



**CTIN 480: Directing for Games and Interactive Media**  
**Units: 2**  
**Spring 2021**

**Meeting Time:** Mondays 1-3:50 PM

**Class Zoom link:** Provided privately

**Professor:** Tracy Fullerton, [tfullerton@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:tfullerton@cinema.usc.edu)

**Bio:** <http://www.tracyfullerton.com/bio>

**Office Hours:** Mondays 10-12 PM or by appointment

**Office Hours Zoom:**

Provided privately

**Teaching Assistant:** Joanna Shen, [joannash@usc.edu](mailto:joannash@usc.edu)

### **Course Description**

This course introduces students to the role of the director across a variety of media with the goal of applying best practices to the direction of games and interactive media. The material is focused on games and interactive media but will also draw from a cross-disciplinary study of directorial techniques and practices from theater, film, performance art, architecture, music and fine arts.

Students will develop the skills of directorial perspective, selection and preparation of material, story and scene breakdown, thematic intent, project planning, team building and communication, situational decision-making, response to change.

Over the course of the semester, they will flesh out a proposed project through the class exercises, bringing a stronger directorial vision to the idea in preparation to pitch it for full production in a later class. The final assignments will be a polished vision presentation for the project, accompanied by a director's notebook of planning exercises, reflections and creative references collected and organized over the course of the semester.

This is a studio class, even though it will be held in a virtual setting, and a large part of the class content will focus on in-class discussion, critique, and problem solving for individual projects. As such, it is imperative that students treat the development of their projects professionally and bring requested milestones to class on time, ready to present. Students will be expected to participate actively in all discussions and critique sessions, giving and receiving feedback of the highest quality.

If students have issues with connectivity, audio/visual hardware, or time zone shifting, they should contact the instructor as soon as possible to develop solutions that will allow them to fully participate in the class sessions and projects.

Throughout this class, students are encouraged to take risks and to look beyond prior art, in-class examples and common wisdom to explore new and different directorial strategies.

### **Prerequisite(s)**

CTIN 488 or CTIN 541. Open to graduates and undergraduates, with an emphasis on students preparing advanced or thesis projects. Acceptance by interview with the instructor.

### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

There are no technology requirements for this class, however several technical proficiencies may prove beneficial. Many students will use image creation or layout software (like Affinity Photo and Affinity

Designer) to create artwork for their planning exercises. Students may also organize their ideas using common office tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, flow-charting software or project management tools like Asana or Trello. Please communicate with the instructor if you have any questions about the technical requirements for your assignments.

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

This course has three required texts, which are available online or from the USC Bookstore:

*Directing Video Games* by Brian Allgeier

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B071Y7DNCZ>

*The Director's Six Senses* by Simone Bartesaghi

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01CHB75VQ>

*The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/193290736X>

In addition, there will be several short selections from the following texts provided in class. Students may purchase these optional texts if they would like to read longer sections:

*The Visual Story* by Bruce Block

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0240807790>

*The Director's Idea* by Ken Dancyger

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0240806816>

*Directors Close Up 2* by Jeremy Kagan

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0810883910>

*A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0415238323>

*Writing Interactive Music for Video Games* by Michael Sweet

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0321961587>

*Creativity, Inc.* by Ed Catmull

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0593070100>

*Pixar Storytelling* by Dean Movshovitz

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XHBRG2L>

### **Course Website**

A copy of this syllabus is available at the course website:

[www.tracyfullerton.com/499](http://www.tracyfullerton.com/499) (password: directing)

### **A Note on Remote Class Work**

Since everyone will be remote this semester, and possibly in different time zones, we will face an unusual challenge for a studio class focused on collaborative learning. The tools for brainstorming and prototyping we will be using will help, but we will still need to accommodate the potential that some of your classmates may be working in a variety of time zones. You may need to be flexible in order to collaborate with some classmates to work on your class exercises.

As per university policy, our main class times (lectures and labs) will be held synchronously, and all students are expected to adjust their schedules in order to attend class sessions at the times listed in the syllabus. If

possible, given your Internet connection, turning your camera on during class is preferred so that the professor and other students can interact as naturally as possible with you. If you have issues with privacy in your environment, it is suggested that you use a Zoom background to block out extraneous visuals.

If you have any concerns about your ability to work remotely during this semester, please reach out to the professor as soon as possible to find solutions for your particular situation.

## Overview of Assignments

### Vision Exercises

- Logline and experience goals, due week 3
- Story arc beat sheet, due week 6
- Scene script draft, due week 8
- Scene script final, due week 10
- Visual exploration, due week 12
- Audio exploration, due week 12
- Location exploration, due week 13

### Final Project

- Vision pitch presentation, due weeks 14, 15, final exam
- Vision pitch document, due at final exam
- Director's notebook, due at final exam

## Grading Breakdown

Participation	5
Logline and experience goals	5
Story arc beat sheet	10
Scene script	10
Visual exploration	10
Audio exploration	10
Location exploration	10
Vision presentation & document	20
Director's notebook	20
Total:	100

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

All written and digital assignments should be submitted by email to [tfullerton@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:tfullerton@cinema.usc.edu) by the start of class on the day that they are due. Presentations will be due in class, with supporting materials submitted via email.

### **Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes**

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructors before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructors or student assistant before final grades are due. Incompletes are only available after the week-twelve withdrawal deadline.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

### **Attendance Policy**

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late, or leaving early, will be marked as having an absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. Absences will affect your ability to participate fully in the class and will also affect the ability of the class to function as a group, so please treat attendance in class as a priority commitment.

#### **Unauthorized Social Media Use During Class**

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

#### **A Safer Space**

In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will use preferred pronouns and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together.

Because this class involves presentation and discussion of creative projects that will contain a range of materials, some of which may present difficulties for others in the class, students and groups are encouraged to use content or trigger warnings as part of their presentation as appropriate.

If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with the graduate advisor for the division, who can either discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

#### **Title IX at USC**

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation.

The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly ([titleix@usc.edu](mailto:titleix@usc.edu) or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

## Course content by class meeting

**Week 1, 1/18:** Martin Luther King Day – University holiday, no class meeting or office hours

**Week 2, 1/25:** Overview of the class – Introduction to each other, discussion of course goals and themes. Material selection – what makes a good piece to work on throughout this class? Sharing of prospective material, prior work, and related experience.

Assignments:

- Logline and experience goal for your project – **due week 3**
- Start a director's notebook for your project – **due finals week**

**Week 3, 2/1:** The Director's Role – Exploring how directors work, approaches across a variety of storytelling media, looking at interviews and sequences from game, film and theater directors.

Reading for Week 3:

- Directing Video Games – Section I: The Director's Role
- The Writer's Journey: Book One
- Director's Six Senses: Chapters 5-6 (Taste & Vision)

**Week 4, 2/8:** Structuring your Vision – Understanding the structure of your idea, the deeper themes, the archetypal roles of the characters, opportunities for meaningful interaction, and the hero's journey. Understanding story arcs and beat sheets.

Reading for Week 4:

- Directing Video Games – Section III: Structural Elements
- The Writer's Journey: Book Two

Assignment:

- Story arc beat sheet -- **due week 6**

**Week 5, 2/15:** President's Day – University holiday, no class meeting or office hours.

**Week 6, 2/22:** The Emotional Journey – Digging into the emotional arc of your piece, illuminating theme through arc, breaking down the beats of a scene and writing VO dialogue.

Reading for Week 6:

- The Director's Idea: Finding the Director's Idea
- Pixar Storytelling: Chapter 1, 5 (Choosing an Idea, A Word on Structure)

Assignment:

- Scene script for VO performance – **draft due week 8, final due week 10**

**Week 7, 3/1:** Directing for Interactivity, designing mechanics that support the emotional arc, defining pillars that support the arc.

Reading for Week 7:

- Watch Michel Koch, Raoul Barbet, GDC Vault, "Life is Strange: Using Interactive Storytelling and Game Design to Tackle Real-World Problems"  
<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1026002/-Life-is-Strange-Music>
- Watch Jenova Chen, GDC Vault, Designing Journey  
<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1017700/Designing>

**Week 8, 3/8:** Director's Toolbox – Visual Storytelling – Exploring the power of visual design in storytelling – cameras, lighting, space and color. Developing a sense for visual storytelling.

Reading for Week 7:

- The Director's Six Senses – Sight: Visual Storytelling
- The Visual Story – Chapters 1, 2 and 9 (Visual Components, Contrast and Affinity, Story and Visual Structure)

Assignment:

- Start a collection of still images that tell stories and affect you emotionally – **due with final director's notebook**
- Create a set of visual explorations that represent the key moments in your emotional arc – **due week 12 with audio explorations**

**Week 9, 3/15:** Director's Toolbox –The Power of Audio – Exploring the power of sound design and music in the emotional arc of your project.

Reading for Week 10:

- Directing Video Games: Section IV – Creative Toolbox
- Writing Interactive Music for Video Games Chapter 1: The Language of Music Storytelling in Games

Assignment: Create audio explorations along with your visual explorations – **due week 12 with visual explorations**

**Week 10, 3/22:** Casting and Scene Workshops – In-class preparation for the voice over workshop, casting your performers. Final scene scripts due.

Reading for Week 8:

- The Director's Six Senses – Smell: Directing Actors
- Watch Amy Hennig, GDC Vault Behind the Scenes: Uncharted 2's Unique Cinematic Production Process <https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1012327/Behind-the-Scenes-Uncharted-2>

**Week 11, 3/29:** Directing Performance – Guest lecture and workshop on directing actors for voice over.

Guests:

- Sarah Elmaleh (Voice actress - Gone Home, Where the Water Tastes Like Wine, Anthem)
- Crispin Freeman (Voice actor – Overwatch, Batman: Arkham Origins)

Reading for Week 9:

- Casting advice from Sarah Elmaleh

**Week 12, 4/5** – Director's Toolbox – Story Spaces – Exploring story through space and location. Presentation of project mood boards with sound explorations.

Assignment:

- Location "scout" for your project – **due week 13**

Reading for Week 11:

- The Director's Six Senses – Touch (Production Design)
- Director's Close Up 2 – Chapter 5 (Production Design)

**Week 13, 4/12:** The Director as Leader – Finding your leadership style, motivating and inspiring a team, making decisions in a collaborative environment, dealing with conflict. Team building role-play. Presentation of location scout explorations.

Reading for Week 12:

- Directing Video Games: Section V – Leadership
- Creativity Inc. - Chapter 5 Honesty and Candor, Chapter 6 Fear and Failure
- A Director Prepares: Chapter 2 (Violence)

Assignment:

- Draft vision pitch – **due week 14-15**

**Week 14, 4/19:** Crafting the Vision – Deepening your vision, the power of the first few minutes, planting ideas that build an experience towards the end. Pitching exercises.

Reading for Week 14:

- The Director's Six Senses – Conclusion, Love at First Sight, the Importance of Opening Scenes
- Directing Video Games: Section II – Crafting the Vision

**Week 15, 4/26:** Representing the Idea -- Being the voice of a project – internally and in the public eye. Finding people to share your vision, giving credit, speaking publicly. Pitching exercises continued.

Reading for Week 15:

- The Director's Six Senses – Chapter 8 (Dead Poets Society Case Study)
- Directing Video Games: Section VI – Production
- Creativity Inc. – Starting Points: Thoughts for Managing a Creative Culture

Assignment:

- Final vision pitch – **due at final exam**

**Final Exam, 5/5 2-4PM:** Final vision pitches, delivery of vision documents and final director's notebooks.

## 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” <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>.

### Support Systems:

*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. <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. <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. <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: <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. <https://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. <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. <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. <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. <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, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

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

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

### PLEASE NOTE:

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**