

## **New digital film school opens in S.F.**

Steven E.F. Brown  
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Classes begin April 25 at the *San Francisco School of Digital Filmmaking*, where about 12 students will start an 18-week introduction to the subject.

The for-profit school, at 2565 Third St., was founded by Stephen Kopels and Jeremiah Birnbaum, filmmakers and former teachers at Emeryville's *Ex'pression College for Digital Arts*.

Tuition for the 18-week basic course is \$8,450, and \$8,950 for a 20-week advanced course that follows it. During the full 38-week certificate program, students will make five of their own films, said Kopels, the school's director for education. He also said the school will produce "one or two feature films a year" so the students can work on them, gaining a vital credit that gives them an entrée into professional film when they graduate.

"We're talking about two excellent people," said Peter Laanen, CEO of Ex'pression. "There's no hard feelings here. We wish them all the best."

Corinne Cox, a spokeswoman for the school, said it aims to attract two main groups: "Students coming out of high school who really know what they want to do, and career changers, people that have decided there is a passion in their lives they want to pursue without quitting their job and committing to a \$34,000 program."

The 18-week basic program can be taken during the day or at night, so that students can keep their job and test their interest, said Cox, while the advanced course, which starts in May, will be held only during the day. Some students will be able to test out of the introductory program, she said, and will begin the 20-week course May 16.

Cox said that students will spend "about \$500 on expenses like a good light meter" in addition to their tuition.

Kopels said he and Birnbaum started the school because there is a demand for film training. "We realized that there are so many people out there who have a story to tell. We saw this tremendous interest. Folks were attempting to tell their story but were frustrated by the craft of it," he said.

Cheap equipment has brought the mechanics of filmmaking within reach of anyone, said Kopels, but people still need to learn how to do it. "Somebody buys a camera for \$400 and says they're a photographer. Owning the equipment is empowering, but you still don't understand the craft of filmmaking."

Kopels said the school plans to grow, but not larger than 120 to 130 students, a number he hopes to reach in about three or four years. Right now, the school has room for about 30 to 40 students, he said, but will be able to buy adjacent space and expand as needed.

*Academy of Art University*, which has about 6,800 full-time students, said 1,200 of those are studying in its motion picture, television and acting department. Tuition at Academy of Art is \$13,200 a year.

Laanen said Ex'pression will start its own digital cinematography program next year, a bachelor's degree for a total tuition of \$59,450. He said he expects it to become the school's most popular degree program, especially with filmmakers like George Lucas working digitally.

Ex'pression has 600 students enrolled in its 85,000-square-foot school in Emeryville, Laanen said.

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