

PRACTICUM IN DIRECTING

S Y L L A B U S

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is for students to develop the ability to communicate effectively with actors. Students will learn how to break down a scene using textual analysis, and collaborate with actors to achieve spontaneous, organic behavior to best tell the given story. Students will also participate in acting exercises, gaining a more holistic understanding of the director-actor relationship.

COURSE OVERVIEW

In the early part of the semester, lectures on various aspects of directing, acting and rehearsing will lay the groundwork for students to cycle newfound knowledge into their practical scene study work. Readings from Weston's "Directing Actors" will help reinforce concepts from the lectures, and provide alternate approaches. The majority of the class centers around each student selecting two scripted, two-person scenes to rehearse in front of the class – the "Midterm Scene" and, later, the "Final Scene". Both scenes are to be cast, shot and edited outside of class, then screened for feedback and discussion. Throughout the semester, students will also participate in "Open Scenes" of non-specific dialogue, in which they will work as actors to experience first-hand the other side of the director-actor relationship.

MIDTERM & FINAL SCENES

For the Midterm Scene, students will select from a provided list of two-person scenes from the following works:

AMERICAN BEAUTY
ANGELS IN AMERICA
BEFORE SUNRISE
BIRDMAN
BLACK SWAN
BLUE VALENTINE
CALVARY
CAROL
FARGO
GONE GIRL
GOOD WILL HUNTING
HER
KRAMER VS. KRAMER
LA LA LAND
LION
LOST RIVER
MANCHESTER BY THE SEA
MARIA FULL OF GRACE
MARTHA MARCY MAY MARLENE

MISERY
 MOONLIGHT
 NIGHTCRAWLER
 SHORT TERM 12
 SWINGERS
 TAXI DRIVER
 THE AMERICANS
 THE GRADUATE
 THE HOURS
 THE KING'S SPEECH
 THE MASTER
 THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER
 THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION
 WHIPLASH
 YOU CAN COUNT ON ME
 ZERO DARK THIRTY

The instructor will provide PDF versions of scenes and full scripts. The Final Scene may come from a screenplay of the director's choice – but must be approved by the instructor in advance. **Please note: it is detrimental to watch the films that scenes are from – students are urged to resist the temptation for mimicry, and do their own work.**

Both scenes shall be accompanied by a “Director’s Book”, containing two parts:

1. “Analysis Packet” (screenplay, character and scene analysis)
Due by email at 8PM the night before the scene is rehearsed in class
2. “Shooting Packet” (shot list, storyboards, floor plan, hour-by-hour, reflections)
Due by email at 8PM the night before the scene is screened in class

Both assignments require students to read the entire script of a selected scene. Students are also expected to hold auditions outside of class, and cast the scene with the best actors available. Students will learn more about themselves and their craft by collaborating with experienced, talented and professional actors. Working with non-actors, or casting roommates in the eleventh hour, will likely lead to a learning experience squandered.

Students are expected to meet and rehearse with actors outside of class. On their scheduled date, students bring in their actors and stage scenes in an active rehearsal in front of class, with props and costumes. Outside of class, students will then shoot and edit their scenes, which will later be discussed and critiqued on their selected screening dates.

READING

Judith Weston: “Directing Actors”

GRADING

Students’ active participation is an essential component to this course, and vital to its overall success. Grading will be based on the following criteria, with the most emphasis

given to students' overall growth throughout the semester:

Final Scene (Director's Book, Rehearsal, Edited Project)	35%
Midterm Scene (Director's Book, Rehearsal, Edited Project)	30%
In-Class Exercises (Open Scenes, Acting Exercises)	15%
Class Participation, Discipline, Commitment	15%
Take Home Assignment	5%

ATTENDANCE / ABSENCE

Tardiness and missing deadlines is unacceptable in the film industry, and will also not be tolerated in class. Not keeping to the schedule or arriving late hinders the instructor and fellow students. An unexcused absence will result in a ½ grade point deduction from the final grade. Two late arrivals over 10 minutes will also reduce a final grade by a ½ point. If students know they will miss class due to unavoidable circumstances, they must notify the instructor and student assistant by email as soon as possible. All justifications must be documented. The student assistant will keep track of attendance and arrival time.

REHEARSAL / CASTING NOTE

Once scheduled for Midterm and Final Scenes, students may not miss their time slot for any reason. As happens with professional actors, scheduling conflicts may arise in the last minute that prevent them from coming to class. To prepare for this, it is highly recommended that students have a backup choice for each role they are casting.

NOTES REGARDING SHOOTING MIDTERM & FINAL SCENES

1. Directors will be responsible for insurance payment for usage of school equipment.
2. Students with the same production letter are invited to work together in groups, but directors may NOT act as their own camera operators. It is not possible to shoot and pay attention to performance at the same time.
3. All projects must be presented in a format playable in class. Check with the student assistant ahead of time if there are any doubts.
4. The school may be able to supply cameras, provided students give proper notice and consult with the student assistant. Using personal cameras is permitted, but students are responsible for ensuring that outside equipment must be compatible for editing purposes – whether in the AVID lab or on another system.
5. The school may be able to provide rehearsal and casting/audition space. Students should consult with SCA Operations.
6. Directors are responsible for finding locations and obtaining permission to shoot.
7. Good sound must be recorded for all scenes. While the on-camera mic may work in a controlled interior environment, students must use boom mics if filming outdoors or in compromised interiors.
8. Directors may edit projects in the AVID lab after going through orientation. If they have access to other sources they may use them, but no tech support will be provided for problems arising with outside equipment or software. It is the responsibility of students to ensure videos will transfer properly, and be viewable on our machines. Questions regarding equipment should be addressed to the student assistant.
9. Directors are required to make DVDs or digital files of edited scenes for actors.

SAFETY RULES

All students are expected to understand and abide by USC School of Cinematic Arts Safety Guidelines. Violations of any of the safety guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University. Please make special note of policy regarding the use of minors, weapons, or cars—which may require the employment of a studio teacher or an off-duty police officer. NOTE: For this class, any scene which takes place in a car (moving or stationary) must be re-located.

Your personal safety and that of your cast and crew is vitally important as you plan and shoot your projects. You are responsible to read the Safety Rules for Student Productions Handbook and abide by the policies that apply to CTPR 478. If you have any questions or concerns, please check with your directing faculty before shooting. Violation of any safety policies may result in disciplinary action such as confiscation of footage, lowering of your grade, failing the class, appearance before the Academic Discipline Committee and even expulsion from the University.

The following require a Hazardous Shooting Conditions Form (which can be found on the SCA Community website in the Student Production Resources Section): stunts, special effects, animals, breaking of glass, fire (including candles and smoking), prop weapons, minors, nudity, fog machines, and water work. Actions that might seem safe under normal circumstances (e.g., hurrying down stairs or crossing an uncontrolled street) may not be under production.

Never leave equipment unattended, and take extra care when shooting at night. Don't store equipment in a car, not even the trunk.

Placing actors in jeopardy of any kind is punishable by failure and possible expulsion even if the actors agree to the situation. Stunts and Effects must be cleared through faculty and properly supervised on your set with written permits. If your actors are doing anything other than sitting or walking, talk to your instructor.

Production Safety Guidelines, The Student Handbook, and the Pre-Production Hazardous Shooting Form and other documents are available at: <http://scacommunity.usc.edu>. Faculty Sign-Off sheets are required for all Hazardous shooting conditions prior to production, including shoots with minors and studio teachers.

FAIR USE GUIDELINES

In order for this class to use copyrighted material, everyone must adhere to the following:

AUDITIONS

When casting and putting notices up in any public forum, students must not enter the title or the name of the writer, if it is a published screenplay. In place of the title of the screenplay your scene is from, 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. Note that 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.

SCREENING

- A. The version of the edited scene you screen must have the following line burned in (like a subtitle) at the bottom of the image from first frame to last: CLASSROOM EXERCISE, NOT INTENDED FOR DISTRIBUTION. It needs to be in a font and size that makes it readable from reasonable viewing distance. Place it at the bottom of frame so it is as minimally distracting as possible. If you don't know how to do this, ask the monitor in the lab. Please note, this sort of thing is also done to protect screeners sent to Academy members for the Oscars and the Emmys.
- B. Because these projects are considered exercises for class use, do not put any credits whatsoever to accompany the scene – not your name, not the actors' names, crew, school, instructor, etc. Again, these are exercises, not showcases.
- C. The instructor cannot screen any scene that does not adhere to these guidelines.
- D. To protect themselves, students should also give actors a copy of the scene which follows these guidelines. Under no circumstances should you provide any actor with anything but the edited scene with the watermark displayed throughout.

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/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.

**Please note: this syllabus may change throughout the semester, as need requires.*