Art & Practice of Giant Screen Cinema

IML 475               Units: 2.0              SA: TBD

**Instructors**

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**Location:** Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre, RZC 119.

**Time:** Tuesdays, 7:00-8:50pm  **Office Hours:** By Appointment

**Course Overview**

The Giant Screen has been available to filmmakers as a mode of exhibition for over 45 years. What was once a niche corner of the larger cinematic landscape has steadily gained mainstream prominence in the last decade. At the same time, the Giant Screen industry is experiencing massive upheavals as it moves away from its traditional reliance on short form educational content and 70mm film.  The goal of this course is to introduce students to the theory, history and practice of Giant Screen Cinema, to contextualize it within the current landscape of digital workflows and feature-length IMAX exhibition, and to give students hands-on opportunities to explore the unique affordances of Giant Screen spaces for visual argumentation and innovative storytelling.

This course will examine the visual language, established genres and economic realities of the Giant Screen short subject documentary film and the changing landscape of digital & narrative filmmaking on the industry. Special attention will also be paid to the process of making content for multiple formats of the Giant Screen simultaneously. The course format will include weekly screenings in the IMAX space, guest lectures and field trips.

In addition to a multiple-choice midterm exam covering assigned readings and lectures, coursework will include regular written responses to screenings and readings, a simple story exercise (IMAX format short film) for the giant screen, and a final project in which students will develop and pitch a documentary short “mission” film at the end of the semester. This final presentation must include compelling visual argumentation that utilizes the Giant Screen space.

In addition to offering a general introduction to field, this course is also designed as a foundational primer for students who wish to take further advanced courses in Giant Screen production across the divisions of the School of Cinematic Arts or who wish to integrate such practices into their advanced creative scholarship.

**Required Readings** (Available on course wiki)

“Digital Immersive Giant Screen Specifications (DIGSS),” Giant Screen Cinema Association

“Production and Post-Production Workflows (P3W),” Giant Screen Cinema Association

Isaacs, Bruce. 2014. *The Orientation of Future Cinema: Technology, Aesthetics, Spectacle*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. (Excerpts)

Bazin, Andre. “The Myth of Total Cinema” and “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”  In Bazin, André, Dudley Andrew, and Jean Renoir. 2004. *What Is Cinema?: Volume I: 1*. Translated by Hugh Gray. 1 edition. University of California Press.

**Assignments and Grading Breakdown**  
•10% Participation - class discussions and Q&As with class guests are an important part of the course and students are expected to come prepared with questions, interests and contributions to dialog.

•10% Reading/screening reflections - students will submit semi-weekly responses to screenings, readings and other class experiences. Schedule and responses on the course wiki. (Please note: one reflection will require students to travel to the California Science Center IMAX Theater to screen ***A Beautiful Planet*** before Sept 4)

•10% Giant Screen Simple Story Exercise - a chance for students to experiment with framing and composition for the giant screen.

•30% Midterm exam. Multiple-choice based on class lectures and assigned readings.

•40% Final Project: 5-minute pitch of a ‘mission’ project. Must include potential funding sources, timeline, budget, relevant science, potential cast, list of narrator choices. Must include compelling visual argumentation justifying its existential necessity of Giant Screen format.

**Weekly Schedule** (Subject to change based on guest availability.)

1. **Introduction and History** (Film: *To The Arctic*) [8/22/17]

•Traits of Giant Screen

•Early history with Cinerama, Multiscreen inc, IMAX   
•Different formats

•Why large format

•Framing and pacing considerations

•Physiological response

•Set up SCA logins for non-SCA students

•Introduce IML Wiki.

•Introduce Reflections

1. **SCREENINGS** (*To The Arctic*, *Hubble, Hidden Universe*) [8/29/17]

•Possible live link to IMAX filming location

1. **Institutional Films: Understanding your Market’s Needs** (Guest: Joe DeAmicis) (*Flight of the Butterflies*) [9/5/17]

•3rd grade to adults

•Educational value/STEM

•Standards of scientific accuracy

•Parameters of programming for children

•Special regional considerations

    •Genres of mission films  
        •Immersive storytelling

**\*\*\*Reflection assignment on *A Beautiful Planet* due before class\*\*\*\***

**4. Developing a project for Giant Screen** (Guests: Di Roberts & Jini Durr) (no film) [9/12/17] (This class may run late)

•Why Giant Screen

•Economics of Giant Screen films (you aren’t going to get rich)

•To Dome or not to Dome, and/or full dome?  
•Creative challenges of corporate money  
•Grant money

•Theater collations

1. **Giant Screen Framing, Technology Past & Present** (*Under the Sea 3D*) [9/19/17]

•Deep Dive into Framing for the Giant Screen

•Deeper history of the formats and tech including film, digital and laser.

•Custom cameras over time

•Film vs Digital (BBOWS reel)

•Digital enabling actual Verite’

•Unforgiving medium

•IMAX Quality Control

•New and emerging technologies

1. **GSCA live Lecture**. (*Space Station 3D*)  [9/26/17]

•Live Lecture from the Giant Screen Cinema Association conference in Chicago.

•Guests will include filmmakers with projects in production discussing the challenges they face.

1. **Space, you can film there YOU just can’t go there**. (Guests: NASA Astronaut Terry Virts & IMAX DP James Neihouse) (No Film)  [10/3/17] (This class may run late)

•Challenges of filming in zero gravity

•Challenges of getting gear into and out of orbit  
•Training Astronauts

•Cosmic radiation and your sensor

•IMAX Camera Demonstration

•Introduction of **Simple Story** assignment

1. **Review Project Ideas** (*Island of Lemurs*) [10/10/17]

**•**Review and comment on Simple Story concepts

•Screen Simple Story projects

1. **3D - Beyond the Beam splitter**. (Guest: IMAX Stereographer Dylan Reade) (*Born To Be Wild*) [10/17/17]

•How Giant Screen 3D is different from other 3D?

•Does 3D enhance the film going experience?

•When to shoot native, when to roto, when to stay 2D

•Faking a frame offset

•Bad 3D in all its forms

**\*\*\*IMAX Theater open for footage testing Oct 12-13, 18-23 hours TBD\*\*\*\*\***

1. **Midterm** - (*Simple Story Projects*) [10/24/17]

•Test

•Introduction of Final Project

•Demo Pitch

•Tech details of creating material for final presentation

•Review of Simple Story projects

•Tech details of creating material for final presentation.

1. **Final Project Introduction** - (Guest: Daniel Ferguson) – (*Journey to Mecca*) [10/31/17]

•Introduction of Final Project

•Demo Pitch

•Tech details of creating material for final presentation

•How to get butts in seats

1. **Marketing Giant Screen Films** - (TBD) – (current Hollywood title) [11/7/17]

•Review Final Project Ideas

•How to get butts in seats

•Educational outreach

•Sponsor tie-ins

•Extra screen experiences

•Social Media campaigns

1. **IMAX Facility Tour (Field Trip) (**Guest: David Keighley) (*Laser Demo, North of Superior, To Fly*) [11/14/17] This class will run late with transportation.

•Laser projection demo

•Film splicing demo

•IMAX camera comparison

•Bus Transportation will be provided from RZC at 6pm, returning to RZC at 10pm.

1. **Pitch Practice** (no film) [11/21/17]

•Students will have an opportunity to rehearse their presentations on the IMAX screen.

•Class is optional due to the Thanks Giving holiday

1. **Pitch Practice** (no film) [11/28/17]

•Students will have an opportunity to rehearse their presentations on the IMAX screen.

1. **FINAL: Pitch Presentations** [12/12/17] (This class WILL run late)

**•**IMAX theatre available to test/practices pitches Dec 1, 4-8 & 11 from 11am-6pm.

**Final Pitch**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the material presented in class by creating a 5-minute pitch for a potential IMAX documentary mission film. Students will present their pitches in the Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre using media they have created for the IMAX screen. This media may be in the form of a power point presentation, DCP or a combination thereof. Pitches must include a hand out.

Presentations will be graded on the following criteria:

Understanding of the industry:

•Why does this project need to be on a Giant Screen?

•Intended audience and is the subject appropriate

•Educational value

•How will you ensure the science is accurate?

•Who will your sponsors be? What are you giving them?

•How will you promote the film?

Logistics:

•Where will you film and when?

•What cameras will you use? Why?

•What formats will you deliver in?

•What crew will you need? Who are the Key people?

Conventions of the Medium

•Does your presentation conform to the conventions of the medium? Framing, Pan/Tilt, Juxtapositions, scale?

•Is your presentation visually compelling?

Media used in this presentation may be original content or found material that conveys your vision of this potential film.

**Technical Notes:**

Power Point:

Frame Size: 1080x1920

Frame Rate: 23.98 or 24.00 (for embedded video)

Audio: DCI Spec

Presentation: Your laptop. Mini Display-Port or HDMI connection. Strongly suggest testing in advance.

DCP:

Frame Size: 1080x2048

Frame Rate: 23.98 or 24.00

Audio: -17db

Presentation: Must be delivered to Matt Scott for processing at least 48hrs before your presentation.

**File Naming Convention**:

All files must adhere to the following naming convention:

IML475\_173\_[student last name]\_[project title(*if needed*)]\_[Date(*YYMMDD*)].mov

**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your  own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize  yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate- sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/ scientific-misconduct/.

**Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.**

You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/ online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources available to students.

**Support Systems**

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is  not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/ home\_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.

**Disruptive Student Behavior**

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. Any student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

**Emergency Plan**

In the event that classes cannot convene at the university, all IML courses will continue via distance education. Specifically, the IML portal and course wikis will be deployed to enable faculty-student interaction (asynchronously and also via virtual office hours), complete syllabi, course readings and assignments, software tutorials, project assets, parameters and upload instructions, peer review processes and open source alternatives to professional-level software used in the IML curriculum. Further details are available on the course wiki.