

**USC SCA CTPR 558– Advanced Producing Fall 2019**  
**Section: 18687 2 Units**

**Instructor:** Tom Jacobson

**SA:** John Fairchild

Day/Time: <b>Tuesdays 6pm-9pm</b> Room: <b>SCA 204</b> Office Hours: By Appt
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Course Description and Outline

This class defines and examines the role of the Feature & TV & Streaming/Digital Producer from inception of the idea to release/airing -- through development, selling, financing, packaging, production, and marketing.

The class provides a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges in producing. The emphasis will be on feature, television and digital productions. We will explore the basic idea of what it means to be an effective producer, including 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.

The course will be a combination of lectures, project assignments, class presentations, guest speakers and open discussions with a Q&A format.

Guest speakers will include professional producers and other experts in the feature film, television, and digital media – financiers, agents, managers, writers, executives, marketers, etc., who will discuss their areas of expertise

Over the course of the semester, students will complete assignments that will be part of a class-long project to build a portfolio to use as a selling and marketing tool for an original project they choose to develop at the beginning of the course.

**Suggested Reading and Supplementary Materials (more to follow):**

*Clearance & Copyright, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Everything You Need to Know for Film and Television* by Michael C. Donaldson and Lisa A. Callif

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

*Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath & Dan Heath

## PROJECTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

A number of assignments are part of the final packet presentation. Speaker questions, pitches and other weekly assignments are also included as part of your grade. Weekly assignments are due by noon on Tuesday before class.

- **THE FINAL PROJECT: “Package” a project to take to the marketplace.** You will be working on this throughout the semester. Each student will assemble a project portfolio, based on an original idea, or *available* underlying source material for any platform – film, television, digital or new media. *The final packet* will include:
  - Biography
  - One-page synopsis / story summary
  - Executive Summary (must include logline, genre, suggested budget level, when and where you might shoot)
  - Packaging lists: writers, directors and cast
  - Marketing/sales/distribution plan (including who you think the market is and how best to reach them)
  - Financing plan/critical assumptions
  - List of buyers you plan to approach, with specific individuals named
  - Supporting visual pitch materials
  
- **Weekly assignment:** Each week one student will be assigned to prepare and present an in-depth report on interesting and relevant news from a variety of entertainment news sources. The report will be presented at the beginning of class.
- **Group collaboration:** The class will be separated into four groups for assignments and presentations throughout the term. Each group will be assigned a one-hour TV pilot to read and analyze. Group exercises based on the pilot script will include:
  - Two-page Coverage
  - Three-five minute in-class pitch
  - Creative feedback, from the point of view of a buyer
  - Targeting a network or platform; Comps of other shows
  - Packaging lists for cast & director
  - Mood board/look book, cast presentation
  - An additional group assignment will be to research and present an analysis of the different buyers.
  
- **Speaker Questions:** Students are expected to research speakers ahead of class and prepare 3-5 questions for them, which are due by the weekend before the class visit by email to the instructor and SA. The depth of the questions will reflect the level of attention to research on the speakers.

Students need to read/view any information provided to them which may include articles, screenplays and other materials and, at times, view movies/TV shows to prepare for a particular assignment, a class or its speaker(s).

Students should do their own research as well, including bios and articles on speakers, especially recent items. They should check out the Trades, Deadline Hollywood, IMDB, and LA and NY Times and, if time permits, look at the speakers' latest work in film or TV.

### **Class participation:**

**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.**

Participation includes engaging with guests in Q&A discussions, discussions with fellow students and instructors about the class topic and assignments.

Attendance will be taken for each class and tardiness or absence will have a significant effect 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.

You are expected to be in your seat promptly at the start of class and at the end of break. If you have an emergency and must miss class, please contact Tom or John no later than the morning of 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 to accommodate guest availability.**

### **Grading Criteria:**

Attendance: see policy below

In Class Participation: 20%

Class Assignments: 35%

Final Assignment: 45%

***Class topics & the syllabus assignments may shift both to accommodate guest speaker availability and based on the subjects covered during the term.***

### **Production Division Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. 2 unexcused absences will lower a student's grade by one full letter (ie: A becomes B). A third unexcused absence will result in a student's grade being lowered by one, additional full letter (ie: B becomes C). A student's grade will be lowered by one full letter for each additional unexcused absence. 2 late class arrivals equate to one full absence.

If you are going to miss class for illness or other emergencies, we want our SA to hear about at least a half-day (roughly 12 hours) in advance. This counts as an excused absence. Any other absence is unexcused. Any more than one unexcused absence will result in half a grade reduction for each absence. Being late twice (2x) equals one unexcused absence.

Assignments will be evaluated both on the quality of the work and the ability to meet deadlines.

**Required Preparation:** Please prepare your professional biography and bring to the first class. Use whatever format you want. We will review standard bio samples and you will revise your bio as part of the class assignments. Also, start thinking about 2 ideas (at any stage) that you would be interested in developing for any screen.

### **WEEK 1, AUGUST 27, 2019: Introductions, Review of class-long project, Role of the producer**

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

**Weekly assignment:** Each week one student will be assigned to present an in-depth report on interesting and relevant news from a variety of entertainment news sources. The report will be presented to the class, should run approximately 10 minutes, and can include visuals such as a PPT to be projected.

Following are some good sources, though by no means all. There are many new media podcasts hosted by industry veterans:

“KCRW’s The Business” (podcast), Deadline.com, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, The Wrap.

LA & NY Times (particularly “Company Town” in LA Times)

Slate, Salon, Indie wire, Redef.com (strong digital and media analysis newsletter, aggregator of articles – great resource)

NYT: The Corner Office (Leadership and Management...really great articles, occasional media focus), Box Office Mojo, The Numbers

Some other industry podcasts: The Producer’s Guide: Todd Garner; Scriptnotes: John August & Craig Mazin

**Discussion of Final Assignment: “Package” a film to sell for a financier.** You will be working on this throughout the semester. Your second class assignment will be to present two ideas, one of which will be chosen to be the project for which you will prepare a detailed presentation that is designed to be presented to potential financiers. Please choose an original idea, not one that’s been sold or previously produced. Your idea can be based on source material. *The material must be available, and you have must have begun the process to secure the rights.*

### **Review required elements of Final Packet**

**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? What buyers expect from 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.

Handout & discussion: *PGA code of credits, Bio samples, Logline guides*

In-class discussion on how to write a bio and a logline. What is an 'elevator pitch'.

**Assignment:** Develop 2 project ideas for next class to pitch as *logline and premise*. Revise your bio per class discussion and samples – who you are for the market, employers and publicity. No more than one page. Turn in next week. The bio will be included in your Final Packet.

## **WEEK 2, SEPTEMBER 3, 2019: Presenting your Idea, Pitching to a buyer**

In-class: *Logline and Premise Presentation*

The class will present their ideas in short form (not a pitch), after which each student will pick one idea to prepare as their final project.

### **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.

Handouts – Pitch guidelines. Reading list discussion, film literacy

**Assignment:** Turn your chosen idea into a 3-minute pitch.

## **WEEK 3, SEPTEMBER 10, 2019: Pitching, Finding great ideas**

**Guest speaker:** *Adam Kolbrenner, Manager*

In-class: one-half of the class will present their ideas as 3-5 minutes pitches.

- Discuss where great ideas come from the obvious to the not so obvious sources.
- How to choose the right platform for your idea.
- How to be sure that your Ideas are sticky.
- Evaluating the marketability of your ideas.

- The value of finished scripts and where to find them.
- Spec script vs. pitch
- Networking with talent and representatives

Pitching – continue discussion

- What are the important elements of a pitch?
- Using practice pitches to improve your idea.
- The ‘elevator’ pitch

Genesis of Ideas:

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. *\*Everyone should be prepared to discuss one of their favorite movies and its provenance – where the idea came from.* We will discuss potential mediums for the students’ ideas and why.

What makes an idea Stick?

Handout: Excerpt from *Made to Stick* sign about the “six principles of sticky ideas.”;

**WEEK 4, SEPTEMBER 17, 2019, The Writing and Development Process;**

**Guest Speaker:** *Studio executive: Jeyun Manford, SVP Universal Pictures*

In-class: The second half of the class will present their final project ideas as 3-5 minute pitches.

How to turn an idea into a script.

FROM IDEA TO WRITER TO PITCH

**Scripts/Writing Process:**

- I have a good idea, how do I find a writer?
- FINDING NEW WRITERS, DIRECTORS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
- 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?
- What kind of scripts should I be looking for?
- What are the important elements in script?
- Working with writers
- How do I get a writer to spec an idea or adaptation?
- 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?

**Assignment: Coverage, pitching, evaluation exercise on a TV pilot.** This is an ongoing assignment that will have several parts due over different weeks. The class will be divided into four four-person groups. Each group will read and analyze a one-hour TV pilot. There are two parts to the assignment for next week: Please write a (2) page coverage summary about the pilot that you read. Additionally, prepare a 3-minute pitch of the pilot story and choose one person in your group to present next week.

Handouts, in-class discussion: Coverage guidelines. Sample development notes. TV pitch guidelines.

**WEEK 5, SEPTEMBER 24, 2019, Legal Review**

**Guest speaker:** *Rights representative / producer*

An overview of the types of contracts and agreements producers should have with writers, studios, other producers, etc. Options, shopping agreements, attachment letters, writer deal guidelines, etc.

The Idea/ Source Material/ Treatments:

- Rights: Getting rights to articles, books, people.
- Should I contact an author directly?
- Protecting your ideas.
- Fleshing out your ideas by finding collaborators.
- How to make a deal with a writer

In-class - group TV pilot pitches: 3-5 minutes.

*Handouts*: Option and agreement samples, writer deal examples. Excerpts from clearance and copyright. Read: Clearance and Copyright Chapters 1, 2, & 4: Copyright and Ideas; Public Domain; Fair Use

**Assignment:** Prepare a one-page synopsis of your final project idea. Turn in next week. For the pilot groups: prepare your TV pilot analysis. Present an argument on which network/cable station the pilot should air. *Find relevant comps of TV shows. How will this show stand out, separate itself? If it won’t (from the network’s point of view), why not? What*

is the season arc and season end? Choose someone from your group to present the pilot analysis in class next week.

## **WEEK 6, OCTOBER 1, 2019, Packaging your project**

**Guest speaker** - *Producer - Basil Iwanyk*

*What's a normal day like?*

### **Attaching High Profile Directors, Writers and Actors:**

- Who should I call: agents and managers, what's the difference?
- How do I get my script to a big "name" actor or director?
- How do I get a director or talent attached without financing?
- If I run into talent socially, can I give them my script?
- Should you use your idea to build a storyworld on multiple platforms?
- Improving your ideas with visual development and reference material

### **Creative Casting:**

- Stunt Casting: My financier wants me to cast a music star/athlete/celeb who is not an actor? 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?

In-class: TV pilot analysis.

**Handouts:** Sample Casting, director and writer lists, mood boards

**Assignment:** Create casting, director and writers lists for your final project. For the pilot groups: Create a packaging list to turn in next week. Who would star and why? Create a mood board and a casting visual presentation for your pilot. Due next week.

## **WEEK 7, OCTOBER 8, 2019: Individual Meetings re class project**

## **WEEK 8, OCTOBER 15, 2019, Indie Financing**

**Guest speaker:** *Cassian Elwes, or alternate guest – Producer, independent financing*

Putting your project together and finding financing

- What are your tools to attach talent to your project?
- Finding finance for mainstream filmed content development & production.
- Self-financing and crowdsourcing.
- The reality of NO's and how to get a YES's.

## **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 \$.

Structure of foreign sales, estimates, equity, bridge loan, structure to pay SAG, DGA, WGA - bond

**Assignment:** Each pilot group will be assigned a buyer in either tv or film: research and be prepared to present next week.

**WEEK 9, OCTOBER 22, 2019 – Tom will be in China.**

**We will either have a guest lecturer, or not have a class this week - TBD**

**WEEK 10, OCTOBER 29, 2019, Television**

**Guest speaker:** *TV Executive – Danielle Woodrow, Director Original Series, Netflix*

### **The process of mounting a TV/Digital Production:**

- 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 job path for newcomers?

In-class: Group Buyer presentations.

**Assignment:** Executive Summary of final project. Turn in next week.

**WEEK 11, NOVEMBER 5, 2019, Publicity and Marketing, Market research**

**Guest speaker:** *Market Research exec, Kevin Goetz, CEO Screen Engine*

### **Different types of publicity and marketing, aspects to explore**

- Align everyone - the message, define your audience
- Creative advertising
- Publicity
- Digital
- Media
- Content

- Research
- Brand Partnerships

The producer's role. Start early.

### Understanding your audience:

- Target an audience - demographic, psychographic
- Genre
- Marketing opportunities: brand, star, story, etc.

**Assignment:** Prepare 1<sup>st</sup> pass of Marketing, distribution plans for final project. Who is your target audience, how will you reach them?

### WEEK 12, NOVEMBER 12, 2019, Building a presentation

- Each project varies – Make yours' personal!
- This is a Sales tool. Make it sizzle!
- Write as if you're talking not writing!
- Elements of a strong presentation (Try for no more than 10 pages)
  - Cover Page with a strong image—Think movie poster!
  - Overview (preferably one page)—What is the proposition/ask? What the story concept? What is the marketing hook and the target audience?
  - Story Elements (2-3 pages)—Concise version of the full story, key characters and storyworld.
  - Creative Team—Only the elements that are actually attached.
  - Visual Elements (1-2 pages)—Provide the “look & feel” for your project that is clear and references your comps, powerful zeitgeist trends and/or classic images.
  - Appendix (Backup information like packaging lists, research information, etc.)
- Choice of format—Text Document, PowerPoint/Keynote, Pitch Book
- Write out a text only version that is 3-5 pages.
- Edit down your Pitch Narrative to a concise PowerPoint/Keynote that is 7-15 slides.
- Create your appendix so you are ready to provide supporting material upon request.
- Consider the setting for your presentation
  - What kind of buyer is it?
    - Will you be using the deck as support for a verbal pitch? If so, make it visual and avoid too much text.
    - Is the presentation something that you leave behind? If so, make sure it is tight and not burden with too much detail.

Handouts: project presentations

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

### **WEEK 13, NOVEMBER 19, 2019, Traditional and Non-Traditional Distribution and Film Festivals**

**Guest speaker:** *Sandrine Cassidy*

#### **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?

**Assignment:** Prepare financing, buyer plan for final project. Include critical assumptions for budget target.

Handouts: Critical assumptions

### **Week 14, November 26, 2019, PRODUCTION—PROBLEM-SOLVING, ACCOUNTABILITY & QUALITY**

**Guest speaker:** *Line Producer*

- The Calm Center of the Storm.
- Building creative partnerships
- Maintaining creative integrity and business concerns.
- Managing on-set problems and egos.

#### **How to hire a director.**

#### **Working with the Director:**

- How to support his/her creative process - working with a writer
- Working with a writer-director
- How to the 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

#### **ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL MEETING TIME - TBD**

Instructor will hold individual meetings, separate from class time to follow up with each student on their projects and career goals, and discuss the final assignment.

**WEEK 15, DECEMBER 3, 2019, Topic: TBD**

Topic by class choice and based on previous class progress. Also, discussion of any remaining questions about final project and previous class topics.

**FINAL: DECEMBER 7-10: Study Days.**

**DECEMBER 11: FINAL PROJECT DUE, INCLUDING REVISIONS**

**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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

**Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710*

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination,

rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats,

harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail [diversity@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:diversity@cinema.usc.edu). You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

**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.