“Special effects” have existed in one form or another since the beginning of cinema, and indeed, some argue that all of cinema can be called a kind of “special effect.” From Melies’ *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) to *Avatar* (2009) and beyond, creating memorable visual “effects” for the audience has always been a paramount concern for filmmakers. The creation and implementation of special visual effects has traditionally been utilized not only to create explosive moments and new visual experiences for audiences, but also for the promotion of films themselves. However, one of the most interesting developments of contemporary digital effects technology is the adaptation of previously “spectacular” technologies for much more “grounded” purposes. This course will encompass a formal exploration of creative, industrial, and aesthetic developments, and critical theories behind, some of the fundamental elements of special visual effects throughout motion picture history. Each week, we will explore a different element of effects history, technological development or application, or critical/theoretical/aesthetic interpretation. We will look at directors, effects industry “stars,” important industrial formations, and how filmmakers and the industry often attempt to reinvigorate old ideas, genres, and franchises with new technologies and approaches. We will analyze films and media in both feature-length and clip form, accompanied by critical analysis and questioning by your professor (and hopefully, yourselves). A healthy selection of critical readings will accompany each of the class segments, giving you some background and context for discussion.

There are five ways in which I will assess your performance and participation in this course:

- Critical Essay #1: 20%
- Critical Essay #2: 20%
- Group presentation: 25%
- Comprehensive Final Exam: 25%
The Group Presentation should ideally be an interactive talk of approximately 10-15 minutes focusing on one significant technology of special visual effects from any point in filmmaking history (it can be either “practical” or “digital”). Other possibilities for the talk can include a visual effects “house” or company not talked about in class, or a significant person in the field of special visual effects history. Topics must be approved by me, and feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

A useful timeline of special visual effects history including all the fundamentals worthy of discussion can be found at the index here, established by Barbara Flueckiger:

http://www.zauberklang.ch/timeline.php

**Critical readings and detailed outlines and requirements for the Group Presentation and Critical Essays (including late turn-in policies) will be distributed separately. Readings will normally be provided one week prior to intended discussion. Films and media listed under each topic in the schedule are suggested screenings, and subject to change.**

**All films formally referenced (i.e. in-depth, concentrated discussion) through screenings, readings and in-class lectures are considered suitable Final Exam material.**

**Regular Attendance is of course required and encouraged for a strong participation percentage of your grade; you will gain a fuller understanding of the many different aspects of Special/Visual Effects history, technique, and theory, which of course will help you in surviving the Final Exam! Also, since we only meet once a week, it is *doubly* important that you attend regularly – each week, you will be exposed to critical knowledge and materials in both verbal and visual capacities. Missing any more than *three* classes without a formal excuse will result in your *Attendance and Participation* grade being lowered by *half*.**

**Please turn off and put away all cell phones for the duration of class – if there is a particular urgent reason why you need to have constant access to a phone, please inform me before class. **LAPTOPS/PCS/MACs ARE NOT ALLOWED.**
SCHEDULE

PART ONE: HISTORICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENTS

FEB. 2\textsuperscript{nd}: Introductions and “Setting the Scene”

*The Sci-Fi Boys* (2006): An Introduction to some of the Famous Personalities in Effects History

FEB. 9\textsuperscript{th}: Authentic Science Fiction


FEB. 16\textsuperscript{th}: Practical Fantasy: Make-up, Animatronics, Puppetry, Stop-motion Photography


FEB. 23\textsuperscript{rd}: Matte Paintings, Optical Effects, ‘Scope, and Rigs from the 1960s to the 1980s


MAR 2\textsuperscript{nd}: Industry Pioneers: Francis Ford Coppola’s Zoetrope Studios, George Lucas and Industrial Light & Magic

MARCH 9th: The 80s & 90s, from Practical to Digital – “Morphing” the Digital Divide


MARCH 16th: **CRITICAL ESSAY #1 DUE**

“Becoming Regionally Digital”: New Zealand goes “Wellywood” –

Peter Jackson and Richard Taylor Bridge the Digital/Industrial Gap with WETA


MARCH 23rd: (NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK)

MARCH 30th: The Film Industry Comments on Itself


PART TWO: AESTHETIC MEANINGS

APRIL 6th: Effects Group Presentations

APRIL 13th: Color, Drawings, and Paintings as Visual Effects

APRIL 20th: “Posthumous Presence”: Recreating or “Finishing” Actors’ Performances


APRIL 27th: Animal Logic: Australian ‘Hero’ of the Visual Effects Industry


Virtual Set-Design, Props, and “Pre-viz”:


MAY 4th: **CRITICAL ESSAY #2 DUE**

New Directorial Visions –

Guillermo del Toro’s “Organic Clockwork”:


David Fincher’s ‘Panic Room’ of Visual Effects:


MAY 11th: Shifting “Realities” in Practical and Digital:

Where do we go from here? (CG Characters): Comic book adaptations, “spectacular bodies” and digital stunt doubles

FINAL EXAM: WED., MAY 18\textsuperscript{th}, 7:30pm – 9:30pm

EMF Policy about Multitasking in the Classroom

The EMF Department recognizes the utility of laptop computers and other electronic devices in the classroom, but only for academic purposes related to the course and under the direction of a faculty member to enhance learning. Student use of electronic devices for personal or other, non-course related activities, such as texting, e-mailing, Internet surfing, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, iPod, gaming, etc., is disruptive to fellow students, disrespectful to the professor, and detrimental to the student’s own academic performance.

Recent research findings indicate students who multitask perform \textbf{significantly worse} than do those who don’t multitask – with multitasking students performing at the same level as those who \textbf{never come} to class.

For these reasons, the Department of Electronic Media & Film fully supports faculty if they implement a course policy prohibiting or limiting the use of personal electronic devices in the classroom. The Department of Electronic Media & Film also fully supports any penalties, stated in the syllabus, assessed against students who violate the course policy.
COFAC Civility Code

All College of Fine Arts & Communication Studies students, staff, and faculty are committed to collegial and academic citizenship demonstrating high standards of humane, ethical, professional, and civil behavior in all interactions.

We must take responsibility for the relationship between our personal conduct and the quality of campus life. What we do and say always has an effect on others, whether we see it or not. Civility means more than respecting campus facilities and grounds. Civility means consistently treating people with consideration and respect. It means being courteous, polite, and fair. It means recognizing diversity and honoring differing points of view. When our behavior is guided by concern for others in our community, we are being civil. Practicing civility requires thoughtful behavior and checking our assumptions and perceptions of others’ race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, abilities, culture, belief systems and economic status.

Civility Code

COFAC places a priority on learning. We value the inherent worth and dignity of every person, thereby fostering a community of mutual respect. Students have the right to a learning environment free of disruptive behaviors and offensive comments. Faculty have the right to define appropriate behavioral expectations in the classroom and expect students to abide by them. Faculty have the responsibility to manage and address classroom disruption. Staff have the right and responsibility to define appropriate behaviors necessary to conduct any university activity free of disruption or obstruction.

We believe that in order to achieve these ideals, all COFAC students, staff, and faculty are expected to exhibit and practice civil behaviors that exemplify: (1) respecting faculty, staff, fellow students, guests, and all university property, policies, rules and regulations; (2) taking
responsibility for one’s choices, actions and comments; (3) delivering correspondence – whether verbal, nonverbal, written, or electronic – with respectful language using professional writing standards and etiquette; and (4) accepting consequences of one’s choices and actions.

The use of offensive, threatening or abusive language, writing, or behavior will not be tolerated and can lead to academic dismissal. Further information about civility can be found in Appendix F of the university catalog.

Examples demonstrating civility in the classroom as a student include:

- Being respectful of the professor and other students.
- Not texting or using cellular phones and other electronic devices.
- Not eating or drinking in class.
- Not reading newspapers or listening to music during the class.
- Not sleeping in class.

Examples demonstrating civility in the classroom as a faculty member include:

- Being respectful of the students.
- Attempting to understand individual student needs and learning styles.
- Discussing civil behavioral expectations during the first class.
- Taking time to talk with students whose behaviors negatively affect the classroom.
- Encouraging students to follow your civil behavior.
EMF Google Group List Serve –

All EMF students are required to join the EMF Google Group List Serve at http://groups.google.com/group/TowsonEMF. This will guarantee that you receive daily postings regarding digital media, video, film, and audio production topics including festivals, special screening, guest speakers, film/video crew needs, internships, and jobs.

Use this email address (TowsonEMF@googlegroups.com) to post your own messages to the group. The main page will also archive all posts.

Instructions:

1. Create a user account and password, and be sure to use the email to which you prefer receiving mail. (You only need to sign up once and you’ll continue to receive EMF Google group emails.)

2. Please select one of the three Email options for reading the group messages:

   (a) Abridged Email (No more than 1 email per day) -- Summary of new activity each day

   (b) Digest Email (Approximately 1 email per day) -- Up to 25 full new messages bundled into a single email

   (c) Email (Approximately 1 email per day) -- Best way not to miss important postings, as you get every message sent as it arrives