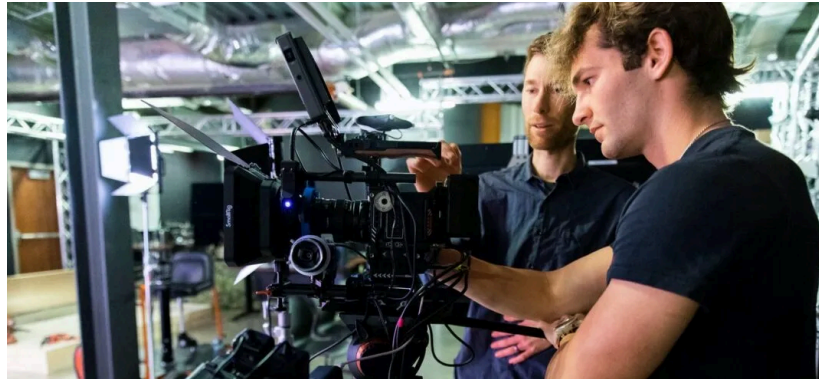


New technologies bringing Baton Rouge filmmaking into the future

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LSU's Virtual Production Stage is up and running for the summer semester. (Ariana Allison)

As *National Treasure*, one of the biggest film productions to come to Baton Rouge since the pandemic, nears the end of its first season's production in June, the future of filmmaking in Baton Rouge is bright.

The Disney reboot is only a signal fire for the innovations coming out of the capital city's film industry, with the next generation of filmmakers being taught on state-of-the-art technology at LSU.

Thanks to a five-year \$1.25 million grant from Louisiana Economic Development's entertainment division awarded in 2021, LSU's digital media center was outfitted with a virtual production stage, utilizing the same technology from Michigan-based Fuse Technology Group that brought *The Mandalorian* to the small screen.

A curved wall of LED screens capable of producing three-dimensional environments, in conjunction with video game design software from Epic Games and motion capture programs, was installed at LSU in February 2022. And by the first week of the summer semester, the first class completely utilizing the technology was underway.

By the second day, professors Derick Ostrenko and Marc Aubanel were already allowing students to take on roles within their film crew, including camera operator, motion capture supervisor and video engineer. The technology is run like a professional film set, with multiple disciplines coming together to work with the technology of the future.

"One of the coolest things is that we are able to get students from the school of theater, screen arts, science, digital media, engineering, music. There are just a lot of areas we are able to bring together that do a really good job at a particular skill set," says Ostrenko, a professor at the College of Art & Design. "We're showing the students what's possible and how to bridge all these technologies together and letting them make their own projects."

Just a 15-minute drive from the groundbreaking innovation on LSU's campus is Celtic Studios, the central hub for almost all filmmaking in the city, bringing together the various talents necessary to sustain the industry. And with help from organizations housed there, like the Baton Rouge branch of the New Orleans Video Access Center, the studio helps connect those individuals to opportunities.

On the set of *National Treasure*, carpenters and painters transform soundstages into lost temples, while electricians maintain the electronics on screens similar to those used at LSU but on a smaller scale. The goal of a place like Celtic, studio executive director Aaron Bayham explains, is to open up the industry to every kind of person—actor or carpenter, creative or technical.

"A lot of people don't realize there are a lot of different types of opportunities to work in film," Bayham says. "Any interest that you have can apply to the film industry. People think of actors or directors, but there's a lot of things that happen behind the scenes, whether it's construction or wardrobe or makeup or visual effects. We should be training our young people with those skills and opportunities to get on-set experience."

One of the thriving parts of the industry in Baton Rouge and on Celtic's lot is Crafty Apes, the largest cinematic visual effects company in Louisiana.

Launched in January 2020 as part of a larger network with seven offices across two countries, the group is involved from script to screen on most all projects it provides effects for, head of studio Sam Claitor explains. As soon as a production gets off the ground, Crafty Apes is there, working with the filmmakers.

"I always say working in visual effects means we work in tech," Claitor says. "The technology is always evolving, so a big part of our job is staying ahead of the curve."

Their work has kept them busy, with local productions like *Where the Crawdads Sing* and *Home Team* booking them well into next year. And in fact, Crafty Apes helped LSU install and develop its virtual production stage earlier this year.

Between the virtual production innovations at LSU and the work being done by Crafty Apes at Celtic, the future of Baton Rouge's film industry is operating on a digital frontier, bound with possibilities.

"It's like the Wild West right now," Ostrenko says. "The future is this merger of the virtual and the physical and what you can do between that."

This is the second part of a two part story from [225 magazine](#) diving into the future of the Baton Rouge film industry. For a more general overview of the current state of Baton Rouge's film industry, [click here](#).

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