**USC**School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 411-The Business of Acting (2.0 Units)**

**FALL 2019- Mon & Weds- 2:00 PM-3:50 PM**

**McClintock Building (MCC)-Room #109**

**Instructor: DAN SHANER**

**Office:** Jefferson #206A

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

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**Course Description and Overview**

The purpose of this course is to develop a basic understanding of the tools needed to successfully build a career as an actor at a professional level. Sharpen interviewing skills, investigate issues related to working in the acting industry such as casting, talent representation, and unions. Explore available resources to actors such as websites, trade publications and educational and training opportunities; examine the basic economic aspects associated with pursuing an acting career; formulate a short-term budget for acting career needs; create a professional acting portfolio; and develop short-term and long-term career plans. Additional topics of discussion will include networking, building and maintaining a social media presence, self-taping and self-submitting for auditions, the anatomy of the television and film business, from origination of a project to final filmed product, the myths and realities of “pilot season”, and the mind/body connection as it relates to the health and well-being of the actor.

We will also develop and investigate auditioning skills in a variety of theatrical and media venues, including identifying your “type”; sharpen cold reading skills; analyze personal habits and fears that might inhibit effective auditioning; collect and prepare appropriate audition materials; and integrate acting skills into fully realized audition pieces.

**Learning Objectives**

To provide each actor-student with practical as well as skills-based preparation for a professional career, to integrate instructors’ direction, criticism and feedback in a positive and professional manner, demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills through reports and assignments, and develop confidence and professional decorum in a collaborative environment.

**Grading Criteria:A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

+/- may be added to any grade.

In addition to technical competence, a student receiving an “A” grade should also have demonstrated creativity, originality and imagination in their approach to the work.

**Studentship (Attendance, Professionalism, Discipline, Responsibility and Participation) will play a part in determining the final grade.**

**Grading Breakdown**:

All assignments and presentations will be graded on a percentage (100 points) scale, which will then be converted into a letter grade.

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| **Scale** | | | |
| A+ 100 - 98 | B+ 89 - 87 | C+ 79 - 77 | D+ 69 - 67 |
| A 97 - 94 | B 86 - 84 | C 76 - 74 | D 66 - 64 |
| A- 93 - 90 | B- 83 - 80 | C- 73 - 70 | D- 63 - 60 |

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| **Assignment** | **% of Grade** |
| Deadline Hollywood Article | 10% |
| Resume | 10% |
| Cover Letter | 10% |
| Casting Director Hit List | 10% |
| Agent/Manager Hit List | 10% |
| Mid-Term Interview | 15% |
| Final Exam- Consisting of: |  |
| Professional Meeting | 15% |
| Synopsis of Meeting | 5% |
| Written Essay | 5% |
| Studentship (See above) | 10% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

**Required Textbook: The Actors Life: A Survival Guide By Jenna Fischer**

**For Course Assignments:**

**All assignments must be typed and printed out and are due when requested. HAND WRITTEN WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Please do not email assignments unless prior arrangements have been made.**

**Additional Policies:**

* All students are expected to bring and keep a separate notebook or tablet for lecture notes. Please keep all assignments and homework returned to you.
* **CELL PHONES ARE** **NOT ALLOWED IN CLASS** except for students with emergency situations discussed privately and approved by instructor, or when specifically requested for research or exercises. Students are requested to arrive early (which means on time) to class.
* **ATTENDANCE IN CLASS IS MANDATORY**. If you MUST miss class, please notify me AHEAD OF TIME, preferably in writing.
* University guidelines prohibit eating in classrooms.

**ADVANCED NOTICE**: **MID-TERM EXAM:**

* For your mid-term MOCK CASTING/AGENCY INTERVIEWS, conducted on Week Seven, you will choose between a real Casting Director from your Casting Hit List, or a real Agent/Manager from your Agent/Manager Hit List. I will be playing the role of that person. This will be conducted as a real interview, and you will be expected to be dressed and researched accordingly. You will also prepare two contrasting monologues; one comedic, one dramatic, from stage, television or film that are age and type appropriate. Each will be **2 MINUTES MAXIMUM IN LENGTH.**
* **DO NOT** write your own material.
* **DO NOT** use song lyrics, poems or literary cuttings. Find material new to you, not scenes you have been re-cycling for years.
* **BEGIN LOOKING NOW**. We will discuss and coach them beginning in Week Five.

**ADVANCED NOTICE**: **FINAL EXAM:**

Your final exam will be in three parts. **Part One:** Set up a half hour (minimum) informational meeting with any Industry Professional of your choice. You will be responsible for reaching out to that person by any means necessary, including personal contacts, through their agents, managers, publicists or assistants. You must have the meeting completed by the end of the semester, and on the last day of class (12/4). **Part Two:** You will give a presentation, no more than seven minutes long, about the content of the meeting on Wednesday, 12/4. **Part Three:** Write a three paragraph, typed essay connecting the managerial, mock interview and the final professional interview. Essay is due on Friday, December 13th, between 2:00 and 4:00 PM, delivered to my mailbox in the DRC. MAKE SURE TO HAVE YOUR ESSAY TIME-STAMPED BY EITHER THE RECEPTIONIST IN THE DRC OR THE STUDENT WORKER IN THE MAILBOX AREA.

**BEGIN NOW**

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

**(NOTE: Dates and discussions subject to change, especially in regard to availability of Guest Stars. Assignment due dates will not change without advanced notice.)**

**WEEK ONE**

**8/26 & 8/28**

**“I AM NOT AFRAID…I WAS BORN TO DO THIS” --Joan of Arc**

**SELF AWARENESS, GOALS AND RESOURCES, ‘BREAKING THE ICE’**

* Teacher and student Introductions. Review syllabus & materials.
* Watch List (Handout)
* EXERCISE: Introducing yourself, being comfortable in the room, telling “your” story. Standing out in the crowd, presenting yourself “dynamically”
* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: on “The Business” and being the CEO of your own corporation, including organization, time management and creating a business structure. In class viewing of 10-minute TED talk.
* PlannerPad (Handout)
* Resource list for Actors. (Handout)
* HOMEWORK: Begin looking for two contrasting, age and type appropriate monologues with attention to length and guidelines discussed. We will start choosing and coaching scenes in Week Five.
* HOMEWORK: Three articles from DEADLINE HOLLYWOOD. What interested you, what stood out, what did you learn? Typed, printed, turn in.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Introduction & Chapter One

ASSIGNMENT DUE FIRST CLASS OF WEEK TWO (Wednesday, 9/4).

**WEEK TWO**

**9/2 (Labor Day) & 9/4**

**“I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE SOMEBODY, BUT NOW I REALIZE I SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE SPECIFIC” --Lily Tomlin**

**HOMEWORK DISCUSSION AND REVIEW**

* Watch list follow up.

**PERCEPTION EXERCISES AND IDENTIFYING THE ROLES FOR YOU**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Who are you and what do you project? Type casting and is it good or bad.
* EXERCISE: How others perceive you vs. how you perceive yourself. What roles are you suited for right now?
* Choosing the right audition material.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Chapter Two
* HOMEWORK: Go to the mall, grocery store or other public place with your list of adjectives and ask strangers their perception of you.

ASSIGNMENT DUE THIRD WEEK OF CLASS (9/9)

**WEEK THREE**

**9/9 & 9/11**

**“THINGS DO NOT HAPPEN. THINGS ARE MADE TO HAPPEN”—John F. Kennedy**

* Watch list follow up.

**MARKETING TOOLS OF THE TRADE – Headshots, Resumes, Cover Letters, Demo Clips and Reels & other marketing tools and services**

* Samples of standard Headshots, Resumes and Cover Letters sent to

Agents, Managers and Casting Directors.

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: How to write a resume. (Handout)
* Headshots. How to find, interview, and book a photographer. Pointers on shooting your headshot.
* How to write a Cover Letter. (Handout)
* HOMEWORK: Either I or the class secretary will email you a resume template to use. Plug in written resume to template, print out and turn in. Do NOT email homework.
* HOMEWORK: Read article “How to Create Authentic Headshots.” (Handout)
* HOMEWORK: Write a cover letter to a Casting Director or Agent/Manager.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS DUE FIRST CLASS OF WEEK FOUR (9/16)

**WEEK FOUR**

**9/16 & 9/18**

**“QUALITY IS NOT AN ACT, IT IS A HABIT”--Aristotle**

**DISCUSSION/REVIEW OF ALL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

* Watch List follow up.

**Possible Guest Star Speaker: Headshot Photographer (TBD)**

**CONTINUE MARKETING TOOLS OF THE TRADE** **(as laid out in Week Three)**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Websites for Casting Submissions - how to list and submit yourself for acting work, both Union and Non-Union. Resources and appropriate formatting. **We will be filling out your Actors Access Profiles, so please bring your laptops that week.**
* Reels, clips and websites.
* Self-taping and Self- Submissions.

**WEEK FIVE**

**9/23 & 9/25**

**“BE SO GOOD THEY CAN’T IGNORE YOU”—Steve Martin**

* Watch list follow up.

**Possible Guest Star Speaker: Creator of CASTING ABOUT website (TBD)**

**CASTING**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Casting Directors.
* How the casting process works in Film, Television and New Media. Differences and similarities within mediums.
* Networking with Casting Directors, getting auditions.
* The new reality of production and where projects shoot.
* The importance of targeting work.
* LA hires vs. hires in local markets.
* HOMEWORK: Casting Director Hit List. Ten of your favorite shows, who casts them, where they shoot, and as much contact info as possible. Typed, printed out and turned in.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Chapter Three

**AUDITIONING FOR TELEVISION AND FILM**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: How to prepare for an audition from the time you get the appointment until you walk out of the room.
* Dos and don’ts, Audition tips, questions to ask.
* The Actors Survival Kit.
* EXERCISE: Begin Cold Reading auditions for television and film, TIME PERMITTING
* You will be cast in roles, sides provided. You will be given enough time to work through the sides. The full progression from entrance to exit, fielding changes of character or direction, using the reader, etc. will be experienced.

**WEEK SIX**

**9/30 & 10/2**

**“SHAKESPERE SAID ‘KILL ALL THE LAWYERS’. THERE WERE NO AGENTS THEN”—Robin Williams**

**DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF ‘HIT LIST’ HOMEWORK**

* Watch list follow up

**AGENTS/MANAGERS/REP**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Talent Reps. (Agents and Managers). Categories and choosing which agent is right for you. Exploring differences and similarities in what Managers and Agents do.
* Networking, finding and keeping an Agent or Manager.

**Possible Guest Star Speaker: Talent Agent and Manager (TBD)**

* HOMEWORK: Agent/Manager Hit List. Choose ten Agent/Managers that you would like to sign with. Include reasons why you feel that person/company is right for you. Include as much contact information as possible. Type it out, print and turn it in.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Chapter Four

ASSIGNMENT DUE FIRST CLASS OF WEEK SEVEN (10/7)

**WEEK SEVEN**

**10/7 & 10/9**

**“POUR YOURSELF A DRINK, PUT ON SOME LIPSTICK, AND PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER”—Elizabeth Taylor**

**MID-TERM EXAM: MOCK INTERVIEWS**

* Mock Agent/Manager/Casting Director interviews. For Grade. Come dressed for success and bring pic/res/and a good handshake. You will be performing your monologues as part of you interview. DO NOT BE LATE. DOORS WILL BE LOCKED AT 10:00 AM AND WILL NOT RE-OPEN UNTIL 11:50. IF YOU MISS INTERVIEW, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RE-SCHEDULE AND YOUR FINAL GRADE WILL BE AFFECTED.

**DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF AGENT ‘HIT LIST’ HOMEWORK**

* Watch list follow up.

**COMMERCIAL AUDITIONS**

* DISCUSSION/EXERCISE: Review cold reading techniques and exercises used for Commercial calls, including the variety of different commercials formats.
* Review the order and process of a standard Commercial call, from sign-in to goodbye.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Chapter Five

**Possible Guest Star Speaker: Commercial Actor and Casting Director. (TBD)**

**WEEK EIGHT**

**10/14 & 10/16**

**“TO SUCEED IN LIFE YOU NEED THREE THINGS: A WISHBONE, A BACKBONE AND A FUNNY BONE”—Reba McEntire**

* Watch list follow up

**THE GENESIS OF A TELEVISION SHOW/DEMYSTIFYING PILOT SEASON**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: How does a show get on the air, from germ of an idea to finished product. The myths and realities of pilot season.
* What happens when I'm hired.
* EXERCISE: Viewing of Production Materials.
* Production terms and jobs. (Handout)

**THE MIND AND BODY CONNECTION**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: The Mind/Body Connection, how we treat/what we put into our bodies and the effect it has on our well-being as an actor.

**Possible Guest Star Speaker: Nutritionist and Wellness Coach. (TBD)**

* HOMEWORK: Prepared scenes for self-taping in Week Nine. (10/21)

**WEEK NINE**

**10/21 & 10/23**

**“EVERYBODY HAS A HEART. EXCEPT SOME PEOPLE”—Bette Davis as Margo Channing in ‘All About Eve.’**

* Watch list follow up

**REASONS NOT TO BE AN A@#HOLE**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Professional decorum on set and in auditions and why it matters.

**SELF-TAPING AND SELF SUBMITTING**

* EXERCISE: We will shoot scenes previously distributed. Bring your cell phones to class. Make you sure you have enough storage.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Chapter Six

**WEEK TEN**

**10/28 & 10/30**

**“THE ONLY EFFECTIVE ANSWER TO ORGANIZED GREED IS ORGANIZED LABOR”—Thomas Donahue**

* Watch list follow up

**UNIONS**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: SAG/AFTRA and EQUITY. How to get in.
* Reasons to join or not.

**Possible Guest Star Speaker from a Union.**

**CREATING YOUR OWN CONTENT**

* The rapidly changing landscape of New Media.
* Writing, shooting and distributing your own ideas.

**NETWORKING**

* Building relationships with the right people.
* Accountability groups.
* Mastermind groups.
* Creating your network.
* HOMEWORK: Review SAG/AFTRA and EQUITY websites.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Actor Interviews

**SELF-TAPED SCENES**

* Finish up as needed and view.
* HOMEWORK: Fischer—Actor Interviews

**WEEK ELEVEN**

**11/4 & 11/6**

**“PEOPLE SAY THAT MONEY IS NOT THE KEY TO HAPPINESS, BUT I ALWAYS FIGURED IF YOU HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, YOU CAN HAVE A KEY MADE.”—Joan Rivers**

* Watch list follow up

**ECONOMICS OF ACTING: $$. SCAMS**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Budgeting for your basic daily needs. Budgeting for your professional needs. Services and Training. Actor jobs. Insurance. Financial planning and Money Management. Taxes and deductions. Establishing credit. Development of other skills to increase marketability as an actor.
* SCAMS and legitimate workshops, showcases, etc.

**WEEK TWELVE**

**11/11 & 11/13**

**“IF YOU CAN DREAM IT, YOU CAN DO IT.”—Walt Disney**

* Watch list follow up

**GOALS: LONG AND SHORT TERM**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: What Kind of Actor Am I? Visualize and plan your approach into the venue that you seek. (Stage, Film/TV, etc.).
* Six-month plan
* One-year plan
* Three-year plan (We will write all these out in class)
* Go over Top Ten reasons actor’s fail.
* Finish outstanding business from semester curriculum.
* Audition Technique

**WEEK THIRTEEN**

**11/18 & 11/20**

**“OPTIMISM IS THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO ACHIEVEMENT. NOTHING CAN BE DONE WITHOUT HOPE AND CONFIDENCE”—Helen Keller**

* Watch list follow up

**SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE MODERN AGE OF FILM AND TELEVISION**

* LECTURE/DISCUSSION: The importance of increasing your presence on on-line platforms such as You Tube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.
* Creating your own content.
* Building your fan base.

**Possible New Media Guest Star (TBD)**

**WEEK FOURTEEN**

**11/25 & 11/27 (Thanksgiving Break)**

**“IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW SLOWLY YOU GO AS LONG AS YOU DO NOT STOP”—Confucious**

**“A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE IS LIKE, YOU KNOW, NIGHT.” – Steve Martin**

**TBD**

**WEEK FIFTEEN**

**12/2 & 12/4**

**“IF YOU RISK NOTHING, THEN YOU RISK EVERYTHING.”—Geena Davis**

* FINAL EXAM: Professional Interview Synopsis
* We will also be completing course evaluations during this week, so please bring your laptops.

**EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS**

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

**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](https://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, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is 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 me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

**Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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**Support Systems:**

*Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411*

Campus Support & Intervention is an office within Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention. We are a team of professionals here to assist students, faculty, and staff in navigating complex issues. Whether you are here seeking support for yourself or someone else, we are available to help you problem solve, understand options, and connect with resources. <https://uscsa.usc.edu>

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu/)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu/)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)