

## Student Spotlight

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### **North Carolina School of the Arts (NCSA) - location: Winston-Salem, N.C.** **"Professor David Elkins makes camera assisting easy and fun to learn"** **By Derek Horne**

Long before David Elkins joined the faculty at North Carolina School of the Arts, his practical advice was already motivating students through his "Camera Assistant's Manual" which was being used in their classes. Published by Focal Press and currently in its fourth edition including Spanish and Japanese translations, the book is used all over the world by beginning and working camera assistants. At NCSA he uses the book in his third year cinematography class where the students appreciate how he makes the material fun and easy to learn. "I try to keep things simple, using everyday language that the students will understand," says Elkins. "Because filmmaking and especially cinematography can be very technical it can be overwhelming to a beginning film student who doesn't know all the language and terminology."

Elkins teaches the Fundamentals of Production and Cinematography, which is a first year class at NCSA. "It covers the basics of equipment use, basics of cinematography, set protocol and safety on set," he says. "Once the students get into the cinematography discipline, I also teach The Professional Camera Department and Arriflex 16SR3 Training. This class covers the job responsibilities of the 1st and 2nd camera assistant on a film crew as well as complete instruction on the setup and use of the Arriflex 16SR3 camera."

Teaching comes naturally for Elkins who enjoys sharing his expertise. "Helping to train a young filmmaker to achieve his or her goal is very rewarding," he says. "I have received many emails and letters from graduates thanking me for helping them get started in their career."

Elkins says that the contacts you make in film school will carry over to your professional career. "Starting with your instructors and going on to your fellow classmates, these contacts will often help you get your first job and perhaps lead to a professional relationship that goes on for many years."



David working on the *Wonder Years* TV show

"I know that many of my jobs as a camera assistant came about because of a few people



NCSA's film school studio village main street

that I knew in film school," he adds. "I still keep in touch with a few of them after being out of school for over 20 years."

Elkins studied cinematography at Columbia College in Hollywood and his first job in the industry was as 2nd Unit 2nd AC on a low budget film that was crewed by many of his classmates. All of his work since has been as a 1st AC and Camera Operator.

His most fulfilling experience was working as 1st AC on the television series *The Wonder Years*. "It was a great job and I loved going to work every day," he says. "I started on the show as a day player, then worked the entire 1989-90 season and continued to be a day player after that."

Elkins continues to work on outside projects as a 1st AC or Camera Operator. This is common among the NCSA faculty who are

working professionals and that is one of the many strengths of the school. In addition to these industry connections, Elkins points out the excellent facilities for shooting which includes 3 stages, editing suites, a Foley/ADR stage, production vehicles and professional equipment.

NCSA has one of the largest film archives in North America and 3 state-of-the-art theaters to show the films. In addition to this, they also bring in guest artists that show their work on film and discuss the advantages of it. "This past year we had cinematographer Robert Elswit who showed *Good Night and Good Luck* and discussed the process of shooting on black and white," he says. "He was one of the best guests we have had in cinematography."

To keep the students interested in shooting on film, all of the third and fourth year projects are shot on 16mm film completely funded by the school. Elkins thinks it is important for film students to learn to shoot on film stock because "film will be around for a long time and it gives a completely different look than video or digital imaging."

"With the advances in film stocks in recent years I don't think that film is going away anytime soon," says Elkins who has done all his previous work on film. "I hope that producers will continue to use film for their projects because of the look it gives and not simply base production decisions on the cost and the bottom line. It's all about putting

beautiful images on the screen and nothing does it better than film." Elkins mentions some of the improvements in film stocks are "the image quality and lack of noticeable grain (which) is especially important."

To find more information on David Elkins' book see his website at [www.cameraassistantmanual.com](http://www.cameraassistantmanual.com) and [www.davidelkins.com](http://www.davidelkins.com)



David teaching a Panavision camera workshop

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