



# Film Studies

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## Introduction to the Film Studies Program

Film Studies involves more than the analysis of one of the youngest and most internationally popular forms of cultural expression today. It means examining how individual movies, particular genres and forms, and different regional and national film traditions reflect and influence the worlds of which they are a part. It means applying that knowledge in production classes that focus on every stage of the filmmaking process, developing skills and techniques to produce your own films, and working collaboratively on the films of your classmates. Ultimately, it means developing crucial skills in critical thinking and complex-problem solving, visual and textual analysis, project management and film/video production, and written and verbal communication that are vital for success in the majority of today's careers.

While the program offers meaningful opportunities to learn and expand on the basic skills of filmmaking, our focus is on the academic study of cinema. We offer a range of electives in different periods, genres, national cinemas, and formats in courses taught by professors from a range of different departments. Our Assistant Professor, Dr. Sonja Bertucci, is an active filmmaker who teaches introductory and intermediate film production, where students produce crew-based narrative short films. In 2020, we completed a major renewal of our equipment, including Sony and Blackmagic cameras, LED lights, and sound equipment.

The Program's emphasis on the collaborative approach to making films (e.g., working on a crew, casting actors, sharing roles as director, producer, screenwriter, etc.) emulates the industry standard and positions students to apply for internships or employment upon finishing their degrees.

Several students placed their films in local and national festivals, including the Poe Film Festival, the Peak City Film Festival, the Washington DC Independent Film Festival, and Top Shorts. One UR graduate, Ryan Frost '05, went to graduate school

at University of Southern California. He later directed the film *September Morning*, based on his experience as a first-year student on September 11, 2001. The film had a theatrical distribution in 2016 and is available on several streaming platforms ([imdb.com/title/tt4966028/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4966028/)).

Other graduates went on to positions with the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences (Roger Mancusi '12), Paramount Studios (Kendall Holly '18), and the Nickelodeon network (Alexandra Sjoberg-Dumit '13). In the summer of 2019, students pursued internships in New York City at Anthology Film Archives (Miles Wilson '20) and FRANK PR (Jeremy Cairo '21).

## Film Studies Major

Since Film Studies is an interdisciplinary program, students choose courses from a variety of departments and programs at the university such as Art & Art History, Classical Studies, English, Journalism, Literatures & Cultures, and Music. The range of courses allows majors to construct a program matching their specific interests.

The major consists of 10 courses. Three core courses are required: Introduction to Film Studies, Introduction to Film Production, and a capstone research seminar to be taken in the junior or senior year. For the remaining seven courses, students choose courses in directors such as Alfred Hitchcock or Martin Scorsese; in genres such as film noir, suspense, action, melodrama, or the western; in international film history and aesthetics; and in film and video production.

Our program has particular strengths in regional and national cinemas, offering courses in French, German, and East Asian film, among others. Film Studies electives are grouped according to the program's three areas of focus: courses in international, regional, ethnic or indigenous cinemas (Group A), courses on particular genres, periods, directors, or themes (Group B), and courses in film production (Group C). Taking two courses each from groups A and B, students construct programs of study that are targeted to their particular interests.

## Film Studies Minor

Students may minor in Film Studies. A minor consists of six courses: Introduction to Film Studies, Introduction to Film Production, and four additional electives from the program's diverse offerings in analysis and production. One course each must be taken from groups A and B.

## In the Classroom

Film Studies majors are generally united by a love of the movies; yet classes involve much more than just watching films. In addition to teaching students important skills in film analysis and production, faculty encourage students to develop a general cultural literacy, or the ability to better interpret and critically "read" the increasingly visual way in which we are asked to understand the world. Courses in production then allow students to apply that newfound literacy and contribute their own stories to our diverse culture.

Few courses are limited strictly to readings of films. Instead, students assess a range of images and the visual language of mainstream media, news coverage, and the internet. Often these visual texts are analyzed in relation to other works to elaborate the circumstances of a given film's production and reception. Theory, journalism, history, sociology, philosophy, and literature might be considered to broaden a film's meaning by developing its cultural and historical context.

Typically, students view and read this context outside of class, coming together in the classroom for discussions on the artistic, technical, and thematic elements that make the film. Classes are small so that students have ample opportunity to try out their own ideas and contribute to the ideas of others.

Discussions are richer because faculty hail from departments across campus, bringing their own academic perspectives, be they historic, cultural, or linguistic. Production classes allow students to get behind the lens and put analysis into practice. In addition, visiting scholars and filmmakers present students with the opportunity to learn from faculty at other institutions and practitioners working in the field.

## Research and Creative Opportunities

Research is a crucial part of the Film Studies major and minor, developing students' skills in big-picture thinking, project design, information literacy, and critical analysis. Every student will complete research, which culminates in a capstone research seminar taken in the junior or senior year.

Additionally, an intensive research experience is perfect for students who want to immerse themselves in a project and work one-on-one with a faculty mentor. Such work can be done either as a summer research fellowship, or as an independent study conducted during the academic year. Recent student research has included projects examining the role of women in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, a documentary film about homeless teens living in the Richmond area, and an analysis of neo-noirs and Roman Polanski's 1974 film, *Chinatown*.

## In the Community

Students benefit from central Virginia's vibrant cinema culture. The University hosts a number of campus film festivals, giving students access to compelling films from around the world. For more than 25 years, the annual International Film Series has introduced audiences to the depth and complexity of international cinema. Other annual film festivals include the African Film Festival, the ChinaFest film series, and the Tucker-Boatwright Festival of Literature and the Arts.

Richmond also sponsored three Latin American Film Festivals over the past decade. Internships at these festivals provide students with real-world experience to complement their classroom study. Students have also had internships with studios and production companies, including 3Arts Entertainment, New York-based Studio Center, and Voice of America.

Off campus the opportunities continue. In partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Richmond sponsors the annual French Film Festival, a staple of the city's cultural life. The French Film Festival includes master classes with filmmakers open to Richmond students. The annual Pocahontas Reframed Film Festival in Richmond honors the contributions of Native Americans and reinvigorates conversations about telling stories of indigenous life. Opportunities for student internships are also available. Finally, the Virginia Film Festival and the James River Film Festival provide further opportunities for students in the broader Richmond community.



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