

CTPR 455: **SURVEY OF PRODUCTION DESIGN (2 units)**

On the most basic level, Production Designers create sets and adjust locations to meet the production needs of filmmakers. CTPR 455 explores how sets shape the staging of action and accommodate the crew and actors. The class traces the evolution of production design to reflect the demands of cinematic storytelling from the magic of Méliès to the rough and tumble of the Keystone Kops to the psychological world of a madman in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and beyond.

Production Designers use the graphic tools of line, shape and form, size, texture and color to create visual structures that have their own coherent logic based on a script. In the process, Production Designers create unique worlds and spaces that reflect the characters that inhabit them. The class will reveal how Production Designers underscore the themes of the script using these visual methods.

Students will be assigned a script, for which they will be asked to create an overall visual structure and design a specific set. The student's work will be organized in a presentation book that is their final project.

The course consists of lectures, film & television program viewing, student projects, guest speakers from the entertainment industry, and assigned reading. There is no single text; a series of selected readings will be provided by the instructor.

This course has a midterm exam.

Students are expected to do self-directed research about the period and setting of the assigned script and to find and use source material related to the script. This research helps students find a visual language and structure for their designs.

Students must rework their class projects incorporating feedback from the instructor and reflecting their growing knowledge of the design process. Students' revised work is presented as part of their final project. The final project and presentation constitute the final exam for the course.

GRADING AND ATTENDANCE

Students are graded on assignments, class participation, the midterm exam and the final project and presentation.

The final course grade will be calculated as follows:

Assignments.....	20%
Class participation.....	10%
Midterm exam.....	15%
Final Project/ Presentation.....	55%

Most of the course information is delivered in lectures, so class attendance is essential. Students are expected to be on time and prepared. Two unexcused absences will result in a final grade being lowered by one full letter (i.e. A becomes B). A third unexcused absence will result in lowering a grade another full letter (i.e. B becomes C). Students with more than three unexcused absences will be given a failing grade in the course.

An excused absence should be obtained prior to class. If you have an emergency and must miss class, please contact the instructor prior to class.

CLASS HOURS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

The class meets Mondays 7-10 pm in SCA 209.

There are no regularly scheduled office hours, but the instructor will be available to meet before and after class. Email the instructor in advance for an appointment.

Instructor: Mark Stratton

Email: markstratton13@gmail.com

COURSE GOALS

The goals of this course are: to introduce students to the world of the Production Designer; to establish a basic design vocabulary; to give the student experience with various aspects of evolving a design concept based on a script; to give the student firsthand knowledge about current production techniques, and to prepare the student for practical applications in the field of production design/art direction. By the end of the semester, students should be able to translate abstract ideas into a cohesive visual structure.

FINAL PROJECT AND PRESENTATION

The final project and presentation are a compilation and expansion of work done by students over the course of the semester. At a minimum the final project and presentation must include:

- 1) your breakdown of the script. This includes the set and location lists generated from the breakdown.
- 2) your overall concept for the film/genre
- 3) your concept for your set
- 4) a floor plan of your set
- 5) choosing the most complicated scene that uses your set, generate the floor plan with camera angles and actor action clearly indicated
- 6) a storyboard of this scene that matches number 5
- 7) the design for a hand-prop or major furniture piece from your set
- 8) a budget. This is the only time in your life when you'll have an unlimited budget. Make sure it includes:
 - a) materials
 - b) furnishings (bought and rented)
 - c) props (bought and rented)
 - d) daily wages (labor)
 - e) greens
 - f) picture vehicles
 - g) backings
 - h) contingencyUse the handout to generate this. Do some research. Check "Debbie's Book" online.
- 9) photocopies of research material. May include color/paint samples, images off internet of Brazos NM or LA, props, price lists, general visual inspirations. Indicate where they are from.
- 10) bibliography: books, internet articles, certain picture books. The bibliography is about words and ideas that inspired you.

Many parts of the final project are based on earlier assignments; however, students must do more than simply recycle these assignments. The final project should be seen as a continual work-in-progress, and final project *submission* as the culminating opportunity to demonstrate growing understanding of the course subject matter and practical command over the principles of production design. The instructor's mid semester comments or criticisms must be addressed and any errors or omissions corrected. But students are expected to continue developing their ideas and revising their work beyond the suggestions of the instructor as well.

Final project presentation is extremely important. Students should prepare their final projects as if they are auditioning for a job. Students' final projects and presentations must be designed.

WEEK-BY-WEEK

This week-by-week schedule is tentative. The actual schedule depends on the availability of guest speakers and the depth of specific discussions in class.

WEEK 1: Introduction

8/24/15 Review syllabus and class requirements.
 The role of the production designer.
 The personnel makeup of the art department.
 The requirements and functions of a set or location.
 Establishing a visual vocabulary and structure.

Reading Assignments:

Mariner, chapters 2 and 3.
 Interview with Ken Adam.
 Assigned script.
 Jae Carmichael essays.

WEEK 2: Historical Perspective: Production Design is Born

8/31/15 Realism vs. Poetry: Lumière Brothers and Méliès.
 Compare *Trip to the Moon* with *The Great Train Robbery* and Keystone Kops films.
 Creating a unified design and world view.
 How sets determine blocking and action.
 How the filmmakers' needs shaped the development of art direction.

WEEK 3: Labor Day – no class

9/7/15

WEEK 4: Historical Perspective Continues: Towards a Film Aesthetic

9/14/15 Screen *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.
 How designers control the audience's eye and create complex visual worlds.
 Creating spaces that reflect characters' states of mind.

Hollywood in the Golden Era. Studios brand their product.

Warner Brothers: Anton Grot, Carl Weryl and Robert Haas vs.

MGM: Cedric Gibbons and Vincent Minnelli.

WEEK 5: Screening of doc on contemporary Production Designers: *Masters of Production*

9/21/15 How designers use graphics to structure their work.
 Guest speaker: TBA

Contemporary directors brand themselves with production design:

Tim Burton, Quentin Tarantino and Wes Anderson. The stylists.

WEEK 5 cont'd

<p>Reading Assignments: <i>Working with the Script</i>, 1-5. Assigned script (re-read).</p>
<p>Written Assignments (due Week 6): Thumbnail sketches. Brief essays identifying protagonist, antagonist, acts and genre. List of five sets to design, in order of preference.</p>

WEEK 6: Space and Framing

9/28/15 Contrast and affinity within the shot and shot-to-shot.
How contrast and affinity are used to create a visual structure.
How to create and use deep and flat space.
How framing composition affects set design.
Mise-en-scene handouts.

BRING TO CLASS:

Thumbnail sketches.
Protagonist, antagonist, acts and genre essays.
List of five sets, in order of preference.

<p>Reading Assignments: <i>Mise-en-scène</i> handouts.</p>
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WEEK 7: Graphics

10/5/15 Line/shape and form/size/texture.
Review for midterm.

Students are given set assignments.

WEEK 8: Midterm Exam

10/12/15

<p>Reading Assignments: Pat Miller's 'Script Supervising & Film Continuity'. Bring assigned script to class for Week 9.</p>
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WEEK 9: Breaking Down the Script

10/19/15 Review midterm exam.
Break down the script's first ten pages to identify scenes, sets, locations, characters,
props, set dressing, vehicles, animals and special effects.

WEEK 9 cont'd**BRING TO CLASS:**

Assigned script, pencils and highlighters.

Reading Assignments:

Working with the Script, 5-10

Written Assignments (due Week 11):

Continuity breakdown, breakdown pages, set list and location list.

WEEK 10: Tone and Color

10/26/15 Discussion of color theory.

Written Assignments (due Week 12):

Overall design plan for film and concept for assigned set.

WEEK 11: Screen *Vertigo*

11/2/15 Analysis of unified structure of color in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.
Storyboard handout.

BRING TO CLASS:

Continuity breakdown, breakdown pages, set list and location list.

Reading Assignments (due Week 12):

Script of *True Blood* episode.

Handouts on floorplans and storyboarding.

WEEK 12: Floor plans, shot lists, camera angles, blocking and storyboards.

11/9/15 Case study: *True Blood*.

BRING TO CLASS TODAY:

Overall design plan for film and set concept.

WEEK 13: The result: screen pilot of *True Blood*

11/16/15 Guest speaker: Cat Smith, art director *True Blood*

WEEK 14: Budgeting – Guest lecturer TBA

11/23/15

WEEK 15: Students pitch Final Projects. In-class review and one-on-one meetings with

11/30/15 **students.**

BRING TO CLASS:

Draft of final project.

**FINAL PROJECTS ARE DUE BY 5 PM FRIDAY,
DECEMBER 11, 2015 in Room SCA 404.**

Assignment due dates remain unchanged regardless of any shifts in the lecture schedule. It is mandatory that each student make a complete copy of all materials submitted for the final project. There have been rare instances in the past where student final projects have gone missing. It is every student's responsibility to have a complete backup of their final project work as a hard copy and/or a computer file.

Given that Labor Day falls on Monday, we will need to schedule a make-up class. That make-up class may be a field trip to be determined.

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/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the 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/academicssupport/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.