

## Learning goals and assessment in Film and Media Studies

We have designed the FMS major to provide students with a solid grasp of the history of film and/or media in a—necessarily—transnational framework. The major encourages a broad training in the aesthetic and technological development of film and media, with consistent attention to the social and cultural contexts in which it unfolds.

We want our students to develop sharp critical skills through the visual and textual analysis we teach. The courses we require in history, theory, criticism and analysis, and production work together to hone their critical thinking, their ability to construct a persuasive argument, their fluency in written and oral expression, and their capacity to carry out research. We are, in essence, teaching them a whole new language which they learn to manipulate with subtlety, and whose aesthetic and ideological implications they continue to explore. In varying degrees, they also acquire facility in and creativity with production technologies.

Among the strengths of the FMS program is the dynamic exchange between critical and production studies, which inform and reinforce each other. Students of criticism develop a clear sense of how the objects they study are made; production students make work that is well-informed critically. In the core production class students acquire a range of skills, and many further develop these in advanced classes. These skills are both technical and aesthetic; they include cinematography, non-linear editing, sound, lighting, and writing. Students practice their skills in both narrative and non-narrative modes of filmmaking that engage critically and creatively with cinematic conventions.

There are three paths through the FMS major. These are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In the “critical studies” paths, students may emphasize either film or media. Most courses of study strike a balance, however. We also offer an emphasis on production for concentrators. Students build a solid cohort through the core requirements. All concentrators must take one of the two introductory courses, “Introduction to the Art of Film,” and “Introduction to Media Studies.” (These are the only large lecture courses that are regularly taught). Students must also include at least one production course for the major. Usually they opt for “Introductory Video and Sound Art,” but they may also take screening writing, photography, journalism, or creative writing classes, whatever brings them to the creative side of things. Majors take one of the three core film history courses that are distributed across early cinema, 1929-1959, and 1959-present. In addition, they take one course in film theory, and one course in transnational/international film or media. This latter core requirement ensures that they acquaint themselves with traditions outside the U.S. and Hollywood. (It is important to note that we consistently emphasize the transnational exchanges that shape the development of film and media in the introductory courses and the history courses). Production majors must also take at least two courses in film/media criticism and analysis. Those pursuing critical studies amply satisfy that requirement as they pursue special topics courses.

The FMS program strongly encourages study abroad, and an ever-growing number of students, recognizing the value of leaving the U. S. cultural, and often, its linguistic context, avail themselves of these opportunities. We also encourage and promote internships; students work in consultation with the FMS director, who evaluates their work, based on a portfolio which includes a report from the students' on-site supervisor. In recent years, most FMS students have pursued at least one internship, and they report that these help to clarify their career goals and sometimes to provide a "leg up" in the job market.

Students map out their program of study in close consultation with the FMS director, who serves as advisor to the major. This centralized structure allows students to "customize" the major to some degree, but it also provides a sounding board for their intellectual questions and concerns.

Our tools for evaluation of students' progress are many. Generally, we evaluate them on the basis of essays and written exams, which assess their mastery of primary texts, their analytical and argument skills, and their writing skills. Most courses emphasize class participation, and some require in class presentations. Since most of our upper level courses are either lecture-discussion format or seminar format, we place considerable weight on students' participation, and we have consistent opportunities to evaluate their critical acumen, proficiency in visual analysis, and their skill at argument. Throughout their course of study, students focus on refining their technical and aesthetic vocabularies, and deepening understanding of their application.

In the special case of production classes, which are generally limited to no more than 12 students, the instructor closely supervises students working either independently or in collaboration. Because of the workshop format of these classes, students' projects develop in relation to regular critical evaluation by both the instructor and the classmates. A final evaluation is based on either a portfolio or a sustained project. Those of us who do not teach in this program, however, have an informal window on the quality and range of student production work through the annual Gollin Film Festival competition, which attracts a considerable volume of submissions, across all levels. More recently, the FMS undergraduate council has been mounting festivals of student work as well. Among their continuing activities are screenings, critiques of student work, and production workshops, all of which are inspired by their coursework. These events constitute significant outreach to the broader undergraduate population with whom FMS students want to share the knowledge they are building.

Overall, we have developed consistent, but somewhat complex, tools of evaluation. But it may sometimes be difficult to measure progress in simple and concrete terms, especially over a short period of time. Our students' skills seem to develop most richly as they synthesize their experience across a number of courses in a curriculum designed to cultivate and reinforce a number of related skills.