

# Canon brings ‘Star Wars’ cinematographer to inspire Poitier Film School students

**David Klein held master classes at the ASU MIX Center's state-of-the-art Volume LED wall stage**

By Barbara VanDenburgh, ASU News  
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David Klein never had a mentor.

He was scrappy — and lucky — enough to succeed without one as a career cinematographer.

His first feature film was the no-frills, DIY darling of ‘90s indie cinema, “Clerks,” which was shot on black-and-white 16mm film. It paved the unexpected path to Emmy-nominated work in prestige TV, including “Homeland,” and ultimately technologically innovative work on the Disney+ shows “The Mandalorian,” “The Book of Boba Fett” and most recently, “Star Wars: Skeleton Crew.”

Now, Klein is stepping up to be the mentor he never had. Earlier this month, Klein spent three days with students of Arizona State University's Sidney Poitier New American Film School at the Media and Immersive eXperience (MIX) Center in downtown Mesa in a visit sponsored by Canon U.S.A.

Klein's visit included a screening of two episodes of his latest series, “Star Wars: Skeleton Crew,” which used LED video wall volume technology to create otherworldly virtual production backgrounds and bring to life the fantastical alien civilizations key to Star Wars' magic.

The MIX Center has its own state-of-the-art volume LED wall stage, where Klein later gave Poitier Film School students multiple master classes on the cinematography techniques utilized in virtual production. He also dropped in on capstone classes, where the Hollywood veteran was able to give professional feedback on student work in real time.

“I think film schools like this and programs like this are absolutely beneficial to pre-career filmmakers,” Klein said. “Having access to working professionals... it's invaluable.”

Poitier Film School students were inspired by Klein's visit, and were especially energized by the possibilities afforded by the kind of virtual production cinematography Klein has been working with for the past seven years.

"This workshop was incredibly valuable in showing the possibilities of technology in film production," said Tatum Aguilar, a Poitier Film School student majoring in film and media production with a concentration in cinematography. "I never knew about this kind of cinematography before and now I can't wait to know more."

"It was super interesting learning how depth of field can be changed within the volume wall," said Matt Pearson, another film and media production major. "It's all a big magic trick."

Klein is part of Canon's educational program, and ASU was the third university he has visited to share his experience.

Canon launched its Explorers of Light program in 1994; one of the core missions of the program is education. Canon sponsors elite photographers to visit schools, speak to photo clubs and present at camera trade shows all over the world in an effort to share their expertise with the next generation of content creators. The Canon EDU program brings Explorers of Lights in both still photography and cinematography to universities across the country for multiday educational experiences with workshops and classroom takeovers.

"This program is a celebration of education. I've been honored to be a part of it," Klein said. "I never had a mentor when I was young, and so that's why I'm here, that's why I do these. I like to give back and share some of the knowledge and experience I've gained over the past 33 years."

Associate Professor Philip Klucsarits, who teaches cinematography and helped to orchestrate Klein's visit to The Poitier Film School, called the event transformative for the school community.

"Sharing his mastery of lighting and use of advanced technologies like virtual production in numerous professional master classes gave students an insider's look at cinematography at the highest level," Klucsarits said. "Thanks to Canon's support, our students were able to engage directly with a leading visual artist whose workshops and screenings expanded their understanding of both the craft and career of filmmaking. The impact on our cinematography program was immediate and profound, with David inspiring these young filmmakers to push creative boundaries in their own storytelling with new skills and confidence."

"Star Wars: Skeleton Crew" was a hit for Disney+, scoring 17 Children's and Family Emmy nominations. Klein and the production team found creative inspiration from Amblin films, pioneered by filmmakers like Steven Spielberg and Robert Zemeckis in the 1980s, calling the series "Goonies in Space."

While volume technology was instrumental in achieving the distinctive look and feel, working with innovative technology also requires human curiosity, creativity and an eagerness to learn.

Klein's advice to young filmmakers in the audience?

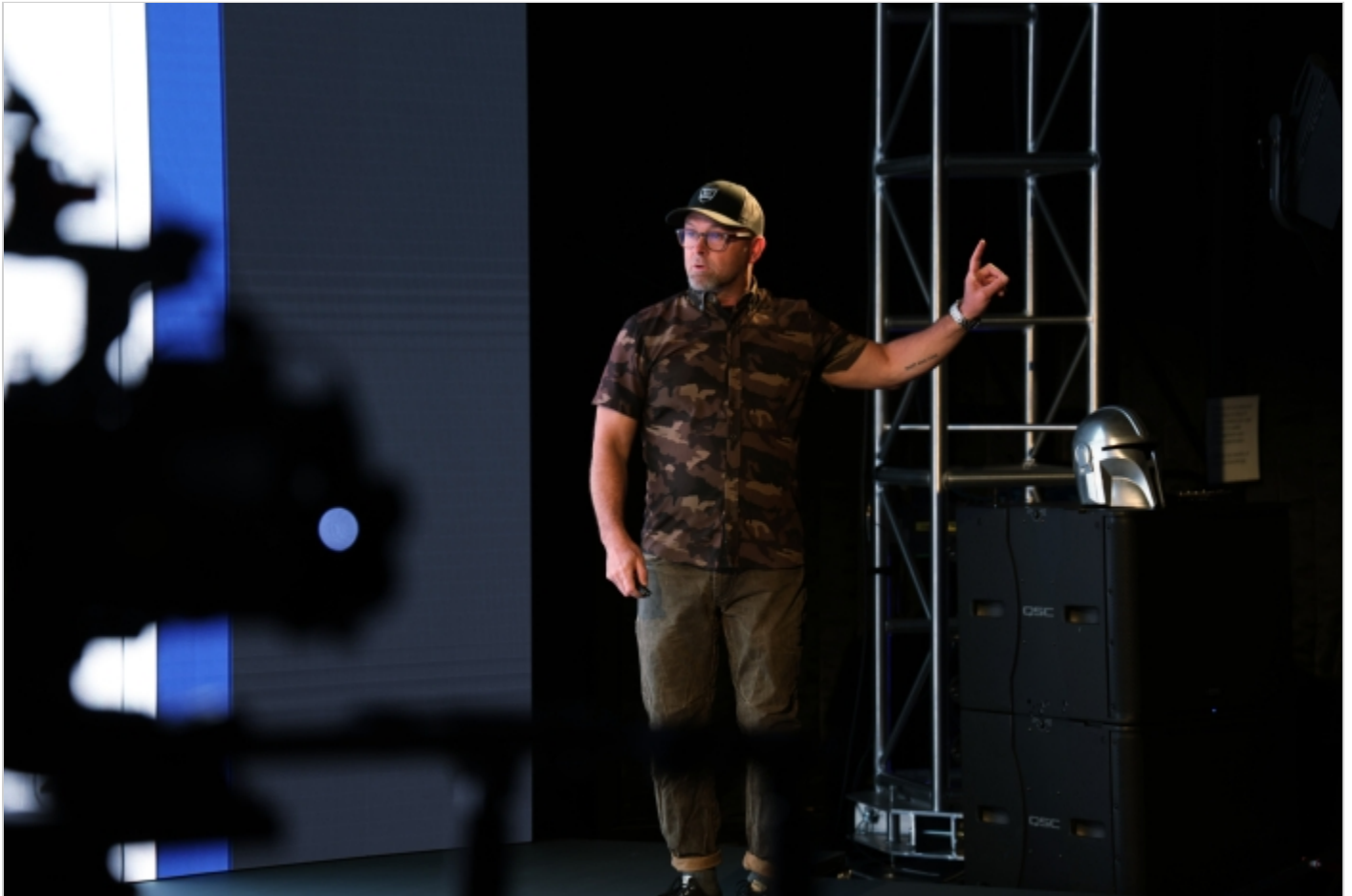
"There are no stupid questions. Even if you think the question is going to get you laughed out of the room, ask it," he said. "After 25 years of doing this, I realized that, especially in that environment with new technology, there aren't any stupid questions because a lot of these

questions simply haven't been asked."

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Cinematographer David Klein conducts a master class for Poitier Film School students at the Media and Immersive eXperience (MIX) Center in downtown Mesa. Photo courtesy of The Sidney Poitier New American Film School

## Text image(s)



Cinematographer and Poitier Film School Associate Professor Philip Klucsarits (left) in conversation with David Klein after a screening of two episodes of Klein's latest Disney+ series, "Star Wars: Skeleton Crew." Photo courtesy of The Sidney Poitier New American Film School