

# Lou Grasso: In Our MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

**M**aheer Hall, a building named in honor of one of Mercy College's founding sisters, Sister Mary Gratia Maher, sits elegantly on the Irvington, New York side of Mercy's Dobbs Ferry Campus. It is one of several private residences purchased by the Sisters of Mercy as

controllers, TV monitors, curtain backdrops and racks to hold the equipment. I was so happy. This was right up my alley, and I knew I could do it." Re-located to Mercy's Victory Hall in 2013, today, the TV and radio studios are constantly buzzing with Media Studies students, engaged in the hands-on learning of directing, producing, editing and performing

York Institute of Technology, with master's degrees in Media Production and Fine Art and Technology. Grasso is part professor, part equipment outfitter and part proud papa. "I enjoy working with students. Touching their lives, watching them go into TV production. I was a first-generation college student, so I've always understood their financial burdens and their struggles in the classroom. With too many professors it was 'My way or the highway.' Instead, I would work with them," he says. "I wanted to make a difference in their lives for the better. That's the point. I was able to figure out how they could participate and be a part of the program in ways they never thought possible. And many of them went on to earn livings in this business."

Countless testimonials from graduates attest to this. From Juliana Tretin '20:



Professor Grasso explains shot composition to a student operating a camera in Fundamentals of TV Production.

the College grew. On a cold Saturday afternoon in 1997, a tractor-trailer pulled up to Maher improbably hauling all the ingredients for a homemade television studio. Mercy Assistant Professor of Media Studies and Program Director Louis Grasso and a colleague unloaded the equipment and Grasso proceeded to build it. From the ground up.

"I built the TV and radio facilities in there," Grasso says. "We had three studio cameras, lighting, editing

in the College's much-upgraded facilities. The program now includes TV, radio, journalism and film studies.

"The first semester my students get to start working with equipment. There are eight levels of television production, four levels of radio production, studio courses, field courses, documentary, two levels of editing."

And watching over the program protectively is its founding father, Grasso, a triple alumnus of the New

"I'm reaching out simply to say thank you. I am currently working as a Set PA for a major MARVEL film! I have worked on a few other feature films as well!... Everything you have taught me throughout my four years at Mercy has stuck with me and allowed me to succeed in this industry in so many ways possible!"



Blowing off steam after a three-hour field production class, MEDA 321. Television Field Production, fall 2015

Each year the program hosts the “Quill Awards” recognizing students for excellence in coursework, an outstanding alumnus/alumna and a professional in the field of journalism, film, advertising, radio or TV production. Graduates who’ve been honored include: Thomas Fehn III ’12, who creates commercials for WCBS and for the Yankees Radio Network; Shannon Freeman ’14, an honoree at this year’s Mercy Alumni of Distinction Awards, who works as a director at CBS News and mentors young women of color interested in media; and Bradley Harring ’08, president of After Hours Media, specializing in motion graphics and video production.

“It’s impossible for me to imagine the School of Liberal Arts without Lou Grasso,” says Peter West, dean of the School of Liberal Arts. “The Media Studies Program includes everything that we aspire to be for our students — hands-on learning, faculty mentorship, technical know-how combined with disciplinary knowledge, internship opportunities and a warm sense of community. Lou does such a wonderful job helping our students launch their careers.”

Today, Grasso has a YouTube channel for students to share their work, and a private Facebook group for more than 170 media studies graduates where they can share connections and opportunities. Asked what the next, new thing will be in his program, Grasso speaks only of the thing he has treasured all along.

“What’s new is keeping the pressure on. You have to be there for the students. There are new people but it’s the same thing. It’s their life.”



Professor Grasso explaining to Communication Studies major Nicole Borges '21 how to cue up an audio track



(left to right): Technical Director Saki Takahashi, exchange student from Japan, Director Ariana Ricci '22, Assistant Director Professor Grasso, Audio Mixing Andrea Loaiza '19. Professor Grasso explains the value of each student's task and how it contributes to a seamless flow of TV production activity.