RANCHO CUCAMONGA: Chaffey cinema program focuses on film careers

Chaffey College students learn to use cameras, edit film and other skills in broadcasting class

BY STEPHEN WALL / CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What: Chaffey College broadcasting and cinema program

Description: Students are prepared for careers in motion picture production, on-air radio production, post-production editing, screenwriting, and TV and video production.

Enrollment: About 100

Chaffey College’s broadcasting and cinema program hadn’t entered the digital age when Daniel Jacobo took over the department in 2002.

Students at the Rancho Cucamonga campus were still using analog cameras and reel-to-reel tape recorders. They worked on outdated computers that had limited editing capacity. The curriculum didn’t prepare them for entry-level jobs in the TV, radio and film industry, he said.

“The program was probably at least 15 years behind in the technology department as far as cameras and computers,” Jacobo said. “We were using a horse and buggy when the industry was using automobiles.”
The year Jacobo arrived, voters in the Chaffey Community College District passed a $230 million facilities bond that helped the department turn a corner.

Some of the money paid for a Center for the Arts that houses several programs, including broadcasting and cinema.

Jacobo purchased motion picture and digital cameras to allow aspiring filmmakers to shoot like pros. He also bought computers featuring 30-inch monitors and the latest editing software.

“If you go into Hollywood right now, they’re using the same thing we’re using right here,” Jacobo said. “We’re not five or 10 years behind.”

About 100 students are currently pursuing an associate in science degree in broadcasting and cinema, he said.

Lizbeth Rodriguez, a 22-year-old Fontana resident, graduated from Chaffey last year and now studies at USC film school. She said Chaffey’s equipment and technology “very much matches up to what USC provides.”

She added that Chaffey provided a strong theoretical foundation and hands-on training to help her advance in what she hopes will become a successful career as a film director.

“There’s no limitations on what you can do,” Rodriguez said. “There’s open doors at every turn. You just have to be willing to find them.”

Jacobo, a broadcasting and cinema professor who graduated from UCLA film school, introduced a new motion picture production course in the semester that began Jan. 12.

Students in the class learn framing, lighting, composition and other movie-making techniques perfected by Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and other legendary directors.

“The millennials today are savvy on electronics,” Jacobo said. “They know everything about technology and digital devices, but they don’t know how stories are told … Students need to know that history did not begin five years ago.”

During a recent class, first-year students practiced mounting 8-millimeter motion picture cameras on tripods. They later went to the computer lab and looked at a diagram of camera parts and how they’re used.

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Dolores Jenerson-Madden, broadcast and cinema specialist, helped the students set up the equipment and understand the terminology.

Calon Higgins, 18, said he’s been interested in film since he was a kid. His aunt and uncle work at The Walt Disney Studios as concept artists and storyboard writers, he said.

“I’ve always loved everything about movies,” said Higgins, an Ontario resident. “I look at things from a behind-the-scenes perspective.”

Higgins said he’s taking beginning acting classes in addition to studying broadcasting and cinema.
“The cameraman’s job is to make the actors look good,” he said. “If the cameraman does a poor job, then everyone else suffers.”

April Mendoza, 21, said she completed the broadcasting and cinema program last semester and hopes to get into film school.

“With all the equipment and everything we have access to, we can create something beyond other people’s expectations for a community college,” said Mendoza, who lives in Rancho Cucamonga. “If we really want to make a masterpiece, we can.”

Realizing the importance of staying on the cutting edge, Jacobo said he plans to apply next year for federal dollars to purchase ultra-high-definition cameras that produce images that “look exactly like motion pictures.”

But he said it’s not enough to have top-of-the-line technology.

“Everybody is using the same equipment now,” Jacobo said. “I like to tell students that the trick is setting yourself apart. How are you original, unique, innovative and distinct?”

He said college graduates entering the profession need to be able to produce, write and edit – a job title known in the entertainment industry as a “preditor.”

“You have to be versatile,” he said. “The days of just knowing one thing are over.”

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