

# Practicum in Directing

CTPR-478 – Section 18571D – Fall 2015

Thursdays 7-10:00 pm RZC Stage A Units: 2

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*“The Director’s main responsibility....is telling the story. This means finding a structure to the script and setting up events so that they are at once surprising and inevitable. You give the actors direction in order that the actor’s actions and interactions illuminate and create those events. The actor has a responsibility....to create truthful behavior while following direction and fulfilling requirements of the script. Actors and Directors must respect each other’s creative territory.”* – Judith Weston, DIRECTING ACTORS (p. 9)

## Goals and Objectives:

To develop a director’s ability to communicate effectively with actors. No matter how good the other creative elements, unless the actors engage the audience as credible intriguing characters, the film will rarely succeed in *memorable* fashion. In this class, directors will learn how to shape the essential structure of a scene by breaking it down into its component parts, and how to guide actors into realizing their roles with spontaneous, organic behavior so as to effectively mount the scene in order to best tell the story.

## Course Description:

This is essentially a “scene study” class — divided into THREE PHASES:

### PHASE ONE: OPEN SCENES

In the initial phase, we will present “open scenes” (scenes with non-specific dialogue). Students will write a scene analysis and prepare the scene for presentation as a director. They will also take part in two other open scenes *as an actor* so that they experience both *giving* and *taking* direction.

### PHASE TWO & THREE: MIDTERMS & FINALS

Each student will then select two scripted dialogue scenes for a rehearsal presentation in class: 1) **MIDTERM SCENE**; and 2) **FINAL SCENE**. Both will then be shot & edited outside of class – and then brought in for critique.

Students will be randomly assigned two screenplays — one for their **MIDTERM** and one for their **FINAL** — from the following list of scripts:

- 1) Good Will Hunting
- 2) Erin Brockovich
- 3) Michael Clayton
- 4) Swingers
- 5) Juno
- 6) Election
- 7) Sideways
- 8) You Can Count On Me
- 9) Sex, Lies & Videotape
- 10) The Social Network
- 11) Lost in Translation
- 12) Ordinary People
- 13) The Savages
- 14) In The Bedroom
- 15) Rachel Getting Married
- 16) Mystic River
- 17) Million Dollar Baby
- 18) Before Sunrise
- 19) Before Sunset
- 20) Before Midnight
- 21) Up in the Air
- 22) Silver Linings Playbook
- 23) Whiplash
- 24) Doubt
- 25) The Apartment
- 26) When Harry Met Sally
- 27) L.A. Confidential
- 28) Rocky
- 29) Moonstruck
- 30) Tootsie

**MIDTERMS** and **FINALS** will be cast with real – “outside” – actors, and brought into class for intermediate stages of rehearsal work. **It is wasting your and the class’s time if you cast friends, classmates, roommates, significant others, etc., who lack legitimate acting training.** The intent is to discover effective methods of rehearsal, and to develop “an eye” for truthful performance. This rarely happens with the uninitiated.

It is expected that all scenes will be pre-rehearsed outside of class, and that directors utilize scene analysis methods to make specific choices of dramatic elements such as backstory, objectives, key props, wardrobe, etc., so that they enhance authenticity.

After their in-class presentations, MIDTERMS and FINALS will be shot, edited, and then screened in class for presentation and critique. Both scenes must be accompanied by a Production Notebook which will contain two parts:

- 1) The **REHEARSAL PACKET** with a scene analysis, rehearsal plan and script with director's notes is due when the scene is rehearsed in class;
- 2) The **SHOOTING PACKET** with floor plan, shot list or storyboard, cast, props and wardrobe lists, and director's personal reflections is due when the edited project is screened in class.

Interspersed with these scene study endeavors, reading assignments will be both discussed in-class and tested (take-home).

### **Auditions:**

When putting your casting notice up on any public forum, you will not be able to enter the title of the piece or the name of the writer if it is an already published screenplay. In place of the title of the screenplay, you can call it anything you want that will draw attention – just boil your scene down to a couple of words that describe the essence of the scene (e.g. "The Confrontation," "Worlds Apart," "The Final Decision," "Make or Break" – etc.) and then make the character and scene descriptions (use the real characters' first names) very specific and compelling. Be sure to mention that the scene will be filmed, that they will receive a copy, and that it will be workshopped in front of the class and professor. This is the official policy of USC School of Cinematic Arts and is intended to protect our right to use the best of the professional screenplays for our scene work.

### **Required Texts:**

*DIRECTING ACTORS* by Judith Weston

### **Recommended Reading:**

*I'LL BE IN MY TRAILER: THE CREATIVE WARS BETWEEN DIRECTORS AND ACTORS* by John Badham and Craig Modderno

*A CHALLENGE FOR THE ACTOR* by Uta Hagen

*ACTING ON FILM* by Michael Caine

*A SENSE OF DIRECTION* by William Ball

### **Groups:**

Students will be broken down into three-person-groups (A, B, C, D, E) — and each group will work together in all three phases:

- 1) OPEN SCENES
- 2) MIDTERM SCENES
- 3) FINAL SCENES

**Schedule:****WEEK 1 – 8/27**

LECTURE: Introduce schedule and course overview; Review handouts and discuss the actor-director relationship; How to talk to actors; How to breakdown a script and do script analysis; Directing Tools (Blocking, Business, Goals, Shape); Overview of the casting and rehearsal process; Shot listing and pre-visualization.

WORKSHOP: Cast and rehearse an **OPEN** scene with students to demonstrate and model proper director behavior; Divide the class into 5 groups of 3 students each (GROUPS A, B, C, D, E). Also, assign scripts for **MIDTERMS & FINALS**.

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Pick an OPEN Scene and rehearse it with your fellow group partners. Each director will pick their own two-person scene to present in class.
- 2) Pick a scene (2-to-4 pages) from an approved screenplay for your MIDTERM. Be sure to read the entire screenplay.
- 3) Cast your MIDTERMS & FINALS with PROFESSIONAL/TRAINED actors.
- 4) Read Weston (Chapters 1 & 8).

**WEEK 2 – 9/03**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A1 Presents OPEN Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B1 Presents OPEN Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C1 Presents OPEN Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D1 Presents OPEN Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E1 Presents OPEN Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Continue to rehearse OPEN scenes.
- 2) Continue to cast your MIDTERMS & FINALS.
- 3) Read Weston (Chapters 2 & 3)

**WEEK 3 – 9/10**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A2 Presents OPEN Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B2 Presents OPEN Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C2 Presents OPEN Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D2 Presents OPEN Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E2 Presents OPEN Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Continue to rehearse OPEN scenes.
- 2) Continue to cast and rehearse your MIDTERM Scenes.
- 3) Read Weston (Chapter 4 & 5)

**WEEK 4 – 9/17**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A3 Presents OPEN Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B3 Presents OPEN Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C3 Presents OPEN Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D3 Presents OPEN Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E3 Presents OPEN Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Rehearse your MIDTERM Scenes.
- 2) Begin script breakdowns for your MIDTERM Scenes.
- 3) Read Weston (Chapter 7)

**WEEK 5 – 9/24**

LECTURE: The grammar of visual storytelling. Shot progression. Composition. Compression vs. Elaboration. Subjective vs. Objective. The importance of cutting each shot on Action and/or Emotion. How to shot list.

**\*\*Discuss putting together the following:**

- 1) **REHEARSAL PACKET (scene analysis, rehearsal plan and script with director's notes). These are due when you present your scene in class for rehearsal.**
- 2) **SHOOTING PACKET (floor plan with shot list or storyboard, cast, props, wardrobes, directors notes, etc.). These are due when you present your completed/edited scenes in class.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Continue rehearsing MIDTERMS & FINALS.
- 2) Read Westin (Chapter 9)

**WEEK 6 – 10/01**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A1 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B1 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C1 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D1 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E1 Presents MIDTERM Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) #1's – SHOOT/EDIT MIDTERMS.
- 2) #2's & #3's – Continue rehearsing MIDTERMS & FINALS.
- 3) Read Weston (Chapter 10)

**WEEK 7 – 10/08**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A2 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B2 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C2 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D2 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E2 Presents MIDTERM Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) #2's – SHOOT/EDIT MIDTERMS.
- 2) #1's & #3's – Continue rehearsing MIDTERMS & FINALS.

**WEEK 8 – 10/15**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A3 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B3 Presents MIDTERM Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C3 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D3 Presents MIDTERM Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E3 Presents MIDTERM Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) #3's – SHOOT/EDIT MIDTERMS.
- 2) #1's & #2's – Continue rehearsing FINALS.

**WEEK 9 – 10/22**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique shot/edited MIDTERMS for #1's & #2's.

**\*\*SHOOTING PACKETS DUE (Floor Plan, Shot List, Dir. Notes, etc.)**

HOMEWORK: Continue rehearsing FINAL Scenes.

**WEEK 10 – 10/29**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique shot/edited MIDTERMS for #3's.

**\*\*SHOOTING PACKETS DUE (Floor Plan, Shot List, Dir. Notes, etc.)**

HOMEWORK: Continue rehearsing FINAL Scenes.

**WEEK 11 – 11/05**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A1 Presents FINAL Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B1 Presents FINAL Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C1 Presents FINAL Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D1 Presents FINAL Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E1 Presents FINAL Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) #1's – SHOOT/EDIT FINALS.
- 2) #2's & #3's – Continue rehearsing FINALS.

**WEEK 12 – 11/12**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A2 Presents FINAL Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B2 Presents FINAL Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C2 Presents FINAL Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D2 Presents FINAL Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E2 Presents FINAL Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) #1's & #2's – SHOOT/EDIT FINALS.
- 2) #3's – Continue rehearsing FINALS.

**WEEK 13 – 11/19**WORKSHOP:

- 1) A3 Presents FINAL Scene (7:05 to 7:35)
- 2) B3 Presents FINAL Scene (7:40 to 8:10)
- 3) C3 Presents FINAL Scene (8:15 to 8:45)
- 4) D3 Presents FINAL Scene (8:50 to 9:20)
- 5) E3 Presents FINAL Scene (9:25 to 9:55)

**\*\*REHEARSAL PACKETS ARE DUE FOR EACH STUDENT PRESENTING.**

HOMEWORK: All Students continue SHOOTING & EDITING FINALS.

**WEEK 14 – 11/26 – \*\*NO CLASS / THANKSGIVING\*\*****WEEK 15 – 12/03**

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique shot/edited ALL FINALS.

**\*\*SHOOTING PACKETS DUE (Floor Plan, Shot List, Dir. Notes, etc.)**

**WEEK 16 – 12/10 – STUDY DAY****WEEK 17 – 12/17**

WORKSHOP: Course Recap. Overflow screening day (if needed).

**Grading:** ACTIVE participation of students is essential. This entails thorough preparation of exercises and scenes. Grading will be based upon the extent and thoroughness of preparation, all written assignments, the presentations of scenes, and the growth evidenced during the semester.

<b>Class participation</b>	20%
<b>Open Scene (Analysis &amp; Presentation)</b>	20%
<b>Midterm Scene (Analysis, Presentation &amp; Shoot)</b>	30%
<b>Final Scene (Analysis, Presentation &amp; Shoot)</b>	30%

**Due Dates:** Missing deadlines is generally regarded as unacceptable in the Industry, and so it will be in this class. If you know ahead of time that unavoidable circumstances will prevent “delivery”, you must notify Instructor immediately, and the circumstances must be documented. Likewise, if an unavoidable calamity prevents timely “delivery”, it must be a genuine emergency and again must be documented. Unexcused missed due dates will result in reduction of 2/3 of a grade for each full class period past the original due date.

**All papers must be turned in as hard copies. Emails not accepted.**

**Attendance/Absence:** Credit towards your grade cannot -- by University policy -- be given for simply being present. It is expected that you will attend class and participate. If you are unavoidably going to miss class, **Instructor MUST be notified in advance in writing (e-mail). Justifications must be verifiable.** You will be permitted TWO excused absences. Beyond that, you will receive a reduction of 1/3 OVERALL COURSE GRADE per excused absence over two, and per each unexcused absence. **SA will keep track of attendance.**

**Late Arrival:** If you are later than 10 minutes, you will receive a HALF ABSENCE. **The SA will keep track of late arrivals (and by how long).** IT MAKES IT HARD TO TEACH WHEN EVERYONE ISN'T ON THE SAME PAGE (i.e, you've missed something that prefaces what I'm talking about when you walk in), and IT IS INCONSIDERATE OF YOUR COLLEAGUES. So, please be on time.

**Scene workshop scheduling:** Once you are scheduled for a time slot in any of the in-class scene workshops (open scenes, midterm and final scenes), the class is counting on you to be there so you **MUST NOT MISS YOUR TIME.** As can happen with professional actors, scheduling conflicts can arise at the last minute that prevent them from coming to class. If this is the case, please inform the SA as soon as you know. Options are to find a substitute actor just for the class workshop, or to ask a fellow student to step in.

**Casting note:** Because of the potential for scheduling conflicts with professional actors, it is my recommendation to choose **TWO TOP CHOICES** for each role. This way, if you run into a problem with your first choice, you will have a back-up.



### **Notes Regarding Video Projects:**

- (1) Students must select scenes they have either never seen produced or haven't seen in a number of years. It is impossible not to be influenced by something you've seen more recently than that.
- (2) Scenes need to be short, between 2-4 pages, two characters, one location.
- (3) Students will have the OPTION of selecting two scenes from the SAME SCRIPT for their respective Midterm & Final Scenes. Scenes should be far enough apart in the story chronology to evidence substantial "character arc". Compellingly different (i.e., major story reversal) consecutive scenes require securing prior approval from Instructor. Casting should NOT be the same for the Midterm & Final Scenes.
- (4) WE ARE NOT CONCERNED SO MUCH WITH TECHNICAL QUALITY AS WITH THE IMPACT OF THE PERFORMANCES. I recommend trying to optimize sound quality (i.e, use a boom mic if outdoors or in a noisy interior), but you will not benefit grade-wise from "slick" lighting. If you do choose to light, that is for your own purposes. I will, however, take into consideration SHOT SELECTION and CAMERA PLACEMENT & MOVEMENT, as it enhances the impact of performance.
- (5) Students will be responsible for payment of insurance for usage of school equipment.
- (6) Students sharing the same production number can work together. Since there is one camera between them, one student can function as the camera operator while the other is directing. As the Director, a student may ELECT to have some-one other than their prod# partner serve as the camera operator, but each student is responsible to serve in that capacity if called upon.
- (7) All projects should be presented in-class on DVD or thumb drive.
- (8) School-provided video cameras may be reserved in the Zemeckis Center Equipment Room, and you must give 24-hours notice. You may use your own video camera, but equipment failure will not be considered a justification for a missed delivery.
- (9) Students may edit their projects in the Avid Express Labs on the Avid Express Pro systems. Two students will be paired on a single drive. You may edit on your own equipment, but again, equipment failure will then not be an acceptable excuse for missed delivery.

### **SAFETY:**

All students are expected to abide by USC School of Cinema-Television Safety Guidelines. Violations of any of the safety guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are 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 the Instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. The office is in Student Union 301, and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

**Instructor reserves the right to change this syllabus at his sole discretion.**