of all assigned materials

## **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

Actors must be highly disciplined and self-motivated to achieve success in the course.

Preparation of assignments and focused attention in class are essential. There is much to be gained through the skillful observation of the work of other students, so respect for the work of your classmates is critical. It is expected you are striving to develop your personal professional work ethic NOW, while you are in this training program.

Professional behavior includes the following:

- Attending all classes and scheduled coaching sessions
- Being on time for all classes and scheduled coaching sessions
- Responding thoroughly and promptly to all class correspondence
- Thorough, advanced preparation for classes
- Timely completion of assignments
- Wearing proper attire (meaning, that which is consistent with the material)
- An openness, willingness, and eagerness to commit to the exercises and assignments
- Respect for colleagues
  - Cell phones may not be used while class is in session. They may, of course, be activated during breaks, but must be turned off again when class resumes. It is incredibly disrespectful to the professor, students, and the course to use your cell phone while others are working. It is also counterproductive to your need to be a skilled observer. This is a huge deal to me. I do not like seeing students on their phones during class. I do not like phones going off in class.
  - Please refrain from irrelevant talking, reading, sleeping, or doing other course work while class is in session. Students who are repeatedly called out for this, yet continue to violate the policy, may be subject to dismissal from the course. This is also a huge deal to me.

## **ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY**

Punctual attendance is critical for your success in the course. Thus, students are expected to be present and punctual for all classes.

The following policy is consistent with all acting courses in the department that meet one day a week:

- Students are allowed no more than a total of **TWO** excused (2) absences during the semester for any reason.
- Students are considered tardy if they arrive for class no more than 30 minutes late. Arriving more than 30 minutes late for class is considered an **absence**.
- Students are expected to attend class for the duration of the period. Leaving class before then is considered an **absence**.
- An occurrence of tardiness for the class **FOUR** (4) times is the equivalent of ONE (1) **absence**.
- A total of **THREE** (3) absences means that the highest grade the student can earn in the class is an F.

Any student with an issue in the area of attendance and/or punctuality will be referred to the Acting Faculty for guidance.

The policy is not negotiable, as that would constitute holding one student to a different standard than all students in all acting classes.

If a student's absences have resulted in a grade with which they are not pleased, they may choose to withdraw from the class.

The professor's roll is the official record of absences and tardiness. At any point, the students are welcome to check the grade roster to be sure that their attendance/punctuality record is accurate.

### ***KEEPING IT REAL ABOUT PUNCTUAL ATTENDANCE...***

***I am very aware that the unexpected comes up in life, and many times it is beyond your control. The attendance policy of acting classes in the Department of Dance and Theatre at UNT is set up to ALLOW for those occasional issues that may come up (illnesses, deaths in the family, emergencies, traffic, car trouble, unavoidable commitments, weather, etc.). All of these things could occur to you during the semester (even a couple of times). Please DO NOT ask for***

*further leeway on this, because there is none. The leeway for these unexpected occurrences is already **BUILT IN** to the attendance policy. Do not ask me if there is any extra credit you can do to make up for excessive absence. Changing the policy for you means that it must, in the interest of fairness, be changed for students in all acting classes. There is **NO NEED** to bring me a doctor's note when you are sick. If you tell me you were ill, I absolutely believe you.*

*If a number of unexpected things come up this semester, it means that this was not the best semester to take this class. It does not mean the class will alter its standard to accommodate you.*

*The attendance policy already allows for the fact that you might get sick and miss a class or two as a result and excuses these absences up to **TWO** times. However, there have to be limits, particularly since your absence may have an impact on a fellow actor. If you are ill and/or absent excessively, it means you are missing the actual content of the course. You are seeking to be a professional actor—get used to the fact that you simply have to **BE THERE**, and you have to be there **ON TIME**. These things are not optional. Once you have used up the two excused absences (or the allowed amount of tardiness), I will treat absence and lateness as the **INDUSTRY** will treat them. It is important that you are aware of this before undertaking the challenge of the course.*

## **PRIVATE COACHING SESSIONS**

Actors will be signing up for approximately **TEN** weekly private session that occur on a specific recurring day and time over **ZOOM**. The expectation of the student for each of these meetings is:

- To be **ON TIME**. I will wait no more than **TEN** minutes—after that point, I will log off, and you will have the option to either self-tape that assignment at half-credit or forfeit the unit.
- To be **PREPARED FROM A TECHNICAL STANDPOINT**. That means the backdrop, camera (framing as requested, and lights are set up so we can begin to work. If it is determined the actor is not ready to record, the session will be terminated, and the actor will have the option of either self-taping the assignment at half credit or forfeiting the unit.
- To be **PREPARED FROM AN ACTING STANDPOINT**. If it is determined the actor has not learned the lines as requested and rehearsed, the session will be terminated, and the actor will have the option of either self-taping the assignment at half credit or forfeiting the unit.

The actor may change their appointment time for a particular week ***if they make the request no later than ONE HOUR before the session***. This may be done via the class email ([untcamera@aol.com](mailto:untcamera@aol.com)). The time signature on the email will serve as the official record of when the request was made.

If an actor cancels their session less than one hour before it is scheduled, an alternate time is not an option. The actor will have the option of either self-taping the assignment at half credit or forfeiting the unit.

Professional audition appointments usually last anywhere from 5-15 minutes, depending on what you are auditioning for. For the units where you are working solo, you will have up to 30 minutes. For the partner scenes, you will have an hour. The session will conclude when both the professor and the actor feel confident about what they have accomplished. This will typically happen before the time is up. If we use the entire session, the best take will be the one we use for the class reel.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Ongoing information regarding class will be distributed via email. In the same the way your agent would operate, you will be getting scripts for upcoming class work via email and Canvas. Students will be notified via text to check emails. I will be employing the use of a class assistant to communicate directly with you and make copies of your in-class work available to you for personal observation and feedback. I will use the following email address to communicate information and send a considerable amount of material:

***untcamera@aol.com***

If you need to communicate with me, please use the email address above exclusively (or text the class assistant). DO NOT text me directly, please. Remember that, if your email address changes during the semester, it is your responsibility to let me know. It is your responsibility to be informed. **I would prefer you NOT use the UNT address ([bob.hess@unt.edu](mailto:bob.hess@unt.edu)) to avoid your email getting overlooked amid the deluge of university emails that I receive.**

## **CLASS CANCELLATION**

Because I continue to work as a professional stage and broadcast actor (particularly as a member of the Resident Acting Company at Dallas Theater Center) and am expected to do so as part of the creative research required in my university contract, I may occasionally have to cancel class for projects I am cast in—sometimes on short notice. Should this occur, you will be notified by both text and email. While I am teaching, I turn down more work than I accept---teaching is my first priority. However, conflicts are sometimes unavoidable, especially due to re-shoots and clients with whom I have

ongoing contracts. If I cancel class at any point, I will make the work up for that particular class at individual times outside of regular class hours.

You will also earn some benefits when I am late for class. I would not count on this happening, though.

## **CLASS MATERIALS**

- An active UNT email account. Your correspondence is an official part of your class record, so it needs to be preserved in a UNT email account.
- Appropriate wardrobe for the projects on which you are working. Your appearance for various on-camera works is significant, and you should begin aggressively exploring how your persona can change from audition to audition.
- A phone, computer, or video camera that will allow you to record and rehearse your class work in your private rehearsals over Zoom.
- Proper recording studio set-up consistent across all students in the course.
- Appropriate lighting, sound, and background to the extent that the actor can be seen and heard for performance assignments.

## **TESTING**

Quizzes covering the information in readings and class lecture will be given. These are figured into your grade for the semester.

## **PREPARATION**

In large acting classes, we have precious little time together. Your preparation for the class assignments is critical. To ensure the best possible use of our time, let's clarify what we need to accomplish when we work in class and in coaching sessions.

A number of our assignments will force you to get very familiar with the copy you will be working with for that lesson. In most cases, you will even be expected to memorize it. It is extremely difficult to coach your work when it has not been sufficiently prepared. Thus, it is essential that this preparation be completed before coaching begins.

Each of you knows that familiarity with and memorization of the text are major steps to freeing the actor and allowing for more possibilities. This is particularly true of acting on camera. You will soon discover that there are plenty of things to focus on in addition to your lines. Improving your ability to analyze copy quickly and get the sense of precisely what you are saying will be a skill on which you will work all semester.

***If any performance is not prepared sufficiently for in-class or scheduled coaching, your work session will be cut short, and the grade point value of that assignment will be forfeited. We will not be able to reschedule.***

## **CONTENT OF MATERIAL**

Please be advised that this class contains the development of text from the contemporary cinema/television and strong language that may be considered objectionable by some. You may encounter literary and directorial points of view that differ from your own. If you choose to take this course, you may be required to represent life as the author depicts it and the director interprets it. In this craft, we seek to explore all possible forms of human behavior, and we may, at times, tell the stories of characters that hold different views than our own and choose words that we would never say personally. If you have any further issues with the copy and scenes presented, please reach out to the professor privately.

## **CLASS CALENDAR**

Students will receive a class calendar outlining the semester work plan. There is a lot of material to cover in this class in a very short period of time---adjustments to the original class calendar may need to be made as the class progresses and unexpected circumstances arise. Students will always receive as much notice as possible of changes and an updated calendar reflecting any adjustments.

## **GRADING POLICY**

In this course, you will be assessed on the following:

- Attendance
- Punctuality
- Work ethic
- Professionalism
- Preparation
- Participation
- Observations
- Written quizzes and papers
- Skills demonstrated
  - Ability to take direction
  - Character choices/analysis
  - Physical and vocal life
  - Comprehension of all the words and meaning of phrases in copy/text
  - Use of and articulation of the language in copy/text



Clarity and truthfulness in performances  
 Awareness of the flow and arc of the scene/copy  
 Emotional investment in the circumstances, actions, and objectives  
 Effective use of camera acting technique and framing

## **GRADING FORMULA**

Your final grade will be based upon the following assignments and point values:

<u>ASSIGNMENT</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
• Quizzes (a total six, earned with a grade of B or better—3 points each)	18
• Course Units (maximum of 5 points each) (Commercials, Spokesperson, Public Service Announcement, Testimonials, TV Scene, Corporate Scene, Teleprompter, Film/TV Monologue, Stage to Camera Monologue)	45
• Course Unit Demonstration	5
• Amazing Performance Presentation	5
• Film Scene	10
• Final Exam (Taped Submission)	10
• Final Exam (Written)	7
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## **Corresponding Letter Grades:**

90 – 100	A
80 – 89	B
70 – 79	C
65 – 69	D
Below 65	F

## **SELF-CRITIQUES**

With most course units, students will be sent a recording of their exercise for any given unit the evening after the reel for that unit has been screened in class. Students should

review their recording and will then submit online a thorough and honest self-critique, *due no later than **MIDNIGHT** on the Wednesday after the class where the exercises have been screened*. Your professor will make prompts for this self-critique available to you through Canvas, as they differ from unit to unit.

If a student chooses to miss the deadline, they will be given an extension *through **MIDNIGHT** on Sunday of that same week*, and there will be a FULL POINT deduction from the value of the assignment. Thus, an assignment originally with worth 5-points would now be worth a maximum of 4 points.

If the student chooses not to submit the critique by the end of the extension period, this reduces the value of the entire unit by 50%. Thus, an assignment originally worth 5-points would now be worth a maximum of 2.5 points. At this point, the student does not have to complete the self-critique unless they simply want to.

The skill of staying on top of deadlines is critical to the success of the professional camera actor. If one misses a deadline, one has chosen to forfeit the opportunity for the work. In the interest of acquainting you with the time management necessary for success, these deadlines are not negotiable.

## **EXTRA CREDIT**

There is NO extra credit available in the class. Please do not inquire if there is some “additional work you can do to raise your grade.” Your grade is based on the criteria clearly set forth in this syllabus. A student who applies themselves to all of the course units and prepares for the quizzes will likely make an A. So the choice is with the student.

## **INCOMPLETES**

Only under extraordinary circumstances that suddenly render the student unable to continue the classwork will an INCOMPLETE be given. Please see your instructor if you feel you may qualify for a course grade of INCOMPLETE. Circumstances have come up in the past which made this appropriate. This has usually involved a scenario where a student had completed the work in excellent standing up to a certain point and then had to leave school unexpectedly for some reason, such as illness or personal emergency. The terms for making up the INCOMPLETE are negotiated by the student, the professor, and the Department of Dance and Theatre, and these terms must be signed by both parties and submitted to the departmental office for approval. Request for an INCOMPLETE cannot be submitted until April 6, 2024.

## **DROPPING A COURSE OR WITHDRAWAL**

Should you choose to drop this course, YOU must initiate the drop and acquire all the proper signatures and paperwork. The last day for the student to elect to drop the class (receiving a “W”) is April 5, 2024.

## **LAST DAY OF CLASS/FINAL EXAM DATES**

Our last official class meeting is Monday, April 29. FINAL EXAMS will take place from 1:30p – 3:30p on Monday, May 6.

After our Final Exam presentations are screened for the class, there will follow an informal *post mortem* discussion to reflect on the semester’s work. Attendance at this *post mortem* is not mandatory. At least 12 students must indicate they will attend for the *post mortem* to take place. As I need to make a reservation for this event, please make every effort not to approach me on the day of the *post mortem* to tell me you suddenly have a change of plans and cannot attend.

## **STUDENT OBLIGATION TO ACADEMIC/PRODUCTION WORK**

Dance & Theater students are expected to budget and organize their time and efforts in order to meet both their academic and production commitments satisfactorily and on time. The faculty and staff recognize that the academic and production assignments within the department, as well as outside employment and other obligations, sometimes impose conflicting pressures on DT students. One of the main responsibilities of each student is to identify carefully and monitor the commitments that comprise his/her departmental assignments and outside obligations. It is also important to keep in mind that production work and outside obligations do not constitute an excused absence from DT classes or from the completion of any required class assignments.

## **ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES**

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation: reference Public Law 92-112—The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first

register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable 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 reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

## **STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING (SPOT)**

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. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website at [www.spot.unt.edu](http://www.spot.unt.edu) or email [spot@unt.edu](mailto:spot@unt.edu).

The Department of Dance and Theatre also offers face-to-face SPOT evaluations, if the student wishes. Ask your professor for details if you wish to pursue that option.

## **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 Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities 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 [www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr).

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM**

Should online meetings of the class ever occur, it is expected that every student will practice virtual etiquette that is respectful to the class, the professor, and other students during these sessions. Adherence to appropriate virtual etiquette is factored into the student's grade. This includes the following:

- Log on at least a minute or two early; do not be surprised if you are counted late if you are not logged on to the virtual class when it starts.
- Do not attend class if you are unable to participate actively. Do not join the virtual classroom just to ignore it or walk away from it. If the instructor realizes this has occurred, your participation will be penalized, and you may be counted absent.
- Do not attend virtual class from your bed. While this is a virtual space, it is still a classroom. You will find it easier to pay attention, learn material, and complete your course work if you are seated at a table or desk.
- If you use a profile picture in virtual classroom, it should be a classroom-appropriate photo.
- Mute yourself unless you are making a presentation to the class or the instructor is seeking questions/comments from the class. For users in virtual classroom, the space bar acts as a quick unmute—press it down to speak on mic, then release the space bar to mute yourself again.
- You are expected to enable your video and remain on camera while class is in session, unless directed otherwise by the professor.
- Dress as if you are coming into a regular class.
- Make sure to illuminate your face with natural or artificial light so the instructor and others can see you clearly.
- Make sure there is nothing distracting or inappropriate in the background of your video feed.
- Try to avoid having other people enter and exit your frame to avoid distracting your classmates and instructor.
- If seeing yourself on camera distracts you, right-click on your own video feed in virtual classroom and choose HIDE SELF VIEW. This setting allows your instructor and classmates to see you, but you will not see yourself.
- Be careful when sharing your screen. You do not want your personal email, documents, or images to be displayed accidentally.
- Be aware everyone can see your messages in chat unless you have chosen to send the instructor a direct message. Private messages to other students are disabled to avoid distractions during class.
- Do not attend virtual class while operating a vehicle or doing anything else in which attending the virtual class at the same time may negatively impact your safety or the safety of others.
- Do not attend class in an unauthorized public space where others will see/hear the class. Your privacy and the privacy of your classmates is federally protected.
- If you know that you are unable to attend a class meeting, contact the instructor in advance to receive a recording of the class that you can watch later.
- Do not share the web URL for our virtual classroom class with anyone outside of class. If class is “virtual classroom bombed” because you shared the link, administration will be notified and will enact sanctions up to and including removal from the course and possible expulsion from the university.

- If the class is “bombed,” the instructor will first attempt to mute and boot the unwanted person from the meeting. If this is not possible or fails to stop the disruption, the instructor will end the meeting, create a new meeting link, and email it to you in short order.