

Illinois Wesleyan University, School of Theatre Arts
THEA 483 Acting for the Camera
Spring, 2022
M/F 9:30-10:50 Ames Library - Sound Stage

Instructor: Tom Quinn
Office: Presser 158
Office Hours: M: 11:00-12:00, T, R: 1-3:00
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Recommended texts:

Acting from Stage to Screen By Ian Bernard
Acting in Film By Michael Caine

Course Description: This course is designed to apply, deepen, and (to an extent) modify the student's developing stage-acting technique in order to accommodate the special demands of the camera. Through discussions, exercises, on-camera monologue and scene work, and the creation of characters for original, dramatic video projects, the student will be introduced to the challenges of camera acting, and encouraged to develop modified techniques appropriate to this intensely intimate performance medium. Of principle concern will be an ever-deepening understanding of energy, active listening, stakes in stillness, and simplicity of expression. As always, students will be called upon to broaden and sharpen all basic, developing techniques necessary for the creation of vital, rich, human characters in structured action.

Attendance Policy: Since tailored for the BFA, this course is a study of *professionalism in acting*. *Attendance* and *punctuality* are fundamental. You are allowed two absences without consequence. With every absence beyond the two allowed your grade will be lowered by one full letter. With five absences the best possible grade is a "D." Six absences will result in a grade of "F" and you will be asked to withdraw from the course. Any exceptions to this policy will be at the discretion of the instructor, and will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

*(Exception: If you are scheduled for a partner exercise or **A SHOOT**, any unexcused absence will lower your final grade by a full letter. Never let your partners down.)*

For an absence to be *excused*, the student must make arrangements with the instructor in advance. In the event of illness or emergency, the student must contact the instructor as soon as possible and provide any documentation requested by the instructor.

Lateness is unacceptable. Class begins promptly at 9:30am. Students arriving after attendance has been taken are "late." Two late arrivals equal one absence. The instructor reserves the right to lock the door when class begins.

Course Goals:

- To provide each student with a meaningful introduction to the world of filmmaking, and to the art, craft, and challenges of acting in film.
- To provide each student with professional grade, video footage of their work in the class, which should constitute appropriate content for an “*Actor’s Demo-Reel*” to be used when they enter the profession.

Course Requirements:

- Monologues:** Each student will select and prepare one dramatic or comedic monologue. It should be SHORT, no longer than 30 seconds. Your character should be speaking to another character or characters, NOT to the audience. Stakes should be reasonably high. It should be something you are very comfortable with, something you do well.
- Blocking and Business Scenes:** Each of you will be assigned to a group-of-three, to prepare and shoot this “*continuity*” exercise, which will be built around an open scene, and shot in the Lab, during class time.
- Materials:** You must supply your own costume pieces and props. These are usually basic, household items. Students must wear clothing that is appropriate to this class. Generally, you can wear what’s comfortable. However, when filming performances in or outside of class, appropriate *wardrobe* must be worn. Occasionally, this may require bringing extra clothes to class.
- Patience:** In many respects, acting in film is like having a theatrical tech rehearsal, and a performance, all in one day, every day. The technical component of the medium takes time to prepare and execute. The ability to cope with this “hurry up and wait” tempo is a part of the challenge of film acting. This will undoubtedly be a significant part of our experience. Be patient. Stay focused. In film, every shoot is a “*show day*.” Once a scene is *wrapped*, your performance can no longer be improved upon. Usually, when we leave a location, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to go back. Therefore, when the tech is ready, you must also be ready. Every time the camera rolls, you must aspire to deliver your best performance.
- Movie Projects:** Each student will be assigned at least one principle role in one of five (10-25 minute) *Original Movie Projects*. (Many of you will be assigned more than one role.) Additionally, each student will be assigned at least one role in one of four, short (1-4 minute) comedy sketches. All of these projects will be organized in regular, **in-class production meetings**, (which will be discussed below). Each project will be prepped and shot outside of class. In addition to their assigned acting roles, each student will participate in pre-production and production

of their assigned film projects, assisting in the preparation, organization and execution of the filming process as needed. The movies will be shot and post-produced by Film faculty and staff, and students from the Film program.

Mindset: Filmmaking is difficult at every level. There are lots of moving parts, and lots of irreplaceable people. It requires preparation, creative acuity, patience, and flexibility. Most of our film shoots will be outside of class. We will use locations on and off campus; interior and exterior. Shoots may be early in the morning, at any available time during the day, or late at night. (*Hard stop at 12am.*) Yes, we will operate on a schedule for the semester, but *there will be unforeseen conflicts, delays, postponements, scheduling difficulties, bad weather and illness.* These are all parts of the process. We will sort them out as they arise. You must not be discouraged or distracted by this. And although you (the actors) may participate in various aspects of pre-production and production, ***your single most important job is to be inside the moment when the camera rolls.***

"Don't let the camera capture a dishonest frame."

- Richard Dreyfuss-

Preparation: This is a 400-level Acting class. Like professional film work, it requires a large measure of self-sufficiency. In the profession, you usually rehearse alone. You are usually expected to develop/create your character on your own. Then, on shooting day, you bring it to the set, do some brief rehearsing, and then they film it. This is a different process than acting for the stage. Success is only possible through preparation. **YOU MUST STUDY YOUR SCRIPT.** Do not show up on set unprepared. You cannot call for line. And it is not appropriate for you to stop a take. Especially if it's because you are not prepared. **BE OFF BOOK. MAKE CREATIVE CHOICES. BUILD IDEAS. CONNECT MOMENTS.** That is your job.

Extras Needed: Most of our movies will require EXTRAS for some scenes. Scenes requiring EXTRAS will be highlighted in our shooting schedule, and pointed out at our regular, in-class production meetings, so everyone in the class knows when they are happening, and can plan to participate. **Each of you will be required to participate, as an EXTRA, in at least four (4) shoots, during the semester.** Shoots are usually 2-4 hours long.

Participation: Everyone is expected to participate in discussion as well as performance, in periodic out-of-class rehearsals and pre-production efforts, and in the examination/critique of in-class exercises, performances and screenings. Everyone is further expected to fully

engage, take risks, and consistently strive for compelling acting. This is most fully accomplished in a supportive environment and it is everyone's responsibility to build and maintain that environment.

COVID 19 – COURSE SCHEDULE DISCLAIMER:

Covid is still here: therefore, as has been the case for the last several semesters, it is possible that we will need to do a great deal of improvising, with regard to scheduling, as well as where, and how we meet. Please be as flexible as circumstances require, and consistently prioritize safety for yourself and everyone around you. I will be doing the same.

Grading Criteria:

- A-Excellent. Always well prepared; extensive outside preparation. Actively pursues improvement and is highly self-motivated. Student makes significant growth in skills and knowledge during semester. Active, positive contributor to class. Punctual, always present.
- B-Good to Excellent. Always prepared; notable outside preparation. Pursues improvement and is self-motivated. Notable growth in skills and knowledge during semester. Positive contributor to class. Punctual, always present.
- C-Acceptable to Good. Generally prepared; acceptable outside preparation. Interested in improvement and often self-motivated. Shows some growth in skills and knowledge during semester. Often contributes to class. Punctual, always present.
- D-(Failing for BFA students) Unacceptable to acceptable. Often not prepared; shows little outside preparation. Shows little interest in improvement and is rarely self-motivated. Very little skill and knowledge growth during semester. Seldom contributes to class and has negative attitude. Sometimes late; some absences.
- F-Largely Unacceptable. Rarely prepared and lacks adequate outside preparation. No apparent interest in self-improvement and not self-motivated. No apparent growth in skills and knowledge. Does not contribute to class; negative attitude. Not punctual; several absences.

Outline of Presentations and Assignments:

Warning: *Adjustments to this schedule may be necessary.*

WEEK 1

F: 1/13

NO CLASS: TOM IS AT ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE FESTIVAL

WEEK 2

M 1/16

******MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY – NO CLASSES******

F 1/20

- Introduction to course. Go over syllabus.
- Discuss the differences between stage and screen.
- Scale of performance
- Building a Role While Shooting out of sequence
- Continuity/Matching Action
- Discuss Collaboration with Film Faculty, Staff, and Students
- Assign Movie Projects, and discuss scheduling of PRODUCTION WINDOWS (Solidify scheduling for the first two movies.)
- Assign Monologues: 30 seconds
- Assignment: Read your assigned movie script(s)
- Assignment: Please bring your **up-to-date**, semester schedule to class on Monday.

WEEK 3

(Shoot MOVIE #1: SUSPICIONS - Over the Next 2 Weeks)

M 1/23

- Discuss Movie Projects
- o Student Producers
- o Batting Order
- o Time Needed
- o Covid Mitigation
- o Special Challenges (Large scenes, parties, football games, haunted houses, etc.)
- o Assign Monologue Batting Order

F 1/27

- Shoot/Screen/Discuss Monologues 1, 2, 3
- Assign Open Scene and Partners for *BLOCKING AND BUSINESS*

WEEK 4

M: 1/30

- Shoot/Screen/Discuss Monologues 4, 5, 6
- 15-Minute Production Meeting

F: 2/3

- Shoot/Screen/Discuss Monologues 7, 8, 9
- 15-Minute Production Meeting

WEEK 5

(Shoot MOVIE #2: DRIVING AWAY – Over the Next 2 Weeks)

M: 2/6

- Shoot/Screen/Discuss Monologues 10, 11, 12
- Assign dates for B&B Scenes 1-5

F: 2/10

- Shoot/Screen/Discuss Monologues 13, 14, 15
- 15-Minute Production Meeting

WEEK 6

M: 2/13

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Shoot B&B Scene #1

F: 2/17

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Shoot B&B Scene #2

WEEK 7

(Shoot MOVIE #3: GIRL CODE Over the Next 2 Weeks)

M: 2/20

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Shoot B&B Scene #3

F: 2/24

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Shoot B&B Scene #4

WEEK 8

M: 2/27

- **NO CLASS - SENIOR SHOWCASE IN CHICAGO**

F: 3/3

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Shoot B&B Scene #5

WEEK 9

(Shoot MOVIE #4 : QUEEN OF WANDS - Over the Next 3 Weeks)

M: 3/6

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

F: 3-10

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- Screen all Edited B&B Scenes (Beckman Auditorium)

WEEK 10 SPRING BREAK - NO CLASSES

WEEK 11

M: 3/20

- 15-Minute Production Meeting

- TBD

F: 3/24

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

WEEK 12

(Shoot MOVIE #5: HAND ME DOWN – Over the Next 2 Weeks)

M: 3/27

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

F: 3/31

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

WEEK 13

M: 4/3

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

F: 4/7

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

WEEK 14

M: 4/10

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

F: 4/14

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

WEEK 15

M: 4/17

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

F: 4/21

- 15-Minute Production Meeting
- TBD

WEEK 16

M: 4/24 - **LAST DAY OF REGULAR CLASSES**

- TBD

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 2nd, 10:15-12:15

- Discussion – What (if anything) did you learn?

Original Movie Projects will be screened at:

*****The 3rd Annual Guerrilla Film Festival*****
(Date, Time, and Location TBD)