



COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

# MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN DIGITAL CINEMA PRODUCTION

## Develop Your Skill Set for a Dynamic Media Marketplace

In this graduate program you'll learn to produce engaging visual content by combining professional cinema techniques with leading-edge digital media tools. The program blends Hollywood and independent film traditions and gives you hands-on experience in the professional film production disciplines. Because the coursework is presented in an online/hybrid format, the program allows students living outside the major media markets the chance to study film production with film industry professionals both online and onsite during the digital cinema production residency in Los Angeles. During the program you will produce several short digital film projects and a thesis film, and upon graduation you will be prepared to produce your own professional media projects and teach in film and media arts programs at the college and university level.

### Program highlights:

- Learn the professional practices and digital workflow used to produce digital media content
- Practice the creative process used to produce quality content for a variety of digital platforms
- Develop visual and narrative techniques to craft your own aesthetic style
- Collaborate with a creative team to produce and edit a short film shot on a RED 4K Digital Cinema camera
- Produce an original short digital motion picture suitable for submission to a film festival and distribution on the internet

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# MASTER OF FINE ARTS DIGITAL CINEMA PRODUCTION

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The MFA in Digital Cinema Production prepares graduates to produce compelling visual stories for an expanding digital media marketplace. It provides hands-on experience applying dramatic narrative and cinematic concepts and professional techniques from the Hollywood and independent film traditions to the creative development and production of entertainment other media content. The program focuses on developing filmmakers well versed in all aspects of low budget, independent filmmaking that can be applied to a variety of media content production environments including commercial, corporate and industrial promotion and communication projects; film, television and other entertainment media distribution channels; and instructional media programs. Students are prepared to collaborate efficiently with a creative team and to adapt to the dynamic digital landscape and media distribution marketplace. Graduates are also prepared to teach in film and media arts programs at the college and university level.

Offered in a hybrid online/low-residency format, the MFA MDC program affords students living outside the major media markets and entertainment production centers the opportunity to study professional film production at the graduate-level with film industry professionals and to develop the technical skills and practical experience necessary to function as media production entrepreneurs. The hybrid program offers instruction for a majority of courses delivered online, with a required one-month intensive residency at the Los Angeles campus. The program is also offered full-time at the National University Los Angeles campus with a significant number of classes offered onsite that includes access to digital editing and production facilities and equipment.

The first year of the MFA MDC immerses students in the applied cinematic arts, narrative structure, cinematic design and grammar, short film forms, sound design and cinematography, and professional editing techniques and postproduction workflow. In the second year, graduate fellows take six MFA Production Sequence courses taking a short film script through a professional film-producing cycle from development to festival distribution over a five-month period. Working from the perspective of the producer, each fellow produces a professional film production and distribution plan and look book used to pitch a project to potential funders and distributors.

Next working as a director, each student prepares a director's production book that details a personal approach to directing the film. In the third class, the students are assigned department leadership positions on a production team that takes the project through preproduction, preparing a production book that will be the guide to the production of the short in the fourth month during the MFA MDC residency in Los Angeles. All MFA students serve in one of the following leadership positions during preproduction and production—producer, director, director of photography, production designer—and rotate through other key production crew positions depending on interests and career goals. After principal photography has been completed, each student is responsible for bringing the project through all aspects of postproduction in preparation for a screening in Hollywood.

As a result of this second year production sequence, the graduate MFA production fellows are prepared for the development and production of their thesis films.

## Program Residency Requirements

All Digital Cinema fellows must take the intensive residency consisting of three courses onsite at the National University Los Angeles campus: MDC 683P production practicum, MDC 688 Production and MDC 689 Postproduction. The MDC 688 Production workshop lasts the first two weeks of the month and the second, MDC 689 Post-Production, runs for two weeks during the second half of the month. MDC 683P runs for the whole month. These three workshops provide students with hands-on production experience in a collaborative environment using professional equipment and must be completed prior to the thesis sequence.

Students who are unable to devote a full month onsite for both MDC 688 and MDC 689 may elect to split the onsite residency by taking MDC 689 first and then later scheduling MDC 683P and MDC 688, which must be taken concurrently. For more information on the residency workshops, contact the Academic Program Director.

## Thesis Sequence

The Digital Cinema Production MFA thesis sequence consists of four courses, MDC 692, 693, 694 and 695 and may last from 12-18 months. Classes cover the producing cycle for a professional film project: development, preproduction, production, postproduction, picture lock and final postproduction in preparation for release and distribution to a film festival.

To be eligible for thesis, the MFA candidate must have successfully completed all core courses by maintaining a "B" average, and have completed the second-year Production and Residency courses with a minimum grade of "B." Candidates who do not meet these criteria can be required to successfully repeat a course based upon consultation with the Academic Program Director and policies for Graduate programs published in the National University catalog.

The thesis project consists of a short subject digital motion picture and written thesis. The finished short film should represent professional quality production values, be between 12 and 22 minutes in length, and present a dramatically compelling visual story that sustains the interest of a discriminating audience. Projects may be documentary or fiction. Although animation projects are not discouraged, to be accepted a thesis candidate must demonstrate previous mastery in that genre and the ability to bring such a project to completion under the parameters of the thesis courses. Specifications and qualification criteria for the project are developed in consultation with the thesis advisors assigned to these courses.

MFA MDC candidates must also complete a written thesis that demonstrates the candidate's ability to communicate coherently, critically, and creatively. The written thesis will be drawn from work completed during the thesis process, including the complete production documentation, an approved proposal, a locked step outline, a screenplay or documentary production treatment, and project funding, budget, scheduling and distribution plans. In addition, the thesis will present a critical analysis of the finished project, an evaluation of relevant genre influences, and a self-assessment of the thesis candidate's evolution as a filmmaker during the thesis producing cycle, including lessons learned and recommendations for future projects.

The MFA thesis process is collaborative and thesis fellows are responsible for maintaining regular communication with thesis advisors and making satisfactory progress on the project. Thesis advisors provide oral and written critiques and notes for discussion and incorporation into the creative development of the story and project plan and to help guide subsequent revisions of the film and lead to a successful qualification of the film.

A fellow must satisfactorily complete each thesis course within the specified term of the course. MDC 692 Thesis Development is four months. MDC 693 Production and MDC 694 Postproduction courses are three months each, and the MDC 695 Qualification course is two months. Incompletes may be considered based on the satisfactory progress of the thesis fellow in each of the phases of the producing cycle and University policy. Any thesis course that receives an unsatisfactory final evaluation must be repeated.

Upon satisfactory completion of thesis post-production, the thesis project enters the Thesis Qualification class to complete the final revision of the film and compile the written thesis. The MFA MDC thesis qualification review committee will provide a final review of the thesis film to determine whether the film has met or exceeded the qualification requirements for the Master of Fine Arts.

## Fees

Production and course material fees listed below cover the additional costs of the residency including workshop and production, expendables, materials, supplies and related expenses. Expenses for accommodation and transportation are not included in the fees or tuition, and students are responsible for arranging their own accommodations and transportation during the onsite residency. Additional equipment fees may apply to some onsite workshop courses.

For more information on program formats, residency workshops, onsite courses and fees, contact the Academic Program Director.

## Production and course material fees:

MDC 688 Course Fee.....	\$1,250
MDC 689 Course Fee.....	\$550

## Thesis Qualification Fee:

MDC 695 .....	\$300
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The Thesis Qualification Fee provides compensation for qualification committee member's time for final review and providing comments on thesis projects prior to qualification.

## Program Application Requirements

To be considered for admission to the Digital Cinema Production MFA program, applicants must meet the university graduate admission requirements listed in the catalog under Academic Information for Graduate Degrees and the following program criteria. Applicants must submit an application packet and pass a personal interview with the Academic Program Director. The MFA MDC program application and interview will assess the applicant's technical proficiency, experience, and skill level in digital photography and editing, relevant formal education, training, or informal experience with film production, storytelling and film history, as well as writing and communication in English at the graduate level. A portfolio, resume, certificate or other proof may be required. Program start dates may vary depending on applicant experience, skills and proficiencies.

Students interested in enrolling in this program should contact the MFA MDC Academic Program Director by e-mail for further information regarding the application process. Please use the subject line "Digital Cinema Production MFA application information." The MDC application and personal interview will determine whether or not an applicant meets

the program prerequisites. The enrollment date and class schedule will be determined by the Academic Program Director after the interview has been completed. Applicants should allow 30 days for review and scheduling of the interview.

### Program Prerequisites

To be successful students in the MFA MDC program are expected to be able to conduct independent research on films, filmmaking issues using valid and reliable sources and be able to write at the graduate level. It is recommended that students have had undergraduate courses or experience in some of the following areas: communication, film, literature, media studies, graphic design, multimedia arts, history, philosophy, psychology, or sociology. A successful applicant should have beginner to intermediate level knowledge of video editing software and be able to create new projects, capture digital video and audio assets, assemble and insert, edit, and export sequences to a variety of QuickTime formats for DVD, internet and streaming formats.

Students are also required to have the basic technical knowledge and skills needed to operate a digital camera using manual settings and be familiar with photographic principles like exposure, iris, and shutter, as well as such digital concepts as white balance, image resolution, frame rate and screen ratio. Students who do not have such experience or skills should take a basic noncredit video editing and digital photography course as preparation for the degree. Students may also be asked to submit a short digital video project for consideration.

### Technical Requirements

Students admitted to the program are expected to have reliable access to a high-speed internet connection, an email account outside of National University for course projects and assignments, access to a DVD rental service for watching films and television programs, and a headset for collaboration in live online class meetings.

Students need to own a personal computer that meets the system requirements for professional digital video editing software currently available. (Always check the manufacturer's web site for system requirements before purchasing software. Students may need to upgrade their computer or components to meet those specifications.) Access to one of the following professional level editing software is required: AVID Media Composer, Adobe Premiere Production Suite (CS6) or Final Cut Pro (version 7). These programs are used for the onsite editing and post-production. Students should plan to learn how to operate required software before taking related classes (MDC 652 and 689).

The following software is required to complete program course work: Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, internet Explorer) or comparable software capable of outputting PDF documents (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Professional), a variety of standard browser plug-ins (i.e. JavaScript, Flash, QuickTime, etc.), an FTP client software (such as Fetch, CoreFTP, FileZilla, etc.), Adobe Photoshop Elements (or equivalent photo image processing program (MDC661 and 651), Apple QuickTime Pro, Compressor or another media transcoding program compatible with the above mentioned digital video editing software package (MDC 662 and 652), project management software like GanttProject, Gorilla or Movie Magic (MDC 650, 683 and 683P), and a script writing program such as CELTX, MovieMagic or Final Draft (MDC 664, 664P and 692).

Access to the following additional equipment is required prior to taking MDC 652, 661, and 651: external FireWire (400 or 800, IEEE 1394), USB 3 or Thunderbolt hard drive for media storage, a digital still camera with manual controls, a digital video camera with manual controls capable of recording HD or HDV signals, an external microphone and stand, a tripod, a basic lighting kit, and the above mentioned nonlinear editing software.

For more information on any of the above requirements contact the Academic Program Director.

### Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this program, students will be able to:

- Critique the creative works of others using relevant critical models and professional vocabulary.
- Evaluate professional and theoretical issues and processes pertaining to movies and aspects of digital filmmaking based on recognized industry models and standards.
- Incorporate research from primary and secondary sources into sustained analyses and interpretations of screenplays, films, and television programs.
- Generate an original narrative screenplay that incorporates standard industry format, dramatic narrative elements in a coherent plot structure.
- Create an original short fiction or non-fiction narrative film with a coherent structure and compelling storyline that engages and sustains the interest of a discriminating audience.
- Generate the standard industry documentation required to effectively communicate and collaborate with a production team during the development, production, editing, and distribution of a professional motion picture.

- Generate original digital motion picture sequences using current cinematic theory and techniques to support the thematic concepts and story objectives of a script.
- Construct digital motion picture sequences using current film and sound editing techniques and theory that engage and sustain the interest of a discriminating audience.
- Implement film industry production and post-production workflow processes to capture, edit, finish, and export digital video assets to appropriate distribution media.
- Create an original short motion picture based on an original concept with a coherent storyline that is significant and complex enough to engage and sustain the interest of a discriminating audience and is suitable for distribution or submission to a film festival.

### Degree Requirements

To receive a Master of Fine Arts, students in the Digital Cinema program must complete at least 81 quarter units of graduate work, of which a minimum of 67.5 quarter units must be taken at National University. Students can transfer up to 13.5 quarter units at the graduate-level from a regionally accredited institution in the areas of communication, film, media studies, or production, provided the units have not been used to satisfy the requirements of an awarded degree. Program applicants wishing to transfer credits into the program should contact the Academic Program Director and arrange for an evaluation in advance. Refer to the section in the graduate admission requirements for additional specific information regarding application and matriculation.

### First Year

(10 courses; 38.25 quarter units)

MDC 660	Narrative Structure in Film
MDC 663	Cinematic Storytelling
MDC 664	Short Film Colloquium
MDC 664P	Short Film Practicum (2.25 quarter units) <i>Prerequisite: MDC 664</i>
MDC 652	Digital Editing <i>Corequisite: MDC 652P</i>
MDC 652P	Editing Practicum (2.25 quarter units) <i>Corequisite: MDC 652, Recommended Preparation: MUL 365 Digital editing competencies may also be achieved by taking Lynda.com or equivalent training courses in at least one non-linear editing program: Adobe Premiere, AVID Media Composer or Final Cut Pro. Contact the Academic Program Director for more information.</i>
MDC 662	Sound Design <i>Prerequisite: MDC 652</i>
MDC 661	Cinematic Design
MDC 651	Digital Cinematography <i>Corequisite: MDC 651P, Prerequisite: MDC 661</i>
MDC 651P	Cinematography Practicum (2.25 quarter units) <i>Corequisite: MDC 651</i>

### Second Year

(6 courses; 24.75 quarter units)

MDC 650	Film Producing <i>Prerequisite: MDC 651 with a minimum grade of "B" and MDC 652 with a minimum grade of "B"</i>
MDC 653	Film Directing <i>Prerequisite: MDC 651, MDC 660 and MDC 662</i>
MDC 683	Production Management <i>Prerequisite: MDC 650, MDC 651, MDC 652, MDC 662 and MDC 653, Corequisite: MDC 683P, MDC 688 and MDC 689</i>
MDC 683P	Production Practicum (2.25 quarter units) Four-week practicum only offered onsite and must be taken concurrently with MDC 688. <i>Prerequisite: MDC 683, Corequisite: MDC 688</i>
MDC 688	Production Two-week workshop is only offered onsite and must be taken concurrently with MDC 683P. <i>Corequisite: MDC 683, Prerequisite: MDC 651 and MDC 653</i>
MDC 689	Digital Cinema Post-Production Two-week workshop is only offered onsite and recommended to be taken after MDC 688 and concurrently with MDC 683P. <i>Corequisite: MDC 683, Prerequisite: MDC 650 and MDC 652</i>

The production sequence courses MDC 653 through MDC 688 must be taken in sequence. MDC 683P and MDC 688 and MDC 689 are only offered in an onsite residency at the National University Los Angeles Learning Center. This production residency is only offered in July of each academic year.

MDC 650 and MDC 688 may be taken separately by splitting the production residency into two visits. However, the time to degree may be extended by up to 12 months. Contact the Academic Program Director for more information.

### **Program Electives**

(2 courses; 6.75 quarter units)

Students doing a short documentary film for their thesis must select MDC 670 and MDC 670P documentary courses as electives prior to starting the MDC MFA thesis sequence. Otherwise students may take MDC 664P Short Film Practicum for a second time and one other 4.5 unit course. Contact the Academic Program Director to discuss scheduling options.

MDC 670 Producing Documentaries  
*Prerequisite: MDC 650 and MDC 683*

**AND**

MDC 670P Documentary Practicum (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: MDC 670, MDC 651P and MDC 688*

**OR**

MDC 664P Short Film Practicum (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: MDC 664*

**AND**

COM 610 Integrated Marketing Comm

**OR**

SCR 671 Character and Dialog

**OR**

SCR 650 Script Reading and Coverage

**OR**

SCR 680 Screenwriting I  
*Prerequisite: SCR 679*

**AND**

SCR 680P Screenwriting I Practicum (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: SCR 680*

### **Thesis Sequence**

(4 courses; 11.25 quarter units)

MDC 692 Thesis Development  
*Prerequisite: Satisfactory completion of all MDC core requirements.*

MDC 693 Thesis Production (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: MDC 692*

MDC 694 Thesis Postproduction (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: MDC 693*

MDC 695 Thesis Qualification (2.25 quarter units)  
*Prerequisite: MDC 694*