

USC School of Cinematic Arts
CTPR 558 -- Advanced Producing
Spring 2018 Syllabus

Location and Time: SCA 316, Thursdays 6-9 pm

Instructors: Jane Goldenring and Susan Cartsonis

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Course Description: Defines and examines the role of the Feature & TV & Digital Producer from inception of the idea to release/airing -- through development, financing, preproduction, production, post-production and marketing phases.

The class provides a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges in producing. The emphasis will be on feature, television and digital productions – including studio and indie films, network, cable and digital/streaming series, and documentaries.

In terms of process, we will explore strategies for acquiring IP and creating, researching, developing, pitching, executing and selling ideas. We will also focus on the creative and collaborative aspects of producing as well as the importance of the entrepreneurial and business side. There will also be an ongoing discussion about the managerial and problem-solving skills necessary to succeed.

The course will be a combination of lectures, case studies, guest speakers and open discussions. Guest speakers will include professional producers and other experts in the feature film, television, and digital media – writers, directors, financiers, agents, managers, casting directors, executives, marketers, distributors, etc., who will discuss their working relationships with producers.

Learning Objectives:

The goals of this course are:

1. To help you focus on what projects and ideas are worthy of development and why.
2. To help you communicate your ideas and projects in a cogent and compelling manner that will help you sell them to writers, directors, talent and financiers.
3. To convey, through the guest speakers, real world advice for getting your projects going and the appropriate outlets for them.
4. To help you navigate the different aspects of being a producer and the many hats that must be worn.
5. To enable you to problem solve at the different stages of your projects – and give examples of how to navigate difficult scenarios on and off a set.
6. To leave you with a working presentation to sell your project and a sense of what kind of producer you want to be.

Suggested Reading and Supplementary Materials:

Donaldson, Michael C. and Callif, Lisa A. Clearance & Copyright, 4th Edition. Everything You Need to Know for Film and Television

Kosberg, Robert, with Mim Eichler. *How to Sell Your Idea to Hollywood*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

Lazarus, Paul. *The Film Producer, 2nd edition*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Turman, Lawrence, *So You Want to Be a Producer*. Three Rivers Press, 2005.

Vachon, Christine. *A Killer Life*. New York, NY: Limelight Editions, 2007.

Vogler, Chris: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd Edition: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007

Goldman, William: *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, Grand Central Publishing, 2012

Class Assignments:

You will be required to complete several short assignments over the course of the semester that will be part of the larger final assignment at the end of the semester. At times, you will be expected to read screenplays and other materials and view movies/TV shows to prepare for a particular class and its speaker(s).

You are also expected to research the guests ahead of time and prepare questions for them. It is a basic courtesy to demonstrate knowledge of the guests' accomplishments and it is also essential for maintaining the highest level of discourse.

Grading Criteria: Meeting deadlines/Attendance: 10%
In Class Participation: 30%
Class Assignments: 40%
Final Assignment: 20%

Class participation is particularly important to the success of this class, in order to stimulate dynamic discussions amongst the students and with the guest speakers so regular attendance is required. Attendance will be taken for each class and tardiness or absence will have a significant affect on your grade. We expect you to complete your assignments on time and be prepared for class. If you have issues with a deadline, please speak to us at least a week in advance of it.

***NOTE RE: ASSIGNMENTS: You will not be graded on whether you are right or wrong, you will be graded on the quality of the work and your ability to meet deadlines. Please be clear, thorough and use facts to support your position.**

Being late is disrespectful to classmates and guest speakers. You are expected to be in your seat promptly at the start of class and at the end of break. Two times being tardy is equivalent to one unexcused absence. Two unexcused absences will lower your grade by one level. A third unexcused absence will lower your grade another full level. If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact Jane and Susan prior to class – preferable in the morning before class.

Class discussion is strictly confidential and cannot be recorded. It should also not be repeated without the guest's permission. Also, it is not appropriate for any student to solicit employment by or submissions to guest speakers. GUEST SPEAKERS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1, January 11, 2017: Meet Your Instructors, Meet Each Other as Professionals, and Think About What Ideas Move You

Introductions. Questions. Survey of class expectations. Discuss all assignments.

Discussion re: the role of the Producer. What does he/she do? What makes a good/bad producer? What do the titles mean (Executive, Producer, Line Producer, Co-Producer, Associate Producer)? What is the difference between the titles in television and film? Who are the “buyers” for projects and what are they looking for and how do they work with the different kinds of producers? What are mandatory skills for different kinds of producers (creative, line, financial, consulting, parasitic in features; writing producers in TV). Discussion of the collaborative process and what it really means for producers and the importance of networking.

Overview of pitching:

- Different types of pitches: TV/digital and film and how they differ
- Is a pitch deck necessary?
- What to do before, during and after a pitch
- What are the important elements of a pitch?
- How long should pitches be?
- What should I leave, if anything, behind in a pitch meeting?
- What are the memorable elements of the successful and unsuccessful pitches?
- What do I do if they “pass”? How to accept and give criticism.

Discussion of Final Assignment: “Package” a film to sell for a financier. You will be working on this throughout the semester. In the second class, you will be asked to present three ideas, one of which will be the project for which you will prepare a detailed presentation that is designed to be presented to potential financiers. You should be thinking about what those ideas will be prior to the commencement of the first class. Please choose an original idea, not one that’s been sold. Your final package will contain: One page Synopsis, Executive Summary (must include logline, genre, suggested budget, when and where you might shoot) a potential writers list (top five names), directors list (at least 5 names), cast list for at least 3 roles, a list of “buyers” you intend to go to (including specific executives at the company), financial materials/critical assumptions in support of final project; a visual component; and a one-page marketing/

distribution plan (including who you think the market is and how best to reach them). Must be presented in a professional and coherent format. You only have one shot to sell your project.

Handouts: PGA Code of Credits. How to prepare for speaker discussions. Bio samples. Executive Summary sample. How to pitch doc and TV pitch templates. Sign up for individual meetings.

In-class Participation: At the beginning of classes we will aim to spend time on role-playing exercises where students will act out possible scenarios pertaining to the class's subject.

Assignment #1: Due Jan. 18th. In class, students will pitch 2 ideas/2 minutes per idea.

Week 2, January 18, 2018: Where Do Ideas Come From And Finding The Right Medium

2018 Speaker: Lindy Goldstein (Producer, THE NUTCRACKER & THE FOUR REALMS)

(2017 Speaker: Suzanne Farwell (Producer, THE INTERN, CARRIE PILBY)

We will look at the genesis of some popular films, discuss how and where great ideas come from, how you know it's a good idea, and how to find and decide the right medium for an idea. In class you will pitch your ideas – 2 minutes per idea, 2 ideas per student. We will discuss potential mediums for the student's best or favorite of the two ideas and why that medium.

Handouts: "Hints on Photoplay Writing" by James Peacock. "AFM's Tips for Pitching" by Stephanie Palmer.

Assignment #2: Students will prepare a more detailed pitch of their chosen idea. Pitch cannot be more than 5 minutes. You must specify what the pitch is for: phone, formal meeting or, cocktail party/elevator. Is the pitch for TV or Film. What's the difference? For presentation in February 1st class.

Week 3, January 25, 2018: Acquiring and Presenting Your Idea

2017 Speakers: Stephen Moore (Agt/Kohner Agency) and Suzanne Farwell (CARRIE PILBY, THE INTERN, IT'S COMPLICATED)

2017 Speakers: Stephen Moore (Agt/Kohner Agency) and Jon Shestack (Producer, BEFORE I FALL, DAN IN REAL LIFE)

The Idea/ Source Material/ Treatments

- Rights: Getting rights to articles, books, people.
- Should I contact an author directly?
- I have a good idea, how do I find a writer?
- How do I convey my idea to the writer?
- Can I protect my idea? How do I keep it from being stolen?
- How long should a treatment be?

Handouts: Sample template for shopping agreement; excerpt from "Adventures in the Screen Trade"; Log-line and synopsis links; Excerpt from "Save The Cat;" "The Kinetic Log-Line" by Bill Boyle.

Week 4, February 1, 2018: Pitching Your Idea

2018 Speaker: Evan Dunskey (Writer, NURSE JACKIE, RECTIFY, SEA OAK)

2017 Speaker: Michael Bostick (Producer, former President of Walden Films and former President of Imagine Films)

Students will pitch an original idea or adaptation and get a critique from instructors and guest speaker. Pitches should be no more than 5 minutes to allow for discussion.

Assignment #3: Write your own Bio that describes who you are for the market, employers and publicity. No more than one page. This will be included in your Final Assignment. Hand in Feb. 8th.

Students will be asked to watch or read the most recent film of guest lecturers for Week 5.

Week 5, February 8, 2018: The Writing and Development Process

2018 Speaker: Stephany Folsom (Writer, THOR RAGNAROK, TOY STORY 4) and Lori Lakin (HIDDEN FIGURES, ALL OF US, SINGLE LADIES)

2017 Speaker: Kara Holden (Writer, CARRIE PILBY, MIDDLE SCHOOL)

Scripts/Writing Process

- What kind of scripts should I be looking for?
- Where do I find them?
- What are the important elements in script?
- How long should it take a writer to do a 1) first draft 2) revision 3) polish
- What do I do if they are taking too long?
- Is it customary to see pages?
- What if the script is not what I wanted?

Development and Story Notes

- Written vs. verbal “notes”, which are better?
- What is a “beat sheet” and how do you get the writer to do one?
- What is “development hell” and how do I get out of it?
- What do I do when I disagree with financier’s/studio’s notes?

Re-writing/Editing/Polishing

- How different should a rewrite be from the original?
- What do I do if the script doesn’t seem to be getting better?
- What if the writer won’t take my notes?
- What if I/ my financier want to replace the writer?

Handouts: Sample development notes and script coverage template. “How to do Coverage.”

Week 6, February 15, 2018: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS. NO CLASS MEETING

Jane and Susan will hold individual meetings with each student and discuss their final projects, goals and progress. Students should know what script or idea they want to package and be prepared to discuss their choice with Jane and Susan.

Week 7, February 22, 2018: Children's Programming and Animation or Documentaries.

Alternative Topic TBD by request of class.

2017 Speakers: Jordan Reddout (writer, THE MUPPETS) and Nell Scovell (THE MUPPETS, WAREHOUSE 13)

Previous guest: Jessica Julius (Disney Animation)

Handouts: PGA Article on digital media executive for next week.

Assignment #4: Executive Summary -- Prepare an overview of your Final Assignment project that will be incorporated into your final document. Due on March 8th. Watch films of speaker(s) for class on March 15th.

Week 8, March 1, 2018: Studio and Indie Financing

2018 Speakers: Laura Lewis (Stealth Mode Financing & former film finance agent/CAA and Brent Emery (Producer, CARRIE PILBY, THE ROAD WITHIN, STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT)

2017 Speaker: Brent Emery (Producer, CARRIE PILBY, THE ROAD WITHIN, STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT)

Previous Guest Speakers included: Brent Emory (Producer, CARRIE PILBY, THE ROAD WITHIN, STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT); Maria Faillace (CBS Films) and Julie Lynn (Producer, LOOK OF LOVE, ALBERT NOBBS); DanTram Nyugen (Exec, Fox Searchlight); Brad Wyman (COO, Fanbacked.com)

Getting In the Door

- What does it take for a studio to actually look at a script/meet with a producer?
- Does anybody accept blind submissions or do I just have to know somebody?
- Is it better to make my film independently or at a studio?

Getting the Green Light:

- What does it mean to get a green light?
- What do I need to do to get a green light? Money? Stars? Budget?
- Since they are paying, do I have to do exactly what my financier/studio wants?

Independent Financing:

The importance of independent & self-finance for producers – How to cultivate it, how to make it work for you in deal making, on set, in post production, and in distribution. Crowd sourcing and other web-based means of raising \$.

Handouts: Buyers List, "How To Do Coverage"

Assignment #5: Synopsis of final project. Due March 29th.

Week 9, March 8, 2018: Digital Media Opportunities for Producers

2018 Speaker: Winnie Kemp (Exec, SuperDeluxe)

2017 Speaker: Kevin Herrera (Former head of Digital for Gersh Agency)

2017 Speakers: YouTube site visit with Sowmya Subramian, Whitney Rosenthal, Liam Collins, Bridget Humphrey

Discussion about web-based entertainment and digital marketing and media. What are the different kinds of shows that are being developed for various digital and streaming outlets.

MARCH 10-17 – SPRING BREAK

Week 10, March 22, 2018: Packaging your script

2018 Speaker: TBD

2017 Speakers: Marcia Ross (indie casting director, former head of casting Disney Studios) and Ben Levine (Mgr, Link Ent.)

Previous guest included: Daisy Wu (Gersh Talent Agent), Frank Wuliger (Agt/Gersh), Jennifer Levine (Mgr/Untitled); Henry Chen and Tristen Tuckfield/CAA indie sales.

Attaching High Profile Directors, Writers and Actors:

- Who should I call: agents and managers, what's the difference?
- How do I get a writer to spec an idea or adaptation?
- How do I get my script to a big "name" actor or director?
- How do I get a director or talent attached without financing?
- What are they looking for?
- If I meet with them, what do I say/do?
- If I run into talent socially, can I give them my script?

Creative Casting:

- Stunt Casting: My financier wants me to cast a music star/athlete/celeb who is not an actor, what should I do? Does it make sense?
- Ensemble casting: the total effect is greater than the sum of its parts. How to create the appearance of having a star by casting alchemy.

Casting Unknown Actors:

- Should I fight for a non-"name" actor who is perfect for the part?
- How does foreign financing affect casting decisions?

Handouts: Sample Casting, director and writer lists

Assignment #6: Create casting, director and writers lists for your project. Due April 5th.

Week 11, March 29, 2018: Working with the Director and Talent

2018 Speaker: TBD Director

2017 Speaker: Jen McGowan (Director -- KELLY & CAL)

Previous Guests include: Daniel Barnz (BEASTLY, CAKE), BILLY RAY (SHATTERED GLASS, BREACH), Sarah Green (THE TREE OF LIFE) and/or Kim Cooper (Senior VP Fox Physical Production) and/or Chrisann Verges (ENOUGH SAID, CYRUS)

Working with the Director;

- How to support his/her creative process - working with a writer
- Working with a writer-director
- How to serve the needs of the financier/distributor together.
- The process on key hires
- Working together in preproduction on securing cast and financing
- Final work on script—adjustments for budget, location, cast, and acts of God
- Scouting, working with departments
- On-set relationship and relationship and process in post production
- How the director and producer deal with multiple agendas from financiers, distributors and other producers

Speakers will discuss working with talent in the development stage and will help guide and determine various reactions to on-set troubles. Some of these may include: arguments over key hires; disagreements over script revisions; interpersonal problems; handling conflicting notes from producers and financiers; on-set squabbles; sudden changes that require shifts in locations; sudden reductions in financing; etc.

Handout: Sample budget and schedule

Assignment #7: Watch TV show in preparation for next week's guest and/or set visit.

Week 12, April 5, 2018: The Challenges of TV Production (Possible set visit)

2018 Speaker TBD

2017: Visit to set of THE LAST TYCOON

Previous Guests: Jason Katims (PARENTHOOD), Betsy Beers (SHONDALAND Partner), Stephen Tao (Bad Robot)

- Pitching a TV show
- Developing a TV show
- Casting a TV show
- Dealing with network executives and studio executives
- Choosing a show runner
- Staffing a show
- The process on a pilot - choosing the director

- The writers room – what is it and how does it work
- What are the jobs on a TV show and what is the best way for someone new to get a foot in the door as a writer and/or producer?

Handout: Visual Marketing examples including teaser reel, pitch deck and one-sheet art.

Assignment #8: Create a visual marketing tool to help sell your final project/assignment (prop, giveaway, sizzle reel, web page, one-sheet, etc.). Due April 19th.

Week 13, April 12, 2018: Traditional and Non-Traditional Distribution and Film Festivals

2018 Speaker: Ernesto Foronda (Sundance Film Festival Programmer, Exec. – Perfect Storm Ent.

2017 Speakers: Ernie Foronda (FAST & FURIOUS, SUNSET STORIES) and Linda Goldstein, Producer (THE MAKERS SERIES, CODE BLACK, WHALE RIDER)

Previous Guest Speakers included: Ron Yerxa (LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE, NEBRASKA), Stephanie Allain (Director of LA Film Festival, DEAR WHITE PEOPLE, HUSTLE & FLOW)

Festivals/Screening for Distributors

- What are the major festivals and what type of films are they looking for?
- How do I decide which festival is right for my film?
- What are the key factors distributors are looking for when they acquire films from festivals?
- How do I submit a film to a festival?
- When should I submit the film?
- Is there a downside to submitting to as many festivals as possible?
- What kind of publicity, if any, should I do at festivals for distributors?

Distribution/Finding a Home/Not Finding a Home/Marketing and Publicity

- What should I look for in a distributor? When should I get a sales agent?
- What is the importance of “rights” (domestic, foreign, video, etc)?
- If my film is picked up, do I need a lawyer to negotiate the terms of the contract?
- What are my other options if I cannot find distribution?
- How do I market my film on my own?
- How can I help market my film?

Handout: List of Top Film Festivals

Assignment #9: Visual material for Final Assignment due on April 19th as well as work to date on Final Assignment which be discussed in individual meetings.

Week 14, April 19, 2018: Publicity and Marketing

2018 Speaker: TBD

Former Guest Speakers included: Tony Sella (Fox), Valerie Van Galder (Sony/Tri Star), Peter Adey (former head of marketing for Relativity Media); Grey Munford & Matt Gillhooley (CBS Films)

Publicity and Marketing:

- What are the important elements to be aware of during a publicity and marketing campaign?

- What do I do if my cast doesn't want to do press?
- What do I do if the press doesn't want my cast?
- What is tracking? What does it mean?
- What if I want to suggest ideas for the marketing campaign?
- What if they don't listen to me?
- Who decides the one-sheet and trailer?
- What if I feel they aren't spending enough?

Distribution:

- Who decides if it is wide or limited release?
- Who decides how many theatres/ screens?
- What if I think they are wrong, can I fight for a different approach?
- When is the right time to ask about a different approach?

Viral Marketing and On-line Partnerships: How to get a running start using new media to publicize and potentially distribute your movie and how to keep it going. What are the types of New Media available for features and TV. What can a producer do to maximize the use of New Media – what kind of materials should a producer be providing to increase their project's profile.

Handout: Sample Market Research Report

***** FINAL ASSIGNMENT Due Date TBD *****

Week 15, April 26, 2018: Catch All Recap & Individual Meetings

Following a final recap, instructors will hold individual meetings to follow up with each student on their projects and goals, and discuss the final assignment. Meaningful progress must be made by this time.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards

<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/>

provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.