Equity
Diversity &
Inclusion in
Teaching
Media

THE STUDENT 7

A GUIDE TO GETTING
THE MOST OUT OF YOUR
MEDIA PRODUCTION EDUCATION

Your time as a student in production is short, and the amount you have to learn before you graduate can be overwhelming. You not only have to learn a host of different kinds of equipment and software, you're working to develop skills in storytelling, visual aesthetics, and sound design, along with theory and history, all while trying to discover your own style. And that doesn't even include general ed classes.

And you're busy. You're probably involved in student organizations and have a job or internship outside of school to boot.

So how do you make the most of time you have in your media production program? This guide is here to help.

The following practices are based on research and input from faculty and students in media production programs across the U.S. They are designed to encourage the building of skills and knowledge that will make you versatile, creative in solving problems, and a strong member of a team, whether you're a leader or part of the crew.

Research shows that we learn best when all members of a class have the opportunity to participate equitably, so these practices also promote inclusion, collaboration, and respect for diverse approaches and backgrounds. Media production, regardless of where it takes place, involves diverse, international audiences with a broad range of backgrounds, perspectives, and identities who want - and expect - to see themselves onscreen. It also involves working with diverse crews and collaborators who bring a variety of life experiences and skills to the table. Learning how to respectfully and responsibly tell stories, express yourself creatively, and collaborate with others with these considerations in mind will help make you a more versatile and sophisticated media producer.

Taken together, these practices can help make your learning experience that much better by developing skills and traits that are not only sought by employers, but that will help take your media production work to the next level.

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1. WATCH THE WORLD

Get outside your comfort zone and watch media that reflect points of view you've never imagined. To broaden your cinematic horizons, watch work from other countries, earlier eras, and a variety of genres. Traditional and mainstream media help create stereotypes about race, gender, class, and other aspects of identity. They also reflect only a limited set of possibilities of what media can do. Watching broadly can help break the mold and introduce you to entirely new ways that people have expressed themselves creatively in image and sound. So watch well and screen widely.

2. CHART NEW TERRITORY

Whether you're making a documentary, a fiction piece or something else altogether, the characters you create and the stories you tell MATTER. The way you represent people, places, and stories affects the way your audience thinks about them. Be true and authentic to your content. Don't just reproduce the same ideas and plots and character types we've seen a million times. Immerse yourself in learning about lives and perspectives different from your own and create a new way of looking at the world.

3. SET SQUAD GOALS

A strong crew is key to a strong project. Strength comes from working together as an inclusive team. Communicate. Collaborate. Listen with an open mind. Stretch yourself. Share power. Show respect. Support your teammates in their learning process. Take notice of who's doing what on set and in the classroom and why. Reflect on your own actions. Think about how stereotypes & assumptions about others might be affecting group dynamics, and work to change that.

4. GEEK OUT IN EVERY WAY

We all love access to great equipment, but a film or video is only as good as its concept, no matter how high its technical quality. Delve into understanding narrative structure, character development, and cinematic language to push your ideas further. Use what you're learning about history, form, and theory to inform your work. The more you know about what's come before, the more effectively you can make fresh, original work that connects with today's audiences.

5. KNOW THE RULES... THEN BREAK THEM

Whether it's the conventions of film grammar or the parameters imposed by an assignment, make sure you understand the rules before you break them. Creative and technical constraints are tools instructors use to spark your imagination and get you problem-solving in new and innovative ways. Start small and hone your vision and your craft before jumping into big productions. But, don't be afraid to dream big. Keep up with news in the media industries, and think about who's making the rules in those fields and who those rules leave out. After all, once you've mastered the rules, you can change them.

6. CREATE DANGEROUSLY

Expressing yourself in front of an audience isn't easy, especially when you're still learning. But this is the time to take risks and laugh in the face of failure. Explore your curiosity. Ask questions. Try new things. Challenge what's come before. Embrace mistakes and missteps as opportunities to get better. Be bold. Whether working with a crew or by yourself, keep experimenting..

7. LOOK BOTH WAYS

Take time to explore your own thoughts, experiences and perspectives on these guidelines. Practice self-reflection. Question your own assumptions. But look outward, too. More and more, audiences are looking for and expecting diverse, inclusive media. Do some research on trends in media production and consumption, and dig into all the resources out there about issues of diversity and equity in the media industries. Where do you see room for improvement? Where do you fit in?

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