

USC SCA CTPR 558– Advanced Producing Spring 2020 Section: 18687 2 Units

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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, 4th 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, 3rd 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 Thursday 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 groups for assignments and presentations throughout the term. Each group will be assigned a 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 analysis from the point of view of a buyer, comps
 - Mood board/look book, cast presentation
 - An additional group assignment will be to research and present an analysis of network and studio buyers.
- **Speaker Questions:** Students are expected to research speakers ahead of class and prepare 3-5 questions for them, which are due by the Tuesday before the class visit by email to the instructor and SA. Submission of questions is mandatory. The depth of the questions will reflect the level of attention to research on the speakers.

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 & Guest questions: 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, JANUARY 16, 2020: 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 chosen by the instructor on interesting and relevant, entertainment news. Topics may also include the history and path to screen for a film or a TV series. 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 for research into an assigned topic, 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, January 23, 2020: 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
- 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, January 30, 2020: Pitching, Finding great ideas

Guest speaker: *Manager or Producer*

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.
- 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, February 6, 2020. The Writing and Development Process

Guest Speaker: *Pam Abdy – Studio Executive / Producer*

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:

- FINDING 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?
- 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-five 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. *WORK AS A GROUP*

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

WEEK 5, February 13, 2020, Legal Review

Review of the notes process. Writing notes.

- Intro, compliment, as part of email or in intro – suggestions, food for thought, etc.
- Headline – story, them
- Headlines – characters
- Page notes. Specific examples

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 – *TV Pilot pitches*

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

WEEK 6, February 20, 2020, Packaging your project

Guest Speaker: *David Alpert, Manager, Producer*

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?
- Improving your ideas with visual development and reference material
- Packaging – which elements are necessary, most important?

How to hire a director

Synopsis writing

In-class: Finish (if not done) group TV pilot pitches: 3-5 minutes.

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

Assignment: Prepare a one-page synopsis of your final project idea. Turn in next week.

WEEK 7, February 27, 2020. Indie Financing

Guest speaker: *Erik Feig – Producer / Executive*

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.

Review coverage writing

- Don't use character name in logline
- Character summaries are not comments. Describe, don't analyze
- If use comment summary up front, it is short. Save more detail for longer comment
- Use a format. Put your name on the work.
- Be clear in the comment re recommendation, guidance

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 8, March 5, 2020 Individual Meetings re class project

Assignment: Revised synopsis.

WEEK 9, March 12, 2020

Susan Arnold & Donna Roth – guest speakers

Case Study: Grosse Pointe Blank

SPRING BREAK: MAR 14-21

WEEK 10, March 26, 2020. Television

Guest Speakers: *Al Gough & Michael Millar – Writers / TV Producers*

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: Discussion of favorite TV shows – setup, season arcs

Assignment: TV group buyer research

WEEK 11, April 2, 2020, Publicity and Marketing, Market research

Guest speaker: *Terry Curtin, Marketing Executive*

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 1st pass of Marketing, distribution plans for final project. Who is your target audience, how will you reach them? Financing/Budget plan
Prepare TV analysis, pilot comps, network targets

WEEK 12, April 9, 2020, Building a presentation

Guest speaker: *Feature or TV executive*

- 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.

In-class workshop discussion: How to advocate for or against buying a project, using TV pilot examples. *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?*

Handouts: project presentations, exec summary examples

Assignment: Prepare executive summary

WEEK 13, April 16, 2020, Traditional and Non-Traditional Distribution and Film Festivals

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?

Budget, financing, critical assumptions

Studio/network analysis of material

- How do they choose to buy?
- Target audience
- Viability
- Competitive landscape – internal and external

In class: *TV group presentations of studios/networks/platforms.*

Assignment: Prepare financing, buyer plan for final project. Include critical assumptions for budget target. Create a visual marketing tool to help sell your final project/assignment (prop, giveaway, sizzle reel, web page, one-sheet, etc.).

Handouts: Critical assumptions

Week 14, April 23, 2020, 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.

Working with the Director:

- How to support his/her creative process
- 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

WEEK 15, April 30, 2020 FINAL INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

Class Topic based on previous class progress and class feedback.

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

FINAL: May 2 - 5: Study Days

May 8, 2020: 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. 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

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

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

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, 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

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

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

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

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, 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

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. 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.