REWIND 92 YEARS. In a 75,000 square-foot facility in the heart of the Queen City, amid the whirring and chugging of heavy machinery, 17,000 laborers turn out 164,000 miles of cloth annually for the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, among the world's largest textile factories at its peak in 1915.

Today, the massive looms have been replaced with cutting-edge digital video editing stations, recording decks, and media widgets. Students donning headphones maneuver a moving image on a computer screen, fingers flying deftly across the colorful keyboard as they capture, cut, zoom, and otherwise revise their work within the video editing lab at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester (UNHM) on the banks of the Merrimack River.

“This idea of transforming a place where people once had to be in order to survive, into a place where they want to be in order to learn, was part of what attracted me to UNHM,” says Anthony “Skip” Tenczar, associate professor of communication arts.

Tenczar was recruited by UNHM in 2001 to establish the lab and create the curriculum for the film-video component of the Communication Arts program, which prepares students for careers in film, radio, journalism, public relations, advertising, counseling, and others. Six years later, it is “producing” award-winning young filmmakers who have become regulars on the festival circuit.

Tenczar came to the University an award-winning film/videomaker, having produced such films as I Keep on Walking, a documentary about one woman’s struggle to reclaim her life after institutional confinement; and Soviet Workcamp, which chronicled an international work camp and aired on the Discovery Channel. His road to teaching was paved by more than 20 years working at the junction of education and film, beginning at MIT’s cable system in the late 1970s, where he collaborated with famed avant-garde media artist and poet Aldo Tambellini.

He has been making films along the way, working across many genres, from documentary and narrative to corporate and experimental. “I don’t want to make the same film over and over,” he says. His efforts have garnered nearly two dozen festival awards over the years, including the “Best Experimental Film” award at the New England Film and Video Festival and the Syracuse International Film Festival forListen, the result of a more recent Tambellini collaboration.

Today, his students learn, create, and practice their artistic and technical skills at his side. This semester, they are out taking advantage of all Manchester has to offer in a Community Media Production course that Tenczar created.

“It’s a very hands-on program,” Tenczar says. But the secret to his success might be in his “hands-off” approach. “I can lead them and help them discover their styles,” he says, but the creative license is theirs. “I’ll work with a student on virtually anything,” even if it is a theme he’s not thrilled about, which is sometimes the case. “I’ll help them make the best film possible within what they want to make,” he adds, always asking, “Is it good enough in your mind? Can you make it better?”

His philosophy pays: Communication Arts students regularly screen films at regional festivals, including Erin Powers, whose film about people who put their hair in dreadlocks, Idread, won the audience award for “Best Student Documentary” at the New England Film and Video Festival. Former students work in Television City film labs, at community TV stations, for the Motor Racing Network, and NBC.

They attribute their success to Tenczar’s passion. “I like being in the classroom,” he says, “and want my students to have a good time even while working hard. I love what I do.”

—Tracey Bentley

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Anthony Tenczar
Associate Professor of Communication Arts
UNH Manchester