Digital media production program growing quickly

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Quartered in a house on the edge of the Tulane University uptown campus, digital media production is a program not likely to be mistaken for a large film operation, and most students may not know that it even exists. But that's likely to change, says program director Mary Blue.

The digital media coordinate major at Tulane offers classes in film studies, art, communication, English, music, and theater and dance. Students from different disciplines collaborate to produce original narrative short films. (Illustration by Tracey Bellina)

"We're growing quickly," says Blue, a professor of practice in the Communication Department. She notes that since 2009, the major has grown from four students to 30, with more intending to declare it as their major.

Digital media production is a coordinate major offering classes in film studies, art, communication, English, music, and theater and dance, with the idea that students from the different disciplines will collaborate to produce original narrative short films. Students in the senior capstone class are required to screen their films at the end of the year.

Two of last year's projects were accepted into the New Orleans Film Festival, a fact that shows the program is not only getting larger, says Blue, but also getting better.

She says the continued growth of "Hollywood South," the New Orleansâ?"based film industry, is an important attraction that is drawing a different kind of student to the program.

"We're getting students that didn't just discover this major," Blue says. "They're coming here with the intent to major in this; they're excited about it from the start."

There's a need for people trained in film production and post production, says Blue, and training students to become part of the local film industry will help to develop that industry as a permanent part of the New Orleans economy.

Blue began teaching the capstone courses in 2009 with a single camera and editing software running on the one computer in her office. A grant she received in 2010 allowed the program to move to its own facility and to purchase more cameras and five professional editing stations for students. And she looks to further expand those capabilities, thanks to an anonymous donation of $200,000, which she says will help keep up with the increasing demand.

"If we're going to be a serious narrative filmmaking program, there are some things that you need to do," Blue says. "So we could always continue to upgrade."