

Students love learning and collaborating **on film**



The University of Wisconsin (UW) film program is one of the oldest and most highly regarded in the country. Part of the Communication Arts Department, the program educates aspiring filmmakers with a blend of production experience and critical studies. The program counts many successful filmmakers in every facet of the business.

Erik Gunneson, a cinematographer and filmmaker, has been teaching production at the university for 10 years. All students learn by shooting film. Introductory students make black-and-white silent short films. In the intermediate and advanced courses, students shoot color sync-sound narrative projects. Animation students work to both animate digitally and on film.

"Learning film technology really pays off for our students," says Gunneson. "Even though they have grown up with the internet and cell phones, these kids love working with film."

For development, the film is either sent to FotoKem in Burbank or to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, about 90 miles away, depending on the format. The program operates its own telecine bay and the resulting images reside on a computer network connected to 40-plus workstations and the main screening room.

In the introductory class, students shoot their three-minute projects using the school's spring-wound Bolex cameras and Kodak 16mm black-and-white film, usually KODAK TRI-X 7266 reversal stock. The projects are designed to be "light journals," an opportunity to study and capture light artistically without a script or narrative.

Later, students in groups of five collaborate on five different narrative projects, each based on three-page scripts. The students rotate responsibilities on each film. These projects are shot with ARRIFLEX 16SR11 cameras and feature lit scenes and sync dialogue.

"It's challenging to make five, three-minute films in a semester," says Gunneson. "Part of what we're teaching is to collaborate under pressure. When you have a cell phone that can shoot video, you need something different from a film production course. You want to understand how to work together to create quality moving images. We try to give students a breadth of knowledge, so that no matter what kind of job they get, they have a good foundation. I talk to graduates all the time who say, 'I'm working next to someone with an MFA and I know twice as much as they do.' If someone comes into the editing room with a reel of film, sometimes our graduate is the only one in the room who has a clue what to do with it."

Gunneson also notes the durability of the program's film equipment. "Those cameras have paid for themselves many times over," he says. "We have replaced all our video equipment twice in the time I've been here, while purchasing little or no new film equipment. It literally lasts for decades, under constant use."

Justin Daering, a recent graduate of the program, says, "At the University of Wisconsin I had the opportunity to learn the art of cinematography while shooting on film. Working with film taught me the discipline I need to operate on a professional film set, and the skill to trust my artistic instinct."

Since graduating, Daering has served as director of photography on two short films and one feature. "I've worked with some high-level digital cameras, and nothing has made me appreciate film more," he says. "At UW, I learned that film is unparalleled in its ability to render stunning, unique images with incredible exposure and color range. Film will always be part of cinema, and so I am happy that at the University of Wisconsin it's an integral part of the curriculum."

¹ Students at the University of Wisconsin film program learn how to collaborate under pressure and shoot on film, the foundation for transitioning to real work in the industry.