

**CTPR 499 Special Topics, Fall 2014**  
**Creating Webisodes**  
**2 Units, Section 18595**  
**USC School of Cinematic Arts**

**Pre-Req: CTPR 310 Intermediate Production or**  
**CTPR 508 Production II**

7:00-10:00PM Mondays  
Location: TBD  
Instructor: Sean Mullin  
Email address: sean@fivebyeight.com  
Office hours: By Appointment

SA: Fernando Rabelo  
Email Address: demirand@usc.edu

### **Introduction:**

Let's look at YouTube. Only YouTube. All by itself: 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube each minute. Six billion hours of video are watched on YouTube each month – an hour for each person on Earth. And that is only YouTube. This, you might say, is an opportunity – and a challenge. But, what fun! This is a huge audience, and the potential for exposure in this market is terrific.

What makes a successful Webisode? How are Webisodic series different than TV episodic series? What are the keys to striking the right chords and creating a successful Web series? We'll find out in this class.

It is not just luck that makes the most successful Web video creators successful. It requires the application of many of the skills you learn here at USC, but in new ways. This is a powerful way to make your filmmaking career profitable and filled with potential. Let's get to it...

### **Execution:**

This course is offered in conjunction with CTWR 435. Production students will work together in teams of two with Writing students to develop web series by employing lessons learned from years of television production, and with guidance from USC Faculty and Web experts from New Form Digital Studios.

Within these teams of two, one student will be the writer/director and the other student will be the producer. These roles will be swapped constantly throughout the quarter, based on whose idea is being shot. During weeks 1-14, each student will write/direct (at least) three WEBISODES.

Then, on week 15, each student will chose their strongest webisode – and they will present it to a panel of faculty and industry professionals.

The panel will chose their top three to be “greenlit.” These three webisodes will be given a full series order (to be produced in the Spring Semester).

Teams for each selected project in the Spring term will be made up of those from the Fall term who wish to remain with the class to its logical conclusion – as well as a batch of new students who are more interested in learning the production intricacies of Webisodic series.

For the first semester, teams will be writing, shooting, and editing these development exercises using their own equipment and resources. Any School of Cinematic Arts equipment or facilities will have to be scheduled by the students, and may not always fit each team’s production schedule. The second term will be described more fully in the syllabus specific to Spring 2015, but for that term equipment and facilities, either at SCA or outside, will be made available to provide professional Web-friendly production tools, and professional input on the selected projects as you proceed.

During both terms, students will also be exposed to concepts and practices of mobile (40% of YouTube global watch time) and other internet markets, publicizing your work and generating hits, revenue generating practices, and related issues. For instance, 80% of YouTube traffic comes from outside the U.S. Will your productions bridge that divide?

Students’ work on their team projects will be supplemented by lectures, discussions, critiques, and reviews by industry guests active in Web media production, and from New Form Digital Studios. Frequent reference to currently produced videos already on the market will be a constant in the class.

**Objectives:**

The focus of this course is twofold:

- To learn how to develop, direct, and produce successful Webisodic series for distribution via the internet.
- To learn what makes your creative concepts accessible and profitable in this market.

Each student will be wearing both hats as writer/director of their own projects. This will enable the production students to help out the writing students – and vice versa.

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance – Students are expected to attend all classes. Students are permitted absence from one class during the term, unless excused by the faculty for compelling reasons of personal or family health or emergency situations.

**Daily Reading/Viewing:**

1. YouTube (front page)
2. TubeFilter
3. Media Redefined
4. Deadline
5. Hollywood Reporter
6. Variety
7. VideoInk
8. GigaOM
9. TechCrunch
10. New Media Rockstars
11. AdAge
12. Mashable
13. Cynopsis Digital
14. MobilizedTV
15. Wattpad
16. FastCompany Blog
17. Gigaohm's Blog

**Trends and Data:**

1. Check Google Trends daily to get a quick pulse on what people are searching for online.
2. Reddit: check video subreddit and identify 2-to-3 subreddits you enjoy and read daily.

3. Devour.com: a great cheat sheet for the best stuff on YouTube. They have 5 awesome videos daily.
4. VidStatsX.com: a ranking site for YouTube channels. Essential for understanding what series/talent are growing.
5. Social Blade: a site with more detail on YT channels.
6. YouTube Trends: <http://youtube-trends.blogspot.com/>
7. YouTube Nation: a daily video show about YT. Not very current, but gives a fun perspective on what is working on YT. Think of it as a news magazine about YT culture.

### **In-Depth Reading:**

"The Art of Immersion" by Frank Rose

YouTube's "Creator's Playbook"

<https://www.youtube.com/yt/playbook/>

### **Schedule:**

#### **Wk 1 – 8/25**

LECTURE: Introduce schedule and course overview; Industry analysis with clips/discussion; Equipment description and explanation; Basic concepts of the class and the work; Analyzing the elements of a successful pitch.

GUEST SPEAKER: Kathleen Grace, Chief Creative Officer of New Form Digital Studios

HOMEWORK: Each student will create (and upload) a 60-to-90 second pitch (concise, nothing fancy, to-camera) for a web series. Students may submit up to three different pitches. All pitches must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Sep. 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 2 – 9/1      \*\*NO CLASS – LABOR DAY\*\***

#### **Wk 3 – 9/08**

LECTURE: Traditional directing concepts/tools – and how they can be applied to the web. Screenwriting strategies and tips – and how they can be tailored for the web.

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique student pitches.

HOMEWORK: All students will write a pilot script for their first episode, WEBISODE #1. Pilot scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Sep. 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 4 – 9/15**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique all scripts. The students with the scripts that feel the most developed will be put into SECTION A. The students with the scripts that need more work will be put into SECTION B. Then, within each section, students will be split up into two-person teams (ONE writing student and ONE production student).

HOMEWORK: SECTION A shoots their pilot episodes (two per group, with each student writing/directing their own pilot). SECTION B revises their scripts. SECTION A's pilots must be uploaded no later than midnight on Sunday, Sep. 21<sup>st</sup>. SECTION B's revised scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Sep. 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 5 – 9/22**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION A's pilots and SECTION B's revised scripts.

HOMEWORK: SECTION A brainstorms new pitch ideas for WEBISODE #2. SECTION B shoots their pilots, WEBISODE #1.

**Wk 6 – 9/29**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION B's pilots.

HOMEWORK: All students create (and upload) 60-to-90 second pitches (concise, nothing fancy, to-camera) for either:

- 1) A new web series idea; or
- 2) If WEBISODE #1 was a smashing success, students can pitch Episode #2 of their web series.

All pitches must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 7 – 10/06**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique student pitches.

GUEST SPEAKER: TBD

HOMEWORK: All students will write scripts for WEBISODE #2 (which might either be a new, original pilot or the second episode in their web series). All scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 8 – 10/13**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique all scripts. The students with the scripts that feel the most developed will be put into SECTION A. The students with the scripts that need more work will be put into SECTION B. Then, within each

section, students will be split up into two-person teams (ONE writing student and ONE production student).

*\*\*This regrouping might keep some existing two-person groups, but it might also create some new groups.\*\**

HOMEWORK: SECTION A shoots WEBISODE #2 (two per group, with each student writing/directing their own webisode).

SECTION B revises their scripts. SECTION A's WEBISODE #2 must be uploaded no later than midnight on Sunday, Oct.

19<sup>th</sup>. SECTION B's revised scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Wk 9 – 10/20**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION A's WEBISODE #2 and SECTION B's revised scripts.

HOMEWORK: SECTION A brainstorms new pitch ideas for WEBISODE #3. SECTION B shoots WEBISODE #2.

#### **Wk 10 – 10/27**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION B's WEBISODE #2.

HOMEWORK: All students create (and upload) 60-to-90 second pitches (concise, nothing fancy, to-camera) for either:

1) A new web series idea; or

2) If WEBISODE #1 (and/or #2) was a smashing success, students can pitch the next episode of their web series.

All pitches must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **Wk 11 – 11/03**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique student pitches.

GUEST SPEAKER: TBD

HOMEWORK: All students will write scripts for WEBISODE #3 (which might either be a new, original pilot or the next episode in their web series). All scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Wk 12 – 11/10**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique all scripts. The students with the scripts that feel the most developed will be put into SECTION A. The students with the scripts that need more work will be put into SECTION B. Then, within each section, students will be split up into two-person teams (ONE writing student and ONE production student).

*\*\*This regrouping might keep some existing two-person groups, but it might also create some new groups.\*\**

HOMEWORK: SECTION A shoots WEBISODE #3 (two per group, with each student writing/directing their own webisode). SECTION B revises their scripts. SECTION A's WEBISODE #3 must be uploaded no later than midnight on Sunday, Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>. SECTION B's revised scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Wk 13 – 11/17**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION A's WEBISODE #3 and SECTION B's revised scripts.

HOMEWORK: SECTION A decides which webisode they would like to present for their FINAL INDUSTRY PRESENTATION. If desired, students may conduct re-shoots and/or pick-up shoots. SECTION B shoots WEBISODE #3.

**Wk 14 – 11/24**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique SECTION B's WEBISODE #3.

HOMEWORK: All students decide which webisode they would like to present for their FINAL INDUSTRY PRESENTATION. If desired, they may conduct re-shoots and/or pick-up shoots.

**Wk 15 – 12/1**

LECTURE: Course recap.

WORKSHOP: Students solidify which webisodes to present for Final Exam/Industry Presentation.

HOMEWORK: Put the finishing touches on the webisode they've chosen for their final presentations (sound/color/etc.).

**12/8 – Study Day**

**12/15 – FINAL EXAM/PRESENTATIONS – 7:00PM to 9:00PM**

**\*\*ALL STUDENTS WILL PRESENT THEIR WEBISODE-OF-CHOICE TO A PANEL OF FACULTY AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS.**

**\*\*TOP THREE WEBISODES ARE SELECTED FOR FULL PRODUCTION ORDER TO BE PRODUCED IN SPRING SEMESTER.**

**Casting & Rehearsals:**

Casting will be according to the SCA SAG Agreement. Team members will be expected to assist each other in casting.

**Grading:**

- **Projects: 60% (20% x 3 projects)** - Students will be graded on the quality of the storytelling, technical challenges, lighting, design, production success, and successful completion of projects within the assigned deadlines.
- **Participation: 30% (10% x 3 projects)** - The class is intensely collaborative. Overall participation means students will be evaluated on how well they communicate their needs on a project to their teammate and to the class at large. On any group media project, the ability to collaborate and share information is critical.
- **Crewing Responsibilities: 10% (3.33% x 3 projects)** - Each student will be evaluated on how well they have performed in their individual roles (writer/director & producer). This is very much weighted on how each student takes on the responsibilities of each of those roles.

Missing "delivery dates" will not be excused without documented medical or personal emergencies. **YOU MUST HAVE "PLAN Bs" (and "Cs") FOR ALL CONTINGENCIES.** Instructors reserve the right to **not accept** late assignments.

There will be NO unexcused absences (documentation required for excused absences). You will receive a reduction of one-third letter grade for each unexcused absence.

**Tardiness will not be tolerated, as there is simply too much that needs to be accomplished. There will be one "official" warning for tardiness, and then we will lower grades by one-third letter grade each occurrence.**

#### **SAFETY & RESTRICTIONS:**

Violations of any of the Safety Guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University. The use of minors, moving cars, or weapons requires the employment of a studio teacher (for child actor) or off-duty police officer (prop weapon/car).

***Students With Disabilities:*** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure



the letter is delivered to Instructor (or S.A.) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at [blackboard.usc.edu](http://blackboard.usc.edu).

### **Disruptive Student Behavior**

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.