

CTPR 499 Special Topics, Fall 2015
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: SCI 209
Instructor: Sean Mullin
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SA: TBD
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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 with Writing students (in teams of two) 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, students will alternate between being a writer/director and a producer, based on whose idea is being shot. During weeks 1-14, each student will write/direct (at least) two WEBISODES. Both webisodes can be centered around the same idea – or they can be completely separate ideas.

The ultimate goal of the course is to cut together a "sizzle reel" video (of no more than 5 minutes in length) to be presented during our final class (Monday, Dec. 14th) – to a panel of faculty and industry professionals.

The panel will choose their top three (or four) ideas to be "greenlit." Each webisode chosen will be given a three-episode 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.

The PGA is solid starting point for creating a sizzle reel:
<http://www.producersguild.org/?sizzle>

For the Fall 2015 term, 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 2016, 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 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 and produce successful web series for distribution via the internet.
- To learn what makes your creative concepts accessible and profitable in this marketplace.

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 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:

WEEK 1 – 8/24

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 idea. Students may submit up to three different pitches.

WEEK 2 – 8/31

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.

WEEK 3 – 9/07 **NO CLASS – LABOR DAY**

WEEK 4 – 9/14

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 (Ideally, ONE writing student and ONE production student.)
HOMEWORK: All students will revise their scripts and begin pre-production for WEBISODE #1 (casting/locations/etc.). All revised scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Sep. 19th.

WEEK 5 – 9/21

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique revised scripts.
HOMEWORK: Continue pre-production for WEBISODE #1.

WEEK 6 – 9/28

WORKSHOP: All students present their prep materials:
1) Shooting Script
2) Shot List
3) Shooting Schedule
4) Call Sheet(s) with Cast/Locations/Props/Crew
HOMEWORK:
1) SECTION A – Shoot WEBISODE #1
2) SECTION B – Continue prepping WEBISODE #1

WEEK 7 – 10/05

WORKSHOP: **WEBISODE #1 DUE FOR SECTION A.**
HOMEWORK:
1) SECTION A – Work on pitches for WEBISODE #2
2) SECTION B – Shoot WEBISODE #1

WEEK 8 – 10/12

WORKSHOP: **WEBISODE #1 DUE FOR SECTION B.**
HOMEWORK: All students need to upload a 60-to-90 second pitch (concise, nothing fancy, to-camera) for either:
1) A new web series idea; or
2) If WEBISODE #1 was a success, students can pitch the next episode – or a possible reshoot – of their web series.
**All pitches must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Oct. 17th.

WEEK 9 – 10/19

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique student pitches.

HOMEWORK: All students will write a script for WEBISODE #2. Scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Sep. 24th.

WEEK 10 – 10/26

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique all scripts.

HOMEWORK: All students will revise their scripts and begin pre-production for WEBISODE #2 (casting/locations/etc.). All revised scripts must be uploaded no later than midnight on Saturday, Oct. 31st.

WEEK 11 – 11/02

WORKSHOP: Discuss/critique revised scripts.

HOMEWORK: Continue pre-production for WEBISODE #2.

WEEK 12 – 11/9

WORKSHOP: All students present their prep materials:

- 1) Shooting Script
- 2) Shot List
- 3) Shooting Schedule
- 4) Call Sheet(s) with Cast/Locations/Props/Crew

HOMEWORK:

- 1) SECTION A – Shoot WEBISODE #2
- 2) SECTION B – Continue prepping WEBISODE #2

WEEK 13 – 11/16

WORKSHOP: **WEBISODE #2 DUE FOR SECTION A.**

HOMEWORK:

- 1) SECTION A – Prep for final presentation.
- 2) SECTION B – Shoot EPISODE #2

WEEK 14 – 11/23

WORKSHOP: **WEBISODE #2 DUE FOR SECTION B.**

HOMEWORK: All students cut together their sizzle reels for their FINAL INDUSTRY PRESENTATIONS. If desired, they may conduct re-shoots and/or pick-up shoots.

WEEK 15 – 11/30

LECTURE: Course recap.

WORKSHOP: Discuss/Critique Sizzle Reels.

HOMEWORK: Put the finishing touches on their Sizzle Reels.

FINALS WEEK – 12/14 – FINAL PRESENTATIONS

***ALL STUDENTS WILL BE GIVEN 10 MINUTES IN FRONT OF A PANEL OF FACULTY AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS TO PRESENT THEIR 5 MINUTE-OR-LESS SIZZLE REEL ALONG WITH A 5 MINUTE Q&A.*

***THE TOP THREE (OR FOUR) PITCHES WILL BE SELECTED FOR FULL PRODUCTION ORDER TO BE PRODUCED IN THE 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).

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 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.

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.