

Lights, camera, Sun Devils: ASU a part of Hollywood's past, future

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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As any Arizona State University film student can tell you, the bounty of opportunities provided to filmmakers on campus is humbling.

From the cutting-edge [virtual production Volume studio](#) at the world-class [Media and Immersive eXperience \(MIX\) Center](#) to a bevy of faculty experts with firsthand industry experience, ASU is a prime locale to get rolling.

Over the years, plenty of Hollywood's hitmakers have thought so too. With its distinctive architecture and vibrant campus, ASU has welcomed numerous film crews, serving as the setting for laugh-out-loud comedies, gripping dramas, thought-provoking documentaries and pulse-pounding action films.

ASU not only has a rich history of movies having been filmed here, but is now producing the professionals who will take the film industry into the future.

"Our connection to the film industry isn't just part of ASU's history, it's part of our future," said [Calvin Jude Stanley](#), video systems technical director at the MIX Center. "Today, we're expanding opportunities by embracing emerging media, new technologies, innovative forms of storytelling and stronger collaborations with industry leaders, giving students hands-on access to Hollywood's newest tools, like virtual production."

The Volume at the MIX Center is a virtual-production LED stage that provides professional-grade, real-time camera tracking and immersive digital backgrounds.

"(Students) don't just learn how to use (it)," Stanley said. "They learn what it takes to plan, collaborate and shoot in a professional environment, preparing them to be the storytellers, creators and innovators who will define the next era of filmmaking."

In addition, ASU's [film and media production degree](#), offered through The Sidney Poitier New American Film School, is offered in both Arizona and Los Angeles — so students can study right in Hollywood's backyard.

With this year's summer blockbuster season in full swing, we're taking a look back at some of the more memorable film productions that have rolled cameras at ASU.

Consider it Sparky's own version of a two-thumbs-up review — or perhaps more fittingly, two forks up.

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—

Calvin Jude Stanley

Video systems technical director, MIX Center

ASU in the spotlight:

[“The Nutty Professor”](#) (1963)

Jerry Lewis wore nearly every hat, serving as producer, writer, director and star of the classic comedy about a mild-mannered college professor who transforms into a brash, egotistical ladies' man.

Seeking an authentic campus setting for the film's classroom and laboratory scenes, Lewis brought his 80-person production crew to Arizona State University. Jerry Lewis Productions and Paramount Studios filmed at the Tempe campus over three days in November of 1962, using Discovery Hall and the Matthews Center library as key locations.

The production also gave about 150 ASU students a chance to appear on screen as extras, paying each of them \$10 a day. In between setups, Lewis played catch with production members and interacted with students.

[“A Star is Born”](#) (1976)

ASU became a Hollywood back lot in the spring of 1976 when the remake of “A Star Is Born,” featuring Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson, filmed several of its most memorable concert scenes on campus.

On March 20 of that year, the production transformed Mountain America Stadium (then known as Sun Devil Stadium) into the setting for a massive, six-hour rock concert. About 43,000 fans paid \$3.50 each to see performances by Santana, Peter Frampton, Montrose, L.A. Jets and Graham Central Station while also serving as extras for the film. Streisand also took the stage for a 30-minute pre-recorded performance that was filmed live and became the emotional climax of the movie.

The production also used ASU Gammage to film scenes for another Streisand performance of “With One More Look at You.” The film's soundtrack album spent six weeks at No. 1 on the

Billboard 200, sold millions of copies and produced one of Streisand's most enduring hits, "Evergreen."

"Used Cars" (1980)

On paper, this satirical black comedy looked like a can't-miss winner. It paired Kurt Russell with Jack Warden, put director Robert Zemeckis behind the camera years before "Back to the Future" and had Steven Spielberg and John Milius ("Red Dawn") helping steer the ship as executive producers.

Despite an \$8 million budget and plenty of Hollywood firepower, the Columbia Pictures production underperformed at the box office. Fortunately, VHS came to the rescue. As home video exploded in popularity during the early 1980s, audiences finally discovered the movie, turning it from a theatrical misfire into a bona fide cult classic.

Filmed primarily in Mesa, Scottsdale and Tempe between November 1979 and January 1980, the movie doubles as a time capsule of the Valley. One memorable sequence takes place inside and outside ASU's Mountain America Stadium, where two rogue TV pirates interrupt a football broadcast with a homemade commercial touting a lot of used cars for sale.

The production also recruited plenty of local residents as extras, paying them \$25 a day. Many later said making the movie was every bit as fun and chaotic as watching it.

"Let's Spend the Night Together" (1983)

Directed by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Hal Ashby ("Shampoo," "Harold and Maude"), this exhilarating concert documentary captures The Rolling Stones at the peak of their legendary 1981 tour.

Filmed on November 5–6, 1981, at the Brendan Byrne Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey, and on December 13, 1981, at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe, the film showcases one of rock's most celebrated live acts at full throttle.

The tour became the highest-grossing concert tour in history at the time, generating approximately \$50 million and attracting nearly 3 million fans.

"Campus Man" (1987)

Made on a modest \$5 million budget in the fall of 1986, this Paramount comedy gives ASU almost as much screen time as its stars.

From the Mona Plummer Aquatic Center to the then-brand-new University Towers, the campus pops up scene after scene, making the movie feel like an extended ASU tour with punchlines.

The story was inspired by the real-life Sun Devil adventures of 1982 ASU alumnus Todd Headlee, who also produced the film. The cast included Steven Lyon, Kim Delaney, Morgan Fairchild and Miles O'Keeffe, while 20 ASU students landed roles as male calendar models, and many more filled out the scenes as extras.

"Raising Arizona" (1987)

When Joel and Ethan Coen rolled into the Valley in February 1986 to make their second feature film, they had a tiny \$2.5 million budget but a big imagination. Filming took place throughout Tempe, Phoenix, Scottsdale and Carefree.

Before the cameras started rolling, however, the production pulled off a little comedy of its own. To secure approval, the film was presented to the Tempe City Council as “wholesome family entertainment.” That description was technically open to interpretation, considering the movie revolves around a career criminal, a kidnapped baby, prison breaks, bank robberies and a motorcycle-riding bounty hunter. The gamble paid off, and the Coen brothers created one of the most beloved cult comedies of all time, starring Nicolas Cage, Holly Hunter, John Goodman and Frances McDormand.

The Valley appears throughout the film, with Mountain America Stadium making a cameo appearance during the final dream sequence.

“U2: Rattle and Hum” (1988)

Riding the massive success of their landmark album “The Joshua Tree,” U2 wisely captured the band’s breakthrough tour in this electrifying black-and-white concert documentary.

Filmed at Mountain America Stadium over two nights in December 1987, the production made the inspired decision to sell tickets for just \$5, helping pack the venue with an enthusiastic crowd (mostly ASU students on a budget) of 60,000 cheering fans and creating an unforgettable atmosphere that perfectly matched the Dublin quartet’s soaring performance.

Legendary blues artist B.B. King opened for the band on both nights.

“Not Quite Human: Part 2” (1989)

Disney Channel turned ASU into the ultimate college campus in this family-friendly science fiction comedy starring Alan Thicke, Jay Underwood and Robyn Lively. The made-for-television movie follows Chip, an android designed to look and act like an ordinary teenager, as he enrolls at ASU and tries to navigate the confusing world of college life.

With ASU serving as the primary backdrop (other filming locations included Tempe High School, Scottsdale and Phoenix), the campus plays almost as big a role as the lovable robot himself.

“Jerry Maguire” (1996)

Few movies have contributed more to everyday conversation than this TriStar Pictures hit that made “Show me the money!” a catchphrase heard in offices, living rooms and sports bars across America. The film’s thrilling finale returned Hollywood to Mountain America Stadium, which doubled as the site of a fictional showdown between the Arizona Cardinals and the Dallas Cowboys.

Tom Cruise stars as a desperate sports agent whose career hangs on the success of Cardinals wide receiver Rod Tidwell, played with unforgettable energy by Cuba Gooding Jr. The stellar cast also includes Renée Zellweger, Jay Mohr and Eagles co-founder Glenn Frey, while former Rolling Stone contributor Cameron Crowe wrote and directed the film.

“Jerry Maguire” earned nearly \$275 million worldwide and received multiple Academy Award nominations. Gooding won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

“The Kingdom” (2007)

Fresh off his Academy Award-winning performance as Ray Charles in “Ray,” Jamie Foxx headed to Arizona to star in “The Kingdom,” a \$70 million action thriller about a team of U.S. counterterrorism agents investigating a deadly terrorist attack in the Middle East.

To bring the story to life, Universal Pictures and director Peter Berg transformed ASU’s Polytechnic campus into a convincing overseas setting, constructing an entire dormitory complex that became the backdrop for one of the film’s largest and most explosive action sequences. The production also hired about 200 locals for small speaking roles and as extras, giving plenty of Arizonans a chance to share the screen with Hollywood talent.

Foxx was joined by an impressive cast that included Jennifer Garner, Chris Cooper, Jason Bateman, Jeremy Piven and Danny Huston.

“Car Dogs” (2016)

Directed by ASU Professor of Practice [Adam Collis](#) and written by former ASU student Mark King, the independent comedy-drama follows a car dealership sales manager who must sell 35 cars in a single month to earn his own dealership, forcing him to choose between success, loyalty and doing the right thing. Starring Patrick J. Adams, George Lopez, Nia Vardalos and Oscar winner Octavia Spencer in a special appearance.

No actual scenes were shot at the university, but behind the camera, the project became an unprecedented hands-on classroom, with 85 ASU students serving as interns alongside veteran Hollywood professionals. More than just a feature film, “[Car Dogs](#)” proved that ASU could do more than teach filmmaking. It could make movies while preparing the next generation of filmmakers.

“Postmarked” (2016)

Directed by former ASU Professor [Gene Ganssle](#), this indie comedy-crime adventure was shot on a tiny budget of \$250,000.

The movie was [shot extensively](#) on ASU’s Tempe campus, with additional scenes filmed at nearby studios. It gave more than 30 students and eight alumni the opportunity to work on professional feature film, gaining hands-on experience alongside an experienced crew.

Written by Valley actor and writer Ron Hunting, who lived with ALS, “Postmarked” follows a group of U.S. postal workers who unexpectedly find themselves at the center of a crime, forcing them to become unlikely heroes.

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

Main image



Classroom scenes for the 1963 production of "The Nutty Professor" with Jerry Lewis were filmed at Arizona State University's Tempe campus. ASU has welcomed numerous film crews over the years and continues to be a driving force in the future of movie-making today.

Text image(s)



Calvin Jude Stanley



A scene with Jerry Lewis (center) in "The Nutty Professor" (1963) filmed in front of Matthews Center on ASU's Tempe campus. IMDB image



The facade of ASU's Matthews Center building, pictured in 2020. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU



ASU's football stadium was transformed into a massive concert venue for Barbra Streisand's performance in "A Star is Born" in 1976. IMDB photo



Fans fill Mountain America Stadium during an ASU game vs. Texas Tech in October 2025. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University



"CAMPUS MAN"



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CAMP - 5 (Top) Todd (John Dye, right) comes, Moby (Nathaniel Whitson) RKO using the college newspaper's facilities and staff to assemble and print his calendar in "CAMPUS MAN" a Paramount Pictures Presentation of an RKO Picture.

(Bottom) Brett (Steve Lyon) and Dana (Kari Delaney) become romantically involved in "CAMPUS MAN" a Paramount Pictures Presentation of an RKO Picture.



Scenes from "Campus Man" shot at an ASU residence hall and the aquatic center in 1986. IMDB image



A view of the Mona Plummer Aquatic Complex on the Tempe campus in spring 2020. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU



Parts of "The Kingdom" were filmed on ASU's Polytechnic campus in Mesa, Arizona. IMDB photo



Part of ASU's Polytechnic campus in East Mesa, looking northwest, captured in 2025. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University



ASU student Katie Ramsey laughs with another student while waiting to shoot on the set of "Postmarked" on Tempe campus in 2015. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU